

HOW TO GO ABOUT HIRING A CREATIVE SUPPLIER

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ear Ms Marcom:

You have asked me to help you choose someone to handle Swampland Development's communications and branding activities. I am happy to provide the following criteria. These are the ten points I recommend to all my clients. After helping you select the firm or individual that best meets them, I will continue to assist you by providing criteria you can use to judge their efforts.

1. DEFINE YOUR NEEDS

Whomever you hire will be shooting your communications arrows. If they're good, their shots will land right on target—but only if the target has been clearly identified.

So first you should prepare, in detail, the specific objectives you want achieved, the target audiences you want reached, and the timeline for doing so. You should also have a rough budget in mind so candidates will know what they have to work with.

2. STATE YOUR PREFERENCES

Don't be reluctant to indicate your company's likes and dislikes, providing examples as necessary. Although a good supplier will never mimic the work of others, knowing your preferences up front will help avoid wasted time and effort later.

The services you are considering will have an impact on shaping your company's public image and marketing style. It is, therefore, crucial that management be comfortable with a supplier's style and approaches.

3. INTERVIEW THREE

Ask for recommendations from business associates, get the names of those whose work you admire, or request referrals from professional organizations such as the American Institute of Graphic Arts, the Public Relations Society of America, or the Promotion Marketing Association.

Check out the Web site of each name on your list. Look at what type of clients they have worked for, the projects they have done, and their style and approaches. Set up an interview with the three strongest.

4. GO BEYOND SHOW AND TELL

Your minimal interview expectation should be a polished presentation describing several client problems and showing the solution they provided for each.

Beyond this, see how well they understand the more subtle underlying business issues involved. Pay particular attention to how well they appear to have dealt with unusual or complex situations.

5. LOOK FOR INNOVATION

Liking a firm's particular style or approach is important, but it is ideas and innovation that give creative efforts their true impact. The work you see should communicate quickly to its intended audience, be persuasive, and be memorable.

Ideally, all this will not only be evident in every project, but more important be evident across a wide range of challenges for a variety of different clients.

6. ASK ABOUT RESULTS

It isn't possible to track the results of every project or campaign, but you should ask anyway. The reason is that the answer you get will be a good test of their knowledge of client objectives

and how hard they've attempted to meet them.

Your work should be in the hands of those who are as concerned about results—getting a good return on investment—as you are.

7. NOTE THEIR QUESTIONS

They should be interviewing you as much as you are them. A good match-up requires each to be comfortable with the other—with their experience and capabilities; they with your operating procedures and needs.

How many and what kind of questions are asked is also a good indicator of thoroughness when later faced with difficult or vexing problems.

8. GIVE DESIRE HIGH MARKS

As important as experience is, a strong desire to work together can easily overcome any shortcomings. Enthusiasm also jump starts inspiration. And later, during a project, it helps overcome any unanticipated obstacles.

Outstanding creative work comes from a marriage of strong talent and genuine enthusiasm.

9. COMPARE PROPOSALS

Look initially for a thorough understanding of your needs and how they will be approached. Then, and only then, consider the price. Make your decision by giving equal weight to both.

Choosing primarily on price nearly always sacrifices service, impact, and results. Focus on value, not cost.

10. GO WITH WHAT FEELS BEST

Selection is not a scientific process. And good creative work requires a collaboration between client and supplier. So, after all the above, go with the supplier you'll feel most comfortable working with.