

Find out who is there

- Talk to colleagues from the country and look in the yellow pages of the phone book, if available.
- Ask people about memorable ads that they have seen recently, and ask the manufacturers who prepared the ads and did the market research.
- There may be an association of advertisers or market research professionals that has a list of members.

Know what you want and be clear with the prospective agency

Do you need outside assistance for:

- *Research*: Carrying out a specific formative or evaluation research activity such as conducting some focus groups or implementing a baseline survey? Developing the project's formative research activity and seeing it through from start to finish?
- *Media and materials*: Drafting one or more specific materials? "Placing" (scheduling and negotiating the number and cost of broadcasts) mass media materials and monitoring broadcasts? Developing the entire creative strategy and the materials based on a general project briefing?

The level of involvement of the communication management unit is critical to establish from the initial interview and will be a determining factor in a good working relationship. Many relationships do not work well because the outside agency is given full responsibility for a task, but then project staff constantly tell it what to do.

Know how these agencies price their services

Market research firms often charge per interview or focus group, with their development costs included in this price. Obviously if the firm will not be doing all of the development work or all of the interviewing, perhaps because of language constraints, a different costing basis should be established.

Ad agencies generally charge clients a percentage of the media placement fee. This price includes their creative work to design materials. If the ad agency is being hired just for its creative talent and will do little or no media placement, a new costing basis must be established.

Get assistance to evaluate presentations made by the companies and make the decision as objective as possible

- Ask individuals who will work closely with the agency to be involved as well as someone with experience working with the agencies.
- Be sure all agencies have the same document relating to the program and are clear about what they are being asked to present.
- Visit agencies being considered and meet the person who will handle the account and his/her supervisor. Find out how many other projects the manager is working on.
- Have the agency present its credentials and its understanding of the work to be performed. Usually, speculative creative work should not be requested unless the client (project) is willing to pay a fee for it.
- Especially if the company has done similar work before, seek detailed references on the firm and on the account manager.

- Have the team rate the agencies in as objective a way as possible and then discuss points that are less easily quantified that deal with feelings about the group and its interest in this type of development work.

It is risky to select an agency on the basis of one good artist or writer, unless the agency will guarantee that this person will be available when needed for your work.

Establish a good working relationship

- Make it clear from the beginning that you want quality work—that this work is more exciting and rewarding—but also more technically exacting—than selling soap.
- Decide on basic procedures from the outset:
 - Who will be on the day-to-day team?
 - When are official approvals required?
 - What type of presentations will be expected?
 - How will pretesting of creative materials be handled?
 - Find out when changes are not acceptable or too costly to be worthwhile. Nothing is worse for the relationship than repeated requests for revisions of the same material because additional opinions come in.
- Respect the professional judgment of the group that has been hired on decisions that fall in its field. Technical health staff should assure that the market research firm has a clear understanding of the critical behavioral issues, important terminology, and appropriate audience segmentation based on what is known about the epidemiology of the health or nutrition problem.

- Clients of an advertising agency should ensure that technical content is correct but not second guess the agency on layout, scripting, etc.
- Refer to the message strategy document (step 9) constantly in evaluating work. What is presented should be “on strategy.”

Potential difficulties in working with advertising firms

The following potential difficulties can be avoided if openly discussed early in the interaction with the advertising firm.

- The firm will have more “clients” (funder, technical assistance agency, government, etc.) than customary with a commercial client.
- The clients will be much more concerned with technical accuracy than are commercial clients.

The firm should probably not expect a major fee from media placement, since public sector programs cannot usually afford the large “buys” that large commercial clients can.