

How An Ad Agency Saves You Money

Wouldn't you rather your advertising worked for you . . . instead of the other way around?

It's summer — time for Little League, trips to the pool and family reunions. But tonight, instead of sinking your teeth into a delicious, home-grilled brat, you're stuck in the office trying desperately to design an online advertising campaign through RadWords, a trendy pay-per-click program.

As you research estimated click prices, your frustration mounts. You know you need to ramp up your advertising efforts — your biggest competitor's been on fire this year, and your own sales have taken a beating. But although RadWords is all the rage with your industry pals, you're now in your fifteenth hour of wrangling with the thing. Meanwhile, a payroll deadline is creeping up, you've been late picking up the kids from daycare, and you still haven't replaced the salesperson who quit last week to pursue her rodeo dreams.

Finally, in absolute desperation, you dial the RadWords "helpline." Your representative (who sounds suspiciously like your teenaged son) starts gushing about auctions and contextual targeting. "By the way," he asks, "What's your daily budget going to be?" When you mumble something evasive, he tells you straight up that people who aren't willing to shell out \$40 a day might as well stick with "the dinosaurs on Craig's List."

As the snotty lecture continues, your confused thoughts begin to race. Would your monthly ad budget be better spent on direct mail? Or what about a radio spot? A TV commercial? All of the above?

One thing's for sure — you've reached the limits of your advertising know-how, not to mention your time and patience. It's clear that you desperately need someone in your corner to help you develop an efficient advertising plan.

But is an advertising agency really practical for a small or medium-sized business like yours?

Agencies: Who needs 'em?

As an independent marketing professional, I'm approached by many business owners who wonder if they'd benefit from working with an advertising agency. In some cases, the answer is no. A very small mom-and-pop or seasonal business may find it more cost-effective to handle their own advertising. An established consulting firm may be able to leverage its industry connections to create an efficient marketing plan. And the only chiropractor in town will likely enjoy a built-in following based solely on referrals — at least until a rival sets up shop.

However, many growing businesses reach a certain sticking point where they realize that achieving their goals will require more advertising than they can possibly handle in-house. In these cases, an agency may be an invaluable resource. Recognizing that you've reached this point isn't always easy, but there are a few telltale signs:

- You're spending more and more money on advertising without achieving a noticeable increase in profits.
- You find yourself relying on guesswork, conventional wisdom or the advice of friends and associates to develop your advertising strategy.
- You're bewildered by the vast array of media outlets available in the information age — television, radio, direct mail, classifieds, electronic billboards, text messaging, email and pay-per-click ads (to name just a few).
- It's growing painfully clear that your secretary is not a professional copywriter and your sales associate is not a polished voice talent. Besides, they're both too busy with their core duties to devote much time to advertising.
- You've tried to outsource your advertising piecemeal by contracting a freelance web designer and copywriter; but coordinating their efforts has created new headaches. Besides, they both charge steep hourly fees.

Much like an accounting firm, a solid advertising agency can be a partner in your business's success. Outsourcing your advertising to experts not only helps you increase profits, it frees up considerable time and talent for innovation, relationship building, staff development and customer service — all important building blocks for growing your business.

And as we all know, **Time Is Money!**

Ads are not enough

While you (and your future advertising agency) may focus considerable attention and resources on advertising, it should be just one part of your overall marketing strategy. Simply stated, traditional advertising involves promoting your products and services through various types of media partners. That alone won't create the sort of consumer loyalty that will help you thrive long-term.

Today's savvy consumers are unlikely to take your advertising claims at face value. They have access to less biased forms of communication, like online consumer reports and third-party reviews. They can also consult social media sites to see which of their friends have "liked" or otherwise recommended your business.

When choosing an advertising agency, it's important to look for one with a broad marketing focus, one that's able to provide those personal touches that can't be accomplished by advertising alone. Remember that an agency pitch should not be a performance but a fully transparent creative discussion about what they offer.

A skillful agency can help you connect your business, products and services with consumers by:

- Crafting short- and long-term marketing strategies geared to your business goals
- Preparing and managing a realistic marketing plan and budget
- Creating, designing and producing ads, commercials and other marketing materials
- Selecting and purchasing appropriate media for each campaign
- Sending clear, consistent messages that reinforce your company's identity, separate you from the competition and create an emotional connection in the minds of consumers (branding)



- Taking advantage of online marketing and social media opportunities
- Helping your company interact effectively with the media (public relations)
- Improving your visibility and reputation through community involvement. Responding promptly and flexibly to your changing needs and wishes
- Providing 24/7 assistance and customer service
- Tracking your progress and building on your successes for future campaigns

Ad agency myths

I'm often surprised at the lengths to which owners of small and medium-sized businesses will go to avoid outsourcing their advertising. Many companies that could have benefited from an agency years ago are still marketing on an expensive trial-and-error basis — or even worse, taking a “shotgun” approach. Though they're investing considerable money and effort in the process, they're probably not targeting their advertising as much as they should be — nor creating ads that sell effectively.

Some common misunderstandings that keep busy companies from outsourcing their advertising:

Agencies are only for big businesses.

A growing small business with several employees will often save money by working with an advertising agency. Hiring an agency frees up time and energy for business development, staff training, customer service and operations — all of which can help a small business grow into a medium-sized or even large one.

Hiring an agency will bankrupt us.

Effective advertising need not involve pyrotechnics, celebrity endorsements or high-dollar Superbowl spots. Many advertising agencies work very effectively with smaller clients on modest budgets. Find an agency that's willing to run a smart, targeted, no-nonsense campaign that sells — and leave the glitzy, multimillion-dollar commercials to Nike and the like.

If we can't afford the best, we might as well do it ourselves.

Signing with a big-name advertising agency may appeal to your ego. But if you're a small to mid-sized business running regional campaigns, take heed. Big agencies may reel you in with aggressive salespeople and flashy presentations — only to assign your account to junior level staffers. You're far more likely to get personal attention and access to top talent at smaller agencies.

My (friend, associate, competitor) had a bad experience with an agency.

Like any industry, advertising has its share of incompetents and predators. Furthermore, the fact that an agency does great work doesn't mean it's therefore a perfect fit for your company. Later on, we'll discuss in detail how to separate the wheat from the chaff — and pick an agency that gets you the results you need.

How an ad agency saves you money

It saves you time.

At a certain point in your business's life cycle, you'll likely reach a point where you can't devote sufficient time to marketing without compromising quality in other areas. Neglecting customer service, staff training and other mission critical tasks can spell disaster for any company. Outsourcing your marketing to a reputable agency allows you to devote more time and energy to your business — not to mention your loved ones.



It adds value to your campaigns.

Bringing pros onboard can make a significant difference in the quality and effectiveness of your advertising efforts. Through your advertising agency, you'll have access to a team of seasoned marketers and top-notch creative talent as well as professional production facilities. Putting out marketing messages that are consistent, compelling and targeted to a receptive audience can help you compete more effectively, strengthen your brand and increase your profits.

It offers an outsider's perspective.

If you've been relying on intuition, conventional wisdom or the advice of well-meaning associates to guide your advertising strategy, you're likely missing out on golden marketing opportunities. Because agencies work with a diverse clientele, they generally have a balanced perspective on which marketing strategies are likely to get results, which aren't, and which are attractive fluff designed to pick your pocket.

It increases efficiency.

Instead of hiring a full-service ad agency, some business owners try to outsource their advertising needs by contracting individually with marketing strategists, designers, SEO optimizers and so on. Unless these freelancers coordinate their efforts, this approach can quickly turn into a management and budget nightmare. Hiring an agency ensures that the folks on your campaign work as a team — and often keeps overall costs lower.

It helps strengthen your brand.

Companies that market by the seat of the pants often send contradictory messages that confuse consumers. An agency can help your company strengthen its brand identity, stand apart from the competition and create emotional connections with consumers. **The stronger your brand gets, the more customers will provide free marketing by spreading the word about your products and services.**

At the end of the day, “word of mouth advertising” is still the best form of advertising. Period.

Tips for choosing an ad agency

Choosing the right agency can make a real difference in your bottom line — and your quality of life. However, choosing the wrong agency can waste money, send your stress level skyrocketing and even damage your brand. When shopping for an agency, don't be dazzled by stunning statistics, clever ads and polished presentations. Instead, zero in on the quality of the agency's services and its compatibility with your company by asking the following questions:

Is the agency sales-focused?

When viewing an agency's portfolio, remember that the goal of advertising is to sell. Does the work compel you to buy the featured product or service? Does it create urgency? Does it speak to buyers' needs and motivations? Concept and cleverness mean nothing if the agency can't deliver ads that increase traffic to your store.

Do I like the agency's work?

It's entirely possible for an agency to do excellent work that's a poor fit for your brand or target audience. Like art, advertising is a highly subjective medium fraught with nuance. Don't be wowed by industry awards or impressive client lists. Instead, choose an agency that produces solid ads that you find compelling. Chances are, your consumers will agree.



Does the agency offer a wide range of services?

When shopping for an ad agency, think long-term. As your advertising budget grows, you may branch out into television commercials, text-message marketing or some cutting-edge medium yet to be invented. Choose an innovative agency that works in a wide variety of media, either directly or through subcontractors.

How will the agency be compensated?

When discussing fees with a potential agency, listen carefully for evidence of honesty and transparency. Ideally, the agency should be willing to work on a commission- or success-based fee with production and related services priced per project. Contracting with an agency on a per-hour basis is NOT a smart option for most small and mid-sized businesses.

Can I trust this agency with my advertising-related expenses?

Some small and medium-sized businesses choose to pay their media bills themselves, while others leave this chore to their advertising agency. If you plan to have your agency make payments on your behalf, be sure to run a complete financial check on that company. Then call your various media partners and check the agency's reputation for solid business practices.

Is this agency working for my competitors?

While most agencies adhere to a strict non-compete policy, it's wise to double-check that no conflicts of interest exist. Review the client list of both the agency and its subsidiaries to ensure they're not working for the competition.

Who will work on my account and what are their qualifications?

As mentioned above, it's not uncommon for large agencies to assign smaller accounts to inexperienced staff. Find out who will handle your account, obtain bios and work samples and arrange a face-to-face meeting. Before entering into a long-term partnership with these people, make sure that you respect their work — and that you like and trust them. At the end of the day this is a "relationship" business.

simplifyMyAdvertising - a sensible approach for smaller businesses

If you're looking to achieve large-agency marketing results at a fraction of the cost, **simplifyMyAdvertising may be an ideal solution for your company.** Our low-overhead business model gives you access to professional-grade production facilities and an experienced team of best-practice marketers, designers, copywriters, and voice and video talent — all at reasonable prices.

simplifyMyAdvertising operates on a commission-based fee structure. You pay only for media purchases and production services. You'll approve each purchase beforehand, and you'll never be surprised by hourly or hidden fees. And unlike most advertising agencies who want you to sign an annual contract with them,

simplifyMyAdvertising operates on a month-to-month basis and allows either party to opt out with 60-days notice.

Our ideal client advertises year-round, is involved in the community and likes the idea of forming a long-term partnership with an advertising agency. We pride ourselves on excellent customer service and work hard to offer the personal attention your business deserves.



simplifyMyAdvertising offers these benefits:

- We choose to focus on a very small number of clients and structure our work so that every client receives maximum attention.
- You deal with the principal, who remains fully accountable for all work performed. You'll never have to worry about your projects being "handed off" to a less-informed associate.
- You never pay for excessive overhead in the form of multiple offices, administrative backup, recruiting, partner perks and so on. We are streamlined to efficiently provide everything the client needs in a timely and professional manner.
- Confidentiality and privacy are protected, because you only deal with the principal.
- We respond quickly to your needs. Returning phone calls or emails within a couple of hours is the 'norm'. Once you become a client, you will be given the principal's cell phone number to ensure your needs are met quickly.
- We are affordable and willing to work within your budget. Our economy of scale allows us the flexibility to match our costs with the client's specific needs and nothing more.

The process

If you're interested in learning more about **simplifyMyAdvertising**, please visit our website: www.simplifyMyAdvertising.com You can also call us at call 855-746-7543 (toll free) 855-simplify or email David@simplifyMyAdvertising.com to schedule a free, no-obligation consult. We'll discuss your business plan, advertising needs, goals and expectations and how we can help you meet them.

About the author

David Brower has over 20 years of experience in marketing, advertising and creative communications. He began his career in radio and television and became a highly-rated on-air personality and award-winning play-by-play announcer. He later served as VP and General Manager for a group of radio stations in Chico, California.

From 2001 to 2008, David worked as a Regional Marketing Manager for the nation's eighth-largest automotive group. In this role, he directed the creative and marketing activities of 29 dealerships in 12 states and oversaw an annual advertising budget of over a million dollars.

When his corporate job was eliminated during the 2008 economic crisis, David decided to pursue his dream of working full-time as a voice actor and audio producer. He launched the successful audio production company POPPA, LLC that year, followed by simplifyMyAdvertising, a full-service marketing firm, in 2010.

To learn more about David Brower and his company please visit www.PoppaLLC.com and experience what he calls his "family of creativity."



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