How to Maintain Successful Client Relationships

Remember the old agency saying, "Good. Fast. Cheap. – pick two?" Well, in this economy, picking two is no longer an option or a realistic way to keep a client on board. Nowadays, it is all or nothing, because if you can't get it done good, fast and cheap, someone else will. So how do you maintain successful client relationships when everyone and their brother is knocking on their doors offering to create a logo for $100, when printers are going directly to them to secure their print jobs, and when nephews are creating websites for next to nothing? How do you compete?

Depending on whom you ask there are many different trains of thought on this one. Creatives tend to believe that the artwork has to be stellar and award-winning; those in account service believe maintaining a solid relationship with the client, through frequent contact, staying on deadline and effective budget management will do the trick; media planners think that providing the client with top level, highly-negotiated media plans might be the key; and lastly, production managers believe that producing high-quality materials within budget is most important.

Collectively – everyone's right – because if you fail miserably in one of those areas, the agency as a whole fails. So I decided to do a mini focus group around our agency and ask people in different departments what they thought. Everyone, no matter what department they were in, pretty much had the same answer: Communication is key. Whether it is with the client, a vendor or internally, successful communication is the key to successful execution – no matter what the assignment.

Then we thought, why not go to the source? So, we asked a very wise client of ours what he thought ensured a successful agency/client relationship, was it stellar creative, effective communication, great media buys, staying within budget, providing detailed reports, etc? We loved his answer.

"Of course all of those things are important, but the most important thing I am looking for in an agency is the collaboration of multiple creative minds that provide me with the big ideas that help to build upon my brand and break through the clutter of the competition. Of course effective communication is essential. I need to be able to clearly relay my goals to my agency in order for them to have the tools they need to come up with that big idea and in turn I need them to communicate effectively back to me throughout the process to ensure successful execution. I look at my agency as an extension of my marketing department and appreciate the fact that the ideas generated are not encumbered by internal office politics. Often my thinking is restricted by the limitations based on the type of company I work for, so having an agency that is an extension of my department and can think freely to come up with the big ideas is very important to me."

So yes, your nephew can probably design your website and your next-door neighbor's kid can probably design you a logo, but they will not have the capability to know your business as well as you do. Nor would they have the luxury of working with multiple creative minds that can communicate effectively and collaborate to come up with the big idea that can also be executed successfully as a team effort by multiple departments.

Good, fast and cheap...well, let's stay within budget!