



IABC Communicator

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Agency IABC Ovation Winners Share Best Practices

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Communicators know that to deliver a successful marcom initiative, they need to find the right partners and suppliers to execute impressive product launches, memorable events and effective media relations.

IABC Ovation Agency 2006/2007 award winners and their clients share these best practices on building and strengthening business relationships.

Cathy Cowan, President, Cowan & Company Communications, IABC OVATION Small Agency winner, and her client Ana Marie Atkinson, Marketing and Brand Manager, Casey's Grill, stress an importance on the following to generate results:

- **Regular briefings & communication**- When the client frequently keeps the agency up to speed on its direction and developments, effective teamwork is established. Share information: overwhelm the agency with paper, briefs, industry research. Better to over-communicate.
- **Month-by-month program plan**- Develop a PR plan to track and plan proactive media relations initiatives. While this plan is continuously revised throughout the year, documenting changes and new activities enables everyone to be on the same page about next steps and timing, creating a more effective campaign.
- **Open dialogue about budget management to maximize value**- Schedule regular touch points about the budget to eliminate surprises.
- **Mix it up**- No matter how clever your pitches, the same lifestyle media won't cover the same brand month after month. For this reason, it's essential for the communications plan encompass a range of stakeholders with various marketing communications disciplines and approaches.

Ken Evans, Vice-President, Corporate Communications, APEX Public Relations, IABC OVATION Mid-Size Agency winner and Agency of the Year recipient, and his client Kelly Harper, Head of Marketing, Retail Investment Products, BMO Financial Group, reinforce the benefits of early engagement, detailed research and a comprehensive strategy:

- **Work collectively as strategic partners**- When the client integrates the PR agency's outside expertise into the planning process from the beginning, this helps generate more comprehensive due diligence on the effect and influence of a new system, service or product on the target market.
- **Improve the strategic planning process**- A more efficient strategic planning process better enables collective creativity and strategic discipline.
- **Changing well-established behaviours and perceptions is a long-term program**- It requires analysis, early engagement of all internal and external support, collective planning and relationships that are based on the spirit of partnership and creative reciprocity.
- **Invest in long-term goals**- Strategic transformation takes time and won't show results overnight. Trust the process.

John Thibodeau, Vice-President, Media Profile, IABC OVATION Large Agency of the Year, and his client Cynthia Keeshan, Corporate Communications & PR Manager, Microsoft Canada, focus on the importance of client/agency partnership in managing image and reputation:

- **Learn the client and the industry**– Build expertise on every aspect of your client’s business and industry. Invest in that knowledge, even if you can’t bill for everything.
- **Bring your agency to the table**– Too often clients use one person to brief the agency on everything that happens within their company rather than inviting the agency to the table to experience the full spectrum of the client’s business goals and working environment.
- **Allow dissention (to a point)**– Agencies can provide their best insight if they are given permission to disagree with the client’s view sometimes. This includes providing critical feedback on how you work together. Be open to criticism and respond to it quickly.
- **Understand the client’s internal processes and challenges** – Success often depends on tailoring your work and recommendations to fit the client’s internal marketing and sales deadlines and to describing your work and successes in language that resonates for your client.

“The best client-agency relationships are built over time through solid communications. Reardon Smith Whittaker suggests that 46 per cent of corporate clients end their agency relationships within two years. Agency churn costs both clients and agencies time and money, so select your agency wisely and apply these best practices to develop long-term partnerships,” confirms Sheila Corriveau, Partner, AgencyLink Inc.