

SWEAT TO SWEET: AGENCYLINK'S 10 STEPS TO IMPROVE CLIENT-AGENCY RELATIONSHIPS

The client-agency relationship takes hard work, ongoing communications and clear targets. When the client organization and its agency hit these ten sweet spots, the relationship is a beautiful thing!



- 1 Make the Right Agency Choice:** There are 564 public relations companies in Canada*. Get off to a good start by making the right choice. Consider and weigh your organization's priorities against candidate agency experience, chemistry, creativity, staff stability, quality of work, accessibility and fee structure, among many other qualities.
* Source: PR firms employing more than one person. Dun & Bradstreet, Hoovers, 2007.
- 2 Align Expectations:** To get the relationship off to a good start, hold an expectations workshop. Determine who will do what, how you will interact, who makes which decisions, how approvals are handled, how often you'll meet, and details of status reports. An open dialogue on expectations takes the guesswork out of the relationship down the road.
- 3 Plan and Integrate:** Involve your agency in the strategic planning process. They have ideas and best practices they can share from other client experiences. This is stimulating work for agency staff and gives them insight into tactical plans you are charging them to execute. To maximize value, be sure to integrate with other marketing agencies or with internal communications strategies.
- 4 Earn Trust:** Each party must be willing and confident to open up to the other. Trust is gained by acting with integrity. Trust ensures that both organizations will do what they say they will do, and by having the belief that an organization has the competence to do what it says it will do.
- 5 Build Commitment:** A great relationship is worth the investment of time and money by both organizations. Commitment is demonstrated by continuous actions and by an emotional orientation. Commitment will see the agency-client relationship through any rough patches it may encounter.
- 6 Communicate:** Strong communications sustain an ongoing relationship. Bring issues out in the open, particularly sensitive and emotional topics. Be sure that expectations are articulated, that progress is monitored, and that common goals are achieved.
- 7 No-Surprise Budgeting:** Money is a strange commodity. Client organizations face tremendous pressure to be accountable for value of budgets earmarked for agencies. On the other hand, agency business models are fuelled by people billing their time. A strong relationship is fostered when there are no surprises on budgets, time sheets, or invoices.
- 8 Contribute:** If a client feels its agency is simply taking orders, animosity will build. Conversely, if the agency feels its flying solo, danger lurks. To work at optimal levels, any relationship needs contributions from both partners. One fills the other's weaknesses, the other learns from the experience.
- 9 Always Measure:** Measure against your priority goals. Test the satisfaction levels of the relationship itself. Make sure your joint programs are making a positive impact with target audiences. Benchmark against industry peers. Then adjust to optimize the relationship and the work.
- 10 Celebrate:** Pause to say thank you. Both of you. Celebrate the successes that your combined efforts have delivered. You'll recharge, reflect on how thrilled you are to be working together and be ready to take the relationship to even higher levels. How sweet is that? 🍬

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