



# 5 Questions About Managing Social You Should Ask your Agency *and the kinds of answers your agency should be able to give.*

Choosing the right marketing or branding agency for your company is a complicated task. You can go with reputation, but reputation can be expensive. You can go with the new guys on the block, but how do you know if they have the experience? Tech-heavy digital design agencies may not know enough about traditional media. And no one wants an agency that doesn't know as much about digital as possible. That's where all the earned media opportunities are!

## So, where's the balance?

In many ways, it's a gut feeling and intuition that you rely on. Your agency will have your brand in its hands, tinkering with it, stretching and molding it. Hopefully, the result will be something new but on-strategy, unexpected and successful.

## Trust is required.

In order to trust your agency, you need to ask questions and listen to what they say — and *don't* say — when they answer. Similar to job interviews (or, dare we say it, dating), there are always a few questions you can ask to separate the possibilities from the poseurs.

## The Five Questions You Should Be Asking:

- 1 What is your definition of a successful campaign?
- 2 If you had unlimited resources and budget, which social marketing outlets would you concentrate on for my business?
- 3 As my agency, are there people you can influence to get more traction for my brand?
- 4 What do you see changing most in the next two quarters?
- 5 How will you measure my success?

## 1 What is your definition of a successful campaign?

No matter how many awards the television commercial wins — nor how many Tweets or Facebook fans it generates — if you measure success in sales and you aren't moving more body wash and deodorant than before, then your agency's success may be at the expense of your business failure. Make sure your agency believes in and respects your idea of success. You are the customer, after all.

To be successful, digital and traditional need each other.

"Your digital work," said Rick Mathieson, author of *The On-Demand Brand*, in an interview with MarketingCharts, "should reinforce and build upon everything else your brand is doing in every other medium. When it's not, sometimes that's your fault, sometimes it's the agency's. If it's your fault, fix it. If it's the agency's fault, start looking [for a new one]."

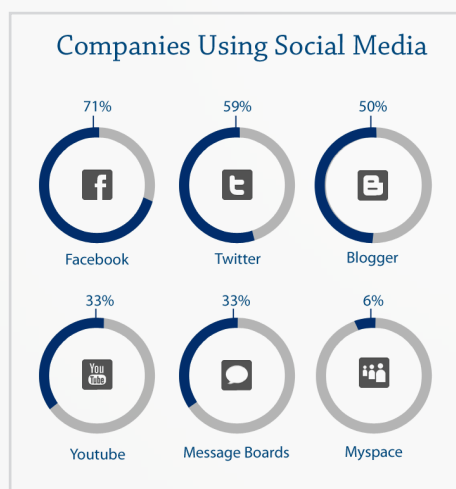
Because all media may eventually become digital, every traditional agency must become inclusive of digital media. And being inclusive means more than simply pointing clients to one corner of the agency office.

"You know you need to find a new digital agency when they say, 'We're experts in everything digital,' and then point to a single person as their specialist in mobile, social, and eCRM," says Bryon Morrison, president of The Marketing Arm's digital group, in "4 Reasons to Fire Your Digital Agency."

COMMENTS LIKES  
ANALYTICS RETWEET  
DEMOGRAPHICS SEC  
POSTS SOCIAL MEDIA  
TWEETS DIRECT MESSAG  
SHARING PAGE VIEW  
TRACKING CONVERSI

*One person handling digital does not make for successful campaigns.*

## 2 If you had unlimited resources and budget, which social marketing outlet would you concentrate on for my business?



*Social marketing strategy needs to derive directly from the digital strategy.*

This is a trick question. As Ashok Lalla of Clickz.Asia says in his blog post "10 Questions for Marketers Before They Brief Their Digital Agency," "Social marketing strategy needs to derive directly from the digital strategy, which in turn should roll down from the overall marketing strategy. That is the best way of ensuring a cohesive consumer strategy."

So when you ask your agency what social marketing outlets they would concentrate on, they probably shouldn't answer with anything specific, unless they can demonstrate a firm grasp of your company and what your overall marketing strategy is in the first place.

**If they are your agency they should already know your overall strategy.**

If they are a prospective agency and they have a good answer about your overall strategy, then they've done their homework. Lalla says keep this in mind: You wouldn't have a New York Times strategy, so why would you have a Twitter strategy? By definition, the strategy comes before the outlet, and no agency should point to an outlet first.

### 3 As my agency, are there people you can influence to get more traction for my brand?

Ask about the agency's understanding of influence and how to use that for earned media. How connected are they? Do you see any overlap with your own connections or industry experts?

Highly influential people speaking on your behalf will make an impact on your brand, but think about the spectrum of influence. Though you probably can't get Jennifer Aniston to shout from the rooftops, perhaps a leader in your industry might be able to give you some props for free through a blog review or video endorsement.

The digital world revolves around networks of people, so don't overlook agencies with connections to experts. And don't overlook agencies with connections to competitors, either. As Larson says, "An agency that is constantly monitoring its competitors will make sure that they're producing the most cutting-edge marketing solutions. They have a good handle on what strategies are successful, as well as what strategies have failed."

#### The best 'user-generated content' is produced by professionals.

You may not want to believe this, but that inspiring and insightful blog post written by your CEO was probably not written by the CEO at all. It was more likely written by a professional copywriter. So it goes for much of the Internet's best content.

As Lalla points out, "The biggest hits of the Internet in the much romanticized 'user-generated' space are professionally produced by the same folks who produce the best advertising. Supervised by the best directors. Scripted by the best copywriters. But made to look 'user generated' via smart creative treatment."

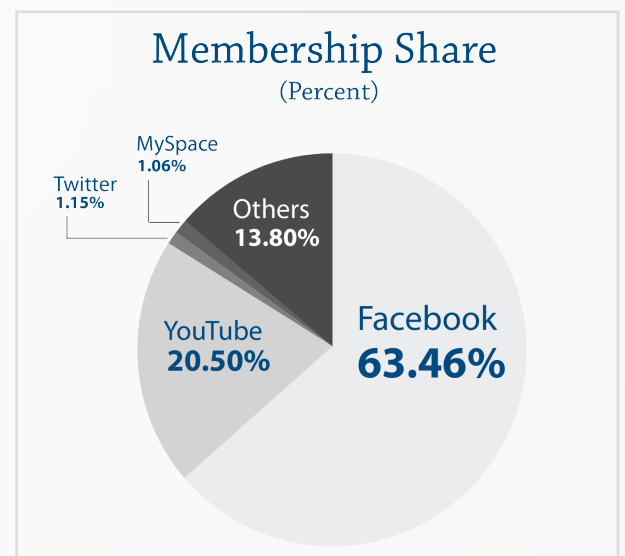
If you think your brand is going to succeed with a video shot for free around the office and narrated by the witty guy in your marketing department, you are betting on the long odds.

#### Spraying substandard creative to all your digital channels and seeing "what sticks" won't help, either.

In the blog post "How To Hire A Digital Ad Agency," Director of Digital Marketing and Public Relations for mPRm Clay Dollarhide says,

*A big mistake a lot of folks get into is they feel they need to be everywhere and on every social media platform, which means they end up spreading themselves too thin and are therefore not able to penetrate any of the social media platforms in a substantial way.*

*Have a discussion with your digital marketing agencies to see where they think your campaign could really succeed within the social media realm and do not feel obligated to have a Facebook fan page because everyone else has one.*



In short, creative content is what your agency is there to make. They are professionals at tone and persuasion. This is why you should be happy with them as a partner and happy to pay them for their work. After all, viral isn't something you "do." It's what happens when your agency aligns killer creative with relevant business goals, differentiated competitive positioning, and audience interest.

## 4 What do you see changing most in the next two quarters?

Ask your agency about the future. Any good agency will have answers to this question. In retrospect, the answer will most likely be incorrect since things change quickly, but it's important to make sure your agency is at least thinking of the next big thing.

Future-focused questions will also help you gauge what risks your agency is willing to take for the sake of innovation, as well as shed light on your own company's tolerance for creative risk.

### If you build it, they probably won't come.

You can waste a lot of money trying to "drive traffic" to promotions that are more like tiny pieces of cheese on mousetraps than value offerings. Lalla says, "The new WWW isn't World Wide Web, but Wherever, Whenever, Whatever. Reach your audience where they are, when they want, in the manner they want to connect."

The destination is no longer an app download or a landing page. It's certainly not a form field! The destination is the consumers themselves. You have to get your brand to them. Trying to get them to your brand home page is a fool's errand.

### "Likes" are likely going away, too.

Mark Zuckerberg detailed changes in Facebook's Open Graph protocol at the F8 Developers Conference. Open Graph's new metadata, Zuckerberg said, "puts personal and semantic meaning behind the Web – I like this band. I am attending this event." Or I ate here or spotted that or ran this.

What will ultimately happen when Facebook links to apps with more and more verbs? The list of new potential Facebook verbs beyond "like" stretches as far as the imagination and will give data more nuance and granularity. Facebook soon expects to generate a billion actions per hour, mostly through arbitrary actions and objects created by mobile apps.

By doing so, Facebook is becoming a new kind of interactive social search engine, where even asking an audience to enter search terms or click a "like" button will seem dated and unnecessary. (Be honest: Don't we all find tallying "likes" a little silly already?) Your agency should have some insight about these kinds of matters.



## 5 How will you measure my success?

This question allows you to assess whether or not your agency values and understands analytical data. Are they ignorant of numbers? Or are they overly enamored with KPIs? Neither is desirable, especially not when you need creative that works on a human level.

Although ROI must be factored into any marketing endeavor, measuring it should not outweigh the freedom to explore creative approaches that may suit your business goals, even those that are difficult to measure quantitatively.

## Clicks and Impressions offer minimal insight.

In "Four Reasons to Fire Your Digital Ad Agency," Stephanie Rogers, Senior Director of Contact Planning at PARTNERS + simons, says, if your agency can't measure campaign performance beyond impressions and clicks, it's time to find a new agency.

Rogers suggest you look beyond simple definitions, saying, "It is important to bring a rigorous process to the definition of success, the development of audience insights, content delivery, and measurement of audience engagement." Mathieson adds, "You can tell the agency is not focusing on the brand when dialogue is only and exclusively about ROI and metrics."

## Metrics should not run the show.

And here's why. Consider the nature of analytical thought. Analysis means, "to separate something into its constituent elements." Raw analytics applied to metrics would be wonderful if your marketing were aimed at machines, which is precisely what "clicks" and "traffic" measure: human interaction with machines.

But you want your marketing to resonate with the human beings themselves. The measurement of success should not be pure analysis, but rather insight, "the capacity to gain an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of a person or thing."

Sadly, all the analysis in the world will not automatically yield intuition. It can't, because breaking a thing into its component parts and reassembling it will not reproduce the thing itself. The two terms, analysis and intuition, represent polar opposite ways of thinking. Your agency should make you feel comfortable with that reality and help you bring those different ways of thinking into balance.

---

## Sources:

<http://www.marketingcharts.com/direct/4-reasons-to-fire-your-digital-ad-agency-12755/>

"4 Reasons to Fire Your Digital Agency," MarketingCharts, Watershed Publishing, April 29, 2010.

<http://www.clickz.asia/2385/10-questions-marketers-should-answer-before-they-brief-their-digital-agency>

"10 Questions for Marketers Before They Brief Their Digital Agency," Ashok Lalla, Clickz.asia, Jan 20, 2011.

<http://www.marketingcharts.com/direct/how-to-hire-a-digital-ad-agency-12518/>

"How to Hire A Digital Ad Agency," MarketingCharts, Watershed Publishing, April 7, 2010.

<http://www.ondemandbrand.com/>

The On-Demand Brand: 10 Rules for Digital Marketing Success in an Anytime, Everywhere World, Rick Mathieson, AMACOM Publishing, 2010.

<http://www.jeffbullas.com/2011/11/07/why-facebook-wants-your-business-to-build-an-app>

"Why Facebook Wants Your Business to Build an App," Adrienne Olds, JeffBullas.com, Nov 7, 2011.