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PROMOTIONS & EVENTS, LLC

WHY DO EVENTS (rather than just spending the money on more advertising)?

By John Roush, President, Geronimo Promotions & Events LLC

I suppose at this point I would be considered a veteran of the agency business. Big agencies, small agencies, ad agencies, PR agencies, promotion agencies, media agencies, direct marketing agencies, digital agencies, boutique agencies.... yada yada yada. Been there, done that.... times 5,000.

Don't get me wrong. I love this business. I am passionate about this business. I love its urgency. I love its creativity. I love its constantly evolving nature. I love juggling twenty projects at once with hourly changing priorities. I even love working with a bunch of raving, ADHD creative types who all believe without reservation that they, and they alone, possess the big idea. And as a result, I will probably never retire until someone confronts me with a weapon and says in a calm but authoritative voice: "Sir. Please put the deck down and step away from the conference table."

So, count me among the few who actually encourage young marketers to get into this crazy world. It certainly isn't for everyone. If you aren't flexible, adaptable and able to tolerate a lot of ambiguity and stress: don't even start. The agency business is not for sissies. It is hard work, long hours and a lot of menial stuff that you don't see on Mad Men.

As the aforementioned "veteran" of the business, I get asked a lot after a guest lecture or by friends of my sons: "So, what are some tips to get ahead in the agency business?" After some serious thought, here are my top twelve tips for success in this mad, mad world.

The first tip is that almost everyone starts at the bottom, and until you show everyone that can you do the basic stuff well without complaining or dropping a ball, you aren't going anywhere. Then they will start piling stuff on. You still cannot drop a ball. If you do that well, they may actually let you spend some significant time with a client. And if you don't do anything stupid there, you will get increasingly involved with the more important stuff, and one day you will find out that you are about to become a "manager." This is when it gets tricky. Because if you don't have a good staff--a staff that has your back and actually supports you, you will not succeed.

To that end, here is my advice for succeeding as a manager in the agency business:

1. Work with your staff, don't just direct them. From concept development to implementation, notice what they are doing right and give them credit. Build a team. Work hard, but have fun doing it. Fun is a good thing, and the client usually ends up wanting to be a part of it, too. Then the client becomes a partner.

2. Keep everyone on the same page and within the required timelines. Set expectations that are high; applaud loudly when they are met. Help when they aren't. Don't hesitate to make changes to the staff or the system if it is needed.
3. Never forget the objectives. Never. It doesn't make any difference how creative an idea is if it doesn't meet the client's objectives.
4. Cross the t's and dot the i's..... make sure someone you trust is managing the details. Check on them obsessively.
5. Communicate frequently with the client and your staff. Manage the process and the expectations. Keep the client happy, and your staff informed. Don't talk down to anyone. Don't play games. Tell people where you stand. Be truthful.
6. Manage the budgets and watch the cash flow. Make sure the agency makes money and the client's money is well spent. Don't forget this is a business. Be realistic with your estimates and projections. Never go over budget, but be direct if something changes. Open book accounting generates trust.
7. Anticipate problems. Develop contingencies. Keep your finger on the pulse of the client and the industry. Don't be afraid to make decisions. Don't drag it on forever, but don't rush to judgment if you don't have to. Don't be arbitrary.
8. If the worst happens, don't ignore or put off addressing bad news. Deal with it now because it usually gets worse with time. Give the client a proposed solution or course of action at the same time you give them the bad news.
9. Look for new opportunities. Make the client's business your business. Understand their challenges. Look for new solutions. Keep your eye on trends, new ideas in the industry, and better ways to do the same old thing.
10. Think outside the boxes. Create. Don't be a cookie cutter. Trust in your idea and don't be afraid to defy convention. Listen to everyone, because often the seeds of the best ideas are buried in the wildest, funniest, or lamest idea you ever heard. Never let go until you have THE idea, but be sure it can be implemented. Be tenacious, but if the client absolutely vetoes it, even if it is a great idea, move on.
11. Present with enthusiasm, but don't forget the set up, the numbers and the analysis. Have some flair. People most remember the beginning and ending, so get it right and make a splash. Practice. Look people in the eye. Exude confidence.
12. Operate with style. Be confident, but not arrogant. Be upbeat. Dress well, but appropriately for where you are. Mesh with the client's and agency's environment. As a general rule, be conservative except for one thing. Be yourself. Don't complain. Do more than you are asked. Don't forget to have fun.

While this list is somewhat arbitrary and tongue-in-cheek, I stand by it. If you live by this advice, you may not become president of the agency, but you will be respected and you will have a long and productive career.

Just don't forget to have fun along the way.