

Is There Too Much To Say About Your Business?

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Does only a fraction of your marketing plan get executed each year?

Every year you go through the same thing. Bold plans are sketched out. This is the year the new brochure will finally get done. Or you'll undertake that major new Web update. Or overhaul your pitches and proposals. Or get that award application in on time. The list goes on. And so, unfortunately, does the percentage of it that remains unfinished. It's just impossible for the one- or two-person marketing staffs in most small service businesses to cover all the bases. And it's not their fault.

You can easily imagine something better.

You can visualize all the pieces laid out in your marketing plan—the graphics you'd use, the successes you'd highlight and, most importantly, the business they might help bring in. Taken singly, the elements seem comparatively small. So why should it be so hard to get them done, especially when their potential impact is so great?

Maybe it's time to send in the cavalry.

In most organizations, marketing staff gets yanked in a dozen different directions on a daily basis. It's no wonder that long-term strategic projects don't get finished. Proposals need to go out, ideas have to get kicked around, press calls have to be returned and there's always that last-minute bit of “temporary” collateral that has to be put together. The smaller the marketing organization, the more it's typically asked to do. Even with staff willing to work long days, there simply aren't enough person-hours to tackle everything. You need help. Probably not another expensive full-time resource, just somebody you can build a relationship with quickly, put to work right away and get some real value from in a short time.

How do you ensure that the help you find is actually helpful?

There is no shortage of marketing consulting firms. They come in all shapes, sizes and price ranges. How do you ensure that the one you hire is really going to help you? Of course, we'd love it if you'd pick Evoke. But you probably have to perform a little due diligence first. We'd like to offer you a short checklist to help you rationalize the process of selecting a consultant who'll help you get your stuff out in the marketplace—and into the hands of your prospects.

- 1. Size.** Decide whether you want to work with a large firm or a small one. Your account will almost certainly matter more to a smaller firm, so they'll be more eager to please and deliver extraordinary value. They also use strategic partnerships to deliver auxiliary services—such as design—so you won't pay for it unless you use it. Just make sure that the firm really possesses the core competencies you need. Larger firms have wider range of resources at their disposal, but that doesn't mean you'll get access to them when you want them. And whether you do or not, you'll pay for it. Also, it's often harder to persuade a larger firm that your project should take priority.
- 2. Track record.** The firm should show repeat success in creating uniquely-voiced material for other clients. If possible, get samples of work they did for two organizations in the same industry and compare them. Look for “language ruts”—jargon and undistinguished terms that appear in several pieces, no matter how different the design. Remember, you're looking for someone to help you get your particular message out there—and make it sound like you.





3. **Expertise and savvy.** You don't want to spend a lot of time explaining how things work in your industry. The firm's principals need to demonstrate that they know a bit about your business. Bear in mind, though, that when it comes to writing creative pieces, you might not want the recognized "experts" in marketing for your industry; they've already worked for your competitors. Consider looking for consultants who are smart enough to make the case that similar work they've done is, in fact, similar.
4. **Clicking.** Now it's time to pick up the phone. It is critically important that the consultants be able to establish strong rapport with you—and your marketing staff—quickly. After all, you need help executing your vision.
5. **Curiosity.** During your conversation, the consultant should ask you a lot of questions. This indicates a creative grappling with your vision and message—and maybe even a fair chance that they'll "get" your voice. Beware of those who seem really intent on hammering home their own messages; they already have the answers. You deserve better—and your clients will absolutely demand it.
6. **Demonstration.** If you still have questions after the first five checkpoints, good consultants that are genuinely interested in your business often offer to do a short "proof piece" just for you at no charge. If they don't offer, you can ask. Give them a piece of collateral you like—that already expresses your vision in the way you want to express it—and the background information they need, and set them to work. Some good test pieces are:
 - Case studies/success stories (or at least the intros to them)
 - New service offerings that fit clearly within an existing framework
 - Bios of new firm principals (modeled on current bios)
 - Executive summaries for short proposals

Finding the right help can take some time and effort, but the process doesn't have to be overwhelming. And once you've established a relationship that can grow into a partnership with your in-house marketing team, you'll be glad you did. More points on your marketing plan will get "hit," and the combination of internal and external views will lead to even greater creativity in all your materials.

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Experience your own power with Evoke.

Steven Skyles-Mulligan of Evoke Strategies understands that organizations and people have unique voices that have to be Evoked if marketing materials are to be effective. For over 12 years, he has helped a wide range of service professionals and their organizations communicate in the marketplace with clarity and passion. Evoke works collaboratively—and quickly—to give you what you need. We'd be glad to discuss your needs by phone or in person at no charge. Call **212.967.7611** or visit **www.evokestrategies.com**.