

WHAT AGENCIES WANT

There are no prizes for guessing what's top of the wish list among agencies. "We want nothing more than to be part of the thinking, not just the execution," says Kerry Hilton, president/CEO at HCB Health. "When the agency is in on it from the very beginning, they're much more willing to jump through hoops and make the impossible possible."

But to do it properly, he says, agencies need know fully the financial boundaries of the project. "When a client is unwilling or unable to share their budgets," he explains, "it's difficult to determine the best solution and the agency is working blind."

Help us to work more efficiently

Adrian Sansone, general manager, Publicis Life Brands International, believes all relationships can become more efficient, citing better collaboration between medical/regulatory/legal reviewers and agency teams as a way to reduce costs and get materials to market faster. "In complex marketing environments, it takes many disciplines working together to develop the most impactful and differentiated strategies," he states. "More can be done to drive a deeper and broader relationships beyond the client marketing teams."

Thankfully, the alignment of decision makers is happening earlier in proceedings, according to Jay Carter, SVP, AbelsonTaylor. "It has reduced the number of revisions in projects dramatically... allowing resources to be focused upon execution with the customer, not on the process," Carter says.

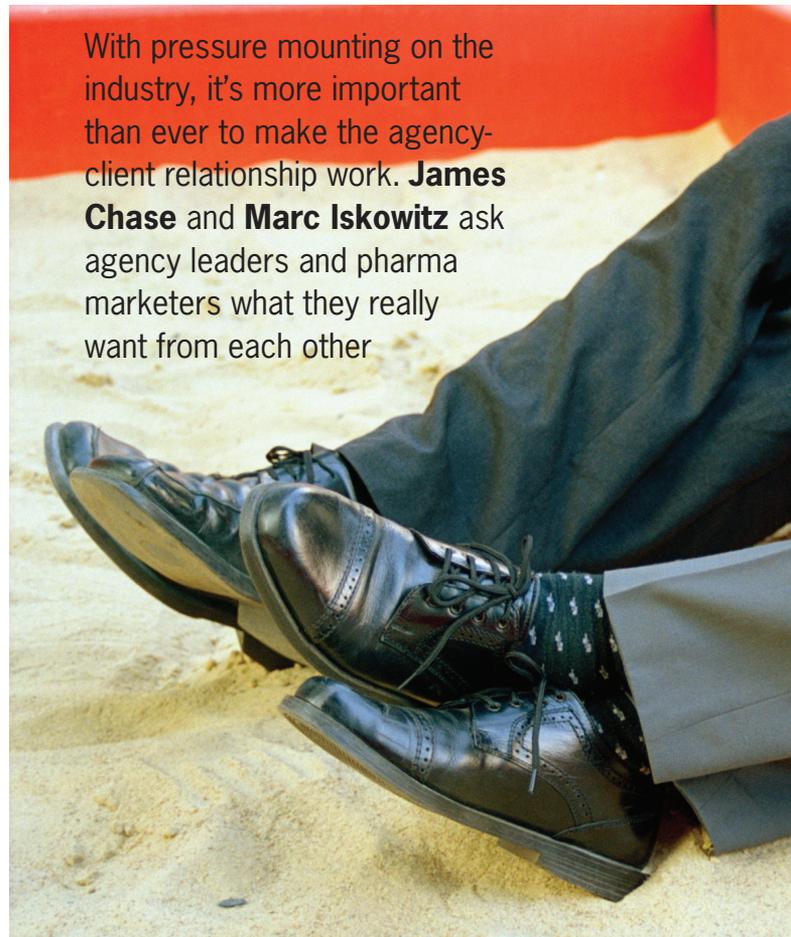
Stop tinkering with our work

Nevertheless, Palio president Mike Myers points to the frustration of clients that constantly change creative. "The vast majority of ongoing course corrections don't really help," he offered in the blog Community Pharm. "They may not hurt either. But it might be a great opportunity to consider that sometimes the experts you've hired may be doing something that is great even before you start tweaking it."

Myers insists that focusing on creative briefs will save money and time, because "figuring it out during the work hurts everyone."

Again, Carter is encouraged by what he is seeing. "As more

With pressure mounting on the industry, it's more important than ever to make the agency-client relationship work. **James Chase** and **Marc Iskowitz** ask agency leaders and pharma marketers what they really want from each other



clients focus upon bottom-line results, vision has become much more important. Most organizations that I work with today suffer little from the 'analysis paralysis' of the 90s. Our brand directors take the time and spend the resources early to formulate a clear and compelling brand vision... and then we have the pleasure of executing a better-thought-out plan."

Don't commoditize us

The P-word has long been a frustration to agencies. "Procurement, in many instances, has commoditized services and placed agencies in a position of defending themselves as vendors versus being treated as trusted counselors/advisors," contends Myers. "I find it ironic and alarming that consultants can be paid two to three times a typical agency rate without any concern, while agencies are fighting to maintain a reasonable level of profitability."

He also maintains that cutting estimates and "fighting over every hourly rate discussion" isn't mutually beneficial. "Clients push for rate reductions, yet demand senior-level agency talent. As a result, agencies often have people working on a client's brand at a loss. This is not sustainable over time."

Ned Russell, managing director at Saatchi & Saatchi Wellness, understands why companies need procurement but believes it can often take the in-line marketing department out of some important conversations at the beginning of the agency selection process. "It also runs the risk of diminishing the role of the relationship between clients and agencies," he says, "which is important because at the end of the day we sell knowledge and a capacity that comes from people. Clients need to have confidence in their people." ■



WHAT CLIENTS WANT

Become a true partner. Laurent Sammut, international senior product manager for Humira at Abbott Laboratories, has an encouraging message for the agency set. “We’re all in this together,” he says, “so I like working with an agency that knows and embraces collaborative relationships, and is a true strategic and creative partner for our brand.”

That also means anticipating the client’s needs, which is something Nate TenHuisen, consumer brand director for Nexium at AstraZeneca, expects – and receives – from his agency. “They understand our objectives,” he says. “They push back appropriately. They give us what we ask for... but they also give us what we need, even if we didn’t ask for it.”

Taking ownership of the business in this way is vital to the success of a partnership, according to Doug Saltel, president and CEO at Edgemont Pharmaceuticals. “Agencies need to take the view that our business is their business as well,” he says. “They need to come up with new, creative ways to challenge the status quo and to reach our target market, effectively and efficiently. They are not there just to produce the materials we ask for. They need to go well beyond creative and to accept that they have personally signed up to help us drive the business forward.”

Work efficiently – and man up!

Saltel thinks inefficiencies usually result from a breakdown in communication regarding project priorities, content, tactical execution or time management. He says, “Why spend time updating a project when you know more changes—like DDMAC feedback—are coming in next week? Why not wait and do the work once, instead of twice?”

Such inefficiencies infuriate Saltel, and he is one client you wouldn’t accuse of over-tinkering. “When we agree on a certain way to say something, don’t go back to your office and come up with five different ways to say the same thing for different promotional items. Keep it simple.”

He also demands that his agencies take a position on the ideas they are presenting. “It drives me crazy when they don’t have an opinion and leave it up to the company to decide. We need the ad agency’s input, ideas, honesty and the willingness to have a healthy debate about the direction we should take. We need an agency team that is willing to challenge us. I have fired ad agencies in the past because they were ‘yes’ people. I will only work with agencies that will be at the table and part of the decision-making process. I have no patience for order-takers; they add no value and are a waste of time.”

Sammut agrees wholeheartedly. “When I brief an agency on a project, the last thing I want is a room filled with people who think everything I say is gospel. I need people to speak up and offer new thinking and new perspectives. So, if I’m not right about something, or if you have another point of view, together we can improve the thinking. The agency who can do that adds real value.”

Understand the need for procurement

Sammut extols the virtues of having procurement teams remove part of the financial discussion between agency and client. “It makes our job easier and allows us to focus on the business,” he says.

For agencies, it’s unlikely to get any easier anytime soon. “They need to understand that these are no longer the good old days of pharmaceutical marketing. An increased scrutiny of ROIs and a more comprehensive understanding of what clients are getting in return for various fees will be the norm moving forward.”

Saltel, too, has little sympathy for the procured. “Agencies need to be sensitive at all times to client budgets and make sure there is value in every dollar spent,” he says. “And if it becomes an hourly accounting exercise, they should change their business model and get a CPA.” ■

A longer version of this article is online at www.mmm-online.com