



Demystifying marketing outsourcing

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By Patrick Byers, Guest Columnist

If you haven't heard of marketing outsourcing, you soon will. Marketing outsourcing is an innovative—some would say revolutionary—strategy that represents an entirely new “third way” to accomplish a company's marketing objectives.

In the past, most executives considered outsourcing simply a smart strategy to better manage resources and keep control the cost of various inputs, such as accounting, IT and HR functions.

Not anymore. Outsourcing is recognized as a powerful way to gain competitive advantage by eliminating non-core distractions so a company can focus on customer satisfaction, innovation, acquisitions and other strategic opportunities.

Though companies have long hired outside vendors to execute direct mail, advertising, public relations and many other deliverables, the complete outsourcing of the marketing function is gaining real traction now.

So, what is marketing outsourcing?

Put simply, marketing outsourcing simplifies the procurement of services and removes the time, expense and uncertainty of building and maintaining relationships with a multitude of talented (but potentially biased) marketing service providers.

Instead, a single resource manages the entire marketing function—from research, analysis, strategy, planning and

management to the execution of advertising, public relations, direct marketing, internal communications, Web marketing and even media buying, placement and printing.

What marketing outsourcing is not.

Marketing outsourcing is not the use of “marketing temps,” a short-term solution that does little to build long-term value.

It does not involve outsourcing marketing disciplines à la carte—such as PR or advertising.

And it isn't “marketing in-sourcing,” where an outside firm assumes responsibility for the employment of a company's marketing department.

Marketing outsourcing is a process that seamlessly integrates all marketing functions through the strategic deployment of resource.

What are the benefits of marketing outsourcing?

In addition to its strategic value, benefits include:

Improved focus. In-house employees are freed to play to their strengths. Companies can gain access to a ready-built team with the infrastructure in place to develop strategy and fully implement every element of the plan.

Truly Integrated Marketing Communications. Since all communications are directed by one firm, all disciplines are executed seamlessly.

Media and discipline neutrality.

Because it encompasses all marketing disciplines, a marketing outsourcing firm isn't predisposed to recommend one over another. Its role is to identify, deploy and manage resources based on strategic analysis of a company's goals, market position and budget.

Reduced overhead. By outsourcing, a company can avoid or reduce the cost of salaries, benefits, office space, computers, vendor relationships and access to credit.

Far from just another way to cut costs, marketing outsourcing is a powerful tool for companies to plan, manage and execute their marketing. Outsourcing helps businesses focus on core competencies, gain more control and improve efficiencies in ways not available before. As companies increasingly “farm out” non-core business processes, it won't be long before marketing joins HR, Legal, Finance and other staff groups as a function that's widely outsourced.

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