

THE CLIENT-AGENCY RELATIONSHIP WHAT MAKES IT WORK?

Relationships have always been an integral part of human interaction. The manner of our relationships shape us, define who we are and determine the type of person we will become. They imbue in us a sense of ethics and morality; provide us with comfort and support, happiness and joy, even sadness and heartbreak. Without these relationships, particularly early in our development, social interaction on personal and professional levels would be more difficult and less meaningful. As a result, we approach new relationships with a certain level of trepidation, especially in our later years. When professional relationships become much more prevalent it can potentially become a revealing and hostile environment.

The professional relationship is one of the most difficult relationships to initiate and can be more difficult to maintain, but is a crucial ingredient for success, growth and development. The agency-client relationship has been around for decades, but has always had a level of mystique surrounding just who was responsible for its evolution, one which took it from the 'traditional' professional relationships of the early 50's, to the much more personal and collaborative ones we experience today. Many credit visionaries like James Walter Thompson, who set out to change the way of traditional agency-client relationships forever.

Thompson, like many other agency owners of his time, discovered the difficulties involved with agency-client relationships and how volatile they could be to manage. Although agencies of that era were producing high quality work, the lack of intimacy with their clients was causing a large number of headaches for both partners. Revised deadlines, constantly changing ideas, failed projects and conflicting views – these factors were combining to ultimately drive a wedge between agencies and clients.



Agencies soon learnt that to overcome these constraints they needed to look at eliminating the detached professional perceptions held by industry leaders, in favour of a much more personalised approach. This was done by improving factors such as the level of communication and collaboration, along with appealing to clients to provide agencies with a greater level of freedom in their work.

Once these elements were achieved, agencies were able to enjoy the tangible benefits of the relationship; information exchange, requirement capture and communication. However, intangible benefits were garnered

too, like freedom to explore innovation and a deep understanding of the client and their business, allowing agencies to ascertain not what simply meets expectations, but redefines them.

So what is it that makes an agency-client relationship successful? If you are a fan of Mad Men, you would assume that the key to success for a creative agency is spirits, smoking and sexism, which is slightly misleading. Although it's difficult to pinpoint defining traits for the success of an agency-client relationship, here are some tips that have assisted UNO over the years.

LETS TALK...

It all starts with communication. Communication is an integral part to any successful personal relationship, but the same rules apply in the professional spectrum as well. A design agency's goal is to develop solutions to their client's problem - nothing puts a bigger smile on our faces than a happy client - but sometimes this can be difficult to achieve. An unhappy client usually results from a breakdown of communication, and therefore a lack of understanding.

Good communication is the seed of any relationship.

The design process is often referred to as a 'journey' for good reason. It starts with an idea, an idea that needs to be planted, nurtured, reviewed and refined in order to ensure it grows and develops. It's the combination of these elements that ultimately facilitates its development into more than just a quick fix, but into a solution.

This cannot happen unless both client and agency enjoy a synergy that comes from excellent communication. It is a journey as much as it is an achievement of an end goal, the galvanisation of relationships, the building of partnerships and recognising that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.



THERE'S NO 'I' IN TEAM

Collaboration is where the relationship begins to blossom.

Good communication allows for collaboration with your partners, rather than work for your clients. Meeting to share ideas and to set goals enables understanding each other's requirements, limitations and strengths, which is all part of the learning process.

Face to face collaboration is one of our most vital tools. It's essential in achieving a balanced relationship and serves as a fundamental tool in ensuring equal contribution, as well as mutual understanding and respect. Relationships based on mutual respect are often the most meaningful. They foster collaboration, but also provide people with the courage to explore, and the freedom to express themselves.

It's one thing to sit down with your clients and discuss end requirements, it's another to go on a collaborative journey with your partners.



BE FREE

We tend to find that our best work comes from being afforded the freedom and trust to explore innovative ideas that we are passionate about. Taking a concept and developing it further through internal collaboration and exploration can often be an incredibly powerful tool. The freedom to employ these principles is critical to the success of not just good ideas, but revolutionary ones. Freedom facilitates passion, inspiration and innovation, without which real change can never be achieved.

A prime example of the power of freedom in the workplace is Google's growing brand diversity. Google Maps and Google Translate were originally developed purely on the back of freedom and trust in their staff. Google encourages their staff to think outside the box and devote time

each week to projects they are passionate about. This principle innovation has revolutionised the world and broken down both geographical and language barriers. They have been developed, refined and ultimately have become cornerstones in the Google product suite.

This is what we all want out of our staff and employees. The development of concepts and projects that surpass our expectations, encourage us to grow as professionals and redefine how we do business. In the end, it comes down to trust. Trust is the foundation on top of which everything else is built. It isn't just a precursor to success, it is the precursor to meaningful, long term partnerships that not only continuously deliver, but surprise and surpass expectations.

It's with freedom and trust that you begin to see bright colours blossom from typically stagnant and boring design.

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

One of the most supportive notions when working with an agency is to accept that some ideas 'dont quite work' or indeed 'fail'. Instead of terminating the project altogether, a strategic re-think may be all that is required.

Maybe it just needs a little pruning?

While communication, collaboration, freedom and trust are all crucial components, not every idea is going to succeed on the first try. Failure is an important part of the design process not simply due to its inevitability, but because it's through failure that we learn, refine, and gain a better understanding of our clients, of our audience, of our strengths and of our weaknesses.

Authors will often re-write a book a number of times in order to perfect their work. J.K. Rowling had Harry Potter rejected 12 times by publishers, constantly refining the novel along the way before it was finally signed to Bloombury publishing house in 1996. The same rules apply in the design world. Failure encourages reflection, growth and development, promoting new ideas or the development and refinement of old ones. If every time we failed we reverted back to the safety of complacency, we would never grow as an individual, as a company and as an industry.

It's this level of freedom that allows us the confidence to go back to the drawing board, and re-trace our steps or forge new paths, communicating, collaborating and innovating our way to that one idea that resonates success.



FINAL THOUGHT...

The garnering and maintenance of a suite of agency/partner relationships requires, above all, effort from both sides. We work in a time where the relationship between agency and partner is not a side effect of solved problems, but a solution itself. As we share the load, so do we share the reward.

UNO 

This is our channel for airing opinions; a few of ours, our International Design Partners, and if you've got some, yours. Our aim is to start a few fires, kick a few tired ideas into shape and stir up a healthy debate on what we see around us.

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