

Why Clients Hate Their Franchise Marketing Agency



David Chapman

My company works with many of the leading national franchise brands and, recently, I wrote two essays about how many franchisees hate their franchisors and how many franchisors hate their franchisees.

I'd love to say that I'm above all the hatred and loathing because every company loves its franchise marketing agency. But, of course, the headline is a dead giveaway that this is not true. Franchise marketing agencies (public relations companies, ad agencies, internet marketing companies, web developers, etc.) also generate their fair share of anger and distrust from clients.

Obviously, I hope that's not the case for our company. We have dozens of clients, many who have been with us for years, so I feel pretty confident that I don't have any clients who have put my photo on a dart board and are practicing their aim during their lunch hour.

In any case, it is true that a lot of clients end up despising their franchise marketing agency -- and for some good reasons.

If you're a franchise marketing agency looking to improve your relationship with your clients, or if you're a client looking to validate the hostility you feel for your marketing agency, well, I'm here to help. These are a few of the reasons many franchise brands hate their marketing agency and what the agency can do to correct them.

Bait And Switch

We repeatedly hear of this problem from new clients who have left another franchise marketing agency. The people clients meet and assume they are going to work with are smart, have creative ideas and seem to know their business backward and forward. Impressed, clients sign the deal. But once the actual work begins, the talent that sold them isn't the talent that's serving their account. The franchise marketing agency brought their A-team for the introductions but assigned their J-team (the junior-level staffers) once the actual work began.

Agencies must be transparent in the pitch and throughout the evaluation process about who will be working with the client to avoid these unmet expectations.

Juggling Accounts With Inexperienced Staffers

Having junior-level team members is essential to injecting new energy and vitality into the agency. But if agencies put inexperienced staffers on the front line and then bring in the heavy hitters only when problems arise, it can quickly lead to overwhelmed employees, poor results and angry clients. The client may feel like they have to spend too much time educating the agency team and generating the big marketing ideas versus getting initiative and insight from the agency.

I've found, throughout my 25-year career, that having a mix of junior-level and senior-level team members who are actively involved with a client generates the best results and client relationships.

Sleazy Business Practices

There's no easy way say this, but some franchise marketing agencies end up coming off as a little shady. I've talked to numerous franchise executives who have told me of franchise marketing agencies that weren't transparent about the hourly rate, the breakdown of the digital marketing spend or the number of hours allocated for each team member working on their account. Many franchise marketing agencies churn through employees and, worse, make promises to clients that they can't and don't keep.

If you can't trust your own marketing agency, something is very wrong. Again, agency transparency ensures client relationships are based on trust and clarity. These values should be instilled within the agency in order to meet client expectations and ensure a trusted relationship.

Complaints Fall On Deaf Ears

So maybe a client has told its franchise marketing company, "Look, this isn't working." And while the agency seems to listen, the client has the same conversations about the same topics repeatedly and nothing changes. It begins to feel as if the situation is a sequel to *Groundhog Day*, in which nothing changes for the better -- except, in this instance, nothing's funny and there's no Bill Murray.

Unfortunately, most franchise marketing agencies don't have a regular scorecard system in place to allow clients to review the account team's performance. This strategy can help ensure a client's voice is heard and changes occur.

There's No Passion -- Except When It Comes To Billing You

Similar to bait and switch, the big ideas and bold thinking never materialized or quickly evaporated. The only thing a client can be sure of is getting billed regularly. And they tend to feel as if nothing would happen if they didn't push their marketing agency.

Yes, clients have a right to be irked. The scorecard system I mentioned earlier serves to uncover negative client perceptions, enabling the agency to have the opportunity to address perceived client issues before it's too late.

There Seems To Be No Plan In Place

Is the franchise marketing agency working off of a collaborative strategic plan with clear and measurable goals? Does the client have a way to track its performance? Franchise marketing agencies must communicate these strategic plans with their clients and adjust as necessary in order to make sure they're measurably working towards their clients' goals.

The Marketing Agency Is Too Big -- Or Too Small

Actually, the size of the agency doesn't matter. The key is to make sure you know who is really working on a client's account and how many hours they are working every month. And, yes, a franchise marketing agency and its client should communicate daily or almost daily -- this is what really matters.