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It Takes Two:

How to Build a Healthy
Agency Relationship

You have many choices when it comes to managing your company's paid search campaigns. One of which is whether to handle this responsibility in-house or work with an Agency who specializes in PPC management. There isn't a right or wrong decision, but if you have decided to work with an Agency, there are some key factors in determining whether or not that relationship will be a healthy one.

Everyone begins a new relationship with the expectation of a happily ever after.

This whitepaper will guide you through what to provide, look for, and maintain to get you there!

This whitepaper focuses on the following areas:

1. What information do you need to provide and seek at the start of a new relationship?
2. What should your agency be doing to make sure you're comfortable, and that they are able to perform to your expectations?
3. Tips on maintaining a top priority status with your Agency
3. How to optimize a long-term relationship and avoid a plateau.

Information to cover with a new partnership.

Once you have decided to hire an agency, it's time to make sure everything is ironed out. The more you cover in the beginning stages, the better.

Establishing goals. You probably already know the basics: leads, revenue, CPA, etc. If you don't, now is the time. What are the key indicators of success for your business? Those will determine your most immediate goals. We're also talking about long-term goals, though. Are goals dependent on performance, or are they set to maintain for a set period of time before revisiting? Either way, you want to make sure goals are discussed and agreed upon now to avoid bumps down the road.

Establish communication frequencies and mediums.

This can obviously be adjusted as you go, but go ahead and determine an initial plan. How and how often do you prefer updates? Let your Agency know if you prefer phone calls over emails, weekly over monthly, or require a particular reporting template over bulleted emails. And don't forget to ask your Agency if they require anything to be able to meet your initial standards. Setting a starting point for how and when to communicate is of the utmost importance to ensure you are on the same page.

Open the Ex-Files. As with any relationship, you always say you don't want to open up the ex-files, but you really have no choice if you want this new relationship to succeed. If you have worked with an agency in the past and had less-than-desirable outcomes, you most definitely need to talk through these issues. What were the problems, and how could they have been avoided? This will make the job of your PPC manager easier because said issues will already be at the top of their mind to avoid. On the flipside, if the Agency has experienced issues with similar verticals as the new client, they should be sure to address those applicable trouble spots with you, as well.

Don't expect the worst based on previous experiences.

Don't let the past repeat itself. As we mentioned before, perhaps you are hesitant from a previous agency relationship. This is the time to let those feelings go and put faith in the newly formed partnership.



Positive Agency Behaviors

Ok, so you've gotten through the initial relationship kick off and have done what you can to make sure from the beginning that you're avoiding any potential issues. So what can and should your Agency be doing to get what they need from you? And should they be doing to solidify your trust?

Be proactive. Your Agency should be searching for opportunities out there before you ask for them and maybe that you haven't ever considered before. Proactivity is key in knowing how much attention your account is receiving as well as how much your account means to the Agency. Remember the Agency is the expert, so they should know what to look for without you asking for it.

Communicating not-so-good news. Maybe there was a dip in leads this week, or CPC spiked, and maybe you don't have a call scheduled for 3 more days. Your Agency should just wait and explain it then, right? Wrong. Your Agency should go outside the normal communication frequency and deliver the bad news, and deliver it now. But it's not just when an Agency delivers this news, it's how. They should come with a plan in hand as to how to fix the issue and projected results. In the world of PPC, you can't always see what's coming down the pipe at us. Bad performance happens, but it's how you handle it that sets you apart.

Staying positive. Even if you haven't seen the best results from your PPC accounts in the past, or if your account is currently in a slump, your Agency should be able to identify opportunities for improvement. They should be up front with you and not overpromise, but they should be confident enough to provide results. Ask them to break down their plan and project results. A great agency should be able to provide this information, no problem.



Maintaining Attention Long-Term

One concern you may have with working with an Agency is that you are just one of many accounts on the plate of your PPC manager. Here is some advice to make sure you are staying at the forefront of your Agency's attention.

Whatever you agreed to do with and for your agency, make sure you're doing it. If you said originally you'd send over back-end revenue data weekly, do it. If you can't do it, let the agency know, so they aren't expecting or waiting for it. Again, no one expects perfection from either side, so communication is key. But, keeping up with what you promised your account manager lets them know you're serious about the outcome of this campaign, and that will instill even more pride in them to make it work for you.

Be flexible. Understand that goals, meeting schedules, and reporting metrics should be monitored as revised as necessary. Flexibility allows your Agency to prioritize responsibilities and communicate openly. If you request an off-schedule report or new information from your PPC manager, provide some cushion in the deadline if possible, or supply necessary back end data in a timely manner. Odds are, your flexibility will result in your Agency appreciating you more and move you to the top of their mind at other times as well.

Know that you are not being ignored. You do matter and your account Agency does care. If there is a moment where you don't hear from your Agency, there was probably a crisis elsewhere that you aren't aware of. Now, if the accepted and agreed upon activity on the Agency side isn't being carried through, then you can most definitely get a little pushy; however, if you've sent an email asking for a general opinion, try not to get too upset if you haven't gotten a response in a couple of hours. PPC account managers are planners; it's possible that your particular account manager is in a meeting, working through some ad copy changes, or pulling data to respond thoroughly. Rest assured you're not being ignored. Give them some time, and they'll be in touch as soon as possible.



Long-Term Maintenance

Long-term client/agency relationships are ideal because the nature of PPC requires time to earn trust and train an Agency on a client's business model. When it comes to keeping the partnership up after a long period of time, there are certainly a few things that can be done to make sure positive performance continues.

Don't forget about the basics. Whatever communication frequencies you decided on, keep them up. Don't start ignoring reporting preferences. The easiest way to keep things going in a positive direction is to continue doing what got you to long-term in the first place.

Be open to new opportunities. If your Agency approaches you with a new engine they'd like to serve ads from, assuming they've done their research and aren't just spending money to spend it, let them give it a shot. If they want to test a new segment, but it may require a short-term dip for longer-term success, let them breakdown the plan and validate their reasoning. You never know what you could be missing out on if you don't trust each other to find these new opportunities.

Challenge each other. Not in an egotistical way, but it's healthy to push a little. If you're on the phone with your Agency, and you want to know a little more about a particular performance change, ask the account manager to explain a little deeper. Likewise, your Agency should ask for additional reporting if you mention your revenue seems to be dipping a bit. No relationship ever profited from both sides twiddling their thumbs and letting the other float through.





All this said, the bottom line is that both you and your Agency must focus on creating and maintaining a healthy, working relationship that is mutually beneficial. This is not solitaire; it's a cooperative, dynamic way of marketing your business. Make sure to keep in mind the best business practices in order to remain professional and open with your Agency.

If you're interested in an account audit or in working with a professional PPC agency, please visit hanapinmarketing.com or call 812.330.3134.



Hanapin Marketing is a paid search agency based in Bloomington, Indiana. Founded in 2004, the company manages & optimizes clients' paid search programs—increasing sales while simultaneously decreasing budgets. From ad copy composition to keyword research to landing page optimization, Hanapin's core objective is to maximize our clients' return on investment.