

Get the most out of your agency relationship. Plan now for a better 2022



By [Niamh NicLiam](#)

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A great working relationship with your agency or digital marketing partner can result in phenomenal revenue growth, while poor relationships can lead to lacklustre delivery and strained dynamics on both sides.



Source: www.pexels.com

Here's how CMOs can work with their agency partners to drive results, and forge mutually beneficial relationships with motivated teams on both sides.

In the honeymoon period after a pitch is won, teams love the excitement that comes with the new creative challenge and the potential to make an impact, and brands are all too happy to get caught up in the boundless energy that comes with a new relationship.

However, it's easy to get caught up in the first flush of a new relationship and neglect doing the work required to lay the foundations for the relationship going forward.

Ultimately all agencies want to succeed and deliver great work for their clients, however, a key part of the relationship's success lies in the practical approach taken by both parties from the outset.

To truly become the partner and trusted advisor that is so often spoken of, agencies need to ask the right questions, they need to be curious and they need to have one eye on the future long-term growth of their clients. In line with this, brands should trust their agencies, sharing not just their marketing goals, but also their broader business strategies and challenges.

This is particularly true in this age of digital where there has been a massive shift in focus and in budget to leverage technology's capabilities, and where the reliance on digital now extends far beyond the marketing department.



A practical guide to digital marketing transformation

Johan Walters, Ansa Leighton & Niamh NicLiam 2 Jun 2021



Making the right choice, based on the right criteria

One of the major causes of poor relationships lies in our procurement process. Far too often the traditional race-to-the-bottom way of deciding on procurement immediately places brands at a disadvantage.

In this environment agencies are forced to compromise on the quality of their work as they turn to junior staff in order to deliver on budget. This is a disaster, particularly for digital teams where skills are often underestimated and the appropriate ones never come cheap.

The best way to overcome this is for brands and agencies to agree on what the problem is that they are mutually trying to solve. By re-framing the narrative when appointing the agency and moving the focus away from how cheaply the agency can come in on the scope of work, the chances of success are infinitely higher.



Marketer-agency relationships are lasting longer than before

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In this regard, it is important for the marketing leaders and the procurement department to work closely to ensure they are sympatico in regard to what is required of the agency. They should work together to draw up the brief, and they should also consider the importance of chemistry sessions to assess the potential for real collaboration, or real conflict.

This will go a long way to ensuring the best agency for the job is appointed and give both parties the best chance of success - as well as a good working relationship.

Commit it to writing

At the outset brands and agencies also need to do a few things if they want to lay the foundation for a happy, healthy and successful partnership.

The concept of a partnership charter should be considered, where both parties come together to workshop their shared vision for success, and to then agree and document the practical expectations and requirements needed to achieve this. The idea was first put forward in The Harvard Business Review and has since gained support from both global brands and agencies.

Taking the time to understand how your new partner likes to work at the beginning of a relationship is critical. While there

always has to be some compromise, it makes no sense for the brand (or the agency) to issue a diktat on how the working relationship will proceed.

Its success should be based on shared responsibilities, shared data and information, and an agreed way of working, with regular checks and honest conversations to ensure that the partnership and the shared vision for success remains on track.

This charter will set the foundations for a healthy partnership that ensures mutual respect, trust and collaboration, and the creation of an environment where all teams are motivated, passionate and strive to do great work.

Defining the partnership mentality before you enter 2022

As brands begin their planning process for 2022, now is the time for CMOs to reflect on the relationship with their agencies. Given the pressure on marketing budgets as well as on agencies to profitably and successfully deliver on brands' targets, it makes sense that a more considered partnership approach be adopted to ensure that both parties' interests are aired, acknowledged and central to what success looks like

In short, innovative, award winning work can be achieved when teams collaborate and support one another, working in a partnership that benefits everyone.

ABOUT NIAMH NICLIAM

Niamh NicLiam is the director for growth and partnerships at Incubeta. Niamh joined the Incubeta group in January 2015, and since then she has helped build successful partnerships with many local and global brands.

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