

Making the Honeymoon Last Forever

| Text/ Patricia J. Fiske |

With each column I write for *ADM*, I can't help but wonder if what I write is culturally appropriate for you, the reader. Having worked with marketing communications professionals in nearly 50 countries, I often learn new ways to think about our industry, ways that often seem strange at first to my western mind. I have observed that what seems "right" to me, may not be the "right" way to produce the desired results in the market. Perhaps this column on client/agency relationships will only be relevant to your relationship with western clients. Should what I write seem inappropriate to your way of working with your local clients, I would appreciate hearing from you.

Like a new marriage, creating a relationship with a new agency and

developing it into a great partnership takes time and continuous work. If you are so fortunate to have a lasting relationship with your agency, it has become one of the assets of your brand. Yet, according to *Advertising Age*, the average client/agency relationship in the United States is 18 months. *Campaign* says it is 36 months in the United Kingdom.

The reasons why relationships do not last are many. For example, *Campaign* reports that 64% of all new marketing directors change agencies within their first year on the job. I can't help but wonder if clients ever include the costs involved in changing an agency in the cost of hiring of a new marketing director. And if you have agreed that a good client/agency relationship is part of the brand asset,

the revolving-door aspect of most advertising and marketing positions limits the support of the brand.

Let us assume that you want your marriage to last forever. Before beginning your search, you identified your goals, objectives, target markets and set your budget. Then you spent several months setting agency criteria and reading proposals. You eliminated any potential conflicts of interest, then interviewed agencies in their offices and in yours. You discussed the pros and cons of each agency with your selection team. Now you have informed all the agencies that were not selected, and you're ready to inform the agency you have chosen.

The chemistry is right. The agency accepts your proposal. The marriage

is announced. The honeymoon begins. As Ian McAteer, Partner of Union Worldwide Partners, Scotland says, "If it is love at first sight, be careful for the end of the honeymoon period. If it is an arranged marriage, it could be very difficult if the agency has to continually compromise. In either case, the early part is often difficult; like a new couple, there often is lots of fumbling around until both parties get to know each other!"

Chuck Curtis, Chairman and CEO of Valentine-Radford/Worldwide Partners, Missouri, USA advises: "It is important to start a relationship with a 'contract of expectations.' 'That is, a written document about what each party expects from the other.'"

John Goodchild, CEO of The Weightman Group/Worldwide Partners in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA agrees, "To get down to the day-to-day work of creating communications that drive the business and build the brand, agency and client management need to meet immediately and agree on the objectives for the relationship and the brand. Both should come away with a clear and shared set of expectations.

Chances are that not everyone who will work on the business was part of the presentations, so the first thing is to have a team meeting including all the agency and client people who will interact. Client and agency management should explain the

objectives and the shared expectations and then have each team member talk about their role and what they believe they can do to help achieve the brand's objectives. Be sure to schedule some informal time so everybody can mix.

Client and agency management should plan to meet monthly through the first three months to discuss how the relationship and the work are progressing. The key goal for the meetings is to identify problems early and fix them before they become real trouble. Setting a tone of openness and cooperation is an important outcome of these meetings and will pay big dividends as they relationship progresses and the inevitable issues arise. After the first three months, the meetings can be scheduled quarterly if the account is running smoothly."

From your vantage point as client, there are some practical things to be certain you have done to build and maintain a quality relationship.

1. Have you introduced the money managers in your company to the money managers at the agency?
2. Does your compensation contract both satisfy your expectations and assure the agency a profit?
3. Have you carved out the time to make the transition to the new agency rather than not rely on the prior agency to do so? That means you have personally secured the files from the prior agency and

transferred them to the new agency.

4. If you need your results to be confidential, have you asked the agency to sign a confidentiality agreement?
5. Everyone agrees that the first 90 days are the most crucial. Have you made certain that the person or team who approved hiring the agency remains deeply involved for the first 90 days and is part of the 90 day-evaluation meeting?
6. Have you thoroughly educated the agency on your mission, culture, history, protocol, and activities?
7. As the relationship continues, trust the agency. Strategy is your agency's job and you should make them do it. Avoid strategic and creative conflicts. When in doubt about the agency's work, ask, "Is that part of our strategic plan?"
8. Expect the agency to give you what they think you need. Never force the agency to give you what you think you want.
9. As soon as results start to happen, market the results internally to let your colleagues know there is a lot of very positive work happening.

Worldwide Partners' agency in Thailand, Amex Team Advertising Limited, has an interesting story to share. Fifteen years ago in Thailand, cotton wool came only in a bulky, cumbersome roll. The consumer tore off small bits and pieces from the roll to cleanse and dress wounds. At that

time, Prairie Marketing, makers of cotton wool, appointed Amex Team Advertising Limited as its agency.

For the brand to triumph in a market with a multitude of players and dominated by a single brand holding about 70% market share, Amex Team realized that it needed more than a unique brand differentiation positioning. To discover the right strategy for the new brand, Amex tapped customers' perceptions and beliefs about cotton wool. The agency found the utilitarian usage of cotton wool for dressing wounds could be extended. It recommended new shapes and packaging for the product, which would add value to the product and connect with consumers on an emotional level.

Targeting women, already the largest users of cotton wool, Amex Team introduced Evergreen as a handy pack of small cotton wool pads. The brand personality of Evergreen was a stark contrast to the competition, which highlighted the utilitarian, impersonal essence of cotton wool. Designed with a feminine and fashionable tone, pink packaging also reflected Evergreen as "the cotton wool for women." Young career women and housewives felt that Evergreen cared about their comfort and ease in making up their faces.

With the strong client/agency relationship promoting the brand, convenient to use cosmetic cotton

wool became a fast-growing segment. Within five years, Evergreen was able to secure leadership of the total cotton wool market.

Maintaining brand leadership meant striking the right balance between continuity and change. Leveraging brand equity, Evergreen increased impact for the brand by introducing a sub-brand, White Rabbit. Amex Team added a sophisticated, albeit high technology point of difference by advertising the cotton wool as fluorescence free. This time the advertising message reached out to young mothers. In an honest, refreshing and compelling fashion the ad stated, "If they love their child, fluorescence free cotton wool is their safest choice." Once again the marketing strategy and execution achieved clarity and synergy for the brand and relevance to consumers.


Evergreen has excelled as a strong brand, which delivers product performance along with the intangible factors that build brand equity. Users identify with the situations in which Evergreen and White Rabbit are used, and identify themselves as the types of people who would use the brands.

Sincere, warm and caring personalities of the brand have come a long way for Evergreen, which now commands about 60% market share. That, plus leadership marketing—capitalizing on differentiation and innovation—continues to drive its

success.

This is evident in the newly developed print ad campaign, which spotlights its cosmetic value. New extensions, such as for making up eyebrows and polishing nails, are in the offing—adding to the already extensive product line.

While many brands have tried to simulate Evergreen in personality and packaging over the years, and have even reduced their prices, Evergreen has not been vulnerable to the competitive pressures, due in large measure to the savvy brand marketing that happens in a long-lasting, synergistic client/agency relationship.

The key to a strong marriage is communication. Worldwide Partners has published an evaluation process for the client and agency to ensure the relationship is on track. The Evaluation should occur every six months and be "two way." That is, the client evaluates the agency and the agency evaluates the client. The evaluation checklist is available for the asking. Simply send an email to patriciaf@worldwidepartners.com and we'll e-mail you the complete list. 

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