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17 Important Points To Consider Before You Hire A Law Marketing Consultant

By Trey Ryder

As we fast approach the new year, many firms are preparing to launch their 2006 marketing efforts.

If you're thinking about hiring a marketing specialist, make sure you consider these 17 key points.

1. Objective Advice. Consultants who are paid fees are more likely to give you unbiased advice than consultants who earn commissions based on the amount of money you spend. If the consultant profits from ad agency commissions, he has an inherent conflict of interest because the more you spend, the more he makes.
2. Experience. Marketing is so specialized and complex that I recommend you hire someone who has provided marketing services for a minimum of 15 years. But, don't assume that because the person has been in business 15 years, he has the knowledge, skill, judgment and experience you need. Make sure you thoroughly interview all consultants you are considering.
3. Workload. Does the law marketing professional do the work for you? Or does the marketing person serve as a coach and simply tell you what you should be doing?
4. Service. Do you feel that the consultant wants to provide you with the help you need to make your program succeed? Or do you get the impression that he is looking for bigger fish to fry and that you're just a small fish in the ocean?
5. Access. Is the consultant hidden behind a wall of secretaries, account executives and administrative assistants? Or is he readily available to you by phone, fax, and e-mail?
6. Stability. Has the consultant been providing marketing services for some years? Or is he new to marketing -- or new to lawyer marketing -- and just waiting for the opportunity to move on to something else?
7. Marketing Focus. Is the consultant a full-time marketing professional? Or does he offer advice in other disciplines, such as management, human resources, training or finance?

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8. Authority. Does the consultant have enough experience that he is a recognized authority in his field? Or is he still a relative unknown?

9. Size and Efficiency. Does the consultant have a large staff and/or a penthouse office that his clients pay for? Or when you write a check, are you paying for his high level of knowledge, skill, judgment and experience?

10. Markups. Does this consultant mark up outside services he hires on your behalf, such as graphic artists, printers, photographers, web site technicians, and so forth? Or does this consultant provide those services to you at cost?

11. Travel. Does the consultant travel around the country from one client to next, running up airline bills? Or does the consultant keep costs down by working efficiently with you by telephone, fax and e-mail?

12. Coverage. Does the consultant have a competent marketing specialist who covers for him when he travels? Or are you relegated to an account executive or administrative assistant who takes messages and tries to relay them to the consultant while he is on the road.

13. Attention. Does the consultant have so many clients he can't provide you with the personal care and attention you deserve? Or does he limit his services to a few select clients who receive the best he has to offer?

14. Work. Does the consultant himself perform the work on your behalf? Or does the consultant delegate your work to a junior associate?

15. Marketing Specialization. Is the consultant a marketing professional who works only with one type of marketing? Or does he try to be a "jack of all trades" so he can provide whatever marketing services you want to buy?

16. Writing Skills. In marketing, nothing is more important than for your consultant to have superior writing skills. And don't expect the consultant's writing to follow the rules of what you and I learned in school because marketing writing is different from academic writing. To sample your consultant's writing style, read published articles and marketing materials that your consultant wrote. You'll know right away whether they come across as warm and friendly — or if the writing seems cold and impersonal. The way the consultant writes for himself will be similar to the way he writes for you. So make sure the consultant you choose has a writing style you admire.

17. Testimonials. Does the marketing consultant have comments from other lawyers you can review? The consultant you're considering should provide you with at least 30 or 40 testimonials from other lawyers. If he provides only a few, you may be reading comments from his in-laws.

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When Do I Need To Hire A Business Plan Consultant

By Howard Schwartz

Every new business owner knows that a business plan is critical - it is drilled into them by potential investors and every banking officer they meet. So why is something that is so important to the launch of a new venture so difficult to write? Good question! In this article I will try to address when you should go out and hire a business plan writer versus taking on the task yourself. First time entrepreneurs often cringe when sitting down to write their business plan. Some spend 6 months agonizing over each period and comma, and even worse others spend 6 months procrastinating and do nothing. So lets break it down and see where / when a business planning company should be brought in

Who will read your business plan and why?

First you need to really understand the purpose of your business plan and who your audience (reader) will be. This is an important point as a business plan being written for a \$100,000 loan is VERY different than a document needed for a \$10 million round of venture capital! Since this article is focused on first-time small business owners, I will focus on preparing business plans raising less then \$1 million in capital. For this "startup" or "seed" business plan 30-35 pages are perfect. You are not expected to deliver a thick book (and no one will read it anyway!). Once you have this down, you can honestly assess which sections you are qualified / comfortable writing and which may need consulting help

Here is what you should write on your own

It is important for you to write a basic draft / outline of your business plan. Without this direction you are probably asking too much of your consultant. Once you have your thoughts organized on paper you can see what you are comfortable completing. Here are a few suggestions:

Executive Summary: Draft the opening of your business plan - then hire a pro to come in and re-write it. Your executive summary will be read first and first impressions are critical!

Marketing: You need to write your own definition of your target customer / audience. For the market research on industry growth and fancy charts go ahead and hire a consultant.

Competitive Analysis: You should put together the first draft of this section, as it is almost as important to understand your competitors, as it is your customers. If you find a consultant that is an expert in your field, then you can work together and add to your initial list.

The Dreaded Financials

This is the most difficult part of a startup business plan, as you are making projections and assumptions on products / services that you have not even produced or sold yet! If you are stuck on this section you can hire a business plan consultant to just assist you with completing your projections (income statement, cash flow, and balance sheet). Figuring out the cost of goods, delivery costs, and

return rates can be simplified by breaking them down into a "light" spreadsheet. Next you need to understand your startup and operating costs - items like electricity, travel, phone expenses, etc. Again just organize these and your consultant can make all the fancy charts and graphs. Just make sure you understand all of the assumptions - for example if you are opening a retail business, you should not look towards your consultant to "guess" your rent - go out and meet with a realtor and come back with real data. If you work closely with your consultant, the financials are a great section to bring in professional help.

Managing Expectations

Now that you know a bit more about when to hire a business plan writer you also need to manage your expectations. You can't expect a \$1,000 business plan to have 20 pages of competitive analysis and a full-blown marketing strategy! If you carefully work through which sections of your business plan need outside help and then manage your consultant closely, your final document will be a success! My next two articles will focus on "How to Find / Hire a Business Plan Consultant" and more importantly "When to Fire your Business Plan Consultant!"

Howard Schwartz is a partner in several business strategy groups, including HJ Ventures International, Inc. Howard has worked with hundreds of entrepreneurs worldwide with a focus on writing business plans for companies interested in raising capital from Venture Funds and Angel Investors. Howard's business plans have secured several million dollars in funding.

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Unique Consulting Services

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Outsourcing your Web Marketing

How To Pick An IT Consultant

How to Gain and Retain More Customers

My Online Friends – Dating Website Script

Time Stretching Tips

Inside The Minds of Winners

Yard Sale Secrets Revealed



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