



Sharing Marketing Excellence

Enhancing CLIENT AGENCY Relationships

..... 2015 ANA Survey Research Executive Summary



ANA surveys are based on topics identified by the ANA and its membership as critical issues and emerging trends that nearly all marketers face today.

Background and Methodology

In first quarter 2015 (between January 28 and February 25), ANA conducted parallel surveys among ANA members and agencies on issues related to the client/agency relationship. The survey covered issues including:

- **The overall strength of the client/agency relationship**
- **The agency's role as a business partner**
- **Agency compensation**
- **Process management (i.e., client approvals, briefing)**
- **And more — including how agencies work with other agencies, agency talent, and procurement**

The survey was completed by 126 ANA members and 105 agencies, providing the opportunity to compare and contrast responses from the two groups. Agency participants self-identified as being from full service agencies, i.e., media and creative (58 percent), creative agencies (23 percent), media agencies (12 percent), and specialty/other agencies (7 percent).

ANA would like to acknowledge Marc S. Strachan, vice president, on premise strategy and multicultural marketing at Diageo North America for providing the inspiration for this survey.

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Key Findings

First, the good news on client/agency relationships. Both clients and agencies agree that:

- Their client/agency relationships are strong.
- A long-term client/agency relationship is important.
- They trust the other.

Further, both clients and agencies agree that the agency is a valued business partner, plays an important role in the client's business strategy, and is influential in driving business results.

However, there are pockets of dissatisfaction.

- Clients and agencies are not in alignment on the **fairness of their compensation arrangements**. Agencies have much lower levels of agreement that compensation agreements are fair. Both clients and agencies are lukewarm on the value of performance-based compensation as a motivator of agency performance.
- Clients and agencies are not in agreement on whether clients provide **clear assignment briefings to agencies**. Only 27 percent of agencies believe clients do a good job (and zero percent strongly agree). However, 58 percent of clients think they perform well on briefs.
- Clients and agencies are not in agreement that the **client approval process** works well. Only 36 percent of agencies are in agreement (and only 2 percent strongly agree) versus 54 percent of clients.
- Clients and agencies have different views on the **value procurement adds** to client/agency relationships. Only 47 percent of clients agree that procurement adds value, while just 10 percent of agencies agree.

Other key findings of the research:

- Both clients and agencies agree that clients recognize the agency for great work, but a smaller percentage agree that clients inspire the agency to do their best work.
- Clients and agencies agree that agencies work well with other agencies — but the level of agreement among clients is much lower than it is for agencies.
- Clients and agencies have modest levels of agreement that agencies have the right talent to meet the needs of clients over the next two years. Clients, in particular, do not have strong agreement.
- Both clients and agencies agree that in-house resources (at the client) are increasingly becoming an option for client communications needs. A previous ANA report, "[The Rise of the In-House Agency](#)," indicates an increasing shift in client sentiment to taking more services in house.

To foster a more-productive relationship, both constituents agree on the importance of:

- Clients providing better briefing and streamlining approvals. The ANA and 4A's will be collaborating to determine how best to accomplish this.
- Agencies being more proactive and having a better understanding/greater empathy of client business.

“It is as much the client as the agency who can make the business successful.”

—Survey Respondent

It's the brief, stupid!

The brief is the foundation of the agency work product. Over the past year, there have been numerous conversations in ANA committee meetings regarding subpar assignment briefs being developed by clients which, in turn, lead to disappointing work from agencies. Initially, this was a bit of a surprise. The briefing process has been around *forever*, therefore shouldn't best practices already be well established and in wide use? Apparently not.

Briefing may be more complicated now than ever. Media is hyper-fragmented, clients are working with multiple agencies, there is more project work, the pace of change is faster than ever, and agencies have been disintermediated to some extent (due to factors including clients using more in-house resources, production decoupling, and clients working directly with media companies).

Agencies emphatically believe that clients do not provide clear assignment briefings. Not a single agency respondent (out of 105), "strongly agreed" that clients provide clear assignment briefings to agencies! Clients must take note of this and commit to change. Bad briefs are frustrating to agencies and cost clients both time and money — for agency rework and the resulting agency fees — not to mention the opportunity costs of subpar creative in the marketplace. Both clients and agencies agree on the importance of better briefing to foster a more-productive client/agency relationship.

ANA will focus attention, going forward, on helping the advertising community improve the assignment briefing process. We'll work with the 4A's to strongly incorporate the agency perspective.

Deliverables are to be determined but could include:

- Conducting additional research to get a more-specific understanding of what's currently wrong with the assignment briefing process.
- Identifying clients with "best in class" briefing processes (perhaps doing that with strong input from the 4A's) and identifying the characteristics of such briefings.
- Holding ANA committee meetings (specifically, the Agency Relations Committee) and/or School of Marketing classes that focus on assignment briefings.
- Asking 4A's to share their learning and perhaps developing some joint ANA/4A's guidance on assignment briefings.

A related "pain point" identified in the survey is the client approval process. Only two percent of agencies strongly agree that the client approval process works well. Both clients and agencies agree on the importance of an efficient client approval process to foster a more-productive client/agency relationship. Many solutions to this issue are fairly obvious: have fewer people involved in the client approval process, reduce the number of approval layers, and provide access to senior-level decision makers earlier in the process. As we move forward on our work to improve assignment briefings, we'll also incorporate learning along the way on optimizing the client approval process.

About the ANA

The ANA (Association of National Advertisers) provides leadership that advances marketing excellence and shapes the future of the industry. Founded in 1910, the ANA's membership includes more than 650 companies with 10,000 brands that collectively spend over \$250 billion in marketing and advertising. The ANA also includes the Business Marketing Association (BMA), and the Brand Activation Association (BAA), which operate as divisions of the ANA. The ANA advances the interests of marketers and promotes and protects the well-being of the marketing community. For more information, visit www.ana.net, follow us on [Twitter](#), or join us on [Facebook](#).

Additional ANA Resources

Marketers are encouraged to tap into the various resources of the ANA to learn more about the marketing industry:

ANA Marketing Knowledge Center: To find articles, toolkits, case studies, and presentations on a range of marketing topics, visit www.ana.net/mkc, or to submit a customized information request to our Research Service, visit www.ana.net/asktheexpert.

ANA Survey Research: ANA surveys are based on topics identified by the ANA and its membership as critical issues and emerging trends that nearly all marketers face today. To access survey reports, which allow you to tap into members-only research and perspectives, please visit www.anasurveys.net. To join our survey panel of more than 1,000 marketers and participate in industry leadership, please visit www.ana.net/pulsesurvey.

ANA Insight Briefs: ANA Insight Briefs are compilations of the ANA's best resources on a given subject. Filled with charts, quotes, and client-side marketer case studies, they provide today's busy marketer with top-line information on the hottest topics in marketing. For more information, please visit www.ana.net/insightbriefs.

ANA Committees: ANA committees offer members a forum for sharing best practices, the opportunity for peer-to-peer networking and benchmarking, and the ability to learn about new industry developments through the exchange of ideas with guest speakers and fellow committee members. ANA committees also often take leadership roles in shaping industry issues. For more on ANA committees, please go to www.ana.net/committees.

ANA Conferences: The ANA helps the marketing community stay abreast of cutting-edge trends and best practices via a comprehensive calendar of national conferences. In addition, the ANA goes on the road to offer members a portfolio of peer-to-peer gatherings that afford opportunities to discuss special needs in a convenient, informal setting. Find more information at www.ana.net/events.

ANA School of Marketing: The ANA School of Marketing offers marketers on-site training sessions and full-day classes that help marketers grow as brand builders. Find more information at www.ana.net/schoolofmarketing.

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