

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF AN EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Establishing an effective relationship management program helps facilitate active communication and proactive collaboration that leads to better work and improved ROI. An effective program may also enable early identification and mitigation of challenges before they become critical issues. There are five key aspects of any effective relationship management program:

Executive Support

Executive support of a relationship management program and its team, purpose, and goals is critical, particularly in organizations where those managing the relationship management program and the day-to-day business owner are not the same. Without executive support, at both the client and agency, the program's impact will be limited.

Credibility

It's important for any relationship management program to build credibility with key internal stakeholders, both client and agency, to gain buy-in and consensus. The program should help stakeholders understand the value the program can bring in cost avoidance, more efficient processes, and better work overall.

Tip: Proximity can help. Whether an internal client stakeholder or on the agency side, when feasible, consider physically sitting with your marketing stakeholders, even if it's only one day a week or on a more permanent basis.

Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Agency relations, marketing, procurement, finance, and legal each bring a unique and specific skill set to the table. These should be positioned as complementary functions, not competitive or combative, in your relationship management program. Define clear roles and responsibilities that each will play (including internal stakeholders and agency representatives).

KPIs and Data Standardization

It's critical to identify KPIs at the outset to define clear expectations for performance. KPIs should ideally be developed jointly with the agency, but can be set independently if necessary. Consider a mix of campaign and business-level results, and leverage quantitative metrics as often as possible to minimize subjectivity and bias. For scopes of six months or longer, consider quarterly alignment meetings to review KPIs and progress against them.

Tip: Some individuals are harder graders than others. While stakeholder satisfaction is an important metric, think about how you can standardize your approach to qualitative feedback. For the sake of consistency and fair process, training may be necessary so stakeholders all understand how to assess each particular metric for scoring.

360° Feedback

360° feedback means both client and agency stakeholders are surveyed, with both parties providing feedback to the other. Doing so reinforces that the relationship is a partnership, and like any relationship, it's important to have a two-way conversation. 360° feedback may also provide insight into shortcomings and missed goals. Often an agency's concerns and a client's concerns are aligned (e.g., the client is dissatisfied with the quality of the work and the agency is dissatisfied with the briefing process). 360° feedback allows those missed connections to be identified and addressed.

Tip: You can build a 360° survey yourself or use a consultant that specializes in relationship management programs. A formal relationship management program doesn't have to cost much or take up the majority of someone's time.