

Building Trust in Client-Marketer Relationships

Professional Information Sources and a Key Communication Challenge



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Submitted by Casey Schlatter

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Writer's Profile

Casey Schlatter is a junior majoring in marketing, management, and entrepreneurship.

- Commitment level to majors: five
- Courses in majors completed at time of report: eight

Relevant work experience includes over two years working as a marketing intern for software company AGS Prime (March 2020 - August 2022) and three months working as a marketing intern for Daniels Construction (February 2023 - present).

As a student, Casey has participated in several business organizations on campus including American Marketing Association, Badger Consulting, and the International Fraternity of Delta Sigma Pi. She held a leadership position in the fall of 2022 as VP Community Service in Delta Sigma Pi.

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Executive Summary

This report analyzes two key information sources for marketers and identifies a key communication problem, concluding with the recommendation of two possible solutions.

Key Information Sources

American Marketing Association is a professional organization for marketing professionals that provides training, resources, and networking opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge of its professionals. A wide range of online and in-person resources and events provide research and opinions on the newest developments in the field.

Adweek is an authoritative source of information for marketing professionals regarding industry trends and events. *Adweek* aims to inform and educate professionals through its coverage, in addition to highlighting the successes of individuals or organizations in the industry.

Key Communication Challenge

A challenge for marketers working in the agency setting as an account manager is to foster trust between the agency and customers when presenting the final deliverables. Effective communication leads clients to trust the recommendations and feel that they are receiving individualized service.

Two solutions to mitigate this challenge include:

1. Provide context for decisions supported by research and data
2. Involve and excite clients in the decision-making process

Utilizing these strategies when presenting the final deliverables is critical to achieve customer satisfaction.

Introduction

The marketing industry requires a sharp focus on trends and up-to-date strategies to create valuable client-customer relationships. Professional organizations and resources provide the knowledge and relationships needed for marketers to develop these skills. From there, translating that expertise into everyday work requires careful communication and practice. This report identifies ways in which marketers can remain informed professionals and effectively communicate their knowledge to client deliverables in a way that fosters trust in the information presented.

Professional Information Sources

Professional Organization: American Marketing Association

A popular professional organization among marketers, American Marketing Association's (AMA) mission is "to be the most relevant force and voice shaping marketing around the world, an essential community for marketers" (*About AMA*, n.d.). Established in 1937 and with approximately 38,000 members worldwide today, AMA is an industry leader in professional marketing associations. Membership is available to marketing professionals and collegians for an annual fee.

AMA accepts those new to the marketing industry, and does not require a high level of industry knowledge. In order to network, members can join one of over 70 chapters around the country. These chapters host additional events and create curated content for marketers and may focus on location-specific topics. Members may attend larger conferences virtually or in-person to network with those from other areas. These conferences are typically focused on a specific topic, with general conferences occurring bi-annually.

Membership in AMA grants access to a vast library of academic journals, blogs, articles, webinars, trainings, and sponsored articles and white pages. These publications focus on cultural and technological trends, and how they affect the world of marketing. In addition, they educate members on both hard and soft skills of the trade like SEO and managing stakeholder relationships, for example. As the authoritative voice of the marketing industry, AMA often examines market trends, makes predictions for the future, and provides recommendations for future strategies. For example, a recent article titled "The Power of AI Personalized Newsletters" addresses a top marketing trend for 2023 identified by *Forbes*, the fear of artificial intelligence as its accuracy increases and how it can be addressed (DeVries, 2023; *Marketing News*, n.d.).

Membership in a professional organization like AMA benefits marketers by providing continuing education and skills that can be applied to their day-to-day work. Marketing is a

fast-moving industry that requires advanced industry knowledge. AMA's resources train and educate marketers and guide them to explore a new strategy, trend, or platform.

Trade Publication: Adweek

As a weekly trade journal popular with marketers, *Adweek* provides coverage resonating with creatives, marketers, and public relations professionals. This publication explores recent marketing moves by influential companies, provides insights and research, and has subsections related to industry niches. Industry jargon is used throughout articles to cater to the industry professional audience. *Adweek* focuses on keeping marketers and professionals up-to-date on trends, events, and companies making waves in the marketing and public relations industry.

Within the agency news section, *Adweek* features case studies of innovative marketing approaches. For example, the article titled "Plant-Based WhatIF Foods Uses Aliens, Zombies, and Cows to Spread Eco-Friendly Message" (Stanley, 2023). This article not only catches the attention of readers but invites them to learn about how companies are being creative in their advertising, in this case by meshing a serious topic with a lighthearted tone. The article is engaging and inspiring to marketers, encouraging them to push the boundaries of their job.

Additionally, *Adweek* offers practical strategy advice backed by data or research. Articles like Kevin Krim's "Why You Shouldn't Be Swayed by the Popularity of Super Bowl Ads" communicate industry research done by professionals in a clear and concise manner (Krim, 2023). Marketers can receive condensed information and key takeaways they can bring to their position.

Adweek also attempts to provide continuing education for marketers with their microlearning series. Topics include mini-lessons focused on learning specific skills, like one course titled "What is Incrementality and Why is it Critical for Proving ROI.". Other courses focus specifically on industry practices like, "Why Marketers Need Collaborative Work Management." As a fast-moving industry, marketers rely on sources like *Adweek* to continue their education of industry practices.

Staying up to date on trends and strategy and continuously learning new skills is important for marketers to remain competitive in the industry, especially as the national labor market begins to cool (DePillis, 2023). No matter the economy, continued learning is vital for career success.

Communication Challenge: Fostering Trust of Deliverables Presented to Clients in a Marketing Agency Setting

The Industry

Marketing agencies are organizations that can offer a variety of services including, but not limited to, digital marketing, graphic design, website development, social media management, and overall marketing strategy and implementation.

Within an agency, it is typical to find two main roles - account managers and creatives. Account managers work as a mediator, communicating with clients to outline deliverables and transferring the information to the creative team. They face the unique challenge of balancing both parties' needs and establishing a friendly relationship and collaborative energy between the two. As marketing agency LAIRE states, “At the end of the day, the most important thing they do is to make sure clients are satisfied with the products, services, and related customer care they're receiving from the company” (LAIRE, 2023).

The Challenge

Account managers are responsible for communicating the final deliverables to clients at the conclusion of the project. One main challenge of this interaction is to foster trust in the material being presented. If clients are confident that what they are receiving is quality work, account managers are able to reach customer satisfaction for their clients. However, this can be a challenging endeavor for two key reasons.

First, clients must trust that marketers are up to date on industry trends, have sound advice, and have made the correct decision for their business. In a 2021 *Forbes* article by Jonathan Schwartz, he emphasizes this point. “When an agency spends on behalf of the client, whether in ad dollars or general retainer hours, they must provide tangible proof of why these decisions were made and the results” (Schwartz).

Second, clients must feel that the creative team understands their business and brand, have taken their input, and have successfully translated the company persona into the work they provided. Clients expect agencies to cater to them and relationships often break down if they feel as if they are not being heard, according to Carolyn Brenner, Account Manager at Bolster, a marketing agency (C. Brenner, personal communication, March 7, 2023).

Two strategies to lessen the impact of these concerns are to provide sufficient context for decisions supported by research and data and to involve and excite the client in the final decision-making process.

Solution 1: Provide Context for Decisions Supported by Research and Data

A marketing agency often provides deliverables that are creative in nature, like branding materials and promotional materials. These deliverables may be judged by clients that are unfamiliar with examining creative materials and clients may question why certain decisions were made. To build trust in the quality of the products, account managers must communicate their decisions and provide context for these decisions that are backed by research and data.

Traditionally, marketing decisions may be emotional in nature, or come from a long experience of working in the field. However, this reasoning may not be easily transferable to a client without the same experience. Building trust by providing research that supports the agency's decisions helps clients to feel as though they are receiving quality information that is well thought out. And, using data may help marketers to be more successful. In a 2021 article published by the Information Systems Journal, researchers found that "BA [business analytics] is seen as a key enabler of creating products that bring more joy and enjoyment to customers." (Tamm et al., 2021). However, they also found that creative decisions should not be entirely replaced by data – good news for marketers working in creative positions. Researchers concluded that, "Unquestionably, data can play an important role in creative decision-making. However, the increasing use of data does not make human expertise any less important. It just refocuses this expertise where it can add the most value." (Tamm et al., 2021). Data and industry research is a key strategy to help clients follow the creative process that occurred and justify why decisions were made, ultimately helping to build trust in the relationship.

One way for marketers to improve their data-driven decision making skills is to attend professional workshops hosted by professional organizations like AMA. For example, AMA has offered workshops like "Data-Driven Decision-Making for Marketers" in the past, which features training to "identify the most important aspects of data, how to visualize that data and how to interpret those visualizations into a strategic direction that will help your organization" (*Events Archive*, n.d.).

Solution 2: Involve and Excite Clients in the Decision-Making Process

Another way to build trust is to nurture the client-agency relationship by involving clients in the process and ensuring they feel that their voice is heard. Communication with clients that involves two-way discussion and shows that the agency values their business are key factors that lead to customer satisfaction. David Gargaro writes for Business News Daily, "Creating open channels of communication that invite customer feedback can help with identifying customers' problems, which will enable your company to solve those issues and build customers' trust over time" (Gargaro, 2023).

One way to do this when presenting deliverables is to present multiple options for clients to choose from. Account manager Carolyn Brenner suggests presenting a range of options - some

safer and some outside the box - to prompt autonomy in the process and give clients the feeling that they are an equally valuable opinion in the process. (C. Brenner, personal communication, March 7, 2023). At the end of the day, it matters that clients are happy with the deliverables they receive, and by giving several options, they feel involved and heard in the process. A recent article in Harvard Business Review supports this idea, citing a recent study that found “taking action to generate the information seems necessary to creating that sense [of ownership]”. (“We Undervalue”, 2023, para. 3). By communicating the thought process behind each option, clients will feel that the agency spent the time to fully understand the problem and identify multiple unique solutions, further building trust that the agency is providing well-rounded solutions that can be trusted.

Another strategy to build trust is to show genuine passion for the client’s deliverables in the presentation. In a 2022 Wall Street Journal article, Alina Dizik reports on a series of twelve University of Wisconsin - Madison studies that found a presenter’s passion led participants of the study to correctly predict if they would win pitch competitions with greater accuracy than hearing or reading a transcript of the presentation (Dizik, 2022). Showing passion for the project shows that account managers care, and that helps to further develop trust in the relationship. An account manager is a customer-service based role, and in a service relationship, customers appreciate individual attention and care.

Conclusion

A successful account manager achieves customer satisfaction through effective communication which subsequently leads to a strong, trusting relationship. In order to foster trust, marketers must provide quantitative and qualitative support for the final deliverables they present. By utilizing data to explain strategic or creative decisions, marketers are able to support ideas created from industry experience. Clients trust marketers who lean on industry research and their own personal expertise to make decisions. In addition, the marketing agency relationship is a service relationship, in which clients desire individualized care. To achieve this, marketers must show a sense of personal dedication and excitement to their clients. When clients feel that the marketer is a member of their team and is enthusiastic about the deliverables, a stronger trust is formed. For a marketer to be successful in these aspects, they must stay informed on marketing trends and strategy. Utilizing resources like *American Marketing Association* and *Adweek* help marketers become more informed, so they can better assist their clients.

By utilizing professional resources like American Marketing Association and Adweek, marketers can...

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