

Hiring an Agency? Agility and Expertise Trump Size

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Having worked for 35-years in the [marketing communications](#) industry, I've learned that smaller agencies are faster, cheaper, and more agile than large agencies. Void of layers and politics, small agencies make internal culture a priority, focusing on client's needs rather than short-term gain.



Large agencies operate and are organized by departments, including, account services, account planning, creative, finance, accounting, production, media buying, human resources and facilities, research, IT, online development and traffic. Layers of people require clients to pay big fees.

In contrast to larger agencies with long, vertical, and parallel structures, smaller agencies have teams of specialists in marketing, public relations, social and digital media that manage the process, from start to finish. They help nurture one another, have a shared voice, and are more incentivized to deliver top quality work.

Deloitte's Research Report, "Predictions for 2017," suggests today's organizations cannot succeed in silos—so people who

“fit the culture” and feel comfortable communicating throughout the company also tend to be most effective as individuals. In most cases, it means making teams smaller, creating more open office spaces, creating new cross-team roles, and often changing functional leadership.

With budget cuts, brands are moving away from hiring large agencies that work in silos, have rigid processes, multiple teams, are inefficient, and are outsourcing to smaller firms that are nimble, charge lower fees, offer transparency, and take risks.

“Flexible,” “collaborative” and “responsive” were the superlatives of agility bestowed upon the best agencies in a survey of over 100 Gartner clients. Marketers now oversee or heavily influence customer experience, digital commerce and business innovation. “Small and midsize agencies can operate in ways that larger agencies, in particular, agencies part of larger holding companies, cannot,” said Jay Wilson, research director, Gartner for Marketers. Gartner, January 2017

Then there’s the question of who’s on the team? Once marketing companies and advertising agencies’ directors, business development teams, and planners pitch and gain new business, lower-level staff are assigned to do the work.

Smaller agencies do equivalent work. After team pitches, and obtaining the business, the same people do the work. Agencies become partners, extensions of the brand and are the voice of the company.

Ten criteria for evaluating smaller agencies:

1. Do they have in-depth knowledge of your industry sector, customers and market environment?
2. Do they challenge underlying assumptions for more creative problem-solving?
3. Do they have a results-oriented track record?
4. Do they have strong testimonials from former and current

clients?

5. Do they have a culture of team spirit and collaboration?
6. Are they original, risk-takers and open to constructive criticism?
7. Is the partnership beneficial to both agency and client? Consider working together for a period of three-months to find out.
8. Are they knowledgeable about the latest business, marketing and industry trends?
9. Do they know best in-practice current B2B or B2C strategies and tactics?
10. Can they shift roles and deliverables based on the target audience, not the internal business model?

Boutique agencies are often overlooked because of their size. But today, success depends on immediacy and adaptability. The approval process within a large agency may take days or weeks, whereas smaller teams offer quicker turnarounds, and expertise, since small firms cannot afford to pad their employees.

For example, having worked for several agencies, when I was a \$150.00 per hour employee, the firm billed me out at \$450.00 per hour. Even interns, that are paid \$20.00 per hour, are billed out at \$60.00 per hour.

The stigma of bigger is better no longer exists. There are many reasons to choose small agencies. While corporate America has been “downsizing,” the rate of small business “start-ups” has grown, and the rate for small business failures has declined. The small business sector is growing rapidly. – U.S. Small Business Association, 2017

In fact, [68 percent](#) of the approximately 50,000 advertising and public-relations services establishments in the U.S. employ no more than five workers. **“Remember small is the new big.” Forbes, 2017.**



About the Author: Wendy Glavin is Founder and CEO of Wendy Glavin Agency. Wendy is a 30-year veteran of corporate, agency, consulting and small business ownership. From General Electric to Burson-Marsteller, Wendy's experience spans a wide variety of industry sectors in B2B2C. Wendy Glavin Agency has big agency know-how, an entrepreneurial spirit, agility and is customer-centric. Please contact Wendy at: <https://wendyglavin.com/>