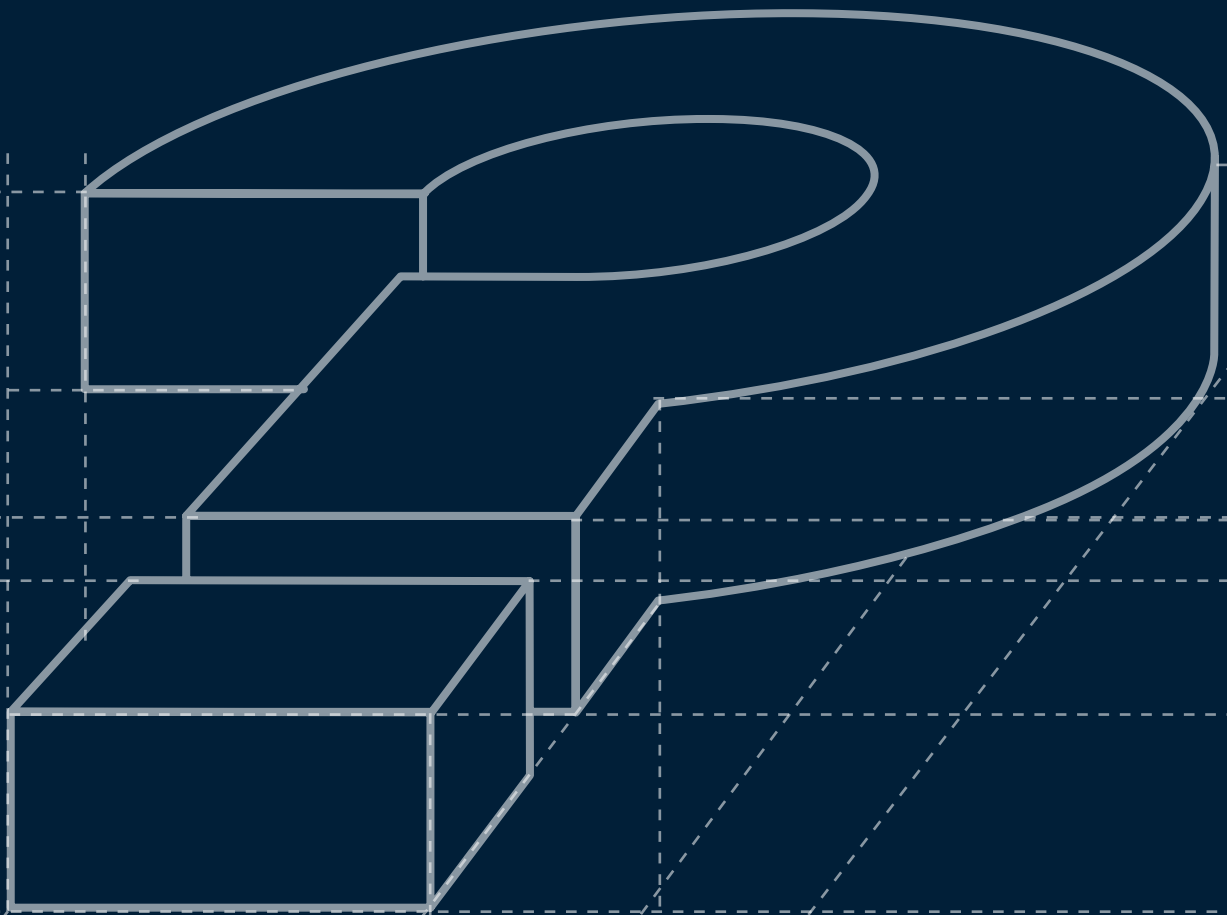


7 Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Marketing Agency



CATALYST
Marketing Agency 

Hiring the right marketing agency can be tough work.

Call after call, meeting after meeting, and among all the pitches, coffees and handshakes, you find different people saying the same things:

"We'll make you the Amazon of your industry"

"You need your own hashtag if you want to own your space"

"Yeah, we'll grow your website traffic by 200%, easy!"

Unfortunately, many of these claims are often false, or totally unrealistic.

Marketing agencies aren't a one-size-fits-all thing. Sadly, lots of businesses, especially those inexperienced in talking to marketing agencies, fail to ask the right questions.

If an agency can't answer these questions, that's a big red flag. To help you find the right agency for you, we've put together seven of the most important questions you should ask when meeting with agencies.

By asking a potential marketing agency these seven questions, you can separate the dog's b'll*cks from the plain old b'll*cks.

NB: We'd recommend asking these questions in a face-to-face meeting. Words only tell part of the story and body language - just as in a normal interview - is key to working out who the right agency is for your organisation.



The Questions

1.

How will you measure results?

2.

How do you manage updates and make sure we're always in the loop?

3.

Have you worked with clients in the past who shared similar issues with us? How did you solve them?

4.

How do you carry out research?

5.

What's your retention rate, and why do clients leave?

6.

What are your team's KPIs?

7.

How are we charged?

1.

How will you measure results?

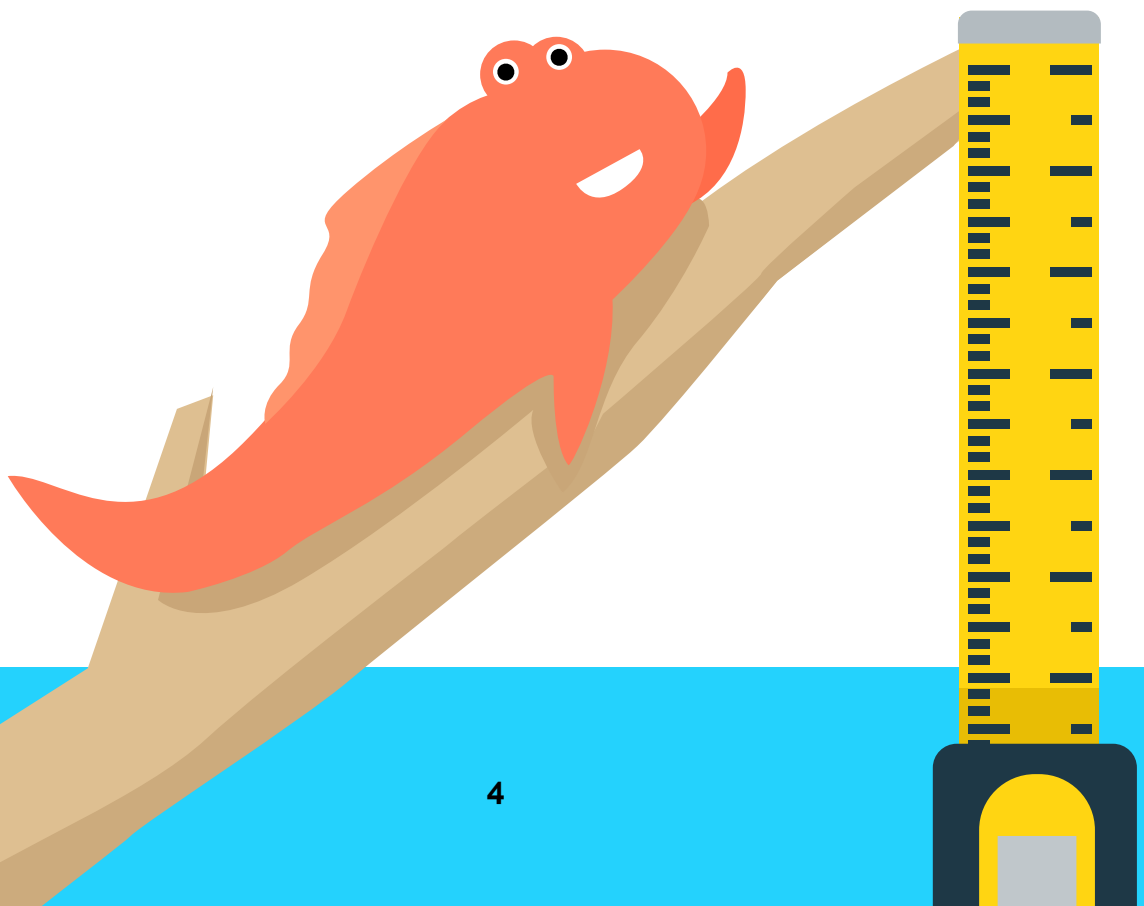
Einstein allegedly once said that, “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it’s stupid.”

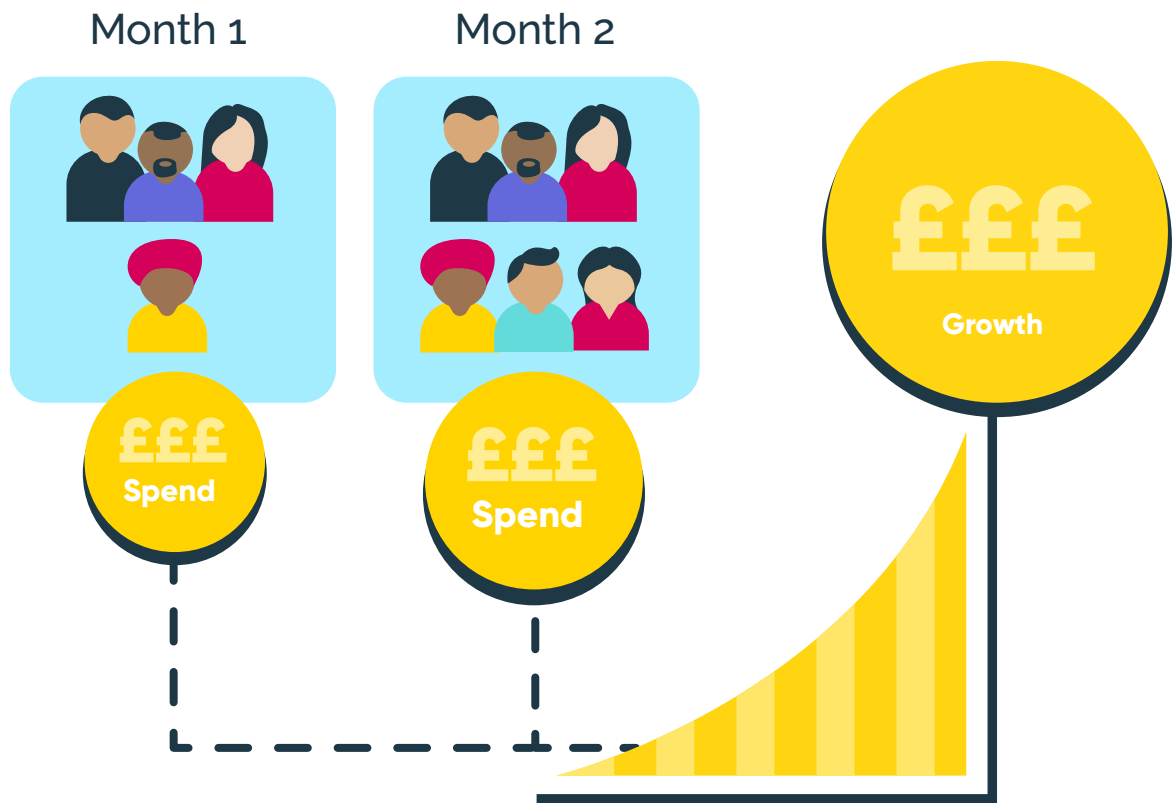
By the same token, setting the wrong goals and criteria to judge your agency’s work by can be catastrophic.

You could end up making an agency look like they’re doing a bad job when they’re not. Or, even worse, you could be blind to the terrible waste of budget that your agency is.

When setting out your criteria, simply saying that you want “more sales”, or “more followers on social media” won’t cut the mustard. You need to set out specific, realistic goals, such as how much you want to grow your revenue based on the size of the market and your monthly marketing budget.

This all boils down to what we call “vanity metrics” – pointless stats that look good on paper. Your agency should deliver tangible results; ones that help your organisation to grow and meet your goals.





It's also important to work out how many new customers you'd need to bring in each month, and what their average spend would need to be to achieve profitable growth.

Website views, social growth and content downloads are great, but if a prospective agency can't detail exactly how this will positively impact your conversion rate, then these are vanity metrics that serve no purpose but to look good.

Find yourself an agency who care about your business' overall growth, rather than just the marketing side of things.

Marketing is just one piece of the puzzle. Any agency worth their salt will be far more interested in looking at the overall picture and proper business growth, than focusing on minor KPIs such as clicks and bounce rates.

2.

How do you manage updates and make sure we're always in the loop?

Hiring an agency isn't just an exercise in business growth, but also one in trust.

There's nothing worse than trusting someone with your time and investment, only to hear sporadic, drip-fed updates on how the project is going.

That's why it's important to structure the way updates and feedback are given to suit your schedule and demands.

Some of our clients like to have bi-weekly catch-up calls and access to our project management software, giving them constant visibility over activity, status and deadlines.

Others prefer to leave us to it, choosing to focus on their own busy role rather than our progress. This changes on a client-by-client basis for us, but it's a discussion you definitely need to have with a prospective agency sooner rather than later.



3.

Have you worked with clients in the past who shared similar issues with us? How did you solve them?

Industry experience doesn't always mean industry results. Focus on the challenges they've solved, and whether they're similar to what you're looking to overcome.

This doesn't mean that because an agency doesn't have the specific experience you're looking for, that they can't do the job, but it's still important to see proven results from previous clients that had similar goals and challenges, even if they're not exactly the same.

You'll also want to find out if they have all of the skills that you need to achieve your goals.

Many agencies are one trick ponies, focusing on web design, SEO or social, rather than offering everything as a package.

Others, however, are like Swiss army knives, with knowledge and expertise across the board.

Consider what success looks like to you, and ensure that any potential partner agency has the skills, ambition and experience needed to achieve your goals.



4.

How do you carry out research?

We've written at length in the past about the importance of putting data at the centre of your research.

Any agency that doesn't have a structured, methodical approach to your project's research is building your project on speculation and guesswork over cold, hard facts - a sure recipe for disaster.

Your business deserves data-driven, evidence-based digital marketing that positively impacts your bottom line and provides an ROI.

It's important, then, that you ask questions about how they'll research your market and competitors. This is where the foundations of a great marketing strategy are formed; without it, marketing efforts are random and destined to fail.

Sure, agencies can have some success when working randomly on preconceptions. Some quick wins may convert into sales, but this approach will only go so far.

If you want true, long term, profitable growth, make sure their research strategy is thorough.

There are also a lot of tools out there which agencies tend to use for research purposes. Ask them what they prefer to use (if they can't think of any on the fly, that's a red flag!).



5.

What's your retention rate, and why do clients leave?

They, uh, leave when, uh...

Honesty is the best policy. Not every business partnership works out, that's life.

You're going to need to trust your marketing agency. If they can't be honest with you at this stage, then how could you be sure that they'll be honest with you six months down the line when you're expecting results?

Their retention rate is an incredibly telling stat. Sure, some relationships were never meant to be, but if people are leaving in their droves, then clearly something is wrong.



6.

What are your team's KPIs?

If your meetings and calls have gone well so far, and the chances of you signing with the agency are high, this is a great next step question to ask.

Agencies who give their accounts team billable targets (i.e. bill 4 hours of client work per day) should be avoided at all costs as they don't have your best interests at heart.

The best agencies realise that they grow when their clients grow. Whether or not they hold this to be true will be told by how they measure success, so ask about KPIs to work out if they're really interested in short-term gain for themselves, or long-term gain for you.

For example, our team at Catalyst are targeted on one key metric – retention.

If we're delivering results, and clients are happy, then they'll stay with us – simple.

In our opinion, retention is **the most important KPI** for any marketing agency.

This means that finding out what your prospective agency targets can be very telling.



7.

How are we charged?

It's easy to forget to talk about costs when hashing out plans for industry domination.

Working out whether you're getting bang for your buck is key in any investment; external marketing work is no different.

Don't forget to ask your potential agency about their billing structure and costing methodology.

Do they work on an hourly rate, or a set fee?

Does this vary across the team depending on skillset?

Are costs results-based in any way? (If not, could they be?)

Working out a way to ensure you get value in your investment is always important. Before you put pen to paper, have a careful think about the size of opportunity at hand, and whether or not the structure of the charge makes sense.



That's a wrap!

So, there you have it. Seven key questions we'd recommend asking any potential marketing partner.

Looking to grow your business? Book a call with one of our specialists. We're on hand to talk through your unique marketing requirements, and how we'll tailor our approach to suit your needs.

BOOK A CALL

Catalyst are a full-service, commercially driven digital marketing agency. We believe in doing things differently; our focus is on tangible results, not vanity metrics.

Our varied team of lead generation specialists range from salespeople to HubSpot experts; writers to artists, allowing us to offer a broad spectrum digital marketing solution, where we become an extension of your team, either filling in marketing skill gaps, or providing an end-to-end marketing solution.

Proper, plain-speaking, honest marketing that evolves alongside your organisation.



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