

Full Range of Services

It may seem obvious, but we've found that successful departments that want to grow don't turn down work. One distinguishing characteristic of in-house creative groups that grow is their courage to actively seek out and accept new projects, particularly those that are high profile and have a high level of strategic importance to the business.

There are several reasons that a department might choose to turn down work. For one of our clients already doing highly visible, brand-level design, taking on more projects seemed likely to increase the number of derivative or production-oriented jobs, which they hoped to avoid. On the other hand, departments that already see themselves as relatively low level might hesitate to seek out more strategic work, due either to a lack of resources or to a concern that they won't be up to the challenge. We frequently meet creative managers who hesitate to take on certain jobs for fear that their work, due to a project's inherent complexity or the department's resource constraints, would fall short of expectations or that they would be unable to do it at all.

These scenarios share the same pitfall: inflexibility. If the department restricts itself to high-end work of a particular variety, there is the potential that the department will disappear along with that work in the event of a corporate sea change. If, on the other hand, the department doubts its ability to handle a certain quantity of work or deliver the requisite level of quality, that can quickly raise doubts about the department's value in general, in which case management could hardly be blamed for seeking alternatives to the department's services.

We not only encourage in-house creative groups to remain open-minded in terms of their offerings at all levels, but we also encourage them to actively seek out new ways to meet the evolving needs of their parent organizations. At one consumer packaged-goods company we work with, the in-house group was focused on a narrow range of work involving channel

promotions. When it became clear that the marketing strategy would call for an increased use of new media, the department actively pursued this business and quickly built its account management strategy around this new service offering. The resulting visibility actually brought a variety of new projects to the department, including significant involvement in critical new-product launches.

Taking on high-visibility work can elevate your in-house group from service bureau to strategic partner, but it cannot be done overnight. In addition to the organizational willingness to assume new responsibilities and risks, it requires a resource model capable of meeting diverse and sometimes unexpected demands. Since you may not initially get enough copywriting or multimedia work, for example, to justify a full-time hire, you'll need to supplement your core staff with qualified contractors. In order to maintain a predictable and reliable source of such specialists, most of the companies we work with have moved beyond the traditional pool of freelancers to engage a staffing partner that understands their ongoing and potential staffing needs and actively recruits to meet them.

Growing an in-house creative department doesn't mean expanding headcount and hoping the work will follow. It does mean finding ways to diversify the types of work produced by the department and elevating its visibility within the organization as a whole. It also means creating an organizational structure that is ready, willing, and able to evolve with the needs of the business. It definitely involves taking chances, raising expectations, and increasing accountability.

About Aquent Consulting

Aquent Consulting, a division of Aquent, provides companies with the expertise, data, and tools necessary to optimize the execution of marketing plans and programs.