How to grow your internal creative services department

Looking across our client base, we've seen again and again that the most successful creative organizations are those that grow. High-quality work and operational efficiency drive this growth and firmly establish these departments as critical to the overall business. Their ongoing effectiveness can be linked to the following four elements:

Chargeback systems. A chargeback system assigns a dollar value to each project undertaken by the department and uses an accounting mechanism to have the requesting organization "pay" for the project. This provides a vocabulary to discuss trade-offs between different approaches, allowing the requestor to decide whether the cost of additional effort is warranted. It also gives the department the ability to add resources as necessary without going through additional budgeting steps, a critical component that ensures access to the resources needed to perform outstanding work.

Account management. True account management means more than dedicated client service and consistent project management. It means partnering with clients to develop marketing plans, manage budgets, and weigh the benefits of diverse approaches to marketing execution. This level of collaboration demands highly skilled account managers ready to participate in and add to key marketing meetings and to partner with the clients on the composition of effective creative briefs for each job, briefs that encourage reuse and maximize efficiency. Such account management ultimately raises the visibility of the department and actively sells its capabilities to the rest of the organization.

Full range of services. One of the best ways to elevate the reputation of the internal team is to take on high-visibility projects—branding work, new media work, copywriting, video—even if you don't have the required resources on hand. Being the "go to" resource means never turning away work because you don't have the staff to get it done. Maintaining a flexible pool of resources—freelancers, agencies, etc.—through which you can meet virtually any demand allows you to build a culture of "yes."

Efficient operations. Low-cost operations are an essential element of a high-growth creative services operation; competitive costs often enable the in-house team to pull work in from external agencies and efficient operations give the internal team the ability to support the critical account management function. Efficient operations means aligning your organization to the work you produce, developing processes appropriate to each work type, automating processes wherever possible, and measuring performance.

With these elements in place, the possibilities are endless. One pharmaceutical company we work with began with a six-person creative operation doing print production work. They leveraged their ability to charge the requesting organizations for the work they were executing and grew to a 120-person team without having to request more budget. A proactive account management organization keeps the team highly utilized. And the group handles everything from routine production jobs to logo design and TV commercials. The efficiency of their organization enables them to keep bill rates below $80 per hour; streamlined processes mean fewer hours billed per project. Audited results demonstrating greater than 50 percent cost savings over external agencies has helped solidify their position as the best choice for creative projects. Most importantly, they have become a global, strategic partner for many of the company's mature brands.

For more information on how you might do the same for your creative services group, please visit aquentconsulting.com.

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. Aquent Consulting has transformed marketing operations of Fortune 500 companies around the world through aligning organizations, streamlining processes, automating delivery, and measuring results.

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