

PART TWO
TEAM

**Build Your
Team**

Even the best strategy only succeeds when skilled and experienced people deliver it. Think of the examples earlier in this book from other areas of life. The corporate world headhunts the best people, professional sport buys and trains the best people, and the military spends heavily on recruitment and then drills its people extensively for successful campaigns.

It's no different with digital teams: the winners in each sector normally have the most skilled and experienced teams responsible for delivery. They can be teams of two or three, or twenty or thirty, but the best campaigns have the best people delivering a clear strategy, with strong leadership to unite them. See Figure 13 to remind yourself of the S-T-A-R formula.

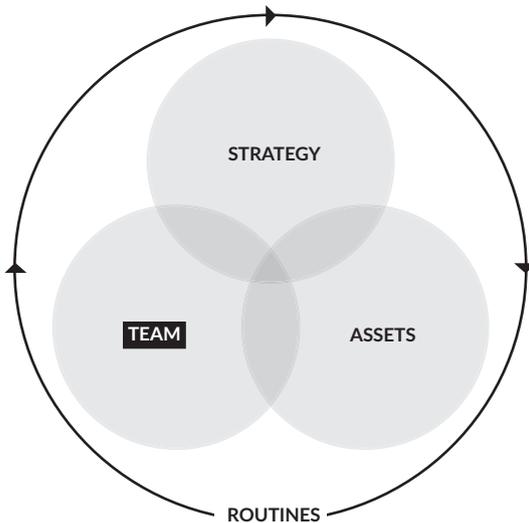


Figure 13 The S-T-A-R formula

Most businesses now have some digital expertise in house, often to undertake repeatable content work or work that requires particularly deep product knowledge. Larger firms might have a digital marketing manager. In some cases the overall marketing manager will lead the digital marketing too. External suppliers, such as agencies or experienced contractors, are normally part of the mix, bringing broader and more up-to-date skills as well as cross-sector experience.

The right allies



Remember that the digital sector has a low barrier to entry and it is not difficult for people to present as being skilled and experienced regardless of their track record. So hiring both for internal staff and external suppliers needs to be thoroughly researched and decisions carefully made.

In digital marketing, we are constantly building a footprint that Google and others will evaluate to try and understand the extent and professionalism of our organisation. Google is always looking for clues about how well developed our digital offering is. Poor work over 6 or 12 months can do plenty of damage to that footprint and it can take just as long to recover.

But it isn't just about skills and experience. We're looking for allies, people who will regard our goals as important to them personally – people who will

be fully invested. Our aim is to build a team that will rally round our goals to make sure they're achieved.

What is the right mix for you?

Before we look at the three options for hiring digital marketing experts, let's consider how the nature of our business might influence our thinking on this topic.

Size of business. Smaller enterprises (six-figure and many seven-figure turnover businesses) are often best served by outsourced or contracted digital marketing experts. This is because the digital marketing requirement is rarely extensive enough to justify hiring, managing and continually training staff in house. It's also difficult for small businesses, whose core activity is not digital marketing, to attract the best marketers to come in and work for them. But higher seven-figure turnover and many eight-figure turnover businesses can often sustain full-time in-house digital marketers, normally in collaboration with agencies or contractors. These rules of thumb vary depending on how reliant the business is on digital marketing, so a business that generates most of its income from online leads or sales might hire in house sooner than a business that generates work from other channels as well.

Skills in business. While six-figure and smaller seven-figure businesses might not be able to sustain a

full-time digital marketer in house, they may warrant a generalist marketer full time. When this is the case, the business needs to be clear what the extent of the marketer's digital skill and experience is before they assemble their team. For example:

- Have they led high-growth campaigns before?
- Do they have experience of hiring agencies or freelancers?
- Have they learned what to look for and what to avoid?
- How committed to the business are they?
- Are they likely to remain with it right to the end of the campaigns?
- How will they react if results aren't being hit?

Answers to these kinds of questions can help a business understand if its strategy should be led in house or by a more experienced agency or contractor. Partnering an in-house team member with the right external suppliers, with a clear leadership and reporting structure, is often the right balance.

Available resource. Once we have a good idea of the level of digital skill and experience of our in-house resources, we can consider whether or not they might be the right people to lead or help to deliver our strategy. We should also consider their likely

workload and how much time existing staff will have available to deliver the digital marketing activity outlined in our strategy. If our staff are engaged in other marketing campaigns, or other objectives, assigning them to deliver our digital strategy will likely see them overstretched with goals that are not delivered. So it is not just the skill and experience we should assess in our in-house staff but also their availability to devote time and give focus to delivering our digital marketing strategy.



Figure 14 How businesses dominate their sectors online

Whatever our conclusions on our available resources, we will almost certainly need – at some point – to hire in-house staff and contractors or an agency to support them to deliver the goals in our strategy. This section looks at some of the factors that cause such hires to succeed or fail, and offers tips on questions to ask as we work through the hiring process.

2.1

**A Winning
Team
Structure**

Before we look at how to hire digital marketers, let's consider what it means to build a team. It's obviously more than just a case of hiring a group of individuals with the right sets of skills. The people we hire will only be valuable to us if they're able to collaborate effectively to deliver the goals we've set out in our strategy.

Over the years, we've seen skilled teams with good strategies fail to deliver business goals for a variety of reasons. For example, the politics at play can be such that an internal team member feels a contractor is treading on their toes, so the internal team member has some incentive for the contractor to fail. That can cause the contractor to want the internal team member out of the way too, and the result is a mess for all concerned.

So, as we build and develop our digital team, we should consider what the right blend and structure are for them to work effectively together. We need to establish clear leadership that everybody understands and accepts, irrespective of whether that leadership comes from within our business or from one of our external suppliers.

Keeping it simple



One of the most useful concepts we've observed over the years is that the businesses with the simplest team

structures, with the fewest and clearest lines of communication, often perform the best. For example, where we have a small tightly knit team in house working with a small tightly knit team from an agency, with a single point of contact between the two, the scope for wasted time, misunderstanding or disagreement is significantly reduced.

With simpler structures, the likelihood is that provided we meet regularly face to face – as we would if we'd adopted the Strategy Mindset – we build strong relationships, plenty of trust and clear understanding about who is doing what and why. The result is that everybody in the team wants everybody else to succeed, simply because they grow to like and respect each other.

Conversely, where we have too many people, stakeholders and lines of communication, we increase the likelihood of misunderstanding and of some team members feeling undervalued or disconnected from the purpose of the strategy. Unhelpful politics can develop within the team. Consider Figure 15. With three stakeholders we have three lines of communication to maintain. But with four stakeholders we have six lines, with five stakeholders ten lines and with six stakeholders fifteen lines.

While most digital campaigns need several specialists involved to deliver effectively, the most successful are almost always those where the team is structured in

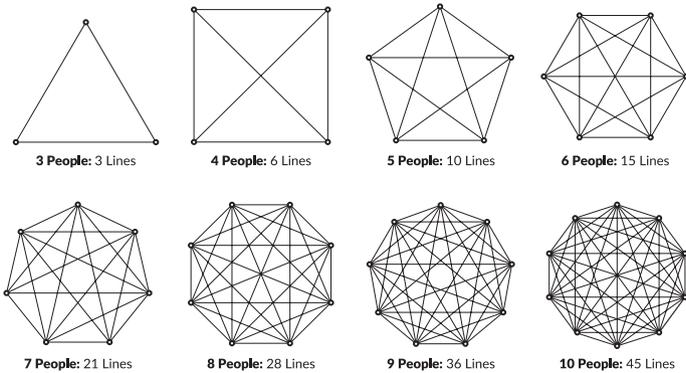


Figure 15 Multiplying lines of communication

the leanest and simplest way possible. And whatever size the team, clear understanding on who has what responsibility, who the decision makers are, and who the points of contacts are internally and externally is vital too.

Clear leadership

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If the appointment of a single leader for our campaign is key to its success, how do we go about choosing that person? Should it be somebody drawn from our own staff? Should it be a contractor? Or should it be a senior team member from our digital agency partner? The answer is usually that it should be the best qualified person for the job, and where that person sits will vary depending on how fully developed our in-house digital team is.

Remember that the role of the leader is to monitor our overall goal and to make sure those responsible for delivering supporting goals are on track. So it has to be somebody who feels invested enough to take such responsibility. If we have a marketing manager or director in house, it would usually be their responsibility. If not, it might be our relationship manager or the account manager from our digital agency partner.

Our campaign leader has to be able to draw conclusions from the results of our various marketing activities as they are reported and to take decisions on potential changes accordingly. So they must have the experience and skill required to interpret results and the confidence to act on them. If somebody who has that expertise and is invested in our succeeding is in place, we have a great chance of our strategy delivering on its intended outcomes.

2.2

**Hiring
In-House
Marketers**

At the beginning of this book we looked at the five mindsets businesses can adopt when they want to use digital marketing to drive growth. The differences between the five mindsets are rarely more exposed than when businesses make decisions on whom to hire to support their digital campaigns. Hiring in-house marketers is vital in many cases but in other cases kills growth. Here we look at some of the factors that make hiring in-house marketers more likely to be successful.

Businesses with turnovers of £10m or less generally achieve the best results by combining a small number of full-time in-house marketers with a small number of contractors or an agency to simulate the breadth of up-to-date skill and experience a small internal team can't realistically deliver on its own. For many larger businesses the same is true, with the subtle difference being that the in-house team might be bigger, perhaps five to ten people rather than two to four.

The problem small businesses have to tackle is that their in-house digital teams are of a size that doesn't normally appeal as a career move to the most skilled and experienced digital marketers in their local areas. Yet, to dominate through digital, those are exactly the people we need on our team.

The best digital marketers normally want to work in larger teams or in businesses with plenty of digital

expertise in house. They want regular training, peers to discuss ideas with and exposure to a variety of cutting-edge campaigns. Working in relative isolation isn't good for a career move. So, when we hire in house in a small business, we have to be clever with our hiring choices and our structuring of the external contractors and agencies around our hires if we are to build a formula that works and one that replicates the standard that our bigger corporate counterparts can achieve.

The classic mistake

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The mistake we see more than any other with small businesses on a digital-driven growth path is the transition from the Agency Mindset to the DIY Mindset. The thought process when this occurs is often 'We are paying more than £3k per month to our agency. We can hire somebody for less than that and they'll be here all the time – imagine what that will do to our results!'

It's an understandable thought process but one that more often than not causes growth rates to go into decline. This happens for three reasons:

- An agency retainer provides a mix of skillsets from several consultants. These have different skills and experience and different personality types. Replacing them with an in-house hire

leaves the business with just one personality type and a small subset of the skills previously accessible. An individual can't possibly deliver the same expertise that was previously provided by a team.

- The small business role often appeals to the digital marketer who – for whatever reason – hasn't been able to hold down good positions in bigger in-house teams or in digital agencies. So where a business may previously have been working with the better marketers in the area, now it is working with somebody with less skill – but they don't know it!
- Finally, the business has also inherited the task of training, nurturing and periodically replacing its hire. But, because digital marketing isn't its core expertise, it struggles to do so successfully. Instead, it enters a cycle of hiring and replacing its in-house staff every 1 to 2 years, often with a dip in the performance of its campaigns either side of those transitions.

A decision to hire in house is likely to work when it is part of a well-researched and planned strategy with appropriate support in place. In particular, it's likely to work when expertise is brought in to assist with the setting up of the new structure. It's rare for new in-house digital marketing teams to succeed when they are set up with a DIY Mindset on the whims of

the owner, but more common for them to succeed when they are set up with a Strategy Mindset – with lots of research and outside expertise brought in to help with the process.

What makes an in-house hire work?

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Hiring in-house marketers is often successful when a business is of a size that it can hire an experienced digital marketing manager or director to run a department of at least four to five staff – in other words, when it has a spend on digital marketing well in excess of £100,000. At this level, the business is approaching a point where it might be of interest to the better digital marketers in the area, particularly if the business is already on a good growth curve.

But, with the right structure and support, a small business can begin to build its own in-house digital team by combining forces with experienced third parties. Usually this is achieved by hiring one or two content producers, or social media or marketing executives, to work within a broader structure whereby contractors or agencies deliver the strategic and more specialist skills the campaigns need. The third party will often help design and manage the strategy, and also help develop the skills of the staff who are working in house, so that the in-house team can be stable and successful.

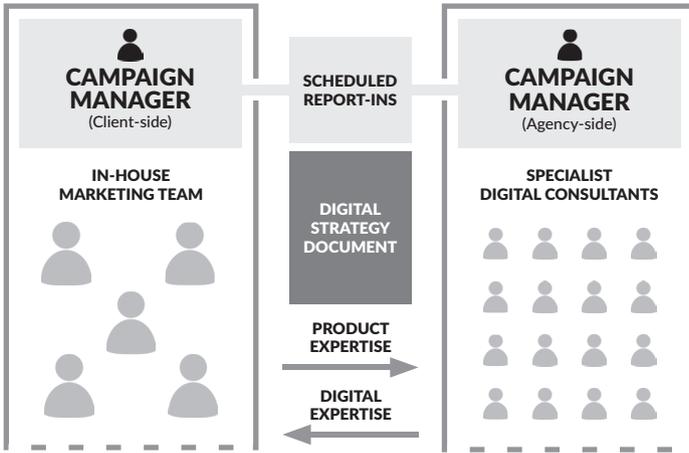


Figure 16 Successful client-agency relationship structure

The structure shown in Figure 16 enables smaller in-house teams to simulate the resources and performance of much larger teams because it meets the needs of both the business and its hires:

- In a small business, hires are not likely to be the most experienced digital marketers in the area but they will have aspirations to grow their careers and find a good career path. Being part of a team that is dovetailed with a great agency meets their need to progress through knowledge transfer and ongoing exposure to seasoned experts and bigger campaigns.
- This in turn meets the needs of the business in that its investment in in-house marketers becomes more stable and more likely to deliver good returns.

The staff it hires have more access to best practice and the opportunity to build their skillset more quickly, which in turn has an impact on the results they deliver. Staff turnover slows so the business gets on average 3 years instead of 1 year from each hire, thereby reducing the cost and disruption of re-hiring.

- This structure also brings continuity and accountability that benefits the business. The right external party serves as the guardian of the business's digital strategy, assisting with re-hires when needed, flagging when internal work is taking the business in the wrong direction and advising on further hires that will be needed for the next phases of growth. Regular dialogue between campaign leaders on either side of the relationship assists this, which is why face-to-face reporting at least once a month is so important.

Whether hiring our first in-house marketers with a view to building a small team or growing our in-house team to five to ten full-time specialist digital staff, we still need to make the right hires. But because most businesses don't specialise in hiring and managing digital marketers, many make poor decisions that set them back on their growth paths. So it works to involve other more experienced stakeholders in hiring decisions and also, of course, to ask the right questions at the application and interview stage.

Questions to ask when hiring in-house marketers

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1. What examples can you show of when you generated great returns for other businesses? What numbers did you achieve for them? How did you get those results?
2. There are lots of great agencies in the area and lots of big corporates with in-house marketing departments. Why do you want to progress your digital career with us?
3. Digital marketing is a broad discipline that requires lots of different personality types and skillsets. If you were only going to be responsible for one area of our digital marketing, what would it be?
4. How long have you spent on average with each of your previous employers? What is the shortest and longest period you've spent with anybody? How long do you plan to be with us?
5. If you join us, a likely goal would be for you to deliver X leads/sales from [digital channel] within [number of months]. What would you need from us to deliver this goal?
6. Tell us about your learning patterns. What books have you read in the last six months? Which

experts do you follow on YouTube and social media? What have you learned from them?

7. If you were to join our team and deliver results for us, what other skillsets would you need around you so that you could grow, develop and succeed with us?

2.3

**Hiring
Contractors
And
Freelancers**

Some digital marketing experts choose not to work in agency or in-house teams, preferring instead to offer their services as independent contractors. In-house contractors are attractive to larger businesses such as corporates who run fixed-term projects. It works better for them to assemble the right people to deliver their short-term projects at higher day rates than to have lots of experienced staff on payroll if demand for them may fluctuate.

In these larger team environments, contractors who have a history of delivering on similar objectives previously are usually hired. When a specialist recruitment agency is involved in the process, they have an interest in vetting and providing staff who are known to be able to deliver on objectives. Companies may hire and re-hire the same contractor several times over. So there are several ways in which the risk of hiring somebody to deliver a particular result for a business can be managed.

Conversely, in environments where a small business is not so experienced in hiring digital marketing contractors or freelancers, the risk is high. This is particularly so because, as we've established, the barrier to entry to present as a digital marketing practitioner is relatively low. So businesses are prone to falling into the trap of hiring somebody who appears convincing rather than somebody who is properly vetted. Just as with in-house hires, the wrong contractor hire can kill growth for a long period. It can be several months

before a business realises what's happening, and it can take just as long to unravel and rectify poor work.

Motivations for working as a contractor or freelancer



If we're considering adding a contractor or freelancer to our team, before we begin speaking to candidates it's useful to consider the different motivations people have for working outside agency or in-house team environments. Digital marketing experts take this path for credible and legitimate reasons, but there are also people who take the independent route because they have struggled to establish themselves in team situations.

On identifying the need for a particular skill for its campaigns, a business might use websites such as Upwork, People Per Hour or LinkedIn to search for somebody working independently who presents as having the relevant expertise. When we meet and interview candidates on this basis, it's useful to be aware of three reasons that lead people to list themselves as available to work independently, rather than in full-time employment, as part of a settled and established team:

- For some, the motivation centres on a desire for a particular lifestyle – for example, they feel a need to work more flexible hours or that they would like to

control more carefully the type of work they do. The reality of working independently is very different, of course, and it is difficult to control demand as a freelancer or contractor. But the motivation is straightforward, and when there is the right match all parties can win.

- Some might be in full-time work but making slower progress up the career ladder than they would like, so advertising as a freelancer provides a means of topping up their income with 'side projects'. Because this type of freelancer is not fully focused on their work for their employer or their freelance projects, they don't fully succeed in either area. They are under time pressures in both environments and don't give full attention to either.
- Others have personality types that have led them to struggle in team environments. This may be to do with their ability to work in a team or because they have not mastered their discipline sufficiently and colleagues or employers have eventually challenged them on that fact. Unable to hold down a good position in a team environment, they switch to presenting as a freelancer or contractor for opportunities where accountability can be lower. Clearly it's important to filter out those who match this profile when interviewing to build a digital team.

Of the three groups, the first is obviously the one to hire while the others are to identify at interview stage and avoid. People who are contracting or freelancing

because of a genuine motivation around lifestyle can be great assets to a small business: they can be both skilled and loyal. A useful indicator of this type of person is a career history with stints several years long with credible employers – genuine industry experience. They were respected and retained when they were in employment and there is a good chance they'll be respected and retained when working independently too.

Motivations for hiring a contractor or freelancer

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We have some insight into the motivations of different types of contractors and freelancers, but why might a business look to hire an individual rather than an agency? With the Strategy Mindset, our aim is to assemble the most skilled and experienced people to deliver our strategy, so our motivation in hiring an individual should be that they are the option most likely to deliver the result we are seeking.

In high-growth environments, the cost of expertise is normally outweighed by the expected returns. A contractor or freelancer will likely cost more per day than an in-house recruit, but less per day than an agency. But all hiring decisions have to be commercial decisions. A £100 saving a day on any hire may feel good on the day the hiring decision is made. But a £100,000 swing either way in returns at the

end of the campaign is a more significant figure. So hiring decisions should always be made on the basis of which approach we consider will give us the best results and returns.

Whether a business is likely to scale up and dominate its sector online if it relies on individual contractors or freelancers is another question. Let's consider the upsides and downsides of this option.

Four upsides of hiring contractors and freelancers

1. There are contractors and freelancers who are skilled and experienced, and who have moved to working independently after successful careers purely for lifestyle reasons.
2. When a contractor or freelancer can bring a niche skill that is needed for one element of a business's strategy, they may genuinely be the best person for the job.
3. A contractor or freelancer will often work without a long-term contract so it's easy to remove them from campaigns if they are not delivering.
4. In cases where a good match is found, a contractor or freelancer can become dependent on work from the business and, as a result, can be bought in and loyal.

Four downsides of hiring contractors and freelancers

1. Contractors and freelancers have finite capacity but demand for their services fluctuates. Pressure on their time may have an impact on the level of engagement, and the results and returns we see from them.
2. If they become ill, overbooked or disappear, our campaigns are suddenly left under-resourced, which has an impact on results and can take time to resolve.
3. Relying on an individual can mean that key information about our business and campaigns resides in their head rather than in our business.
4. A contractor or freelancer may see us as a priority initially but, if a bigger or better-paying opportunity comes along later, we may become less of a priority for them.

If we think back to how great teams are assembled in other areas of working life, the best people are sought and organised into a sustainable structure that delivers predictable results. Part of that structure is about accountability and face-to-face reporting. We want the simplest team structure possible with the fewest lines of communication. When we hire, we should therefore think not only about whom to hire

but also about the simplest possible structure that will work, and within which one can communicate with one another effectively.

Questions to ask when hiring contractors and freelancers

1. Digital marketers are normally strong in some areas but not all. If we were to assign you to just one area of our campaigns, which should it be?
2. What case studies and examples of work can you show when you have personally delivered big results for businesses that are similar in size or sector to ours?
3. Why have you chosen to work as a contractor or freelancer rather than in an agency or in-house team where you might learn so much more over time?
4. In the last 12 months, what is the busiest you have been in any given week and what is the quietest you have been? What do you do when you are overbooked?
5. How many people have you worked for in the last 12 months? And how many are you still working for today?
6. When and from where would you prefer to deliver your work for our campaigns? How much

time would you want to spend with us face to face to deliver results?

7. A goal we might assign to you would be to deliver X leads/sales from [digital channel] within [number of months]. What would you need from us to deliver this and how long would it take you to do so?

2.4

Hiring Digital Agencies

When a business is using digital to scale up or dominate its sector, a digital agency is usually one part of its digital delivery team. This is even true of larger businesses with nine-figure turnovers. Businesses of this size may have large in-house teams, perhaps fifty people or more. But digital agencies are usually retained for the mix of expertise they bring, and for their up-to-date knowledge of what is and isn't working across a range of channels and sectors.

Despite this requirement, what we tend to see is marketing managers and marketing executives who are frustrated with their digital agency. They often say things like 'We're not really sure what they do', 'They don't really bring us any new ideas' or 'They're slow in getting back to us.'

These are simply signs that the wrong digital agency has been hired, or a good agency has been hired but one (or both) of the parties isn't managing the relationship effectively. Hiring a digital agency and making the relationship work requires many of the same principles we apply when we hire in-house staff. We should vet them properly, set clear expectations, maintain face-to-face reporting, and review and adjust regularly to keep everything on track.

Here we'll consider some factors that increase the chances of making the right digital agency hire, and

of making the relationship effective once the hire is done. To begin, let's look at the different types of agency there are so that we can shortlist appropriately.

Three types of digital agency



Remember that it pays to keep our structure as lean and simple as possible, with the fewest possible lines of communication. So, in some cases, multiple agencies might be needed but where possible we are aiming to hire just one. Before we can begin the hiring process, we need to be aware of the three different types of agency that exist in the market:

- **Full service agency.** Full service marketing agencies provide all aspects of marketing including digital, and also usually including brand development, design for print, exhibitions and PR. These tend to be the bigger agencies and all the services are available under one roof. There is great convenience in this but obviously the trade-off is that full service agencies do not usually live and breathe digital, so the results and services they can deliver for businesses are unlikely to match those of a specialist digital agency.
- **Digital agency.** Like full service agencies, digital agencies provide a mixture of services and bring experience of delivering digital marketing for many different clients. The difference is that all

the staff in a digital agency are specialists in digital marketing. Services are likely to be a mixture of promotion or optimisation services (e.g. SEO, PPC, conversion rate optimisation, content marketing and social media) and web production services (e.g. design, build and maintenance of digital assets). For these reasons, where results from digital are vital to a business, a digital agency is usually hired.

- **Niche agency.** Some digital agencies choose to become specialist in a particular niche of digital marketing rather than providing the full range of services. So, for example, some niche agencies provide promotion but not production services. Others might specialise only in niches that are valued by high-end e-commerce businesses such as conversion optimisation or usability testing. Sometimes digital agencies subcontract niche agencies on larger projects and other times they are hired in directly by clients.

Once we have an idea of which type of digital agency is most appropriate to help us deliver the goals we've set, the process of finding the one that is best matched to us begins. Just as with staff, poorly matched client-agency relationships fail and eat up lots of time and budget in the process. Conversations with potential agency partners are more productive when we're clear on what their motivations are likely to be, so let's consider that next.

Behind the scenes at the agency

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If we were to ask a hundred digital agency owners about their favourite client relationships, they would all be able to list some that are particularly special to them – special, perhaps, because the fit is so good, the relationship is so strong, everything works for both parties, there’s a real openness, results are consistently delivered and the account is profitable too of course.

But most will also have client relationships that are the opposite, where the retainer is ticking along, not quite delivering, communication is difficult, goalposts seem to keep changing, decisions are taken without the agency’s involvement and, as a result, the agency feels powerless to deliver growth for the client in question.

For both the agency and the client, the first relationship here probably feels like one that’s worth investing time in. It’s the one where it pays to go the extra mile when there is the chance to do so, because it feels like a relationship for the long term. The second relationship feels like one that will come to an end one way or the other. The agency seeks to service it by the book, but naturally puts its best resources on the accounts that have the best long-term potential.

A bought-in digital agency partner

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So it's in our interests not just to hire the right agency but to set up and manage the relationship in a way whereby we make ourselves a priority for that agency. We're looking to set up a win-win relationship in which the agency is the right agency for us and we feel we are the right client for them – one where there is long-term potential for the relationship to work for both parties.

To achieve this, we bring the Strategy Mindset to the hiring process. We base our hiring decision on evidence – for example, a five-minute phone call to three existing clients of that agency adds so much colour to whatever they present to us in their pitch. And when they do pitch, we probe, make sure we ask challenging questions and listen carefully for evidence in their answers.

We should know, for example:

- how many staff the agency has
- how many will be involved in our account
- what the reporting structure internally is
- whom we will deal with day to day
- what results these people have achieved for businesses like ours already

- what budget the agency thinks we should be placing with them, and how that compares with their smallest and largest accounts
- why the agency wants to work with us rather than other businesses that have approached them

We're looking for clarity on whether the agency will be hungry to serve us once we are on board. Do they have everything they need to achieve the result we're seeking? Sure it may feel good in the cool office with the glossy presentation and the (hopefully) nice coffee. But what will be happening after six, twelve and eighteen months? We need to feel confident on that before we commit to a hiring decision, because it can be a lot of work to undo a wrong relationship once it is up and running.

Setting up for success

Once we have made our decision on which agency we want to hire, the way we onboard them will influence how the relationship plays out over time. A good agency will know how to set the relationship up to succeed, but remember this is not a mature sector and many agencies have yet to identify and formalise best practice. Our experience is that setting up a relationship ladder, whereby multiple relationships are maintained (see Figure 17), is most likely to lead to success and to mean that, when an issue does occur, everybody is aware and it is quickly escalated and resolved.

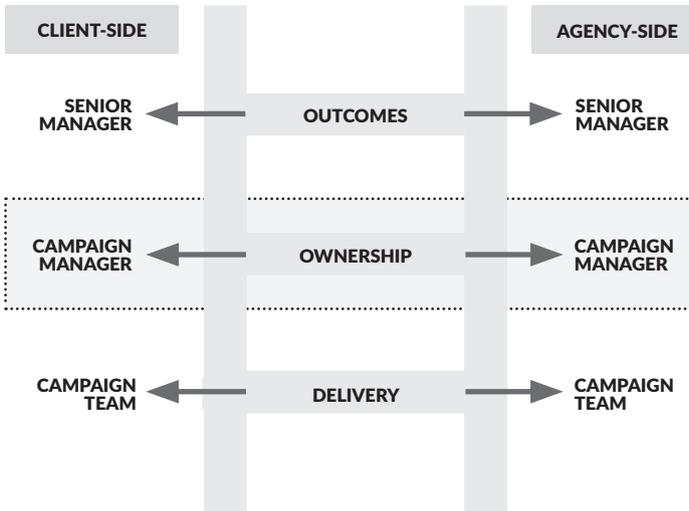


Figure 17 The relationship ladder

With the relationship ladder in place, a fundamental requirement is that the campaign managers meet at least once a month and look each other in the eye as they talk results. For this to work, we need other aspects of the Strategy Mindset to be firing too. We must have our published strategy handy so we're all clear on what's expected, we must have the rest of our team in place to deliver it, we must have the right digital assets and our daily routines must be up and running. When all these aspects are in place and working, we have the chance to scale up and dominate our sector online.

Questions to ask when hiring digital agencies

1. What examples can you show of when you have achieved big returns for businesses similar to ours? Are you happy for us to call those clients for a reference?
2. How many staff do you have? What is the structure? Which are your biggest and smallest departments? Which are the most and least heavily booked?
3. How many clients do you have on your books and how many do you meet with every month to discuss the results you've achieved for them?
4. What are your own plans for the next 12 months? Who will you be hiring and why? Why are we a fit for you in the next 12 months?
5. What would be an appropriate monthly budget given the goals we have? Where would that budget position us in terms of your smallest and largest client accounts?
6. If we do sign with you, who will we deal with on a day-to-day and month-to-month basis? What are their backgrounds and what results have they achieved in their careers?
7. A goal we are likely to set up is to achieve X leads and sales by X deadline from [digital channel]. What would you need from us to achieve this?

2.5

**A Winning
Team
Mentality**

So now we know that we're aiming to put together the simplest team structure we can, and we have some ideas now on how to do our hiring well. But what needs to happen day to day for that team to succeed? What does the culture need to look like? And what steps can we take to help our team have a winning mentality from the outset?

Five factors are usually present within a successful digital team – that is, a digital team that consistently delivers the leads and sales needed to scale up a business and dominate its sector online. Some issues are about structure and some are about culture. Hires will usually only work effectively when these five factors are also in play:

1. **Buy-in.** All team members have all been bought into the story behind the campaigns. They have visited the business and recognise the opportunity that exists to grow it. They see this as something they want to achieve for the people behind the business and as a good project for their own careers too. They can see why the campaigns will be meaningful and they believe they can succeed.
2. **Leadership.** Team members know who the leader of the campaigns is and believe that they have the knowledge and experience needed to achieve the result. They respect the leader's judgement and the direction they want to take. They like the

leader and want to deliver for them, and they feel the leader likes them and will reward them for successes achieved.

3. **Ownership.** Each team member understands clearly the area they are responsible for. Their goals are clear and measurable so there is no ambiguity about whether they are achieving them or not. So, for example, if somebody is responsible for paid search, the number of leads or sales required and the cost per acquisition are clear. This way, they always know whether or not they are on track.
4. **Face-to-face meetings.** All team members meet face to face at least once a month to report on their individual results. This happens even when there is an awareness already of some of the results. Team members know they need to prepare and present their outcomes clearly. They know they also need to show why they expect to be delivering their goal successfully next month too.
5. **Visible progress.** Team members feel progress as it is happening. It may be numerical – for example, they can see how their part of the campaign is feeding success in the campaign overall. Or it may be that we feed back directly when we see success. The team then feels it is building something, and that its mission is succeeding, and team members become increasingly bought in the more results are achieved.

Things don't always go completely to plan though and within reason that has to be accepted. So what happens when things aren't quite working? How do we know when to make changes?

Making changes



Results are not always predictable in digital marketing. Campaigns play out in constantly evolving marketplaces. Competitors change tactics, Google changes algorithms and audiences shift to new social channels. A skilled and experienced team can adapt relatively quickly when it needs to. But what do we do when we have a dip in results that has gone on for some time?

In the 'Goals And Roles' chapter in Part One, we saw how supporting goals feed an overall goal. When reporting is clear, we can see easily when one or two tactics are failing and then isolate the cause. It isn't always so straightforward of course, but there are some questions we can ask when we aren't seeing the results we expected:

1. **Do we have the right tactics in place?** Could it be we're looking to the wrong channel to achieve results? It's unlikely we've made a wrong call if we had skilled and experienced people choosing the goal. But in 'Choose Your Tactics' in Part One we marked some tactics as 'reserve' and

this might be the time to call on them. It could be, for example, that our PPC is great but our landing page conversion rates are poor. We need to identify that and make changes and, if we've appointed well, the leader of our campaigns will have the expertise to make that call.

2. **Do we have the right people delivering each tactic?** When we know a tactic can work successfully in our market (perhaps because it has worked for us before or because we know it is working for a competitor), we then have to look at who is delivering that tactic for us. Do they actually have the skill and experience required to manage that tactic? Maybe there is a training need? Maybe we made the wrong hire? The Strategy Mindset is about having the best people for each role so, if we need to bring in somebody stronger, the leader of our campaigns has to make that move.
3. **Are our goals and budgets realistic?** If we chose what we thought were sensible goals and sensible budgets with no historical data to work with, it might be we need to switch around some of our supporting goals. Maybe organic search isn't going to deliver the results we anticipated, but maybe paid search can overperform? Our research should have led us to set realistic goals and budgets but if we made a mistake we must identify it and adapt our goals and roles accordingly.

The primary goal doesn't change. Supporting goals can change, tactics can change and people delivering them can change. But the primary goal is the reason we have the strategy – it's the endpoint. Where we are going doesn't change, but how we get there might.

Think of it like a car engine. It's a long journey and we may have to replace or service one or two of the parts along the way. But we don't put in a whole new engine or decide we're only going to go part of the way. We do a quick roadside fix when we hit a problem, confirm we're good to go again, put the final destination back in the satnav and push on until we get there.

TEAM SCORECARD

Businesses that dominate their sector online are usually strong in all four elements of the S-T-A-R formula. Score yourself on the team element by allocating points to each of the ten statements below, based on the following scoring system:

2 = very true, 1 = partly true, 0 = not true.

We feel certain we have appointed the best digital agency partner for us.	2	1	0
We know that senior management are pleased with our performance online.	2	1	0
Our in-house team regularly engage with outside parties for training.	2	1	0
Our digital marketing skills are stronger than those of competitors.	2	1	0
Everybody in our digital team knows the goal they are responsible for.	2	1	0
We have an agreed leads/sales goal with our digital agency partner.	2	1	0
Our in-house team is managed by an experienced marketing professional.	2	1	0
We feel we have all the skills we need to dominate our sector online.	2	1	0
When our digital team reports in, the goals we have set are normally met.	2	1	0
We sit face to face with our digital agency partner at least once a month.	2	1	0

Add up your total to see which band your business is in.

16–20: In the context of your team, you're working with a Strategy Mindset.

10–15: You've lots still to put in place before you'll scale up predictably, but you've made some progress.

0–9: This is a low score, but most businesses have low scores. Will yours be the one that steps up and improves?

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Take the full test and get your business's
digital strategy score at:
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<https://getmyscore.digital>
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