



**Overcoming the Breakup:
When Marketing Agency Relationships
Go Awry — and How to Fix Them**

So, you broke up with your marketing agency.

It was tough. You did the whole song and dance: the “We’ve just been growing apart” number, the “We’re not *the one* for each other” routine, and everyone’s favorite, the “It’s not you, it’s me” runaround. Except, in relationships with agencies, most of the time it really is them. No wonder you’re hesitant to dive into another commitment! With money, time, resources and business goals on the line, it’s hard to even justify dipping your toes back in.

And when you’re ready to start? That’s a whole other ball game. With over 120,000 agencies in the US alone, trying to find the right fit feels like a job in itself. Plus, you have to figure out what went wrong, how to avoid those problems next time, how to trust again...**sigh**

That’s where this guide comes in.

We’ll take you through the steps: pinpointing where the relationship failed, finding new ways to address your concerns, and identifying characteristics in agencies that will set you up for success. Because sometimes, you just need somebody to lean on. So come on over here, and let’s get started!





Why Do Agency Relationships End?

While we are true believers in the power of inbound marketing and know that there are many awesome agencies driving inbound programs for their clients, we also recognize that sometimes these programs—and agency-client relationships themselves—fall short. This can happen for a multitude of reasons.

Here, we've broken down a hypothetical breakup into two categories: first, the *It's Not Me, It's You* category, where the fault lies mostly with the agency, and second (and you're not going to like hearing this in your vulnerable state), the *It's Not You, It's Me* category, where those lines begin to blur.



The “It’s Not Me, It’s You” Breakup

Scenario #1: Expectations were not met.

Maybe your wires got crossed. Maybe the agency’s sales team or account manager made promises they didn’t (or couldn’t) keep. Either way, what you expected to get from your partner—more leads, higher quality leads, a solid content strategy, better rankings in Google—and what you *actually* got were two completely different outcomes. Whatever the reason, they didn’t deliver, and now you’re left back at square one but with less money. Not so appetizing.

Scenario #2: Costs are too high.

You’re a year or so into your HubSpot subscription. You’ve been investing time and money into your marketing software and agency retainer, but your reports aren’t showing the ROI you’re looking for. Your agency keeps sending you invoices, but their monthly summaries aren’t painting the picture you need in order to justify continuing the relationship. You know how precious your resources are as you’re trying to grow your business, so you cut the cord and attempt to find a way to generate leads without their help.

Scenario #3: You experienced a culture clash.

You might consistently receive content that doesn’t align with your brand’s voice or style guide. Perhaps you defined your buyer personas during the onboarding process, but none of the marketing collateral effectively targets them. Or maybe your agency doesn’t seem to understand the goals and motivations of your clients. In the end, it’s required far more effort to make this engagement work as opposed to just doing marketing yourself. What’s more, you just can’t vibe with this agency, how they communicate, or the way they do things. Meetings become awkward and strained, so you say goodbye.



Scenario #4: You've got this!

Okay, so your agency actually turned out to be pretty great. They taught you a lot about the marketing world, how to align your marketing with your sales efforts, and how to create and execute on a plan that produces qualified leads. Maybe they were working with your existing in-house team or point person, and consequently, your company has been set up to achieve its goals. And now, you've come to the point where you don't require the extra resource. Therefore, you part ways amicably.

The “It's Not You, It's Me” Breakup

Sometimes it's helpful to do a little introspection. It can be difficult to see yourself as part of the problem in a failed relationship—you are the client after all, and your needs are (and should be) the number one priority. But it's possible that you went into an agency relationship without researching what you should expect from a partner. Maybe it really was you...

Scenario #5: You came in with little knowledge or understanding.

Here's what marketing is: a science of attraction and engagement. It's testable and it's measurable—meaning success with your audience can be found with a little trial and error. Not every tactic is going to work wonders, and your agency is responsible for making adjustments where necessary and improving on those initial results.

Here's what marketing is *not*: magic. While good agencies can deliver “quick wins”, it will likely take time to see how your overall strategy will pan out. Your agency isn't off the hook though – they need to work with you to set realistic goals and expectations. However, if you hire a marketing agency without any idea of what today's marketing best practices look like, you may have a difficult time understanding the techniques they're using to promote your business and generate more leads.



Scenario #6: You want to be completely hands-off.

Think of your favorite relationships (professional or personal). They work because you operate as one unit, right? You are teammates. The same is true with your engagement with a marketing agency. Particularly during onboarding and the first few months when your marketing team is learning about your business, industry and customers, you'll need to be present to answer questions—and to communicate and bounce new ideas around. If you want to be completely hands-off, your agency is going to have a hard time building out a sound strategy and reaching goals, and you're not going to see the results you're looking for.

Scenario #7: You can't seem to loosen the reins.

You obviously care a lot about your business; otherwise you wouldn't have made this kind of investment in the first place. And relinquishing some of the control over your marketing can be challenging, but trust is necessary. The best outsourced marketing partner will not simply take your direction and execute. The right firm will be a partner in your business, one that brings new ideas to the table, suggests new ways of doing things, gives you information and insights to make decisions, and pushes back on your ideas when appropriate.



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Setting Up Your Next Relationship for Success

In most of the scenarios we've just described, you're left with a problem: you still need marketing help, but you're not ready to commit to another agency. However, should you decide that the agency route is still the right path for you to take, the longer you wait, the more business growth opportunities you miss. **So how do you avoid another breakup and set the next relationship up for success?**



Define Your Expectations

It's more than simply defining what you want to see happen as a result of hiring a marketing agency. Setting expectations is also about preparing yourself to contribute to a successful onboarding. Start by asking yourself the following questions:

What leadership, if any, do you need to bring in?

The agency is A; you need to have a B. Is there someone else in-house whom you'd like to spearhead managing the relationship? Someone you can rely on to relay your goals and requirements? This point-of-contact coordinates with the agency to keep communication free-flowing and easy. Define that point person early on, as it will render the agency vetting process much more streamlined.

How do you prefer to communicate?

Email? Slack? Zoom? Weekly, biweekly, monthly? Make those preferences concrete so that you can establish a routine with your agency at the very beginning of the engagement. If you set a consistent schedule, your marketing partners will know exactly when and where to present plans, report on results, etc.

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How much time can you dedicate to this relationship early on?

As we mentioned earlier, you should be actively involved in the onboarding process. So how much time can you realistically dedicate to your agency? How much time can you set aside to teach them about your company or any specific industry terminology, rules, programs, etc.? Yes, an experienced agency will learn fast, but they can't do it all on their own. Assessing your availability can help you avoid misaligned expectations down the road.

What are you looking to get out of this relationship?

Your business goals should be at the core of everything your agency does for you, and it will be helpful to document those as soon as possible. But it's also important to define what a successful outsourced marketing engagement looks like to you. Again, if you establish these guidelines from the beginning, your agency will know what to focus on and put at the heart of each interaction they have with you.

Determine Your Budget

Your marketing budget should take into account two components: *cost* and *value*. To help you determine what you should be allocating, you need to answer two questions:

1. What return do you need to see from your marketing efforts?

If you are like most companies, your marketing is focused on building your brand with your target audiences so they engage and convert into the employees, customers and influencers who can help you achieve your business goals.

Understanding things like the lifetime value of a client and the financial benefit of attracting and retaining great employees will help clarify how much you need to get from your marketing—and how much you need to invest.



2. What can you realistically afford?

We like to tell clients that by working together, we will achieve all of their marketing goals, but that their budget will determine the pace of progress. It's important to find the right balance between what you want and what you can afford so everyone is clear on how fast programs can move.

You need to determine, for your own company, the value of what you expect to get from marketing. Because you're not just spending on leads, strategy, and content—you're investing in your business's future. Remember, just as the cheapest option isn't always the best option, and the most expensive option doesn't necessarily mean it's the highest quality option. The happy medium between cost and value is the sweet spot you must define.

When speaking with a new agency for the first time, ask them if they have any resources that can help you better understand what type of investment needs to be made based on the number of new customers you're looking to gain in the coming year. Savvy agencies will be able to look at your data analytics, pull the important numbers and calculate how many website visitors and conversions you need in order to hit your goal, and suggest the best ways to get you there in the shortest amount of time.



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Find the Culture Fit

One of the most important things to look for in a partnership is shared values. If you're going to work alongside someone long-term, it's important that you can see eye to eye. You wouldn't hire someone internally if you didn't like them, right? So ask yourself the following questions and do the research to determine if a new agency is the right fit.

Has the agency worked in your industry? Do they specialize in it?

"Worked in" and "specialize in" are two different things. Working with an agency that specializes in your field helps you skip much of the introduction and expedites the onboarding process, as well as activities like content creation.

How do you feel after you talk to them?

What's your gut feeling about the agency? Did you genuinely like the person you spoke to, beyond their expertise in the industry? Your sales rep is a reflection of the company's culture; expect them to represent the company as a whole.



Are they using sweeping sales-y language?

Red flag! Contrary to what you some organizations believe, good sales people don't want to sell to everyone. In fact, they should first be focused on figuring out if they can really help you in the first place. The initial meeting between your two parties should be tailored to learning about your company and your goals. One size does not fit all.

Do they have case studies and testimonials?

Don't just take their word for it – see what other companies have to say about them. These days, social proof of success is a necessary differentiator. Check out their website and other review sites for testimonials, customer stories and case studies that showcase great results. Better yet, look for examples of projects they've completed for companies in similar fields.

What does their Glassdoor profile look like?

Do people actually like working at this agency? If you need to determine a culture fit, look no further than Glassdoor. Employees past and present leave honest reviews that can reveal much more than what a salesperson would be willing to. Before you engage with a company, make sure there's consistency between what reps say about the company and what other employees say about the company.



Inquire about Starting with a Project

If you have the option to do so, ask your prospective agency if you can start out with one project. For example, this might look like a content audit complete with SEO recommendations, interviews with a couple of your customers and the creation of new case studies, or the writing and promotion of a new piece of premium content.

Regardless of the project type, an agency's willingness to work with you on a single strategic initiative (and not lock you into a year-long contract) may not only demonstrate their flexibility and understanding of your situation, but also the confidence in their abilities to impress you. This approach could also provide a preview of your future relationship – and it will show you how they communicate, if it's a good fit, and what kind of quality they can deliver, all without any strings attached.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

You'll see it in every piece of advice online about how to set your agency relationship up for success: communication really is the key. Throughout the engagement, but especially early on, make your opinions known. Trust them as the expert and listen, but if you're seeing something you think could be improved, say so. Having that open line of communication is necessary for the rest of the relationship, so start early.

Understand that Mistakes Happen

No one is perfect, and your future agency will work through kinks early on in order to deliver you the best results possible. If a mistake happens, it happens – it's what the agency does to fix it that matters. Think back to your previous agency relationship. Did the team address your concerns adequately? What would you like to have seen done differently? Being able to articulate this will help you understand the actions that should be taken next time around.





Resources to Help You Find a New Agency

Ready to get back in the saddle and find a new marketing agency? In addition to looking for a pricing and culture fit that works for you and your team, the following criteria can also be used to help you effectively vet potential partners.



When evaluating your agency options, be sure to ask about:

- Client testimonials and case studies
- References from current clients
- The agency's certifications (including those related to HubSpot)
- The age of the agency – and how many years they've worked in your industry
- The agency's client retention rate
- Any relevant awards they've won
- A complimentary marketing assessment

And here are a few resources to get you started on your search:

- [HubSpot Partner Directory](#)
- [Databox Partner Directory](#)
- Your HubSpot Account Manager or the Customer Success Team

Just because it didn't work out the first time around, it doesn't mean it won't now.

Agencies are meant to help your business shine, and finding one that suits your needs is absolutely possible. So don't give up! As they say, there are plenty of fish in the sea.



About Precision Marketing Group

Precision Marketing Group is a full-service outsourced marketing firm and HubSpot Platinum Agency Partner, offering the best in strategy, design and execution to privately held B2B organizations. For over 15 years, our seasoned team has been helping HubSpot customers grow their businesses and find success with their marketing.

Interested in seeing the kind of work that we do?

[Check out some of the results we've achieved with our clients.](#)

If you have any questions about how to get started with a new agency, we're more than happy to help. Contact us today for a complimentary consultation!

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