

How to Hire a Marketing Coach -- or Not

By Cathy Goodwin

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When I started my business, I decided to time and money by paying for marketing support. Here's what I wish someone had told me before I reached for my credit card.

1. Hire a coach who knows your product and your market.

Coaching, animal behavior, organizing, marketing and weight loss services are not marketed the same way.

Don't accept a canned list of tips, tricks and techniques. What you need is an understanding of your customers and how they buy.

2. Ignore the coach's "here's what I did" stories unless you, too, are a marketing coach.

A marketing coach uses different strategies from other kinds of coaches, let alone other businesses.

And some marketing coaches don't understand their own success. One coach admitted she had never seen her own web site statistics. She had no idea whether clients came from the ads she recommended or from search engines.

3. "If it ain't broke, don't fix." Without a basis of comparison, you can't evaluate your need for help.

You may feel discouraged by your numbers, but you may actually be doing better than others who have been in business a comparable length of time.

4. Just because a lot of people are doing something doesn't mean it's working.

One coach recommended a tactic that "a lot of people in your field are doing."

"True," I said, "but can you find me one person who has earned real money that way?" He was silent.

5. Calculate expected results in dollars.

"Double your ebook sales" sounds good -- but what if you've just sold one for \$20? Sell two and

the coach kept his promise!

You'll need a hundred years to recover the coach's fees.

6. Your coach should read and analyze your materials before each meeting -- not during the call.

You need thoughtful insight, not impromptu, top-of-mind ideas.

7. Insist on a results-based guarantee.

An idea may sound terrific till you implement it. Don't thank the coach or offer testimonials till you get results. You may want your money -- and your testimonial -- back after three months.

8. Get an idea of what process the coach suggests.

There's no magic in marketing. Generally you need to network, give talks, identify benefits, and make calls. If you already know what you need, but can't or won't do it, why pay a coach?

9. Anyone can get great testimonials from clients. If you can't get a referral from someone you know, pay for a single session.

Try out a few ideas. Allow enough time to see results. Then, and only then, schedule follow-up sessions.

10. You can lose more than the fees you paid.

One marketing consultant said, "I charge \$100 to evaluate your website and I guarantee my work. There is no risk!"

Wrong. If you follow bad advice you can lose clients and business for months and you may never recover.

And there's the rub. You hire a consultant because you feel clueless -- but blindly following advice can do serious harm. The most successful business owners I know haven't paid a dime for marketing help. They follow their intuition, which is not for sale. They may hire someone to implement their ideas, such as a web designer, but they know their market well and won't let anyone else create strategy.

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