

## **Expert Insights: Closing the “Marketing Black Box” Training Gap: Taking Back Control of Your Company’s Marketing Program for Higher Sales and Business Growth**

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You may have heard of a “Black Box,” a term generally describing a process or function that’s performed in a way that the operator of the Black Box doesn’t know or understand.

In business, Black Boxes often occur wherever some type of specialized expertise is used to perform a business function. As important functions in today’s business environment have become more specialized and complex, they sometimes require help from outside consultants and other experts who, in their own way, act as Black Boxes for the functions they perform. While this special expertise may be required in other aspects of a business, in-house marketing teams will often delegate too much of the planning, execution, and management functions of their marketing programs to third parties like ad agencies and other consultants.

This results in “Black Box Thinking,” where the marketing team becomes overly reliant on these outside consultants for too much of the critical decision-making and execution functions of their marketing programs, leading to a loss of control and distancing between the in-house marketing team and all the individual projects that have to be implemented for the company’s marketing program. When Black Box Thinking takes hold in company marketing departments, this separation prevents those who should be more fully engaged in the direct execution of those functions from developing the best approaches, work products, and solutions to achieve the company’s marketing goals.

### **Why “Marketing Black Boxes” Make Your Marketing Less Effective and More Expensive**

In this Black Box scenario, the in-house marketing team places most of its reliance on these third parties to develop the marketing strategy, the marketing plan to fit the strategy, and the day-to-day projects and deliverables required to execute the plan. The marketing team will usually provide only a general list of its near-term goals as the “inputs” that go into this “Marketing Black Box,” and then relies on outsiders to develop the strategy and requirements for the plan or project—a new lead generation initiative or promotion, a new product launch, and a list of the specific projects required for this effort, such as content marketing, keyword search, e-mail campaigns, etc.

These third parties then go off and produce these strategies and the key deliverables required to implement those plans—sales copy, advertising layouts, e-mail messages and campaigns, landing pages, etc.—and then comes back to present these plans and deliverables (the “outputs”) to the in-house marketing team. But because there was a Black Box relationship between the marketing team and the “doers,” it’s likely that the marketing project:

- Will not be as effective in generating response and ROI, because important benefits or information were either missing or were not clearly communicated to the prospects who saw the final marketing campaign
- Will take longer, because there will be more revisions required due to poor coordination and a lack of understanding by the ad agency or other outside consultant when they develop the key marketing projects and deliverables for the campaign
- Will be more far more expensive, because too much of the work for the project was delegated to ad agencies and third parties, who are often focused on maximizing their client revenue, and whose rates

are usually higher compared to in-house staff, because they include the contractor's profit margin and overhead expenses

When Marketing Black Boxes happen, marketing programs cost more, take longer, and, most important—they don't generate the response they should, because the marketing team didn't make sure their product's benefits were compelling presented, and they didn't understand the process of marketing execution required for each of the projects in their plan.

### How to Break Your Company's Marketing Black Boxes

Marketing Black Boxes aren't the marketing team's fault, because these skills aren't taught at the college or MBA level, and are usually only picked up along the way, for example, by working in an ad agency or as a consultant, or through effective training.

Knowing these skills is critical and essential for in-house marketing teams, even if they're working with outside agencies or consultants who are doing the actual work on their company's marketing programs and deliverables, because:

Your in-house marketing team must take the initiative in defining the specific activities required for their marketing programs. These include lead generation projects like digital advertising and pay-per-click keyword search programs, targeted e-mail and direct mail campaigns, trade shows and events, etc., as well as the critical ongoing prospect-to-customer conversion projects, like content development and automated e-mail campaigns, and integration of all these projects into your company's CRM and marketing automation systems. This requires knowing how and where each of these projects work best in typical B2B marketing programs and understanding how to put these individual activities together to generate new sales leads and convert these leads into buyers during the long, complex sales cycles that are a fact of life for most products and services sold in B2B markets.

The in-house marketing team is responsible for defining the key sales benefits, product positioning, and other critical "inputs" required for every marketing project. To do this, they must understand how to gather this information within their company and develop it into a form that can be effectively communicated to and utilized by their outside agency or consultants. Additionally, when they review deliverables created by their agency or consultants, your in-house team must develop the ability to evaluate the sales copy and layouts used in these deliverables for every marketing project to insure they are presented in ways that readers and viewers will respond, to generate meaningful response.

Your in-house team must know enough about these individual projects to closely supervise the day-to-day work being done by their outside agency or consultant. This means learning and understanding the step-by-step process of execution for every marketing project, the timelines and costs involved, and the best practices for executing each of these projects to deliver the best response, and right on time to take advantage of every sale and marketing opportunity. Without close supervision by in-house marketing members who know the process for each project, there is a greater chance of slippage in the time schedule for the project, and the persuasive impact of sales copy and deliverables used in the marketing project will be lower, because the marketing team wasn't involved in ongoing review of copy and layout for the project to make sure that these deliverables clearly and compellingly present their product's most important, problem-solving benefits to the prospect

Because no one else cares more about your company than your in-house marketing and sales teams, these teams need to learn and understand the processes of clear presentation and effective execution for every marketing project that's a part of their marketing program. No ad agency or consultant, no matter how dedicated, can afford to commit 100% of their dedication, focus, time, and effort to your marketing program—but your in-house team can. And giving them the training and the tools enables them to close the Marketing Black Box gap and get control of your marketing program.