

Expert Q & A – Virtual Marketing Agency Benefits for Small Businesses

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Are you wondering how your small business might be able to afford to hire a marketing agency? In this expert interview, nationally accredited public relations practitioner, **Patricia (Pat) Hartman**, founder, president, and senior marketing consultant with [Imagery Marketing & Research Consultants, Inc.](#) shares her insight with American Entrepreneurship readers.

How can small business owners justify the expense of hiring a marketing agency?

Hartman: Many Small business owners don't think they can afford to hire an agency. But the truth is that you can't NOT afford one. A professional marketing firm will look at your business with fresh eyes and without the preconceptions that you and your employees have. You have expertise in your business area. Professional marketing agencies have expertise in the areas of marketing communication that you don't have... and you don't have to "pay the overhead" you would carry if you hired an in-house staff of experts or the hassle of finding qualified freelance professionals.

What is the most cost effective option for small business owners who want to hire a marketing firm?

Hartman: A virtual marketing agency can help entrepreneurs maximize their marketing dollars. A virtual agency is a company that has a network of freelance professionals in all aspects of marketing communication that can be called upon when needed. A small business gets access to all the services without paying the overhead. If you need a copywriter, the virtual agency brings one in from its network. If you need a graphic artist, the virtual agency brings in the graphics professional that is perfect for you.

The only difference between working with a virtual agency and the traditional agency is the virtual agency comes to your office for meetings instead of trying to impress you with its fabulous offices. You shouldn't be paying for the "fabulous offices." You pay for only what you need.

What should a small business owner look for when considering hiring a virtual marketing firm?

Hartman: When looking for a virtual marketing agency, make sure the agency principals are known for their professionalism and knowledge. How long have they been in the marketing arena? Are they accredited? What type of experience do they have? Are they innovative? Will they listen to you and treat you well? What do their customers say about them?

Interview the agency owners/partners as if you were interviewing a prospective employee. Check out their business philosophies. Do you feel comfortable with them? Chemistry is important in the agency-client relationship.

Do you have any other advice for entrepreneurs who are considering contracting with a virtual agency?

Hartman: During tough times, a company that keeps its name in front of the public can increase market share using fewer dollars than in good times. Why? Because many of its competitors are short sighted and cut advertising and promotion. It's important to make your ad dollars stretch. And it's important for you to create and maintain a good brand image. That's where hiring professionals is so important. The bucks you save by not paying for more than you need are bucks that can be spent promoting your business. And that's important in these tough economic times!