

How and when to hire a marketing agency

Description

The 5-Step System to Professionalize Your Marketing

Stop wasting money on random tactics. Discover the exact system to organize your chaos, align your actions, and hire the perfect marketing partner for your growing business.

Growing your small business but feeling chaotic? Learn how to write a marketing plan, align your actions, and choose the right marketing hire.

Introduction

Reaching 5 to 10 employees is a massive milestone that usually brings more work. You are juggling sales, hiring, and operations, so marketing becomes the thing you just try to fit in. That is exactly where things break. At this stage, many founders make the same mistake. They hire an external marketing agency to fix their internal confusion.

In most cases, this does not work, and here is why. If you do not have a clear marketing plan, an agency will just execute random tasks at a premium price. **To scale successfully, start by aligning your marketing actions first.** Then, strategically decide if your bottleneck (the main thing slowing your growth) requires a tactical freelance marketeer, a full-service marketing agency, a Fractional CMO, or a full-time Chief Marketing Officer.

If you are earlier than this stage, this system still applies, but your focus should stay on simple execution first.

The Resource Constraint Filter:

If you have zero time to manage people, hire an agency or a Fractional CMO to take over the management burden entirely. If you have zero budget, pause your hiring search and focus strictly on aligning your internal team and tasks first.

Recommended Order of Execution:

1. Assess the marketing situation.
2. Map your current tasks
3. Write the marketing plan.
4. Align your current actions.
5. Choose your hire type.
6. Run a paid test project.
7. Lock in a 90-day feedback loop.

Business Facts

1. The average salary for a full-time CMO in the United States is over **$200,000** per year, making it an impossible hire for most small businesses.
   Source: https://builtin.com/salaries/us/cmo-chief-marketing-officer
2. Marketers who document their strategy are **313 percent** more likely to successfully track and report on their marketing campaigns compared to those who do not write things down. It is about creating accurate reporting and data clarity, not just guaranteed business success.
   Source: https://avada.io/blog/marketing-strategy/
3. A consumer packaged goods company spending **18%** of revenue on marketing operates in a completely different reality than an energy company spending **3%**. Knowing your exact budget prevents overcommitting to an expensive agency. Source: https://boomcycle.com/blog/right-percentage-of-gross-revenue-to-invest-in-marketing/
4. Specifically, the average marketing budget sits at exactly **7.7 percent** of company revenue. This gives you a hard, verifiable baseline to use when calculating what you can actually afford to pay a new marketing partner.
   Source: https://boomcycle.com/blog/right-percentage-of-gross-revenue-to-invest-in-marketing/

Why a $5,000 Retainer Will Not Fix Bad Messaging

The real problem is treating marketing like a magic trick. Marketing is actually a multiplier. If your internal messaging is confused, hiring an agency will only multiply that confusion at scale. Consider this common failure scenario: A founder hires a **$ 5,000-per-month** agency without a plan. After three months, they have beautiful data reports, but zero new revenue.

Your goal is to hire the exact right level of talent to solve your specific problem without draining your capital.

The Hiring Decision Framework:

Here is how experienced operators usually think about this. Think of it like this: Strategy leads to Management, which leads to Execution. You need to fix each layer in order:

1. Document exactly what you are selling and to whom.
2. Audit all the random marketing tasks currently happening.
3. Identify the gap between your strategy and your execution.
4. Hire the specific person or team designed to fill that exact gap.
5. Track performance based on hard revenue numbers, not vanity metrics. For a broader look at the metrics that matter, check out the 75 management KPIs every manager should know.



The 5 Proven Steps to Hiring Your Marketing Partner

1. Writing the Marketing Plan (The Foundation)

Strategy is hard to outsource, so start with a simple plan first. Before you hire anyone, write a one-page summary that defines your target audience, core offer, pricing, and primary 6-month goal.

- **The Benchmark:** A successful one-page plan should take no more than two hours to write.
- **The Risk Reversal:** You are not locking in a permanent strategy. You are simply creating a baseline document to give to your new hire so they can quickly understand your business.

2. Aligning All Marketing Actions (Ending the Chaos)

When you have 5 to 10 employees, marketing actions are often scattered. Audit these actions and stop everything that cannot be tied directly to a clear return on investment.

- **The Benchmark:** Audit your current actions and eliminate at least 30 percent of the random tasks producing zero leads.
- **The Timeline:** Dedicate one single afternoon this week to list every marketing task your team performs.

3. The Marketing Hire Decision Matrix

Use this decision matrix (a simple way to choose) to pick the right player for your budget and goals:

- **Freelance Marketeer ($500 to $3,000/month):** Best for execution. They write blogs or run specific ads. This requires high initial communication to ensure they understand your exact requirements.
- **Marketing Agency ($3,000 to $10,000/month):** Best for scale. They bring a full team of designers and writers, requiring a dedicated monthly budget.
- **Fractional CMO ($3,000 to $10,000/month):** Best for strategy. They act as your part-time executive, writing the plan and managing freelancers for you.
- **Full-Time CMO ($12,000+/month):** Best for large operations. Only hire a full-time CMO when you have a massive budget and a large internal team.



4. The Vetting and Interview Process

Do not hire based on a smooth sales pitch. Test their competence in the real world. Ask agencies how they handle accounts when ad performance drops. Ask freelancers to show case studies with actual numbers.

- **The Cost Layer:** A good rule is never to sign a 12-month contract immediately. Pay the agency or freelancer for a strict 30-day paid trial project to see how they deliver.

5. Onboarding and the Weekly Feedback Loop

Do not hire based on a smooth sales pitch. Pay the agency or freelancer for a strict 30-day paid trial project to see how they deliver. Once hired, hand them your one-page marketing plan and aligned task list. Then, build a strict reporting system using defined marketing KPIs to convert this strategy into a controlled system.

- **The Benchmark:** Track defined metrics only. A â??leadâ?• is a booked sales call. Demand a weekly report showing exactly how much was spent to acquire each specific lead.
- **The Timeline:** Give your new hire or agency 30 to 60 days to optimize their campaigns before expecting a massive spike in revenue.

3 Common Mistakes When Scaling

1. Expecting a Freelancer to Be a CMO: A freelance copywriter is hired to write text, not to build your entire company strategy. If you hand tactical workers strategic problems, they will usually fail.

2. Hiring an Agency Without Internal Tracking: If you do not know your current numbers, an agency can easily manipulate its reports to look successful. You should know your own conversion rates first.

3. Focusing on Vanity Metrics: Likes and followers do not pay payroll. If your marketing hire cannot directly connect their actions to highly qualified leads, you are burning cash.

The Decision Lock: What to Do Next

If you are unsure what to do next, use this simple guide:

- **If you have a clear strategy but no time to execute,** hire a **Freelance Marketeer** today to take over daily tactical work.
- **If you have a proven system and $5,000 to spend monthly,** hire a **Marketing Agency** to scale your results immediately.
- **If you are lost, chaotic, and need a high-level strategy:** Hire a **Fractional CMO** to build your plan and manage the chaos.
- **If you have no budget for outside help:** Stop interviewing. Dedicate this week to aligning your internal actions and writing your one-page marketing plan yourself.

Real-World Example

Sarah ran a growing logistics company with 8 employees. The business was chaotic. She was spending $1,200 a month on ads with no tracking while managing daily operations, resulting in wasted money. Initially, she wanted to hire a full-time marketing manager for $80,000 a year.

Instead, she hired a Fractional CMO for $3,000 a month to write a clean, targeted marketing plan. The Fractional CMO then hired a specialized freelance marketeer for $1,500 a month to execute the exact steps. Sarah saved tens of thousands of dollars, removed herself from the daily marketing chaos, and her cost per lead dropped from $80 to $45 within 90 days.

Summary of the Best Marketing Hires

Hire Type	Best For (Scenario)	Typical Cost	Time to Impact
Freelance Marketeer	Cheap execution of specific tasks	$500 to $3,000 / month	Immediate
Marketing Agency	Scaling a proven internal system	$3,000 to $10,000+ / month	60 to 90 days
Fractional CMO	Strategy and leadership on a budget	$3,000 to $10,000 / month	30 days
Full-Time CMO	Large companies with big internal teams	$12,000+ / month	90 to 120 days

Expert Quote

â??Do what you do best and outsource the rest.**â?•** â?? Peter Drucker.

Final Thoughts and Your Next Steps

Hiring the right marketing partner is the fastest way to drag your business out of the chaotic growth phase. However, outsourcing your problems without a clear plan is a guaranteed way to bleed money immediately. You must document your strategy, align your team, and pinpoint the exact right level of talent before you sign a single contract.

Take Action Now!

Every day you operate without a solid foundation is another day your competition steals your market share. A great marketing hire requires a bulletproof plan, and you simply cannot afford to wait. Stop guessing and download the **Marketing Essentials Bundle** at Excellent Business Plans right now to lock in your strategy before you make a impactful financial mistake.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. How do I know if I need a marketing agency or just a freelancer?

If you need one specific skill, like writing blogs, hire a freelancer. If you need a multi-channel campaign requiring designers, developers, and ad buyers, you need an agency.

2. What exactly does a Fractional CMO do?

A Fractional CMO is a part-time executive. They build the high-level strategy, define your target audience, set the budget, and manage your external freelancers or agencies for you.

3. How much should a small business spend on marketing?

Growing businesses should allocate 7 to 12 percent of gross revenue to marketing. If you are aggressively scaling, that number can occasionally increase to 15 percent.

4. Why is my current marketing agency not getting results?

Agencies usually fail due to a lack of alignment. If your sales team cannot close the leads the agency provides, or if the agency does not understand your exact ideal customer profile, the campaign will fail.

5. How long should I give a new marketing hire to show results?

Tactical work should show immediate results. However, comprehensive lead generation campaigns like paid advertising or SEO require a strict 60 to 90-day testing period to optimize and show a true return.

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Date
11/24/2026
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