

Client Handbook

WE MAKE STORIES. NOT SAUSAGE.

Some say putting together stories is like sausage: you don't want to see how it's made. We love the joke, but to the contrary, we think it's important to be clear about who we are, what we do, and how we do it. That's why we've put this little book together. To provide some insight into what you can expect of us. And what we need from you. Because what goes into a project makes a big difference as to what comes out. Okay, maybe crafting stories is like sausage after all.

WHAT WE'RE HERE FOR

We call ourselves a strategic communications agency, but that's mostly so we can tell our mothers what we do. It may be a video you ask us to shoot; it might be a 1,500-word issue paper; it might be a press release that we distribute to our media contacts; it might be a photo shoot. In case that sounds like we have a muddled focus, it's actually the opposite—we have a clear vision that all these things define a brand. Heck, it could be anything. We care if it's great.

YOU'RE OUR PARTNER

We don't see you as a customer. We hope you don't see us as a vendor. You didn't come to us for toner, after all. You came to us for one-of-a-kind ideas that will shape how the world sees you. Those ideas shape how the world sees us, too. That makes us part of your business and makes you part of ours. Partners.

And there are traits we look for in our partners. We value those who accept the communications and creative expertise they pay us for. That trust us with their budget. That are comfortable with us making a fair profit on our work together. That respect our people and our process. That challenge us to greatness without challenging our goodwill.

We go through the wall for partners like that. And often work through the weekend.

PROS AT THE PROCESS

Most agencies pay lip service to process. Some think it cramps creativity and flexibility. We think it increases creative outcomes. It allows time for having crazy ideas and then finely crafting them. It minimizes mistakes, striking an appropriate balance of responsiveness and responsibility.

We are happy professionals when we get to take the following steps in the following order. This doesn't always happen. One job might only need half the enchilada. Or the

schedule may be so blazing hot, multiple steps have to be taken simultaneously. But knowing the path we're supposed to take keeps everyone from getting too off course. Or from getting at one another's throats.

Project Briefing—Q&A session covering the project's scope, specs, and budget. Should include the real decision makers so that everyone ends up on the same page.

Estimate—Based on the time and resources the project will require. Might include rough production estimate; final production estimate depends on final concept.

Creative Brief and Schedule—Distills project's communications needs and creative strategy, and outlines project timeline from kickoff through delivery.

Concept Development—We will develop as many great ideas that answer the assignment's challenge as possible.

Concept Presentation and Selection—The best, on-strategy ideas are presented to the client to review and select. We like to do this in person when possible, and again, with all decision makers involved.

Execution & Preview—Selected concept is finished out and provided for client review and feedback, with revision cycles as needed. If requested revisions change the project's scope or specifications, we provide a revised estimate or schedule.

Production—Approved execution is prepared for and released.

Celebration—One high-five maximum.

KEEPING OUR MOUTHS SHUT

Loose lips sink (partner)ships. To do our best work, we need to know as much as possible and often become a seamless part of our clients' organizations. So we end up knowing a lot of inside stuff. We have nothing to gain and everything to lose by divulging confidential information. We keep all clients' work product and information confidential and happily sign non-disclosure agreements when asked. Protecting our clients' interests is the same as protecting our own.

MAKING SURE THINGS ARE RIGHT

No idea is brilliant enough to excuse sloppiness. If our work is not all right, it's all wrong. We set high standards and rigorously review against them. We follow the Associated Press style guide for punctuation and grammar. We follow clients' corporate style guides for graphic design and visual identity. We internally proof copy and layout with every revision cycle, and use third-party proofers when prudent or necessary. We obtain client approval on final drafts before final production. And we do this even when it

costs time. The alternative costs a lot more. Like pappy used to say, measure twice, cut once.

TO MEET OR NOT TO MEET

PDFs. Email. Web chat. Although it's easy to communicate electronically, it can actually keep us from being truly in touch. The old fashioned face to face is still the best way to get some things done. At a project's beginning, it's helpful to talk through all the details. When ideas are ready to share, it's essential to discuss the thinking behind them and answer any questions.

On the other hand, meetings can also be the worst way to get some things done. Meetings that are rich in opinion sharers but poor in decision makers last longer than necessary and end without a real conclusion.

We say let's meet when we should. Start with a specific agenda. End with a clear idea of what comes next. And save time for the actual doing.

WHO OWNS THE WORK

Nowadays, there is a lot of talk about intellectual property. We want to keep it simple. The work we produce under a signed estimate or retainer agreement belongs to the client. Unless asked not to, we show and tell about the work we've created (after it's been made public, of course). And we keep ownership of any ideas that we generate and present but that a client declines to produce. If you have something else in mind, let's talk. But we've found this is a great way to make sure we produce work all sides are proud of.

MONEY STUFF

Our estimates fall into two categories—agency costs and production costs. Agency cost estimates are based on the time and agency resources that we believe it will take to complete a project. Production estimates cover the costs of acquiring outside resources and materials, such as printing, photography, and production costs. These are based on the best bid from the best production partner for each particular project. In some cases (production-intensive projects, in particular) these might also reflect additional agency resources required to oversee production.

We bill after a job is finished and delivered. Our term is net 30 days. We occasionally consider bartering for trips to Yellowstone or Polynesian archipelagos.

Now, let's get to work.