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Field Marketing: In-House or Not?

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If you have already chosen to add field marketing to your business' existing repertoire of marketing areas, you have already made one wise decision. The next question that should be at the forefront of your mind is this: should I handle field marketing in-house or find an agency to do it for me?

The answer to this question will depend somewhat on the nature of your business, its product (or products) and their associated industry. For example, if you envisage field sales as representing the majority of your sales activities, you may benefit from handling them in-house. This allows for tighter integration of your field sales teams with your management team, which will in turn help to facilitate accountability and ensure that the channels of communication are always open. If you are certain that your field sales team will be busy all year round then this can represent a more cost-effective alternative to paying agency rates.

On the other hand, if you are not sure how regularly you will engage in field marketing activities, it is almost certainly better to use the services of an agency than it would be to expend time and money on recruiting your own team. One of the greatest benefits of this approach to field marketing is that your obligations as an employer will be limited - in other words, as soon as it becomes clear that this avenue is not providing an adequate return on investment, you will be free to take the necessary steps to jettison these activities from your business and thus your budget. If you are employing field sales staff directly, you may find this more difficult and costly achieve.

Another advantage of outsourcing field sales is that it will enable you to take full advantage of agency expertise. If you decide to handle field marketing jobs in-house, you face the choice between employing experienced personnel (who may be hard to come by and will certainly be expensive) and training new staff members from scratch (who may be incompetent and will cause you to incur additional training costs regardless).

If the field marketing initiative you envisage involves four members of staff travelling around the country on a promotional vehicle and handing out free products to the students at a different university each day for a year, you may benefit from employing these as permanent (or long-term temporary) staff members. This is because you have already decided that they will work for an entire year - you already know precisely where they will go and what they will do, and you do not envisage any situation in which you might rescind on your campaign.

By contrast, if your field marketing plans involve sending staff members to a number of relevant trade exhibitions around the country, you may benefit from outsourcing the work to an agency. This is because the trade exhibitions are likely to be infrequent, which means your business will benefit from the ability to request staff on a daily basis. Also, because the work is spread out but you will not be providing transport, this enables your business to benefit from the savings an agency is able to make by sourcing staff members from the area nearby each trade exhibition.

Essentially, the most important thing field marketing agencies can provide your business is agility. If agility is not a priority area for your business, you may find that an in-house team can cater to your needs. On the other hand, if agility is crucial to your success, you will find many attractive qualities in the outsourcing model.

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