

Your Clients Are Killing Your Best Ideas, And That's Your Fault

Getting client approval for your agency's brilliant ideas isn't an obstacle to doing your job. It's your only job.

We live in a time of great change. Everywhere you look, there's disruption. But while all that change is happening, one thing stays stubbornly the same. That one thing is undermining your best ideas. It's destroying your strategies. That one thing is your client.

The person who hired you because of your prior work, but who is now quibbling with your insights. The person who asked you to solve their problem, but who is now nitpicking your conclusions. Why? Because they don't understand what the hell you're telling them to do. That's a shame. That's a terrible vexation. But guess what. That's your fault.

The Client Is Smart

The client knows their business. They understand their customer. They're adept at their org's sales motion. But now they're in a position to judge your marketing. And the more that the world of marketing has evolved, the less likely they're going to understand the paradigms you're working with.

So when confronted with new ideas that seemingly aren't appropriate, any client will return to what they know. They're going to over-index on control instead of creativity. They're going to grind down your handsome idea to the thin edge of non-existence.

Your Job Is to Be Empathetic

It's your job to understand the client's context. To understand what they really, truly need. Not what you want to give them, but what will be the most useful for their business. Then it's your job to help the client want it.

Six Ways to Keep Aligned

Create a clear strategy brief. Get sign off. Create a record of your approach and methodology. The brief becomes the single source of strategic truth.

Create a clear demarcation point between strategy and production. Ensure the client is aware of how timelines and budgets can be affected by further strategy changes.

Ask the hard questions. Don't let well-meaning intentions prevent you from asking your client direct questions.

Insist on the appropriate amount of face time. Great work is built, not debuted. Any surprise to a client is a failure.

Know when to stop pivoting. At a certain point, constantly changing a project plan creates undue stress on team morale.

Maintain multiple relationships with the brand. Those relationships give you context and help you understand what's going on within the brand.