



SIX LESSONS IN
EFFICIENT SERVICING





Account Management - A Necessity

Management is like a pivot around which an agency's business revolves. What many fail to recognise is that advertising is a 'business'. It is the reason that clients are called Accounts. And every business needs a good manager to manage accounts.

Account Managers of the Shaolin

Account Managers tend to be at the receiving end of both, clients and creative. Creatives brand them as the well-dressed 'courier guy' or 'postman'. No one listens to them. And all of them say that they didn't do an MBA to chase artworks, despatch stuff, spend nights in office waiting for material to arrive, write contact reports, fight with creative, and get paid peanuts compared to their peers in banking.

The Real Reality or What good Account Management is all about

As the name itself implies, it is about managing. Good Account Managers are Jack of all Trades, the difference is that they are Masters of All, as well. Account Managers who 'know' are smugly comfortable about the fact that they can do anything they want (copywriting, media planning, media buying, film production, whatever...) anytime, but the others cannot do what they do.

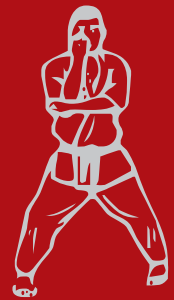


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THE SIX MOVES

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Account Management is about Managing Business

Good Account Management is about never losing sight of the fact that it is a business they are into. They have to keep the wheels of the account moving all the time. They have to manage costs, revenues, profits and not just manage, but make them grow without clients ever getting the feeling that the agency is taking them for a ride.

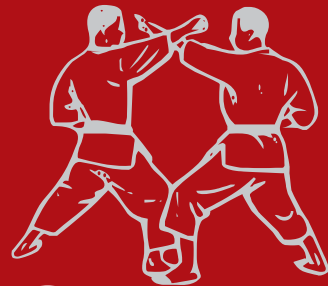


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Account Management is about Managing Sales

Agencies are in the business of selling creative solutions. It is as ambiguous and intangible a product as it can get. Good Account Managers are the ones who manage these sales. As mentioned before, it is once again a fine balancing act since the interests of the client as well as that of the agency have to be kept in mind all the time. So they have to be prepared with their rationale and base their sale on a strategic thought. They also need to have an open mind. They shouldn't unnecessarily defend, either with the client or within the agency.

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Account Management is about Managing Agency PR

Good Account Managers need to know about the agency, the happenings in the agency network, the philosophy of the agency, its convictions and beliefs. It is only then, that armed with such knowledge, they can present a confident and definite picture of the agency to their existing clients as well as prospective ones. They are the best link the agency has with the outside world.



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Account Management is about Managing People

Being the link between the agency and the client (or put differently, being at the epicentre), Account Managers have to manage people within the office as well as their clients. They have to play a balancing act so as not to antagonise everyone all the time, or, for that matter, anyone anytime. They have to play consultant, friend, partner, boss, agony aunt, mentor, guide, patient listener and many other things all the time and sometimes at the same time.

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Account Management is about Managing the Science of Marketing with the Art of Advertising

Like Luke Sullivan says in his book, 'Hey Whipple, Squeeze This', "Advertising is a craft executed by people who aspire to be artists, but is assessed by those who aspire to be scientists. I cannot imagine any human relationship more perfectly designed to produce total mayhem." By possessing some of the above mentioned skill sets, Account Managers can actually help achieve this balance.

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Account Management is about Managing Negotiations

Account Managers have to be expert negotiators, be it with clients, be it with creatives, be it with photographers or film makers or be it with media. They always strive to get the best so that the agency's creative as well as business interests are never compromised. They need to have enough maturity to understand which battles are to be fought and defended with their life, and which are to be let off.



Here is the how and why. Account Management is about Managing Knowledge. The knowledge that Account Managers need to acquire can be broadly classified into 3 classes:



Knowledge of Agency Processes

In an agency, it is only Account Management that is 'unskilled' labour. Everyone from art directors, to production people, to copywriters and even media all have a set of skills that they have mastered. Account Managers, being the only regular point of contact with the client, need to have a working knowledge of all disciplines so as to be able to manage the account.



Knowledge of Client's Business

This will truly help the relationship. Account Managers need to be as concerned about their client's business as they should be about their own. They need to know as much (and maybe even more) about the competitive environment as the client does. They need to know the happenings in the marketplace so as to recommend ideas and solutions to the client.



General Knowledge

A well read and well-informed Account Manager needs to further develop his knowledge to be able to apply it to seemingly disparate and unrelated things.



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