

# 4R ! Marketing Matters

## Don't Be Held Hostage by Creative Contractors

Are you being held hostage by your creative contractors? Here are some examples of what I mean.

A couple of years ago, 4R was brought in to provide virtual marketing director services for a growing

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software company. One of the first things I did in establishing the new marketing department was inventory all the company's branded elements—like logo, web site, brochures, business cards, presentations—and locate all electronic versions being stored on the server. The collection on the server was very small—mostly low resolution jpegs of the logo and a few graphics. No problem, I thought, I will contact the design firm that

created these and get the files from them.

It turned out to be a big problem. The design firm didn't want to give me the files. When I pressed them, pointing out that the company had paid for the work and so owned the files, they tried to charge me their very high hourly rate to burn the files onto CDs, and claimed it would take quite a few hours. Frustrating. I finally did end up getting the original art files for the company's brand elements, but it was a struggle.

More recently, a client of mine switched web site designers. The company they switched to provides a full package that includes design and maintenance of the site as well as back office service such as list management and metrics collection. They also sold my client on their system for creating the weekly newsletter—an HTML email that was being written and formatted by another contractor without a hitch. Turns out that the site uses a content management system with a database front end. Once the text is entered in the right slots, the system creates an HTML version of the newsletter. Now, though the previous contractor still writes the content, there is an new step in the workflow, as one of the client's staff has to plug

that content into the new system. And the newsletter design is not easily changeable, so any design flaws are there until someone decides to pay the new company to go in and fix them.

These two stories are common scenarios among creative



artwork is to your brand image, the more critical this is. You don't want to be dependent on a single third party for the look of your company—and you want the ability to change providers if necessary.



ramping up the contractor and putting more pressure on the checkbook.

These are a few strategies that will keep you from being held hostage by your creative support people. If you feel that you are already being held hostage, I invite you to contact me and let me know what's up. I can give you suggestions for getting more control over the graphic part of your company's brand.



contractors. Whether in an honest attempt to make things easier for their clients or as a way of holding the client's business hostage, many creative companies end up causing big headaches for the businesses that use them.

Every business needs creative contract support, no question about it. But there is a difference between a creative contractor who works on the client's behalf and one who creates an unproductive dependency relationship with the client. If you use creative contractors for any or all of your company's graphic image creation, here are some things to keep in mind when considering current or future creative support services:

- ▶ Make sure that any artwork you have done is provided to you in its native file format as well as a print ready form like PDF. The more related the

- ▶ Be sure that creative contractors provide you with color and type specifications for any work they do. This way, you can match these specs on in-house documents such as PowerPoint presentations or Word documents, and, again, you can provide them to other contractors if you choose to change shops.

- ▶ Make sure that any electronic design work can be easily modified. Though you don't want to do the modifications yourself, you also don't want to spend a lot of time and money on small changes that need to be made.

- ▶ Try to get some in-house capability to make changes to your web site. If you do opt for a content management system (and don't get me wrong, they can be great), ask for the ability to add pages and edit text so that simple content tweaks and additions don't require

## **Content that connects. Projects that produce.<sup>SM</sup>**

Service companies rely on communication to snag their markets' interest. Written and verbal communication of the "one to many" variety is the keystone of services marketing, and the basis for any marketing strategy. Well thought out and executed programs that "get the word out about us" need to get your market's attention and grease the wheels for sales.

**4R** creates content that connects and produces measurable results through well-planned marketing initiatives. We will work with you to increase the awareness and interest of your target audiences so that sales opportunities increase and your sales cycle decreases.

**4R Marketing**  
www.4rmarketing.com  
(713) 429-1374