

From social media agency to client side



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Dimitri Tsamados, partner at executive search firm CTPartners, sheds light on the move from social media agency to client side.

Large businesses are increasingly looking at bringing on in-house social media specialists as a way to build their digital platforms that engage their customers, partners and employees for greater customer loyalty, brand recognition and market share.

Companies such as Air France, Volvo Cars, Aetna (Insurance) and Deloitte have been hiring in-house social media leaders for the US, Europe, Middle East and Asia.

As with most situations where there is a surge in demand, supply has not been able to keep up, resulting in an acute talent gap. The ideal social media leader for an airline, automotive, insurance or professional services company is an oxymoron, 'an experienced social media executive with the management savvy, business responsibility and cultural fit of a big-company corporate executive'.

Most of the seasoned social media talent currently available is imbedded in digital marketing agencies. Consumer goods and media companies have also been building muscle in the same space, as many have had a head start in filling the talent gap after years of communicating creatively with customers through various online platforms.

Over the last few years, most other companies have been forced into the build-or-buy decision. Do they train from within, go outside for talent or commission digital marketing agencies as a bridge to their internal function?

The tide has finally turned as social media becomes more widespread and companies are buying talent in-house – and agencies provide a ready pool of talent.

Digital marketing agency people, like creative agency guys, are not easy to integrate into corporate environments. Here are some useful tips, based on feedback from clients and candidates, to keep in mind if you consider taking the leap.

Build an internal fan base. Be prepared to become an internal evangelist and educator. Very often, the pressure is on to bring about results quickly from the beginning, but achieving that can be difficult without the explicit or implicit buy-in of others within the company. It could require you to encourage cultural changes across various departments. You may encounter those who are still into 'old school' marketing techniques, and find yourself having to educate team members from other marketing disciplines on how social media works and can be integrated into existing campaigns, and when it can work on its own.

Know the territory. It is useful to get up to speed with the company's business plans and where they stand on internal processes, the allocation and use of resources, legal and trademarks and budgets. It's not all about the brand positioning alone. This needs to be combined with a thorough business analysis of industry environment as well as all their professional stakeholders, not just the end-consumers alone. Get to know the main social networks for various target audiences and target countries.

Build or showcase real life case studies. Demonstrate how social media can work for the company with external case studies and results from campaigns developed in-house. This is where the use of social media monitoring tools comes in handy. Don't be shy about touting internal social media successes if there is something that is worth talking about. Compare them with failed campaigns to demonstrate objectivity.

Use business-speak. Those who are steeped in social media language will need to remember that they may be using jargon only they understand. Make complex concepts, systems and campaigns easy to understand in simple layman's terms.

Build the troops. You need 'foot soldiers' to manage social networks, who will eventually be groomed as future social media leaders. Many internal team members are probably very technically proficient but may lack the experience in engaging with others in public or other departments. So set time aside to ensure they are trained and groomed for future opportunities.