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firm about PR agencies. She knew I had previously worked in two agencies, so she wanted my input as to whether I thought PR agencies were worth the cost.

That got me thinking that if she had some questions, others might as well.

First, there is much more that should go into evaluating a PR agency relationship than just cost – although I completely understand that cost should (and is, by all reality) be a major consideration. What you want to measure in addition to what it's costing you is 1) value and 2) efficiency. Here's what I mean.

Are you deriving value by outsourcing work to a PR agency? As sure as I'm sitting here writing this, you should be able to answer this question. If you're in a firm (could be any kind of company, software developer or reseller, for example) that's larger, your managing partner or shareholders will want to know the answer. After all, part of their potential earnings are paid to the agency, so they'll want to know if the firm is receiving any value for the cost. What you'll want to do is measure the value in a few ways;

Simplest way: Is the work being done by the agency adding to your bottom line? Are you retaining clients because of the agency's work or are you gaining prospects – and converting those prospects into clients? I say this is the "simplest" method because it comes down to pure dollars – and this is most obvious when you can track a prospect conversion.

Not-so-Simple way: Did the work change someone's mind? I'm not going to go into PR 101 here, but PR campaigns should be persuasive and intended to change someone's mind about something. I know that's vague. but think of it in this example. If Congress followed through with its 1099 requirements, it was up to them to persuade the public (and the accounting profession) that the requirements were a good idea. Of course, most accountants I know were opposed to it, but let's just say

for now that one accountant's mind changed because of Congress' proactive PR

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... which leads me to the final point. The most successful PR agency relationships I've either dealt with or encountered were the ones in which the client (firm) properly managed the agency relationship. I think it's up to the client to manage this relationship rather than the PR agency calling the shots. When this occurs, the client usually feels as if it hasn't been influential in helping control the outcome.

Managing the agency is very simple, actually. It all boils down to effective, two-way communication with your agency team – and this starts at the top of the agency food chain. You have to establish this relationship from the very beginning, too; otherwise, you'll lose valuable time and money.

PR agencies are definitely worth their cost – if they are properly managed and you derive value to your organization. Enough said.

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