

## People are the Key to Better Workflow

By Dawn Travelstead

Now more than ever, efficient workflow is critical to the success of an agency. Without it, even the most creative firm may find itself in a state of chaos.

You have to meet deadlines. *Period.*

You have to stay within budget. *Period.*

You have to know who's doing what (or nothing at all) and when.

And, most importantly, you have to have the right tools.

A centralized project management system, ideally overseen by someone whose sole responsibility is its maintenance, can save valuable time and money. Task, time and expense management, client access to materials, and instant retrieval of information are indispensable features of a strong workflow system. But perhaps the most important thing you can do to build a more efficient workflow is to **promote efficiency-thinking among all agency employees.**

Keeping your agency culture and current needs in mind, ask employees to think about how they can help increase workflow efficiency. Do team members log in regularly to check the status of projects? Are they aware of the "big picture" reports available to them? Does someone touch base each morning to discuss, "what's hot and what's not?" How can employees better plan their workdays (e.g. meetings, research, email, "groove time," etc.)?

In terms of your agency's physical environment, do employees have all necessary supplies, including up-to-date software, comfortable (ergonomic) work stations, proper lighting, etc.?

Next, consider the projects themselves. As soon as the estimate has been approved, outline the job's Critical Path. Make sure the copywriter has what he needs (e.g. copy mandates, website references, an understanding of tone, etc.). Can the art director begin searching for stock photos or pull the ad from last year as a point of reference? Can an account coordinator find missing tidbits of information (e.g. phone number, new address, etc.) on the client's website or via another source?

When dealing with slow-to-quote vendors, explore your alternatives. Research other providers online. Can you purchase padded mailers now ("On sale!") or have labels preprinted? Also, think about what can be done, now, to speed things up once printed materials are actually in-house.

If you're in danger of missing a deadline(s), revise the timeline(s) and let everyone know; make sure the client is also kept in the loop. If incoming client revisions are minimal, consider re-arranging the art director's workload. Can he make the change now rather than wait until tomorrow? If the account supervisor can approve the ad in the absence of an account executive, seek her out.

Every agency employee plays an integral role in workflow success. Through the combination of a centralized traffic system, managerial commitment and employee dedication, your agency can experience unparalleled efficiency and profitability.

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