

Strategic Consulting for Peace of Mind

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Abstract

Professional consulting services can add insight to the strategic planning process, providing organizations with external perspective that helps make better decisions and impact the success of marketing implementation and organizational development.

Types of consulting engagements

Consulting as a prelude to a project or program

You may have a specific project that needs some tightening up like a marketing campaign or an internal organization strategy.

Consulting on Retainer

Clients also retain a strategist on a weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis for consulting sessions to review what they're doing, brainstorm, and help them make decisions on the right actions to take to achieve a particular goal. Often, a monthly session can generate ideas that can be acted upon for the rest of the month and keep momentum around marketing or planning activities.

Consulting as overall strategy development

This type of engagement is usually a series of sessions or time commitment to evaluate the overall marketing strategy for your organization, including short and long term tactics.

Many organizations implement a project based on an internal decision-making process. I'm not here to tell you that your approach is wrong but I can tell you that your strategy may not be as informed as if you got outside help. How can I say this? I don't know your company or your staff expertise. I can tell you that most members of every organization have an internal perspective, an agenda that serves the profits of the organization. That is the way it should be. Your team should be – well, on the same team. But herein lies the problem. It may be difficult to truly see the impact that your communication has on the audience, whoever they may be—customers, partners, investors or employees. That's why strategic, forward-thinking organizations bring in outside perspective to build organizational and marketing strategy—and help them to enrich their relationships and create long-term positive impact.

Whether you need to tap into a new market, launch new services, introduce new products or navigate changes in the existing marketplace, rest assured that a professional strategist will not have the inherent informed perspective that you have, and therefore, can contribute to your process by shedding light on alternate approaches and ideas for a truly strategic engagement.

Strategic consultants generally work with professionals of varied functional areas and levels, from product marketing and sales management, to directors, vice presidents, and CEOs.

What will a strategic consultant do?

Listen.

Sometimes telling your story is clarifying. By sharing your thought process, you may be able to identify previously undiscovered gaps. It is valuable to record it to play back later. Listening to the story like you are listening to someone else often nets further understanding about your motivations and pain points.

Ask questions.

Ask questions that elicit ideas and uncover unforeseen roadblocks.

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Stand in the shoes of your audience or audiences.

React like them, for good or bad.

Define the problem.

The biggest mistake that organizations can make is jumping to a solution before really understanding the problem. An external questioning process can help you to understand the true issue more clearly before moving on to the solution.

Turn problems into opportunities.

Joe's National Bank has mistakenly charged all of their customers an extra \$25 on their monthly statements and has gotten thousands of angry phone calls and emails. Customers are expressing their loss of trust in Joe's integrity and management ability. This is an unfortunate and serious problem. Joe could apologize, refund the money and move on. Or Joe could see this as an opportunity to go beyond the minimum requirements by demonstrating superior customer service. Perhaps the bank could add an additional \$10 to every account and explaining why the problem will never happen again. Joe could make a senior bank employee

available via phone and email to reassure customers that they are more than just a numbered bank account. While this may seem expensive, it may be the same cost as a full blown marketing campaign and imagine what lost customers cost.

Recommend alternate solutions and approaches.

What immediate value are you delivering to the audience before asking them to give you something like money or time? Instead of a simple call to action direct mail campaign, can you make the communication meatier by delivering valuable information that addresses a pain point?

Recommend gathering more data.

Maybe the program you want to deliver next month is based on some generally good thinking, but not enough data. Whether engaging in services for consulting or on a specific deliverable, the consultant may utilize key stakeholders to provide candid input into the process through a combination of surveys, interviews, and dialog and your organization needs to be ready to share information freely from many sources. The

consultant may suggest that salespeople, customer service, and other staff who interface with clients fill out a survey, as this data provides insight into customer's needs and interests. At the end of this discovery process, information can be summarized and presented back to you. The resulting data empowers organizations to make more informed decisions, such as the allocation of marketing resources, potential areas for improvement, and market opportunities.

Look into the future.

This marketing campaign has an immediate impact, but what happens after that? How can you create a lasting impression?

Getting more and making real impact

While there are no guarantees, most organizations begin projects with a certain amount of measured optimism. A good strategy expert can provide the insight that keeps that optimism around for the long haul AND help you reap the benefits of a well thought out endeavor.

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Hiring a consultant

Chemistry

One of the most important aspects of a successful consulting process is how the parties work together. Who is going to work with the consultant? Does the style and personality of the consultant work with theirs? Before starting any engagement, meet once or twice with them or ask for a free session to get a feeling for how the process works.

Experience

While you don't need to find someone who has deep experience in your precise business, it is important to know if they have experiences with companies like yours (manufacturing, services, B to B or B to C) and the practice area you need help in like marketing, organizational development or technology.

Coaching ability

Finally, the consultant's role should be one of a guide or coach. Does the consultant have the ability to coach in a way that is comfortable to you? In most cases, the consultant's primary role is not to implement on a project from the outset, but to help you determine what needs to be done and how.

creative vision [with a plan]