



Profile of an Account Executive

By Connie Burtcheard

If you are a shop that I have worked with, you have probably heard about my thoughts on the Account Executives of today.

I really blame it on my generation of Advertising people. We all got burned out and left the Industry—leaving a void of good mentors for Account Executives. The creative people stuck it out. Many media people stuck it out, but the Account people with experience left.

So, with the lack of mentoring, what can the current generation of Account Executive's (AE) improve on? The first step is to identify what an AE should be doing.

An agency AE is key to maintaining the relationship between the agency and the client. AE's are the liaison between the client and the creative team to ensure the client's needs and goals are being met on every project.

AE's bear a huge responsibility and juggle many projects at a time, all while communicating clearly with the client and the agency's creative team.

What are the duties of an Account Executive?

- Manage the account on a day-to-day basis.
- Develop an understanding and knowledge of the Client's business in order to develop communications strategies and proactively search for business opportunities for the Client.
- Contribute to the development of a Client's short and long-term strategic plans.
- Ensure that budgets are being expended accurately and within approved parameters.
- Interact internally with other departments to ensure the messages, brand and work quality is consistent.
- Communicate with the Client on a consistent and thorough basis to keep the Client apprised of all activity and its progress.

So, that being stated, what do I think is lacking in today's Account Executive?

- I believe that the AE of today is an order taker. They only hear what the client wants and brings that back to the agency.
- I don't think that the AE of today thinks strategically about what will be best for the client and the agency at the same time (the win-win theory).
- I think that the AE of today is more on the side of the client and not the agency. I think that there are too many write-offs and write downs.
- I believe that the AE of today is so afraid to loose a client, that they will sacrifice the good of the agency to keep the client. I also think that this is due to their lack of experience and the support of management.

What can be done to improve the skills of the Account Executives of today's world?

- Communicate with the AE that they are not only responsible for the relationship with the client, but also are the strategic thinkers for the client.
- Regardless of whether they are shared with the client or not, AE's should be creating estimates to determine how much time and expenses each project will take. You should have a system that can track the estimate versus the actuals. While in the beginning, your AE may not be good at estimating, you will find that their skills should improve over time as they begin to track what they expected against what really happened.

(Continued on page 2)



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- Provide the tools that allow your AM/AE to be able to monitor how each project is tracking, from a profitably standpoint.
- Teach, or pay for seminar's, for your AE to become better strategic thinkers. (This is the best client relationship builder.)
- Explain to the AE that thinking about what is best for the client and the agency, is what they need to focus on.

Communicate that loosing a client is not always a bad thing. Remember that if a client is draining your agency of its resources, this is not a good relationship. A good client should be willing to compensate you for your efforts. If an AE is managing an account, and you have provided the tools to track this information, you should train and then trust your AE to help detect the client that you don't want to have.

The most important advice when training your AE's is to teach them how to take care of both the client and the AE. Teach them how to manage each project. Let them communicate concerns about the client freely. Let them monitor the client and make you aware of any signs that you should be aware of.

A good and well trained AE is crucial to a successful agency. Be sure that they are well trained, know what they should be accountable for, and what they should be sharing with you.