



Ffiona Dawber

THE TRUST TEST

The value of a trusted and transparent pharma-agency relationship should not be underestimated for both parties

Building it can take years, but it can be broken in seconds. Trust is essential in the pharma-agency relationship. The basis upon which trust is won or lost should be regularly reviewed in order to maintain effective working relationships.

Now, perhaps more than ever before, as companies of all sizes rigorously scrutinise their cost base, it is understandably tempting to assume that if you know the price of something you can understand its value. But strong, trusted relationships resist the trend towards commodifying every service.

Before I founded Synergy Vision, I worked as a Global Clinical Director for GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), having joined the pharma industry after training as a nurse and working in the NHS. During the last five years of my time with GSK I worked with a lot of agencies; some of them were great, and some were ... well, not so great.

It taught me a lot about the types of relationships pharmaceutical company teams should have with their agencies. A trusted and transparent partnership is key to working successfully with an agency. As a client you want to know you can trust your agency to work on your behalf. If you don't have a solid sense of trust in your partner, then the relationship isn't really worth anything and the potential resulting damage could be catastrophic.

Meeting client needs

Central to building trusting relationships is a thorough understanding of the needs of pharmaceutical teams, but many agency staff simply don't know what these are, having never 'walked in their shoes'.

I know from my years in pharma how wonderful it is when you find a supportive and understanding agency partner who you only have to brief once, safe in the knowledge that they will deliver every time. When an agency also makes associations from a revision you make, and anticipates the impact on other projects, highlights them and suggests solutions, it also helps to foster a trusted partnership. With increasing pressure being put on pharma teams to outsource work on the basis of cost, rather than value, this can often backfire. The time pressures in pharma are such that, if you've given someone ten days to do something and then it comes back ten days later and it's not as expected, you haven't got another ten days to get it re-done. Sadly, pharma teams often end up having to redo the work themselves, which defeats the objective of briefing an agency in the first place!

The focus purely on costs can also obscure the fact that, in the long-term, pharma teams will find it more reassuring, not to mention far more cost efficient, if they can trust the people they've delegated the work to - it also puts the agency in a better position to help them shine, which is what we're here

to do. To get there, a pharma team needs to work with people they can trust so that they act as an extended part of their internal team. The pharma team needs to feel they can trust the agency team just as much as their internal staff and know that the agency they engage will work in their best interests.

One early 'warning sign' for the relationship comes after the pitch when you meet the team who will actually be working on your account. Quite often, agencies will 'wheel-out' their brightest and best to work on winning your business, but then - instead of a senior team of experienced high-flyers a client will be expecting to work with - the account is managed by a less experienced junior. Having encountered that on the client side it is something I never want our clients to experience.

All our account managers are highly skilled senior individuals. For us to staff the agency in any other way would, we believe, eventually damage the relationship and trust that we have with our clients - I certainly felt that when I was working in pharma.

Synergy Vision

When I created Synergy Vision I placed trust and identifying with clients at its heart. Starting out as a team of two, our early account wins were for KOL management and advice services, and our reputation often preceded us, with the business initially built entirely on word-of-mouth. It was important not to try to be all things to all people, but instead provide a best-in-class service.

Our current 30-strong team based in London focuses on global and European projects, mirroring our pharma and international experience. We have also recently launched a new division focused on delivering projects for clients working in Ireland and the UK. Here our specialist team has been handpicked for their local market expertise.

Now six years old, Synergy Vision is proud to have created and developed strong and trusted partnerships with the pharma teams we work with and we've never lost a client!

The Trust Test

Partnerships built on trust ensure mutual respect and support, expectations and timelines that are met and provide confidence in your agency. To get a measure of this take our 'Trust Test':

- Do you think of your agency as an extended part of your team?
- Do they understand the environment you work in and the challenges you face?
- Do they ask the right questions to enable them to understand your brief?
- Are you confident your briefs will be followed correctly?
- Do previously marked-up, and corrected, mistakes mysteriously reappear in later versions?
- Are you frustrated by being allocated a junior team member after selecting an agency based on discussions with more senior staff?
- Is your agency transparent in their budgeting?
- Quite simply, does your agency 'get it'?

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