

E-commerce insider: How to identify a true expert marketing partner for your business

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The e-commerce playing field moves at a breakneck speed and for businesses with an online shopping division or one that is completely online, keeping up with the ever-changing algorithms and platform developments is a fulltime job. In this cutthroat arena, the right digital marketing strategy and choosing a vetted paid media partner can be the difference between success and countless missed opportunities.



Cheryl Ingram

South African online retail is growing at a rapid rate and for both established and burgeoning businesses it is crucial to opt for an expert partner who possesses the knowledge, experience, and strategic insights to maximise e-commerce growth potential. Paid media pioneer Cheryl Ingram, co-founder and director of [The Digital Media Collective](#), has built her business, one of only four accredited Shopify Experts in South Africa, based on this premise. “The world of paid media moves so fast, with platform updates, algorithm shifts, new sales funnel building mechanisms and technology shifts happening daily – it’s impossible as an e-commerce business owner to stay up to date with it all,” she says. With this in mind, Cheryl has created a checklist for business owners embarking on, or considering changing up their paid media strategies:

Check your paid media expert's partner status

Before you choose your paid media specialist or agency it is imperative to verify their skills, explains Cheryl, and this is easy to do across a variety of platforms. Both

Meta and Google classify agency partners against a number of things, including skill set, campaign types, spend and best practice, as well as requiring that their buying teams complete a series of exams to validate their expertise which are governed by validity dates. On Meta, prospective partners can provide their account manager status and blueprint certification links to clients, while Google has a partner's directory listing accrediting agencies as either standard partners or premier partners. In South Africa, there are only 34 Accredited Google Partners (of which only a handful are independents like TDMC). Similarly, Shopify has only four accredited partners in South Africa. “Clients don’t always feel like they can ask for these kinds of certifications, but we think it’s imperative they do and that they have access to them,” says Cheryl. “If you’re spending money, you are entitled to know that it is being spent by people who know what they are doing.”

Insist on account access and transparency

“Not being granted access to your own social media account is a red flag in any e-commerce business,” says Cheryl. By having direct access to their ad accounts, clients have the option to monitor campaigns, evaluate performance metrics and ensure their budget is allocated effectively. This level of transparency fosters trust, enables collaboration and empowers clients to make more informed decisions. “This openness leads to learnings on all sides and ultimately drives successful outcomes,” says Cheryl. “The volume of wasted budgets spent on channels as a result of lack of expertise and inefficiencies is extensive. At TDMC, we are passionate about transparency and firmly believe that everyone should always be able to see exactly what was spent where and what the results were, without having to request the information.”

Ask for an audit

Making a commitment to appoint an agency can be an overwhelming process. One of the ways to allay concerns or answer questions you may have is to ask a prospective agency to conduct an audit of your current social media ad accounts and

site performance. “The data and learnings may come at a fee, of course, but I think it’s money well spent – you will soon be able to assess their ability to read the data and determine how and where they can assist your business,” says Cheryl.

Check on dedicated experts for different touchpoints

While a small business owner is required to service multiple areas of their business simultaneously, the paid media world is so complex and fast paced, it is always worth asking how a company structures their business. Within our business we have platform specialists, each of whom has a deeper level of understanding on specific platforms. It would be impossible for a single account manager to know all there is to know on Meta, Google, TikTok, LinkedIn, Twitter, Programmatic, Digital Out of Home, Mailchimp, Klaviyo, Shopify, Shopify Apps and more. As and when clients need a platform deep dive, our specialists provide an additional layer of expertise to the account manager to ensure that clients are provided with all the up-to-date information they may need.

Ask for their scope of clients

Each and every e-commerce business has a unique offering, but an agency that has expertise in your category is one that can use their market learnings to assist you on your journey. That said, an agency that has expertise in businesses operating on a far larger scale than your own can have enormous advantages for a business owner looking to outsource their paid media. “We have the benefit of aggregated buy-in across 120 accounts. For example, we spend in excess of R10 million a month with Meta alone – we are a valued partner to both Meta and Google, which means they prioritise the information flow of changes and updates to us,” explains Cheryl. “This is what being an Expert or Accredited Partner means – we have access to dedicated account teams with each platform who provide us with a first line of support across numerous requirements – including, but not limited to, access to beta product testing, urgent escalations, new business wins, advanced buying strategies, technical conundrums and more.”

Ask about service

E-commerce requires its paid media backbone to be ‘always on’ both for efficiencies and agility. The benefit of an agency with multiple specialists working on various channels is the levels of available expertise and the volume of support, says Cheryl. “There is no such thing as us not being available – we are available as close to 24/7 365 days a year as possible. And if something does go awry, we have the benefit of a team of 57 and an extended partner network who can lean in to problem solve.”

As the world of online and e-commerce continues to develop, so accredited media partners will become more crucial. While creating the likes of organic or newsletter content can certainly be kept inhouse, outsourcing expert-led sales channels is best given to the experts – assisting with more targeted sales campaigns and working harder to safeguard your spend.

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