



Is Your Client Just Not that Into You?

You know the situation: The meeting went really well. You felt a real synergy with the prospect. He laughed at all of your jokes. She really seemed to get your creative strategies. Left the meeting walking on air, knowing in your heart that this one was “the one.” Then, you spend hours waiting for the phone to ring. Waiting for those two little words that you long to hear: “You’re hired.” But the phone never rings, and a few weeks later, you see the client out at lunch with one of your competitors. Everything seemed so perfect. What went wrong?

Just as Greg Behrendt and Liz Tuccillo enlightened millions of women with their bestselling tome, *He’s Just Not that Into You*, I’m here to clarify the rules of engagement when it comes to the client-agency courtship ritual. Here are ten signs that your prospect or client is just not that into your agency.

- 1. Plays the rush-rush-wait game.** The prospect has to get together with you NOW - time is of the essence. You rearrange your schedule and take the meeting, but then you never hear from him again. Serious, professional clients realize a good proposal and a good program take research and time. If a prospect seems too hot to trot, or isn’t willing to invest the time it takes to let you work your strategic magic, it’s time to move on.
- 2. Won’t let you do your thing.** Some clients are so possessive that they think cutting you a monthly check means that they own you. Make it clear from the start that you have other clients and other obligations and expect to do a great job for everyone.
- 3. They play the blame game.** If a client or prospect refuses to accept constructive criticism without blaming you for their mistakes, you’re in a toxic relationship. Get out now. If you can’t tell a client the truth, they’re not the client for you.
- 4. Wants to see other people.** If a client is happy with you, he or she won’t look elsewhere.
- 5. Stops returning your calls.** This is a big red flag that something is wrong in the relationship. Healthy client-agency gigs require regular communication. If that’s not happening, it’s time to find out why.
- 6. Loves the thrill of novelty.** Beware of clients who habitually fire agencies. It’s a good idea to chat about the last agency (or few) that a client or prospect has hired and see if

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they'll spill how the relationship ended. If they have nothing but negative things to say about previous agencies, you can be sure that they'll bash you, too, once things head south.

7. Cheats. If they've been using another agency without telling you, it's time to move on. Not only is this unprofessional, but it can damage your own credibility if another agency is duplicating your efforts, unbeknownst to you.

8. Takes you for granted. It should be a privilege to work with your agency. Don't reinforce the image that everything is effortless. When a client says "good job," don't brush it off - gently remind them of how hard you work on their behalf. Of course, back it up with regular reports about the results you're generating, too.

9. Lies to you and asks to be forgiven. In this business, truth is essential. If it's lacking, you'll lose trust and that could damage your reputation. You may decide to forgive a lying client the first time, but if it happens again, find a new one.

10. Buys the cow...NOT! If your client is getting the milk - your ideas, creativity and talent -- for free, your efforts will immediately lose value in the client's eyes. Never give away your services and then expect to be paid. It doesn't happen. And if you don't value your work, no one will. This also means not letting clients take advantage of your agency with excessively slow payments and using your agency as a bank. If they respect you and your work, they need to be current on their payments.

11. Trashes your reputation. You can never live down a bad reputation. Public relations professionals who burn their bridges with clients, vendors and the media, then think they'll survive in the long term have much to learn. It takes great time and effort, and sometimes a name-change, to get past a reputation as a volatile maverick that can't be trusted. Keep your rep pristine - don't lie to the media; don't cheat your vendors, treat your staff well - people talk to the most unlikely sources...and word gets around quickly.

The sooner you separate the top tier from the tire-kickers, the sooner you'll be on your way to headache-free client relations. If your prospects or clients show signs of being "not that into you," it may be worthwhile to try to salvage the relationship, but it might not be, either. If the client has a wandering eye or no respect for your time, it's time for you to move on. No piece of business is worth dishonoring or devaluing yourself. Remember, clients are like buses -- miss one, and you'll catch the next!