

Industry: Advertising and Public Relations
Business: Advertising and Public Relations

Title Account Executive

Interviewee Betty

Graduating with a theatre major, Betty knew she wanted to go into advertising. This had been the result of an internship between her junior and senior year at an advertising firm. Her first position after graduation was as a Traffic Manager in a Chicago ad agency. She scheduled meetings and helped to coordinate communication between departments. She then became an Account Assistant. She assisted the Account Executive with clients and other miscellaneous tasks. Next, she was promoted to Account Manager, giving her opportunity to assist an Account Executive, work on day-to-day projects, help manage accounts and supervise other Account Assistants. She spent about eight years in the aforementioned positions before deciding to look for position in the city where she had gone to college.

The search was difficult because Betty had to do the job search while living some distance away. Betty made it quite clear that:

...networking became the key to getting in the door at my current company. I had several friends in the city and when I told them I was looking to move back, one told me about the position. I came and interviewed for it. The interview was great and I've now been an Account Executive for about two years.

Betty's primary job responsibilities are to her three major clients. She speaks with her clients on a frequent basis and they discuss objectives, progress on current campaigns, and other issues relevant to her clients. Based on the shared objectives, she determines strategies and meets with her creative team, who take into account both her and the client's ideas to create effective copy and overarching campaigns. Betty describes her job as being a "go-between" because she must constantly ensure that the creative team is doing what the client wants and also explain creative strategies to the client so that the client understands and approves the direction she is taking a campaign.

Betty reports to her Account Supervisor, the next position to which she would advance. That position consists of higher level planning, new product development, and pursuing new business. When asked what the company's hierarchy and accompanying career path looks like, she said that there is really no formalized job path. There is a general path such as Account Coordinator (similar to her Traffic Coordinator position), to Assistant Account Executive, to Account Executive, to Account Supervisor, and then to a Vice President, Partner, or President. But, more often than not, most people do not follow 'a typical' career path. Employees often jump across responsibility areas – potentially from Account Assistant or Computer Specialist to Creative, or from Account Supervisor to Market Research. What Betty really likes is the opportunity for people to be placed where their talents lie and for the cross-pollination of talents, skills, and knowledge that results.

Recruiting and Training

According to Betty, "the first thing to do if you are interested in any job is to send a resume and cover letter to the employer." You should also do whatever you can do to network. It is sometimes surprising where connections might be that can open doors – or at least get your resume into the hands of someone who will take a serious look at it. To do this right, "you really, really need to join professional associations and be active in them."

During the interviewing process,

...it is very helpful if potential employees job shadow for a day. Job shadowing is very popular in the advertising industry. It consists of a day where a potential employee follows a present employee around for a day and learns about the job. It gets an “applicant’s face seen” and it lets firms decide if you would fit in the culture. Most job shadowing sessions are set up with just one simple phone call.

At Betty’s agency, they typically look for “a college graduate who is smart, but not necessarily ‘4.0 smart’.” Betty says, “We would rather see a person be real world smart than book smart. An applicant needs to be able to communicate well in order to sell their ideas and to work with clients as well as co-workers.” Betty made it clear that an advertising job requires hard work and potential employees “should be prepared to give 125%.” In addition to being honest and willing to learn, an applicant must also fit with the personality of the firm.

Betty’s final tips to someone considering a career path in advertising and public relations, included:

- Job shadow the particular job that interests you.
- Regularly read industry publications.
- Know about the company where you will interview.
- Don’t scorn lower positions. Sometimes it is necessary to start out in a low position in the ad agency.

Performance and Compensation

Good job performance is determined by results. Did you achieve the client’s goal? Did you achieve the agency’s goals? Account Executives get annual performance reviews from both the agency and the client. In addition to results, good performance is determined by good customer service, always learning more, working well with people, bringing in client business/money, and managing budgets well.

At Betty’s current firm, the only reward systems are promotions and raises. However, Betty said that many other agencies give commissions based upon client profit. Her firm does give company bonuses and these are based on company performance

Greatest Challenges and Rewards

It is very challenging to be a liaison between “the creatives” (the creative team) and our clients. I have to constantly resolve differences (between the two)... It is also challenging to be able to pinpoint the focus of a client’s campaign. Often the client asks us to do a great number of things that we know are impossible to do at the same time...

Betty also finds it challenging to convince clients to be daring marketers and to do something edgy and different. Clients do not usually want to take chances because they risk a lot if an edgy campaign does not pay off. She said it is also challenging when the client “nitpicks” the creatives’ ideas because usually the creative team feels strongly about their work and they do not like it when it is changed even in the slightest. It is always a challenge to effectively communicate and coordinate with the clients, creatives, research team, public relations, and new product development.

Despite the challenges, to put together a winning campaign and see its impact is a huge reward - other rewarding aspects of 's job are:

- When a client agrees to step up and do something big or different
- Making the client look good
- Teamwork and support

Meanwhile, the most frustrating parts of her job are:

- Pressures from deadlines
- When the client just does not get it
- Client's internal bureaucracy
- Not being able to defend work to "behind the scenes" people at the client's business
- Working with people who do not understand marketing

Top Insights

Betty said that she has been seeing industry changes that make her efforts more difficult. One of these is that the entire advertising/ public relations industry faces some big challenges such as the increasing use of consultants to determine the marketing plan and then just using agencies for ad development. Even when an agency considers itself a brand consultant, this can be hard to overcome.

Betty provided some important perspective on being a top performer. She said that a top performer in the advertising/public relations industry is someone who:

- Thinks outside the box
- Is able to put a smart plan together, not just provide the obvious media or strategies
- Really knows the client's business
- Has integrity and speaks the truth to clients
- Is open to ideas from all sources
- Avoids the appearance of arrogance