



# What Separates an Advocate from a Vendor?

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By Deborah Daily, Co-Owner, Buckaroo Marketing/New Media



I developed a better understanding of our company's business model the morning our son and his three-week-old driver's license crossed paths with another vehicle in a local roundabout.

Our car didn't look too good, but he was fine. The driver who hit him was also uninjured, and her car suffered the worst of the damage.

Most of us don't get into accidents often enough to have working knowledge of the processes that follow. I'm generally a patient person, but after a couple days waiting for somebody -- anybody? -- to initiate those processes, I took the proverbial bull by its horns. From getting the police report, to talking with the insurer, to dealing with the body shop, I devoted several interesting but unenjoyable hours to learning about what needed to be handled. And I grasped what truly sets our business apart from many others.

Companies in need of marketing or advertising expertise have a seemingly infinite array of choices. Depending upon their specific needs, they can choose from a host of vendors to manage emails, shoot photographs, create designs, hang billboards, generate blogs, produce videos, print invitations, write newsletters, engineer a new website ... the list goes on and on.

But having access to all those options doesn't necessarily mean having enough knowledge to successfully manage or even understand what's involved in working with those vendors. Typically, companies have minimal -- if any -- experience in those sectors, so they throw themselves on the mercy of vendors. Most I know are honest, but there are those who can't resist profiting from a company's inexperience.

If you've never overseen the development of a website, produced a brochure for a trade show that's just two weeks away, or can't figure out why anyone would spend good money for a photographer when your iPhone takes pretty good pictures, you're in that inexperienced category.

So let's say you're tasked with producing that quick-turnaround brochure. Easy, right? You'll just open Microsoft Publisher and use one of those handy templates, drop in some photos you took with your iPhone, and ... what do you mean by "copy"? Oh, the words. Well, maybe one of the sales guys can put something together. And then when you find someone willing to print it quickly, you give him your file and he says it's no good. Something about live areas, gutters, and your photos being at 72 when they should be at 300, whatever that means. He still thinks he can get it done within the two weeks and you can pick it up on the afternoon of the 4th. Oh, he didn't realize you meant it needed to be at the hotel in Orlando on the 4th?

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	6:00 pm Purdue Krannert Weekend MBA Info...
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It's not your fault. You're operating in areas you don't know about. You're discovering there's a big difference between printing something on the office printer and preparing it for a printing company's 6-color sheet-fed press. You're learning about the importance of photo resolution. You would have never guessed the printed brochures would have to dry for a while before they could be shipped safely. And the individual vendors did share that information with you, but long after you really needed to have it.

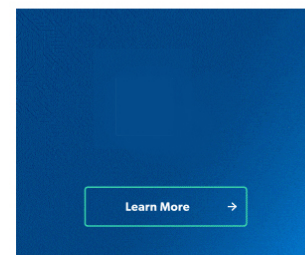
That's where we come in. Our business model is one of advocacy. You turn to us for marketing or advertising, but our real job is to understand what you need to know and share it with you before you make critical business decisions. If you called us in desperation about your quick-turnaround brochure, we'd listen to your goals and explain what's involved in making the deadline. Or, if the deadline's impossible, we'd recommend other ways to make the most of the trade show.

You hire a vendor to take your order and perform a specific task or tasks. An advocate will walk alongside you as you run your business. They'll do far more listening than talking, and in time, you'll come to trust their counsel as much as your CPA or attorney. And an advocate will never make you feel embarrassed because you didn't know something.

An advocate will serve as your watchdog, steering you clear of the small misunderstandings that often turn into huge problems. We know what's realistic, and what's negotiable. We can show you why spending twice as much for Step A will cut the cost of Step B by several times that amount. When a salesperson shows up with a really exciting marketing idea, we know what to believe and which questions to ask.

Nobody knows more about your company than you do. But nobody expects you to be an expert at everything. That's when you can benefit from having a trusted advocate. Exactly the kind of advocate I sure could have used when my son called to say, "I'm okay, but ..."

Deborah Daily is co-owner of Buckaroo Marketing | New Media, a Fishers-based advertising agency established in 1999. She can be reached at [dldaily@gobuckaroo.com](mailto:dldaily@gobuckaroo.com).



Grow INdiana Media Ventures, LLC  
Inside INdiana Business With Gerry Dick  
1630 North Meridian Street, Suite 400  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
PHONE: (317)275-2010  
FAX: (317)472-7355  
NEWSLETTER@GROWINDIANA.NET

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