



How to Choose a Marketing Partner in Australia

A plain-English guide for Australian small businesses weighing up doing marketing yourself, hiring a freelancer, or bringing in an agency.

Marketing is one of those things every Australian small-business owner knows they should be doing more of, but few have the time or the headspace to do well. At some point you hit a wall: you can keep muddling through yourself, pay a freelancer for a few hours a week, or hand the lot to an agency. The right answer depends on your budget, your goals and how much of this you actually want to own.

This guide walks through how to make that call without getting sold to. It is written for owners spending their own money, in a market where word travels fast and a bad hire costs you more than just the retainer. No jargon, no inflated promises — just what to look for and what to walk away from.

1. Work out what you actually need

Before you talk to anyone, get clear on the job. Are you chasing more leads, a tidier brand, a website that converts, or just someone to keep the socials ticking over? ‘We need marketing’ is not a brief — and an honest partner will push you to be specific before they quote. Write down what a new customer is worth to you and roughly how many you can handle. That single number tells you what you can sensibly afford to spend to win one, and it keeps the whole conversation grounded in dollars rather than vanity metrics like follower counts.

2. Decide who fits: DIY, freelancer, consultant or agency

A solo freelancer is cheap and flexible but stretched thin and easily knocked off course when their other clients get loud. A big Sydney or Melbourne agency brings depth and polish, but you may be a small fish paying city rates and dealing with a junior account manager rather than the people who pitched you. A regional or independent consultant often sits in the sweet spot for an Australian SME — senior attention, lower overheads, and someone who actually picks up the phone. Match the choice to the size and complexity of the work, not to whoever has the slickest deck.

3. Check they are a real, accountable business

This part is quick and non-negotiable. Ask for their ABN and look it up on the free ABN Lookup register — you want a business that is genuinely registered and current, and you want to know whether they are registered for GST (if they are, expect 10% GST on top of their fees, which you can usually claim back if you are registered yourself). Be wary of an outfit that only trades through a personal bank account or dodges the question. In a market as small and connected as Australia’s, reputation and referrals travel fast — so ask around your industry and for two or three client references you can actually ring.

4. Pressure-test the relationship before you sign

Ask how they will handle your customer data. If they are running your CRM, email lists or ad accounts, they are handling personal information covered by the Privacy Act 1988 and the Australian Privacy Principles — ask where that data is hosted and who can see it. Watch out for agencies that simply re-badge a US or UK playbook for the local market; what works in those markets often lands flat here, and you want someone who understands Australian buyers, channels and seasonality. Finally, read the contract: confirm you own your accounts, domains and data, and steer clear of long lock-ins before they have proven anything.

Indicative A\$ ranges for Australian SMEs — check whether GST is included or on top.

Option	Typical A\$ cost	Best when
Do it yourself	Your time, plus ad spend	You are just starting out, budget is tight, and you have time to learn
Freelancer / contractor	A\$300–1,500 / month or A\$50–150 / hour	You need one specific thing done well, like social or copywriting
Independent consultant	A\$1,500–5,000 / month	You want senior strategy and hands-on help without big-agency overheads
Full agency	A\$5,000–20,000+ / month	You have real budget, multiple channels, and need a whole team behind you

Common questions

How much should a marketing agency cost in Australia?

It varies widely. A freelancer might run A\$300–1,500 a month, an independent consultant A\$1,500–5,000, and a full agency A\$5,000–20,000 or more — usually plus 10% GST and separate ad spend. What matters is not the headline figure but whether the likely return justifies it, based on what a new customer is worth to you.

Should I hire a freelancer or an agency?

A freelancer is great for one well-defined task and a tight budget, but they can be stretched thin and have single-person risk. An agency or consultant suits you when the work spans several channels or you need strategy plus delivery. Many Australian SMEs find an independent consultant the best of both — senior attention without city-agency price tags.

What are the red flags when choosing a marketing partner?

Guaranteed results or ‘number one on Google’ promises, vague pricing, no ABN or references, pressure to sign a long contract fast, and an inability to explain how they will measure success. Be especially wary of anyone selling a recycled overseas playbook with no real grasp of the Australian market.

Should a marketing agency have an ABN?

Yes. Any legitimate Australian business will have an Australian Business Number, and you can check it free on ABN Lookup to confirm it is current and see whether they are registered for GST. If they cannot or will not give you one, treat that as a serious warning sign.

Who owns my accounts and customer data?

You should — always. Make sure your website, domain, ad accounts and analytics are set up under your own logins, not the agency’s. Ask where your customer data is hosted and confirm they handle it in line with the Privacy Act 1988 and the Australian Privacy Principles. A trustworthy partner makes handover easy if you ever part ways.

Are lock-in contracts normal?

Some setup or campaign work reasonably needs a minimum term, but long lock-ins before a partner has proven anything are a red flag. Look for a short initial period or a sensible notice clause. Confident operators earn your renewal with results rather than tying you in upfront.

Read the full interactive guide, with a free tool, at cmbeyer.com — or ask Bea to build a package for your business.