

The Media Planning and Buying Blog

[← Previous Post](#)[Next Post →](#)

Media Buying Agencies vs. Ad Agencies: A Comparison

Both media buying agencies and ad agencies can offer value to an internal marketing team. However, the question of which option your company should choose and what you should expect from it isn't so straightforward.

As a [media buying agency](#), Capitol Media Solutions is proud to work directly with companies as well as to serve as a partner to their ad agencies. Our aim in both relationships is to bring success to the client.

That said, it's helpful for companies to understand the distinction between the two types of agencies. Let's take this from a "needs" standpoint; advertising campaigns should have at *least these* three elements:

1. Sound strategy and planning.
2. Outstanding creative.
3. Effective media buying.

Comparing how media buying agencies and ad agencies deliver on each of these three elements can explain the differences in what each offers.

Strategy and Planning

Advertising agencies direct their attention to the overarching marketing strategy and marketing plan for clients. They may:

- Conduct industry research and a SWOT analysis.
- Establish broad objectives for the client's business, products, or services.
- Segment and target the audience to identify how a client should position itself.
- Define specific marketing tactics.

Media buying agencies typically focus on [media strategy](#) and [media planning](#), which may be one piece of an overall marketing plan that a company or its ad agency creates. In the case of Capitol Media Solutions, media planning includes:

- Research to define a client's target audience at a fine-detail level.
- Identifying the best markets, media, and publications for the buy.
- Establishing the budget and time frame best suited to accomplishing a company's goals.

Our agency can also recommend tactics, such as [experiential marketing](#) and [email marketing](#), which are especially useful for supporting a media buy.

Creative

Ad creative is the aspect of your media buy that customers consume. Whether it's visual, audio, or otherwise, the creative is the way that a customer experiences your marketing, from a [pay per click digital advertisement](#) to a [billboard ad in Times Square](#).

It's important to optimize both the creative and the targeted delivery of that creative. When tradeoffs are necessary, ad agencies may give priority to the message while media buying agencies may prioritize the media because of where the expertise of each lies.

Media buying agencies typically establish the requirements of the creative based on the media plan. For example, a business news website that the plan is targeting may only offer leaderboard ad units or ad units that don't allow expansion ([see the current IAB guidelines](#).)

This approach establishes that it's better to advertise where the right audience is than to sacrifice "location" for specific creative choices. Requirements for creative may also change depending on the [television media buying](#), [radio media buying](#), or [print media buying](#) that a media agency selects.

With ad agencies:

- The media plan may come before the creative. Just as commonly, though, an ad agency's creative department will dictate which media and formats a buy will target.
- Creative production likely occurs inside the ad agency. Media buying agencies typically do not offer creative as a service.
- Media buying agencies can often contribute data about how customers interact with advertisements, which helps refine the final creative.

This brings us to...

Media Buying

Media buying agencies specialize in this process:

- They identify the best time frame, establish markets for reaching the target audience, and recommend the budget to achieve a client's goals.
- A [media agency](#) may also have special insights into the target audience because of the tracking it conducts for ad campaigns.
- Agencies such as ours have extensive relationships that they can leverage with publishers to provide clients with better rates and value-add placements.

Ad agencies may operate a large number of departments in addition to media buying, such as account management; account planning; strategy; trafficking; website development; and creative. Departments may then sub-divide; for example, the media buying department may be further siloed into television, radio, print, and digital depending on the size of the agency.

Which type of agency works better for media buying depends on your perspective and your experience.

Capitol Media Solutions has developed great relationships with both clients and ad agencies thanks to our expertise and focus. We manage everything, from the strategy to the planning to the execution to the reporting, to help clients succeed in their media buying goals.

[Get in touch with Capitol Media Solutions](#) to learn more about how we work.

SHARE THIS STORY

