

THE AGENCY YOU WANT TO BE

A guide to the expert growth programmes
available to agency owners

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A WORD FROM US

The path of an agency owner can be a lonely one. There are pitfalls almost everywhere you look, and it's down to you to steer clear of them.

At RiskBox, we see the issues that agencies face every day. We know what the common challenges are, and have seen companies overcome them time and time again. This perspective is valuable, and it's also why we encourage all agencies to surround themselves with a trusted network of experts that can support them in their success. After all, no one knows everything.

This guide is for owners of creative and digital agencies, whether they're very small or established. It details the experts that we've come across over the last few years as part of the Bulletproof Agency Network. They've all contributed their own information about their respective growth programmes, so that you can choose the ones that best suit the agency you are – and the agency you want to be.

Of course, this trusted network of experts includes brokers. When it comes to insurance, outside help will ensure you're always covered by your policy, especially as you grow. What's more, it'll help you to constantly re-evaluate your existing protection and prevent you from tripping over snags that agencies before you have already stumbled across.

By keeping your broker aware of any contracts you're signing with clients, changes to your service, or decisions concerning your premises, you'll stay safe in the event of a claim. This way, you can focus your attention back on business development and the personal wellbeing of your team. We explore what it means to be close to your broker in this guide too.

We hope you find our guide useful, and please feel free to follow up with any of the experts we've featured.





THE AGENCY COLLECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

We are a peer support network of agency owners and directors. We provide content, opportunities and ongoing support to help you take your agency to where you want it to go. Our team can introduce you to potential partners, help you to build new relationships, and connect you with others who are facing (or have faced) challenges that you're going through right now.

The Agency Collective provides an opportunity for you to build genuine connections with real people. Leads for future work come as a side product through sharing advice, forming partnerships and building friendships throughout the community.

Website www.theagencycollective.co.uk

Contact anne@theagencycollective.co.uk

Twitter twitter.com/agencycollective

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

We are one of the largest sources of knowledge and support for agency owners. Our membership includes:

- Meetings with experts and your peers
- Introductions for partnerships and support
- Up-to-date knowledge via invite-only Slack
- Boost your LinkedIn reach
- Meet other agency owners & shareholding directors
- Access to our member's only content library

AGENCY SUITABILITY

Turnover	From startup to £1M
Staff Numbers	From startup to large agencies
Other Criteria	Agency founder & director only

PROGRAMME DETAILS

Delivery Method	A vibrant Slack community, weekly events, peer groups, emails, 1-2-1's, expert speakers, industry insight, catch up content
Frequency	Daily (not weekends)
Size	Over 300 agencies and growing
Time Commitment	As much time as the agency owner can invest
Cost	£129 / month



BULLETPROOF AGENCY NETWORK

INTRODUCTION

The Bulletproof Agency Network brings together trusted advisers on financial, legal and insurance issues for the benefit of Agency Owners and Senior Teams across the UK. Our podcasts, content and events programme brings together thought leaders and leading lights in the Agency Sector to deliver practical content to help you scale, remain sustainable and navigate a fluid commercial and regulatory environment. In short, we want to see you survive, thrive, and contribute to a growing community.

Website bulletproofagencynetwork.com

Twitter [@BulletproAgency](https://twitter.com/BulletproAgency)

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

There is no formal programme, but rather an ad hoc collection of events and content that are run to encourage agency owners to focus on growing their businesses and ideally engage formal professional growth programmes

AGENCY SUITABILITY

Turnover	Up to £5,000,000
Staff Numbers	Up to 100
Other Criteria	Content aimed at owner and senior management of agencies who wish to grow their business in a profitable and sustainable way

PROGRAMME DETAILS

Delivery Method	Events, both physical and online, and provision of content
Frequency	Monthly
Size	Up to 100 per event
Time Commitment	2 hours per month
Cost	Free for online content £25 per physical event

INTERVIEW

JO SCOTT

Founder / Managing Partner
Truth Creative

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO SIGN UP TO AN AGENCY GROWTH PROGRAMME?

I nearly didn't! My co-founder, business partner and husband (same person) convinced me otherwise. The catalyst was that whilst we had steadily grown, it was really down to my individual hard work - as he put it, "you just peddle faster" - and ultimately we don't want to grow in head count - we want to stay boutique, but there's a ceiling to that - so we needed other ways to support our distinct proposition and the idea of productisation and generating revenue growth from that was appealing.

WHAT MADE YOU FEEL THAT FORM WOULD BE ABLE TO HELP YOU ON THAT JOURNEY? WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THEIR PROGRAMME THAT MADE IT SUITABLE FOR YOU?

I was approached by Dave Crawford - referral from a contact, and we actually knew him from McCann Erickson days. Form was (and is) my critical friend. I say that with affection - it's not that we discovered light bulb moments, deep down we knew what our weaknesses were, but what they brought was the ability to challenge us and our thinking. When you run a business with your husband and you are at the top, it's hard to get another viewpoint and so they brought diversity to our thinking and ultimately gave us the much needed confidence to thrive. The difference Form brings is its team of experience - I'll be honest, 'consultants' are rarely experienced and much of it can be words and air - Form brought industry expertise to the table and they held our hand on the journey.

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE THE PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTED AND HOW DID YOU WORK TO OVERCOME IT?

Probably confidence in ourselves. For me, value-based pricing and sticking to it. I'd always bend for a desire to be 'nice' - it devalued what we did. We also needed to promote ourselves better and that's really shifted.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT ON YOUR AGENCY?

Pricing strategy. We have generated 2.5x new, new business this year - I'd say the catalyst of this is the productisation we developed. We also bought a building - in Manchester. That's amazing.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR YOUR AGENCY?

We need to keep focused on Truth matters. It's very easy to get caught up in the day to day. I now have a senior leadership team I can rely on - it's not just me, on my island anymore. Our plans are to really focus on the products we have developed, knowing that if we sell the strategy then the CLV naturally generates additional revenue. That's very powerful.



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THEY BROUGHT DIVERSITY TO OUR THINKING AND ULTIMATELY GAVE US THE MUCH NEEDED CONFIDENCE TO THRIVE



CACTUS

INTRODUCTION

Cactus are the UK's leading Agency growth consultancy. We have worked with over 1,000 agencies globally over the past 10 years many of which are recognised as some of the fastest growing agencies in their territories.

Website www.cact.us

Contact hello@cact.us

Twitter [@cactus](https://twitter.com/cactus)

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

We hold over 30 events annually to give you the insights you need to evolve you and your agency business forward.

Our events will connect you to Industry leading people who share their real life stories and learnings to help you build a Best in Class Agency.

If you would like to attend one of our one-day conferences, round tables, socialising drinks events, walk and talks or golf days then please connect with us see www.cact.us for more information

AGENCY SUITABILITY

Turnover	£250k - £3M
Staff Numbers	3 - 40
Other Criteria	Independent Agencies

PROGRAMME DETAILS

Delivery Method	Non Exec Directors, mentoring, training, workshops
Frequency	Varies monthly / Quarterly / One off
Size	1 to 16
Time Commitment	Varies: 2 hours monthly / full day monthly / full day quarterly / full day one off
Cost	Varies - from £165-£4,750 p/m to £6,000 for Audit & Strategy Workshop

7 WAYS YOUR AGENCY RISK PROFILE CAN CHANGE

INTRO

There are a few key insurance areas that business owners need to consider as their agency grows. Whether that's adjusting existing insurance (like increasing limits or updating the details of your office) or taking out new types of insurance, it's important that you adopt a proactive approach.

Before you make any big business decisions, refer to this list to determine how they might affect your cover.

2. CONTRACTS

Of course, if you're growing, you're probably picking up larger clients and larger contracts. These clients will often insist on their own bespoke contracts that specify certain types of mandatory insurance as well as higher limits of cover, so you'll need to constantly review the policies you have in place.

TIP: New insurance obligations under contract should always be run past your broker. They can sometimes help you justifiably push back on unreasonable obligations.

1. ASSETS

Moving to a larger office? With a smart new fit-out and increased amount of kit? Your insurers need to be notified. They might have certain requirements that need to be met to keep your insurance valid, particularly when it comes to security. An alarm signalling system, for example, might be specified in your cover.

TIP: If your expansion involves leased equipment, it's generally cheaper to add this into your existing policy. The leasing company may charge you for the insurance within their hire agreement, which can be costly.

3. FINANCIALS

When your renewal period is approaching, prepare your financial statements for your insurer. A change in turnover and wages can have an impact that needs to be taken into account when budgeting. Although the premium will increase as you grow, it might not always be directly proportional. Ask your broker to benchmark the premium against other insurers.

TIP: Don't forget, as your financials increase so will the capital you may hold at any one time. Special consideration should be given to Cyber & Data cover.

4. LIMITS

With more capital and bigger contracts comes a greater potential impact of worst-case scenarios. It's therefore key to regularly get advice from the experts about the insurance limits that your agency purchases. This is particularly true for Professional Indemnity, Cyber & Data and Management Liability insurance.

TIP: As you look after higher levels of data, the impact of a major breach increases. This would incur higher costs too, so your liability limit will need to reflect that. Greater risk for insurers means their cover will get more expensive – so, again, bear this in mind when budgeting.

6. INVESTMENTS

If you've taken investment to grow, there's now a new party involved who has expectations about the future performance of your agency. If you fail to deliver as expected (even if it was through no fault of your own), then disputes can arise with the investors. It's critically important to ensure that you have an appropriate level of Management Liability cover in place to protect the personal liability of your directors.

TIP: Investors will often insist that Management Liability insurance is in place before signing off on an investment. They know that this insurance can respond (and ultimately pay out) should a director commit a wrongful act.

Whenever there's a major change to your business, and at the very least when your renewal is due, you should seek expert advice. Our greatest tip would be to set aside around 30 minutes every year to speak to your broker. Update them on your business, what's changed, and what's in the pipeline for next year. They can then flag any potential impact on your insurance, and ensure you stay protected.

5. PEOPLE

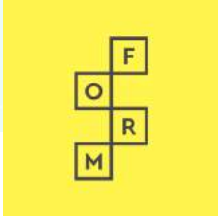
As your agency grows, the culture can shift – and it can be more of a challenge keeping everyone happy. That's why you need to consider how to protect yourself from staff issues, such as a potential employment practice claim. You should be able to legitimately make changes to your team and follow the correct HR procedures without the fear of expensive litigation.

TIP: Decent Employment Practices Liability protection can form part of a Management Liability package. Protection here is normally far broader than when it's part of a simple Legal Expenses policy.

7. GEOGRAPHY

Agencies normally start off relatively locally focused, but tend to be more exposed globally as they grow. You might win an overseas client. Maybe you'll engage an overseas supplier. Or perhaps you'll open up satellite operations in another country. Regardless of how you'll take over the world, it's important to bear in mind that all of these scenarios come with specific contractual and legal obligations that will affect your insurance. When opening an overseas office, for example, there will often be certain types of insurance that you'll be obliged to obtain. Otherwise, you'll be in breach of local regulation – and vulnerable to fines and sanctions.

TIP: This is easily one of the most complicated areas when it comes to your insurance. Independent, expert advice should be sought.



FORM STUDIO

INTRODUCTION

Form are a growth and leadership consultancy supporting ambitious leaders to build remarkable organisations in the digital, creative and tech sectors. We work nationally and globally, as well as having a number of fully and partially funded programmes available to SMEs based in Greater Manchester and the Liverpool City Region. Details of all our services can be found on our website – form.studio

Website	form.studio
Contact	hello@form.studio
Twitter	@form_leadership
Instagram	@form_leadership

Website	www.gatherlcr.com/shift
Contact	hello@gatherlcr.com
Twitter	@Gather_LCR
Instagram	@Gather_LCR

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Shift is an online course to help you take your business to the next level.

By joining Shift, you will:

- Clarify why you matter to your customers
- Learn to use your time more productively
- Gain insights to lead your team more effectively

The first wave of the programme has received an average client rating of 9/10. Clients tell us:

"The themes covered have been truly relevant, presented in an incredibly clear and straightforward way, making it easy to understand how we can immediately start to apply to our business, and get value from it."

- Nick, Creative Director at Uniform.

AGENCY SUITABILITY

Turnover	£500k+
Staff Numbers	5+
Other Criteria	Ambitious leadership team, based in Liverpool City Region

PROGRAMME DETAILS

Delivery Method	3 x half-day online workshops that include 1-1 time with other business leaders 3 x learning kits that include digital resources and personalised insight reports Support and feedback beyond the workshops to stay on track and get results A cohort of 15 business owners across the Liverpool City Region
Frequency	Applications for wave 2 close at the start of February 2021, with 2 further waves running in 2021.
Size	15
Time Commitment	3 x half day workshops, spread across 5 weeks (one every other week)
Cost	All Shift course fees are covered by the partners behind Gather, so we can give you support at no cost to you.



GROW YOUR DIGITAL AGENCY (GYDA) INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION

We help digital agency leaders to run the agency they want to run so they can live the lives they want to live. We are UK's #1 resource for digital agency owner-founders, working closely with over 200 agencies. The focus is on helping you to grow a sustainable agency (using proven tools & techniques). Clients include award winning agencies as well as Google Premier Partners. We are expert agency growers (not generalists) who have been part of the journey of the best agencies in the UK and Europe.

Website www.gydamemberhub.com/DAMF

Contact rc@GYDAinitiative.com

Twitter [@robert_craven](https://twitter.com/robert_craven)

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

The Digital Agency Forum is a business growth program for owners, founders, directors, and rising leaders of digital agencies.

- Access to 30+ key resources and templates.
- 1-2-1 accountability buddy.
- Regular 1-2-1 coaching sessions (1 per quarter)
- Access to a private Facebook Group.
- Six Keynote sessions via Zoom from Robert Craven.
- Six Mastermind sessions via Zoom.

Get some accountability, share ideas and solve issues with a group of driven and focused digital agency owners to help you scale, gain freedom and have more fun.

AGENCY SUITABILITY

Turnover	£300k+
Staff Numbers	5 - 100
Other Criteria	Ideal for owner / manager / director / founder

PROGRAMME DETAILS

Delivery Method	Mastermind Group
Frequency	Monthly
Size	10
Time Commitment	3-4 hours per month
Cost	£245 per month

OTHER OFFERINGS

Free Community of 1400 agency owners	facebook.com/groups/GYDAinitiative
Consulting, coaching and mentoring available at the VIP MemberHub	www.GYDAmemberhub.com
Books	Grow Your Digital Agency Digital Agency Strategy Workbook Bright Marketing

INTERVIEW

REBECCA LEWIS SMITH



Co-founder & Director
Fountain

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO SIGN UP TO AN AGENCY GROWTH PROGRAMME?

Fountain started working with Cactus just as we hit a period of rapid growth. As a team of four co-founders, we knew that the insights we could gain from external agency growth experts would help us to avoid pitfalls and keep us focussed on our growth targets.

WHAT MADE YOU FEEL THAT CACTUS WOULD BE ABLE TO HELP YOU ON THAT JOURNEY?

WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THEIR PROGRAMME THAT MADE IT SUITABLE FOR YOU?

We had been aware of Cactus for some time, and had seen one of the Founders talk at events. He was kind enough to take the time to speak with us and give really valuable feedback and advice – long before we signed up to work with Cactus in an ongoing capacity. The information and tools that he shared with us, both in his talks and from those initial phone calls, were extremely helpful and valuable – they gave us templates to work towards for growing our agency. When we came to consider working with an external partner, we didn't even consider any other agency growth experts – and we've been working closely with Cactus ever since.

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE THE PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTED AND HOW DID YOU WORK TO OVERCOME IT?

Over the past three years we have encountered so many challenges, both large and small. Having Cactus on our Board means that we have a sounding board with a wealth of extremely in-depth knowledge and experience. From ensuring that we're taking the right steps to balance team capacity and profit margins, to shifting our mindset as we meet those "step change" opportunities that can transform our business seemingly overnight.

As founders, we definitely sleep better at night knowing that we can run financial questions by Cactus and ask them for advice about how we can expand our client base, grow our networks and win new work.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT ON YOUR AGENCY

Since we started working with Cactus, Fountain has grown significantly – but beyond meeting and exceeding our growth targets, we have become a better-run agency. We have implemented an innovative team structure, invested in our culture and team wellbeing, while also managing to improve efficiency and billability per head. We stick to metrics that ensure financial stability, while also investing in growth. And beyond what we have achieved, there is also the invisible value of all the mistakes we avoided that could have delayed our limited success along the way.

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WE HAVE IMPLEMENTED AN INNOVATIVE TEAM STRUCTURE, INVESTED IN OUR CULTURE AND TEAM WELLBEING, WHILE ALSO MANAGING TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND BILLABILITY PER HEAD.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR YOUR AGENCY?

Fountain is continuing to grow, work with ever larger clients and build on the exceptional results that our team delivers. In 2020, as we navigated the intensity of the pandemic and its effects on our clients, we also made a shift in agency leadership – handing the reins to a new generation of leaders from within our team. Meanwhile the co-founders took the initial steps into new and exciting roles that are not directly linked to the day-to-day running of the agency, but will continue to improve the agency and extend our networks.

The future for Fountain is exciting and fast-paced. With beautiful new offices opening soon to house the UK team, and our team growing in our North America office too, we're excited to be working with global clients and bring our methodology to more businesses around the world. We're continuing to work closely with Cactus, and their support and experience is extremely reassuring as we face the next growth phase at Fountain.

AJ&SMART / LEVEL UP

INTRODUCTION

You learn from other's experience and problems, or just listening to other's progress. Level Up puts like minded people together that want to make their business better and this has created a real life connection between us. Some of us have actually "met" outside the group to discuss specific issues.

Website www.ajsmart.com/levelup

Contact support@ajsmart.com

Twitter [@AJSmartDesign](https://twitter.com/AJSmartDesign)

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

This programme is perfect for individuals or teams who want to learn how to design, deliver, and participate in workshops and Design Sprints. Used by tech giants like Google, Slack, and Twitter, the Design Sprint makes for a perfect tool to help teams solve complex problems, fast - it's also a service that agencies can provide to their clients. 70+ videos train and certify learners in Design Sprints, Remote Design Sprints, Workshops, and Advanced Facilitation.

AGENCY SUITABILITY

Turnover	Up to £1,000,000
Staff Numbers	1 to 20
Other Criteria	Small to medium client-service agencies looking to increase revenue and/or company size and looking to improve, implement, and streamline company processes. Similar to executive coaching, this course gives you the strategies and tips to grow and manage growth.

PROGRAMME DETAILS

Delivery Method	Video content and coaching library, peer to peer learning through the Level Up community and access to recorded Q&A calls.
Frequency	Ongoing, complete at your own pace
Size	140
Time Commitment	The course is completely self-paced: you can either sprint through it in one weekend or take a few weeks to go through it.
Cost	£1997

OTHER OFFERINGS

Design Sprint Masterclass	www.ajsmart.com/masterclass
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WHY AN INSURANCE BROKER IS AN AGENCY OWNER'S BEST FRIEND

To help share the burden of business management, agency owners will happily speak to advisors and mentors. But they often won't think twice about brokers – despite the fact that they can offer a unique insight into your risk exposure.

It's these insights that keep you from overstepping your cover or paying for unnecessary premiums. To prove it, RiskBox's resident expert Sam Johnson has broken down the benefits of buddying up to your broker...

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Traditional insurance providers only speak to you at renewal. And for some, renewal is automatic. This means that you might not speak to your insurers for years, even though you could dramatically change as a business during this time. To make matters worse, these changes could inadvertently impact the nature of your cover.

For example, throughout the coronavirus pandemic, many organisations moved to working from home. This has meant they've no use for their office space or even the amount of staff they employ. As a result, they may be paying for premiums that are no longer relevant.



In contrast, if you've grown substantially and now have more staff than when you initially took insurance out, you may not be covered in the event of a claim.

Partnering with an insurance broker prevents this. We ensure your cover scales with you. By staying in the loop of your opportunities and threats, we're able to offer real-time support and tell you what cover you actually need.

CONTRACTS CAN COST YOU

We know how clients can be. Some want you to sign contracts on their terms instead of following your standard statement of work process. Trouble is, client Ts & Cs are a risk magnet. Unknown contract stipulations can expose you to all kinds of breaches to your current cover. Fall out with your client, and you could find yourself struggling to recuperate the losses.

For example, say you're a web design agency and you sign a contract with a client that demands a certain delivery date. The client keeps asking for amendments that you hadn't predicted and unfortunately the delivery date is pushed back. All of a sudden, the client doesn't want to pay, and you're faced with a difficult situation.

You either take the financial hit or suffer reputational damage by attempting to claw the money back. But not when you have a broker by your side. We can review the insurance terms within your contracts to make sure that they're reasonable and that you can easily comply with them. If the relationship sours, we get insurers in early so you're less likely to find yourself out of pocket (they may fill the gap in any amounts owed) or in a long, drawn-out legal process with your client.

This is especially useful when you're working with international clients. US client contracts, for instance, can mean you're now beholden to the US court of law in the event of a breach.

KEEP CLEAR OF PITFALLS

A close relationship between you and your broker keeps you from tripping over jargon. Let's face it, insurance is dense. As a result, some providers will sell you cover that you don't need without you even realising. That's not the case when you work with us. We only recommend what's relevant, as well as suggest ways to scale it up.

We also offer support when clients require you to take out cover for a project or campaign that you're supporting them with. In these instances, we help you to benchmark your exposure and reduce the level of cover your client has requested.

We do this by negotiating on your behalf and leveraging our expertise to address their concerns.

Finally, a closely partnered broker will keep their eye on any legislation changes and trends to see how they impact you from a risk protection perspective. We know you aren't going to purchase every available cover initially, which is why we try to alert you to any threats you may face as you grow.

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A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR BROKER KEEPS YOU FROM TRIPPING OVER JARGON.

PARTNER WITH US

Protect your agency from pitfalls and apply RiskBox's expertise. We're able to identify the most relevant coverage for you and ensure you don't pay a penny more for something you don't need.

Our team will act as an extension of your business, keeping you protected from risks at all times. What's more, we'll encourage you to review other insurance options should you grow and expand your offering, or shrink and focus on a niche.

Sound good? Speak to a member of the team by calling us on **0161 533 0411** or by emailing **info@riskboxuk.com**.



RiskBox