

Agency selection - is there another way?

By  Angelika Kempe

8 Nov 2019

To comply with internal procurement policies, brands are compelled to regularly put their marketing and advertising business out to pitch.



Image credit: Agence Olloweb on Unsplash.

This applies even if they have successful partners in place. It's time to consider alternatives to this time-consuming and costly practice.

The pitching process

Marketing directors know the drill: every three to five years, they start a formal tender process to choose new marketing service providers. Often, they do so under the watch of an internal procurement team that is under massive pressure – due to a lack of both resources and insight.



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This does not bode well for the outcome, given that marketing procurement is particularly nuanced and requires a unique understanding.

Companies have two broad pitch options: a “do-it-yourself” approach or using a pitch consultant. The DIY method works out in the end, but often only after the company has released the same tender several times without selecting – at a steep cost in time and resource to client and bidders alike.



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There is an added credibility risk to brands when companies don't get the bidding process right the first time. The main culprits are misalignment between procurement and marketing teams, and changes in the scope of the work put out to pitch.

What about pitch consultants? The good ones have a thorough understanding of the client's business, the industry and the supplier landscape needed to ensure a rigorous process, that facilitates solid governance and an independent evaluation process.

Yet this approach is not necessarily cost-efficient or suitable for every company or pitch.

The biggest failing of pitches, even with the benefit of an expert pitch consultancy, is sustainability. The average industry length of client and agency tenure points to a flaw.

Ironically, the test drive principles of 'try before you buy' – so fundamental to marcomms practices – is not deployed by the industry itself and therein lies the challenge.

My years of experience in pitch facilitation has often led me to question the need for complex, costly and time-consuming pitch processes. And, in the context of a frail economy, smarter, cost-efficient solutions are not only relevant but essential.



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I have, therefore, started to move away from the traditional pitch scorecard towards a more sustainable matchmaking model – applying metrics, alternate insights and experience to pair the right client with the right supplier.

Introducing the matchmaking model

There is some science to this: well-established methods such as the enneagram or insight tools are used for team selection. This increases the chance of success and shortens the time taken to onboard agency personnel.

But it's also about pairing the client with an agency that is right for its profile, maturity and complexity.

The landscape is increasingly competitive, and a good pairing of the jockey and horse wins the race. And, increasingly, in tough-trading conditions, the win and sustainable value often lie in a workhorse agency rather than the trophy-ware of a high-profile agency.



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My early experience with the matchmaking model has been encouraging. It is quick, has a high success rate and the skills of the agency and the client are typically well-matched and builds in the crucial element of trial – the essential courtship before the nuptials.

The matchmaking process is based on a deep understanding and intimate knowledge of how the client operates and which agency would be a good fit with its approach to collaboration, the deliverables and quality it is seeking, and the sort of agency relationship it needs.



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I still advocate a fuller, more rigorous process for high-resource, high-spending clients, but find that the matchmaking alternative is ideal for the more innovative, small-to-medium spenders. It is a sound alternative for those seeking more innovation and less convention in managing supplier selection.

Apart from the benefit of sustainable pairing, it is low-risk because marketing and procurement still get the final say. And materially, it saves two scarce resources – time and money.

ABOUT ANGELIKA KEMPE

The marketing and media industry is no stranger to Angelika who has two decades of experience in brand and agency management. Angelika has a Diploma in Marketing and Advertising from the Institute of Management (IMM) and is an accredited facilitator, mediator and negotiator through AFSA (Arbitration Facilitation South Africa). Her strengths include managing all media agency types related to all commercial and process-based issues, with a special focus on contract negotiation, performance management and good governance.

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