

What you should know about pitching in advertising

 By [David Edworthy](#)

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If you're a brand, here is what you need to know about pitching in advertising: Pitches be crazy.



This is the first of a two part series about pitching in advertising. I'll be sharing all the things your advertising agency is probably not telling you. I'll also share insights on the pitch process, help you with judging creative work, and stop your brand from stifling the creative process. Let's get into it...

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If you have been in the advertising industry for any amount of time, you would have probably heard of the story of when Peter Marsh pitched on British rail. The story goes that British Rail - a very proud, stiff upper lip company arrived at the offices of the agency, ABM, where they were greeted with a very disengaged, couldn't-care-less receptionist. Instead of getting the royal red carpet laid out - as it was by the other agencies - they were placed in the waiting room filled with overflowing ashtrays, and ignored for about forty minutes.

Now, by this stage, the top brass of British Rail are furious and about to walk out. Enter Peter Marsh, he looks at them and

says “That’s how the British Public see British rail. Now let’s see what we can do to put it right”. ABM went on to win British Rail’s business - the most profitable account in the UK.

Advertising pitches have become a source of legends. I just wish that the legends went more like this one. Instead, I’ve seen creatives overworked; I’ve heard of people dying from stress and exhaustion; and, very rarely, have I seen the bravery and honesty of Peter Marsh.

So here are the insights for you, the client, if you’re thinking of going out to pitch.

1. Don’t go out to pitch

Trust is far more important than a contract and if you keep switching agencies, how will you ever build that up? Rather spend the time fixing the relationship with your agency - it’s going to make them work harder because your success is theirs.

Also - here’s a little secret of what happens when big clients leave an agency. The advertising industry is small, which means that when you leave your agency, that agency has to retrench their staff. Where do those people go to find work? The agency who has just picked up your business.



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But now - instead of you fixing the relationship that you had with those people in the first place, you have a bunch of people working on your account who resent your brand for putting them through all the stress they’ve been through over the last few months. And these are supposed to be the people who love your brand the most. Good luck on getting them to be creative.

2. No unpaid pitch work

In theory, I think that this is something that we all agree on...and yet, I constantly see clients either not paying for a pitch, or completely underpaying.

If you are truly looking for new talent, how can you expect the next up-and-coming creative genius to compete with multinational agencies and stand a chance. They just don't have the resources.

And then there is this problem...you go out to pitch and if you're a profitable business, your agency is going to throw every resource at that pitch. For two or three weeks, you've got everyone in the agency working themselves to death to make sure that they win the business. They are all pulling all-nighters just for that two hour presentation where they show you what they can do.

The problem is that it is not what they can do all the time. At the end of the pitch, they're exhausted. They need time to recover. And then, when it comes to the first presentation after they're won the pitch - you can't understand why everything just isn't as polished or good.

There should be a new rule to pitching...you're not allowed to have more than one team working from 9-5 over a week. Because what that team is able to deliver (which will be great) is probably what you're going to get when they become your agency.

3. How to judge work

So there are a lot of metrics that clients are using nowadays to judge work and that's great. But there is one area that I believe is missed and it's because it is probably the hardest to judge...especially in a pitch when the work might not be as polished as it normally would be when the work is going out to market.

For this reason, I believe it is imperative to have a creative consultant as part of your judging panel. In essence, this person is a creative director who has worked at various agencies in various mediums and has seen ideation happen from when it is just a scamp on a piece of paper to being a full-blown production. The biggest reason you need a creative director is this, you might not be able to polish a turd, but I have seen many agencies who know how to package one. A good creative director will be able to pick that up. Metaphorically speaking - of course.

They have been trained for years to spot good ideas - the ones that have legs - and bomb the ones that don't. They should, most of the time, be able to spot an idea that has had a lot of money thrown behind it to make it look better than it is. And this will also help in the process of bigger agencies being able to spend more money on a pitch than a smaller one can.

4. Remember why your agency won

This is one of the strangest phenomena that happens after the pitch. And I'll tell it from an agency's perspective. You worked your butt off for weeks on end to win the pitch. When the news hits the agency that you won, you walk around high-fiving people and strutting around like you're on the set of *Madmen*. This is why you got into advertising...finally, a client has recognised your creative genius.

You meet with the new marketing director who is always ex-agency and you go back to your creatives with a promise of "This one gets us, guys". The first brief comes, for some odd reason - they're not going with the work that won the pitch - even though they all loved it, but that's okay...this time things are going to be different.

The brainstorm goes well, ideas flow back and forth, your team are enthusiastic, you present - people in the room are laughing, there is a good atmosphere...and then you get the debrief. You're pushed back. You go back to the drawing board, come up with more great ideas, present to a room of eager minds - again, everyone is happy, but you're pushed back. Again. And again. And again. Until you finally find yourself presenting work that is compromised in every way and the great, brave creative product that won the pitch is somehow forgotten.

5. Don't make the same mistakes that you did with your old agency

Concentrate on the relationship. Don't give unreasonable deadlines. Spend time and money building that trust. Make your agency the biggest fans of your brand and it will show in the work. And if you have a Peter Marsh level of honesty - reward it with your business.

With that all said, take a look at the video where I review the type of work that you get to make when your agency and client trust each other. It's ballsy. It's brave. And it's an ad you'll be talking about this weekend. If you like what you see, subscribe, like and share. Let's improve the creative output we see in advertising.

ABOUT DAVID EDWORTHY

I'm a freelance copywriter who has worked for some of the biggest advertising agencies in the country. I have experience in above and below the line advertising - having won awards, locally and internationally, for both. I think that the ad industry, as it stands, is broken and it can't be fixed using the same thinking that got us into this problem. Things are going to change. I want to be a part of that.

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