

When the pitch is a small part of the whole

 By Johanna McDowell

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Long known as pitch consultants with expertise valued by agencies and marketers, remote work has brought to light the broad range of services intermediaries bring to the table, and it's a feast for clients.



Source: www.pexels.com

Never before has value versus cost been more important to marketers and agencies. The global pandemic forced all industry sectors to assess the services they invest in and determine how much of their spend would provide adequate return in investment during the uncertainty.

Interestingly, a trend we've seen in the sector is that intermediaries are being called on from prior to pitch and through onboarding, right up to ongoing guidance. While this holistic approach has always been on offer, it appears that operating remotely due to Covid-19 and its restrictions has made agencies and marketers look to intermediaries to confirm their requirements and operational choices.

A deeper look into the timing of this phenomenon shows that the role of the intermediary has blossomed with the uptake of video conferencing and few face-to-face meetings. Because the "middle men" have built their businesses and reputation on their thorough knowledge of all parties involved in a pitch, few are better placed to give the guidance required to all parties.

As the go-between with a vested interest in every relationship succeeding, we are seeing a need for intermediaries to be on call for at least the first 60 days of a relationship. Because of their prior understanding of what each party does and how best to guide them, clients have shown a greater trust in the online relationship with their chosen experts.

Trust in the leap to online

While many businesses took time to build up trust in online communications as the pandemic hit hard, intermediaries were in the privileged position of already having an intimate knowledge of those they were working with. They felt comfortable enough to pick up the phone at any time or Zoom in to a discussion, even on the difficult issues like contract negotiations and casting their nets wider to attract companies not previously used.

It is this trust that we have seen grow through the difficulties Covid brought. In fact, one project that went surprisingly well for the IAS was a global pitch from a London-based firm looking to South Africa to meet its requirements in 17 countries in Africa.

Owing to previous dealing with the agencies, those put forward were tried, tested and known to us. There was not a question that couldn't be answered for the client, when they needed the answer.

On reflection, I believe the trust that we are sharing across our sectors now is not new, but it is more profound. Clients who have always known they could trust the process didn't realise just how much they could rely on it until they had no other choice.

Years of meeting, working with and understanding the people and processes in our industry has paid off in a closer, more empathic relationships and a renewed trust we may not have had without technology making things more personal.

And if that isn't as unpredictable as it is serendipitous, I don't know what is.

ABOUT JOHANNA MCDOWELL

MD of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS), and partner in Scopen Africa, with a background that includes being on both the agency and the client side of the fence, Johanna McDowell is well-placed to offer commentary on marketing and advertising in the South African and international contexts. She built her career in marketing and advertising since 1974, holding directorship in both SA and British advertising agencies. She was MD of Grey Phillips Advertising in 1988.
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