

# Global survey indicates low uptake in request for proposals (RFP's)

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Boutique PR agency owners are finding value in building professional networks that are local and global. Having been made possible by technology and social media, these networks give PR agencies the opportunity to brainstorm with their peers, share best practice on a global level and offer clients a macro perspective on PR / media industry-related issues.



PR Boutiques International offered just such an opportunity recently, conducting a survey by among its member agencies worldwide. Members were asked about the request for proposals (RFP's) process and to indicate if they always participate in RFPs, sometimes, or almost never, and to provide reasons.

An overwhelming 80% said they almost never participate, with only 13% almost always and the remainder, sometimes.

The argument among the majority of agency owners who almost never participate was that briefs are often not clear because clients do not understand their own requirements. Clients also tend to have a blanket approach, targeting agencies of all scope and size without first determining each agency's services and approaching those with the right criteria.

In other countries, the RFP remains a legal requirement, and while the client may well enjoy the relationship with their existing agency, an RFP demonstrates to the necessary departments and sometimes government, that the agency is competitive and is giving others the opportunity to tender. Sometimes cost-effectiveness is a motivator for an RFP.

Many agencies taking part in the survey stated that relationships remain key in their industry. Building a business or brand relies on the strength of a PR agency's relationships. Many agencies were quick to point out that a great deal of new business is derived from referrals, networking and repeat business where one client moves to another industry or competitor, taking their PR agency with them. Synergy is crucial to a successful working relationship and it is only possible to determine whether there is synergy by a face-to-face meeting between a client and a PR agency.

And what about the time and costs associated with planning and strategising for these often lengthy RFPs only to find the contract awarded to another agency and your own concepts being adopted or exploited? There is no compensation for the time that has been invested in creating a pitch.

Interestingly, the member agencies that indicated they almost always respond to RFPs are situated in Europe and the Middle East. They said they derive most of their new business from RFP's and believe that this is a great team-building exercise, as well as an opportunity to benchmark themselves against competitors, due to the detailed feedback they receive from clients after the process, about where they missed the mark or could improve.

This feedback indicates that in certain geographical regions, RFP's work because clients seem to give good briefs and agencies are encouraged to pitch themselves against others, making for an exciting industry that is always pushing for even more creativity and innovative thinking, while continually raising the bar.

As a South African agency, Grapevine has often entered RFP processes without even an acknowledgement of receipt. We are also often asked to submit a quote without knowing the brief, but we don't offer a one-size-fits-all package. Our PR campaigns are tailor-made according to each client's business and financial needs. We believe that understanding a client's requirements is critical to creating the right PR proposal and only experience will enable an agency to extract enough information in a single briefing session by asking the right questions.

Fortunately South Africa has companies that help to streamline the RFP process, such as the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company, which assists clients with drafting a concise brief and then shortlisting advertising, marketing and PR agencies to target for RFPs to prevent a waste of time, effort and money.

In conclusion, PR Boutiques International continues to believe that identifying the best fit must be part of the RFP process. When the client and agency both agree on the potential of the relationship upfront, agencies can cut to the chase giving clients what they are looking for in the proposal document without expensive or unnecessary trimmings.

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Managing director of Grapevine Communications and member of PR Boutiques International.

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