

IPA/ISBA Pitch Principles March 2011

There has been a lot of debate about pitching of late.

So much so that the IPA and ISBA decided to collectively look at the matter in detail and find out what its members were thinking.

We conducted research amongst clients and agencies to determine current practices and attitudes to pitching and importantly to establish the real costs of pitching.

The results about pitch costs were alarming, for many reasons, not least the discrepancy between what clients and agencies actual think pitching costs.

To give you some idea, clients perceive agency pitch costs to be in the region of £31k for a large pitch. However the reality is that it actually costs agencies more like £178K (approx 99 man days).

What also emerged was that pitches are increasingly becoming longer, more inefficient and more expensive than ever before. Little has fundamentally changed with the pitching model in a business that has changed dramatically.

However the research also revealed that 58% of clients recognise the need for a new type of pitch process and further investigation by ISBA established a core of visionary clients already experimenting with different pitch approaches.

Therefore we formed a task force which consisted of senior marketeers, agency CEO's and chaired by Mark Lund – former advertising chief and now leader of the nation's biggest advertiser COI - to gain a collective view of how we could help improve the current landscape by creating some guidelines for new ways of pitching.

OPENNESS & TRANSPARENCY: Both sides need to be honest about the opportunity.

Transparency is imperative all the way through the process, generally in most pitches there is an unnecessary level of secrecy. Why keep the names and number of agencies, budgets, time frames and resource a secret?

By opening this up agencies can make informed decisions on pitching and clients are assured of full participation and a more straight forward pitch journey.

Clarity of the opportunity is key from the outset, the scope of work, the timescale, the commercial opportunity, the reason it's moving, and the individuals involved.

For fairness and consistency all agencies should be briefed on the pitch at the same time and place. Quality of briefing can vary significantly from first to last meeting so a single briefing platform ensures consistency of message, saves time for the client and encourages senior level participation.

RESPECT: Treat pitching with the respect it deserves. It requires senior involvement/authority from both sides from day one. Don't just bring the decision makers in at the end of the process. Only with senior client involvement from day one can the agencies be judged fairly.

Design a proper process that gets your housekeeping in order before the pitch.

Consider paying a fee to an agency as a sign of good intent.

Agencies should take care not to ambulance chase or pursue every opportunity to pitch published in the press. Be discerning about what the agency pitches for, be clear about what opportunities are right for the agency business.

BRAVERY : Both clients and agencies need to be brave when managing a pitch process. Clients need to say no if agencies try and squeeze last minute onto pitch lists – a well planned pitch does not need last minute additions.

Agencies need to be brave and firm with clients and push back if there is little clarity in or the brief is poor or if timescale are too tight or indeed too protracted.

Clients should feel confident that it's OK to eliminate agencies along the way if they really don't have a chance – it's not an imperative to finish with three or four agencies, when you are sure it will be one of two. It's fine to consider cutting down the pitch list to two after say, the tissue session if it feels like the right decision.

Clients need to be able to say no to an agency and not feel bad about it. If the incumbent agency is not in with an equal fighting chance then it's perfectly acceptable not to invite them to re-pitch, you will end up saving them a lot of time and money.

Also, there may be alternative ways of pitching that could be more efficient and effective for the task in hand, seeking expert advice from a specialist who could advise on other options.

Remember always be principled and always challenge bad practice.

ACCESS AND NAVIGATION: Is an imperative. Clients have to understand that for the pitch to be successful they need to make themselves available for the pitching agencies. Clients and agencies need to have the process clearly mapped out from the outset in terms of numbers, timings, people involvement and location. Who is the decision maker, and what is that decision based on.

Treat all pitching agencies as if they were the incumbent. Allow them to navigate their way through your business in the same way.

TIMING: Pitches can often go on too long. Set a timescale and stick to it where possible.

A creative pitch in four weeks may not always be possible but could be worth aiming for. Contemporary practice seems to indicate that pitches are elongating and this causes uncertainty and is costly to business. Many pitches are elongated by lengthy negotiations which should be contained within the pitch timeframe.

(Some pitches do take longer particularly *Media and any pitch governed by the Official Journal of the European Journal.*)

POWER OF COLLECTIVE ACTION – encourage both parties to sign up to the IPA/ISBA mutual pre-pitch NDA and be cautious of clients and agencies who are not willing to respect these principles.

At the very least remember the 5 P's of pitching:

- Process
- Preparation
- Professionalism
- Partnership
- Payment