

Twenty tips to a polished pitch process

 By [Johanna McDowell](#)

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When pitching for new business, in essence most agencies offer similar services. However, a polished pitch that sell your services indicating how you will meet your client's needs, stands a far better chance of creating a lasting impression on the client. The following 20 tips on handling the new business pitch may help your agency to stand out from the rest of the contenders and ensure your pitch wins the business.

1. Don't proceed with a pitch without knowing the full scope of the work versus the revenue content. By knowing the full scope of the work as well as the budget constraints, an agency better understands what the client wants and what they need in the future.
2. The working team should be represented in the chemistry stage and at the final presentation in order to build a rapport with the client. Clients buy the team as well as the agency.
3. There must always be access to the client, which should be facilitated via a consultant. How a client behaves during a pitch process will indicate the behaviour during the course of the relationship.
4. The theatre of a pitch presentation can be as critical as the content. What might be "over the top" for some clients might be "understated" in another's view. Decide on how to present your pitch during the chemistry stage.
5. Strategic and creative execution disconnects are the number one pitch killer. To avoid this, an agency pitch team must ensure once the creative output has been finalised, the strategic team review it and ensure their strategy correlates with the creative output.
6. Use less PowerPoint presentations and connect more with the audience. Winning an agency pitch has moved on from high tech to high touch. Don't read your slides; read your audience through consistent eye contact.
7. Agencies will always push boundaries, and "boy scouts" don't always win. Respond to the brief as the client has wanted but then show the client what you think they really need. As long as you have demonstrated that you have listened to the initial brief, you will be able to pave the way for the work you really believe the client needs.
8. Credentials should take no longer than 10 minutes of a one-hour pitch. Period.
9. No-one cares about an agency's philosophy. Avoid the self-indulgent "chatter" that can accompany a discussion

around what the agency's internal belief system is.

10. Make sure you know what the client wants and give it to them, before you give them what they need.
11. Redefine partnership. Agencies always want to partner clients but often the client does not have the time to be a real partner. Define what partnership means for you and your agency. Accept that sometimes partnering will not be possible but make the assessment of the client early on.
12. The work and the idea must win. Be prepared to show solutions.
13. Procurement people are often fixed on price, not content. Consultants must assist procurement officers through one-on-one training.
14. Agency position during the pitch process does not matter and has no bearing on the client's final decision. You can be in position one or six and it will make no difference as long as the pitch process does not exceed two days.
15. Be careful with alternative media. It can win pitches but is still regarded, by some clients, as supplementary to classical media. Be sure to make the case for digital within the client context.
16. Non-advertising disciplines such as PR, digital and direct marketing can now take lead position in an advertising campaign.
17. Global campaigns have lost their lustre. Many consider that the era of the global pitch is over.
18. The size of an agency network no longer matters. It is what it can deliver and where that counts.
19. Always obtain data feedback after a pitch - it is your right.
20. It is OK to pull out of a pitch but don't be too hasty in your decision to pull out because things change constantly during a pitch process. Also remember that the later you pull out, eg at final pitch stage, the more difficult you make life for the client and the consultant.

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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