

# To pitch or not to pitch: chasing shiny new things

By  Danette Breitenbach

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New business is an important part of the success of any agency. Historically agencies put a big emphasis on pitching. It's exciting and winning a big client can be life changing for an agency.



Supplied. "Chasing shiny new things at the expense of current clients can be the downfall of an agency," says Mike Schaffer, CEO of Echo Factory in Pasadena, California, US

"Winning a big client can alter the course of an agency, changing the entire landscape of your business, but not always in the way you anticipate – or want," says Mike Schaffer, CEO of [Echo Factory](#), an award-winning advertising agency in Pasadena, southern California, US.

"Chasing shiny new things at the expense of current clients can be the downfall of an agency," he adds.

## Balancing growth with news business

"You must ask a number of questions: How will this win affect your current team moving forward? Will your current Tier 1 client no longer be the Tier 1 client? What does that mean? Does your strategy, creative and media team stay on the current Tier 1 client or move to the new business? And how will this affect the growth of your current clients and the work you are doing there? All this needs to be considered," Schaffer says.

“Think about your business. As an agency leader, it is my job to think long term. Ask: Is this going to be good for our business? Is the client going to be happy with us or fire us because we took on a project that wasn't a good fit? I want clients that will be with us for five years and longer, partnering for the long run.

“Pitching on a big client can require all the agency resources being pulled from current clients,” he says.

“Also, top talent love to chase a pitch because there is so much creative freedom, but what about your current clients and growing their business?

“Every agency's challenge is balancing growth with new business,” Schaffer adds.

## **The pitch checklist**

So, if you want to pitch, how do you know it's the right thing for your agency? Schaffer and Echo-Factory have a checklist to determine this.

First on his checklist is the question: Do we as an agency think that we can help grow this business? “This is the guiding light and top of the checklist. Only if the answer is yes then we go to the next number on the list.”

Next, Schaffer says, ask: “Do we like the client and does the client trust us?” He says you usually find this out during the pitch process. “It is during this process that you will determine if the client is willing to listen to you, and you to them. If the answer is yes for both parties, and there is trust between the two, then you can decide if you be able to collaborate.”

If the answer to the above is no, then the agency should bow out. While this is not uncommon, he says the excitement of taking on a large client is so extreme that it is difficult to say no, but you must if this is the case.

“As an agency, you need to ensure that your business is healthy, that you are growing your current clients' business and this means that sometimes you have to turn down what seems to be an opportunity, but it is in actuality not healthy for your agency.”

He adds that when clients and agencies do not work well together it leads to frustrations internally that create a toxic environment. “Currently it is difficult to keep good talent, and no one wants a bad agency or to work for one.”

But if there is trust, then the next step is to make sure that the goals of the brand and agency are aligned. “What are they looking for... a strategist partner, a creative partner, to increase media... and can your agency provide this.”

Following this, if you compete against other agencies, and make your pitch, then hopefully you win the business.

“Then it's about getting the right team in place and making sure the client knows who the team is. This usually already happens during the pitch process. Then you need to spend time to get to understand and learn the business,” Schaffer says.

## **Be a smart businessperson**

Considering all the above, Schaffer and Echo-Factory believe strongly that an agency can do well if they can keep their clients for longer and keep their top talent on their top clients instead of always trying to win new business.

But it can take a lot to say no to what looks like a big opportunity. “Not all opportunities are good for your agency - we learnt this over a long time. You must also be a smart businessperson,” Schaffer says.

## **ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH**

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