

Big fish, small pond vs small fish, big pond

 By [Rolf Akermann](#)

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I am sure many in the industry will read this article and nod their heads in agreement. Many small agencies have been responsible for building huge brands in the South African market across all categories, only to see the business move to the large agencies.

Here is my theory why this happens so often: Firstly, it is not very "hip" for a marketing director/manager to say that his brand is handled by an agency and then having to explain that it's a small one in "Pitsonderwater", compared to saying that its with the largest agency in the country. In a way, it reflect its importance by having a big name handling the brand.

A sense of security

There is also a certain security for a marketing person responsible for selecting an agency, in that if they select one of the top agencies, they feel assured that it was the right decision. No blame will be levelled at the marketing person responsible should anything go wrong, as they selected "the best". It takes a very gutsy marketing manager/director to select a small agency for their brand. An example of this was the move of the ABSA account to a virtually non-existent agency.

Secondly, many believe that their brand, having grown so astronomically, now deserves a big agency. The fact that the brand is extremely profitable and growing in market share continuously does not seem to enter the formula. The small agency was also costing the client substantially less than he now has to fork out for the smoke and mirrors of the big agencies.

Is the passion there?

What happens next? The client with a relatively small budget ends up with a big agency and therefore very often does not receive the attention they deserve. In a small agency, the compassion and total involvement in the work of all staff reflects in the quality of work delivered. As we all know, the top brass will only be seen at the pitch and never again when it comes to the big agencies.

There is another side to this coin: At times, small agencies win clients from big agencies. Why? If you're not a VW or BMW or whichever W, you will find yourself being often serviced by the least qualified staff in the big agencies. This is the niche for smaller agencies. From MD to tea lady, everybody is involved in their clients' brands and is passionate about it, because their livelihood depends on it.

Small means able to adapt and manoeuvre

What really happens in a big agency? I was part of Lintas South Africa, a sizable agency, and personally responsible for the Sanlam account which had a multi-million budget. In reality there were only six people who were involved on a daily basis on the Sanlam account. Big agencies are very similar to any corporate. Everything takes time with all the red tape, whereas a small agency can turn things around very quickly.

To the small agencies out there, congratulations on what you've done and keep on doing it. To the marketing managers/directors, **BIG** is not always better...

ABOUT ROLF AKERMANN

Passionate Marketing / Brand Strategist with substantial industry experience - Thrives on building and growing successful brands...

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