



Ending the Traditional Pitch Mania

Adopting smarter ways to conduct agency reviews and new business pitches.

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I've seen it all, it seems. I'll bet you have, too. The endless RFPs. The RFPs from hell. The poorly run ones. The ones filled with regrets and disappointments on both sides. If you are an advertiser, you've probably run many agency reviews in your career, hoping to find the right agency partner for a new assignment, or to land a new agency of record. If you are with an agency, new business pitches are an essential part of fueling growth. So, if advertisers and agencies are going through this matching process on a regular basis, why—in the name of the advertising gods—are we struggling to evolve the traditional, slow, painful, and inefficient pitch?

Humorously, Toronto-based shop Zulu Alpha Kilo launched the website **smarterpitch.com** to challenge advertisers and agencies to reconsider how they handle pitches, combined with a new presumed-fictional video called, "The World's Worst RFP." This parody video follows another hilarious one they produced three years earlier called, "Say No to Spec," calling out that other professions like architects, personal trainers, and accountants don't give away their ideas to promote themselves. In this new spot, we witness the RFP from hell: six months, 25 agency participants, and four rounds of creative specs. In the fictional spot, a consulting firm beats the traditional incumbent agency, justifying the win as a result of demonstrating unmatched

capabilities in "data, deep data, big data" and "low-ball negotiations," and coming short of becoming the client's new AOR. It's time for change.

> **Smarterpitch.com** offers a reasonable checklist of best practices for both advertisers and agencies to put into immediate practice.

For Advertisers:

- 1. Identify the reasons to run an agency pitch and be thoughtful about the agencies you invite.*
- 2. Don't be robotic in your solicitation to agencies. Be human. Pick up a phone. Have a conversation.*
- 3. Do your homework on the shops you might like to invite to pitch. Then invite the top five or six shops.*
- 4. Hire a reputable search consultant to help determine the best agencies to invite, and to run a thorough, efficient, and fair process.*
- 5. Map out the whole pitch process and clearly communicate expectations for each step.*
- 6. Spec creative turns your pitch process into a beauty contest that won't provide a true reflection of the agency you're about to hire – #SayNoToSpec.*
- 7. Keep a level playing field for the agencies. Clearly define the rules*

of engagement. Outline the consequences if an agency breaks them.

8. Remember that chemistry and “fit” is the most important factor to a successful agency-client relationship. Get to know the people who would be on your account.

9. If you really want to see creative work from your top agencies, give the agencies a real, live project, collaborate with them during creative development, and compensate them as though they were already your partner.

10. Phones down in the meeting! Even without spec, agencies put in hundreds of hours into preparing for a pitch. Be gracious and you’ll get 110% from the agency you do hire.

11. Ask yourself if you can’t work things out with your existing agency. The pitch process is expensive and time-consuming. Be sure you’re prepared to go through with it.

For Agencies:

1. Know your strengths. If a client is holding a pitch for a big shop, and you’re a small team, don’t waste your time.

2. Be selective with the pitches you participate in. Automated “To whom it may concern” invites likely won’t lead to a true agency-client partnership.

3. Ask how many agencies are pitching—and how many will be shortlisted. Too many in either category is a huge red flag.

4. Find out if the client is working with an agency search consultant. Ask around to determine his or her reputation.

5. Understand the full pitch process and all the steps required of you during the pitch.

6. Spec creative puts your agency into an expensive cycle that diverts resources from paying clients—#SayNoToSpec.

7. Make sure you’re competing on a level playing field. Know the consequences for agencies that break the rules.

8. Ask the client questions about their business and what they’re looking for—and listen to their answers.

9. Show your personality. Be passionate. Letting what makes you different shine through will go a long way to helping both parties determine true “fit.”

Source: smarterpitch.com

The most compelling point is the need for establishing a “relationship” with a business partner, instead of approaching this as a transactional process. Even though advertisers often rely on automated tools to manage a process otherwise too



Ending the mania: Why the traditional pitch approach is obsolete.

demanding, the process must allow for genuine interactions, open discussions, and authentic chemistry checks that are important to mutually assess each other’s ability to work well together. The website concludes with a healthy reminder, and perhaps one of their most poignant observations: “Before you start looking for an agency, have you made every effort to make it work with your current agency partner? Just like marriage counselling, there are consultants out there who will conduct a relationship evaluation to identify where the gaps are in the agency-client relationship.”

The industry disfunction is still real, but traditional ways of running RFPs are thankfully vanishing slowly but surely. “The World’s Worst RFP” parody might make you laugh or cry. Or both. But it’s spot on. Smart agencies are avoiding poorly managed RFPs—too long, too vague, too costly, too subjective, too transactional, with too many participants—like the plague. They are not to blame; to the contrary. And their clients are realizing that the traditional ways of running RFPs are no longer sustainable practices. Advertisers are also doing increasingly better at assessing their existing agency partnerships, avoiding unnecessary pitches altogether. And when a pitch is inevitable, we know now that there are far smarter and more effective ways to run those and effectively match the right advertisers with the right agencies. As an industry, we simply deserve better. By using common sense best practices, we can do better and contribute to a stronger industry.



If you would like to learn how to drive greater value from your client/agency relationships, consider reading best-seller and industry reference Agency Mania:

<http://bit.ly/agencymania2>

Or, sign up for our complimentary Industry Update:

<http://agencymania.com/subscribe.html>



Bruno Galpois is the co-founder of Agency Mania Solutions, a premier service and technology firm specialized in helping companies realize the transformational value of managed partnerships. Bruno is the author of best-seller “Agency Mania” and the former chair of the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) Client/Agency Committee and a faculty member of the ANA School of Marketing.

Our clients’ continued accomplishments result from cutting-edge practices in the area of client/agency performance evaluations. See how stronger relationships contribute to better marketing.

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