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Advertising pitch market strained by policy and process issues

By  Adam McCleery | 13 August 2025 [0 Comments](#) 

Fatigue, policy-driven reviews, stretched timelines and tough contract terms are fuelling frustration and inefficiency across the pitching market, according to industry stakeholders.

Despite a steady stream of pitch activity across creative and media, industry experts are questioning the necessity, effectiveness and reasoning behind recent account reviews.

According to Jen Davidson, managing partner at Tumblturn, a large portion of pitch activity, particularly in media, is being driven by contract expirations and tenure policies, not just performance shortfalls.

"Contract governance has tightened significantly, with agreements no longer automatically rolling over as they once did," Davidson said.

"It appears that many of these reviews are driven more by contractual obligations tied to tenure periods rather than actual performance issues or capability shortfalls."

Darren Woolley, founder and global CEO at TrinityP3, pointed to a rise in unnecessary pitches initiated to satisfy procurement or contractual policy.

"The irony is that the more high-performing the current relationship, the greater the chance of the marketer moving on with the promise of more," he said.

Woolley said this trend, paired with unrealistic timelines and unclear expectations, is contributing to what he calls "pitch fatigue", a growing disillusionment among both marketers and agencies.

TrinityP3's research reveals most national reviews stretch three to four months, though global and complex briefs often drag beyond 12 months.

While a well-run pitch can be concluded in just four weeks, delays are frequently caused by internal misalignment and shifting stakeholder involvement.

In some cases, marketers underestimate the time investment required to run a process, leading to poor communication and agency dissatisfaction.

In others, stakeholder changes mid-process or lack of cross-functional alignment, from marketing to legal, procurement and finance, create further delays and shifting expectations.

Kim Hamilton, CMO at OMG Australia, noted that marketers and agencies alike are increasingly feeling the pinch.

"Pitching is a significant investment of time and resources for everyone involved, both clients and agencies, so it's important to set the process up for success from the start," she said.

"Burnout and capacity issues for clients, especially if they have underestimated the analysis required, has become more frequent."

Clarity and alignment from the outset, on scope, selection criteria and value expectations, are the most effective tools to mitigate inefficiencies, Hamilton said.

But in practice, alignment isn't always achieved.

Both Hamilton and Woolley cited cases where evaluation criteria shifted late in the process, often due to new stakeholders coming in or unclear internal decision-making frameworks.

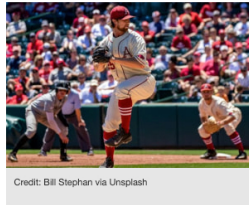
Another tension point lies in contract terms and conditions.

Woolley said agencies often face aggressive demands in pitch documentation, such as IP assignments without compensation or liabilities for decisions made by clients, particularly in media.

In some cases, these clauses are embedded in early-stage documents such as NDAs or tender agreements, with agencies unaware of their implications until later in the process.

Terms around payment are also under scrutiny.

"The issue of payment terms is a significant one, particularly for independent agencies managing cash flow, where clients have been known to push payment terms to 90 days and



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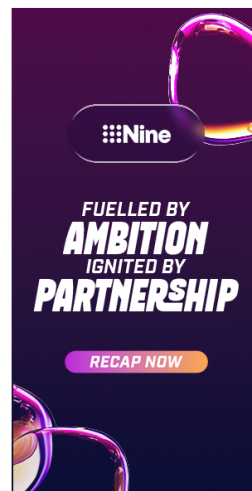
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longer," Woolley said.

Woolley said this was a serious issue for independent agencies managing cash flow.

Hamilton echoed the sentiment, urging clients to apply the same scrutiny to media budget management as they do to agency fees.

"Media billings are one of the largest cost centres a business has, yet often receive far less interrogation," she said.

"An agency should be maximising every cent of that investment, driving more working media for the client, and eliminating hidden fees."

Hamilton said transparency here is just as critical as it is in remuneration.

In addition to contractual red flags, agency participation is also impacted by perceptions of process integrity.

Woolley noted that agency shortlists are often influenced by informal referrals or past relationships, leading some participants to suspect pre-determined outcomes.

"Many marketers are inclined to invite agencies recommended to them by industry colleagues and friends or agencies they have worked with previously, which can create a perception that the process has a foregone outcome," he said.

Furthermore, lack of proper debriefs after a pitch, particularly for unsuccessful agencies, compounds dissatisfaction and fatigue.

"When making a final decision, marketers will neglect to provide the unsuccessful agencies with a suitable debrief, beyond simply informing them they are unsuccessful, leaving the agencies feeling they have wasted their time," Woolley said.

Another layer of complexity comes in benchmarking fees, particularly as agencies shift toward output-based pricing models, influenced by automation and AI.

Woolley noted that this evolution is making it harder for marketers to compare costs accurately.

He said fee benchmarking isn't just about hourly rates anymore. It now has to consider deliverables, output value, and the impact of automation.

With the drawbacks of traditional pitch processes becoming more evident, industry leaders are advocating for alternatives.

Hamilton is a proponent of independent agency reviews as a less disruptive option, offering structured assessments of current relationships without the upheaval of a full-market tender.

Woolley's TrinityP3 offers a similar alternative through its Agency Commercial Review, used by marketers satisfied with their agency but still needing to demonstrate diligence.

"This examines the commercial, financial, legal, and performance aspects of the current arrangements and produces a scorecard for both the agency and the marketer," he said.

The review aims to bring structure and intent back to the process with the goal of making pitches fast, focused and flexible.

Despite the pitfalls, not all sentiment is negative.

Hamilton said that when done well, pitches can 'reinvigorate partnerships' and bring clarity and ambition to the forefront.

"It's not just about evaluating the agency's performance today, but about asking a fair and valid question about whether this is the partner that will set us up for success in the years ahead," she said.

However, both Hamilton and Woolley stress that who runs the pitch matters.

Research from TrinityP3 indicates agencies are more satisfied with consultant or marketer-led processes than those led by procurement, which tend to over-index on cost and risk mitigation.

Hamilton said pitch quality directly impacts the energy and trust on both sides and that's what sets the stage for strong, sustainable partnerships post-pitch.

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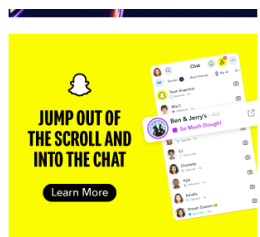
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