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Pitch Paralysis: Why processes are slowing and taking longer

By Ashley Regan | 29 April 2025 0 Comments



Agency pitches are taking longer and getting more complex and the culprit is the increasing involvement of non-marketers, according to consultants.

Only one-third (32.9%) of pitches in the past year ran on schedule, seeing almost two-thirds (60%) of pitches running over time from as little as a few weeks up to over a month, data from TrinityP3's *State of the Pitch 2025* found.

This is an increase from last year's report which saw 44.2% of pitches run on time.

Q25. Was the pitch process delayed or took longer than expected?



Viktor Talashuk via Unsplash



Response	2024	2025
No, it ran on time	32.9%	37.1%
Yes, but only by a few weeks	7.8%	18.6%
Yes, by a month or more	22%	4.3%
Yes, it was significantly delayed	26%	7.1%
Don't know	11.3%	32.9%

More frequent delays are caused by increased complexity of requirements and the increased level of C-Suite involvement at the end of the process, which can seriously delay things because of diary availability and requirements to internally brief the people involved.

There's a sense among some agencies that senior management is usurping the process, TrinityP3 founder and CEO Darren Woolley told *AdNews*.

"Some agencies have suggested that marketers aren't really in control of their own pitches anymore, because senior management came in and changed everything," Woolley said.

Across categories more and more pitches are attracting the attention of local and sometimes global senior management outside of marketing wanting to get involved in the decision.

However they often enter the process late and with a very different set of expectations, causing a decision delay and a massive inconvenience for agencies.

"Their involvement is usually not up front, senior management tend to jump in towards the end, so there's often a need to pause the process so everyone can recalibrate — because, of course, marketers can't just tell their MD to go away," Woolley said.

"Suddenly you've got more people involved — not just marketing, but procurement, finance, legal, corporate comms — and even global execs stepping in with their own priorities."

While executive interest can be positive, it must be managed with care, TrinityP3 managing director Nathan Hodges said.

"The danger is the CEO can be brought in at the last minute and is attracted to what is on the table at the time," Hodges said.

"That can often be a 'shiny' idea but rarely is the strength of the potential relationship evident at that point - this is the most important thing."

Pitch priorities have shifted

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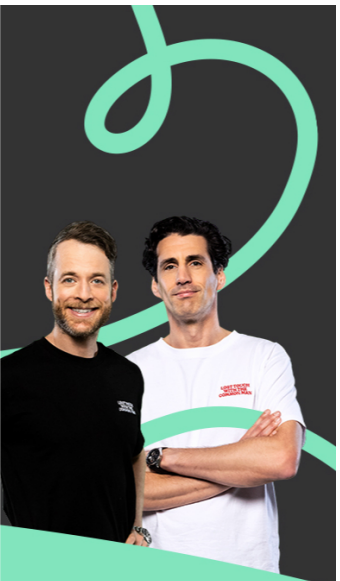
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Woolley points to two major trends driving senior interest: a traditional preference for holding companies, and concern over global agency alignment.

The issue is especially pronounced in local pitches with overseas head offices, now catching the eye of global senior leaders.

"Marketers are more open than ever to independents, but many senior execs only know advertising through the traditional perspective of big networks," he says.

"So often non-marketers come into the process and ask, 'Why aren't we using one of the big four?' And suddenly there's a new conversation about the direction of the pitch.

"On a global basis, non-marketers may be concerned about globally aligned agency preference or strategy alignment with the global brand.

"It's very much a management down view into advertising, rather than being involved in the advertising industry."

One global holdco CEO told AdNews that pitch shortlists are noticeably expanding as clients cast a wider net, increasingly interested in independent agencies.

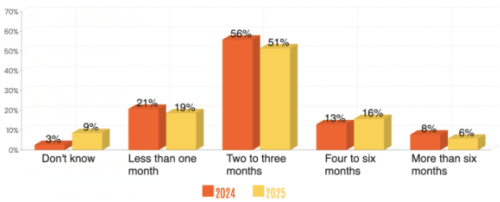
But the complexity of the process is leading some indies to walk away.

One independent agency CEO told AdNews they recently turned down \$1.5 million in potential work.

"The process is becoming so complex and unclear — we've had pitches just stall with no updates. No one knows what's going on anymore," they said.

While the average pitch lasts two to three months from engagement to decision, 22% stretch beyond four months — especially when global execs get involved, The State of the Pitch data revealed.

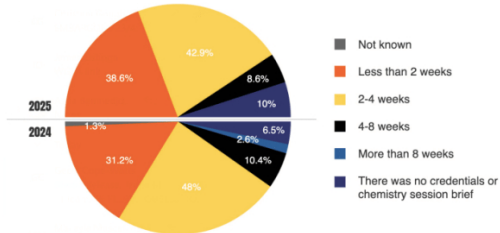
Q24. How long did the pitch process take, from being invited to participate to being appointed in months?



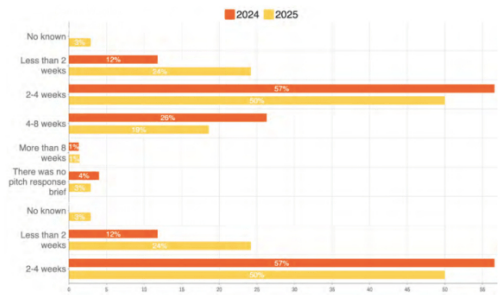
Although pitch windows are getting longer, scheduling of the process remains a sensitive area with agencies often complaining about not being given enough time to respond, or process steps such as chemistry sessions being non-existent.

Around 10% of pitches skipped early stages like credentials or chemistry altogether, the data found.

Q13. How long were you given to respond to a credentials or chemistry session brief?



Q17. How long were you given to respond to the pitch brief (Creative, media or other)?



"They left the pitch until the last minute, so there was only a 3-week turnaround from chemistry to the final pitch. If they'd started the process months earlier, it would have been more respectful to agencies," one agency in the study said

Clients no longer want just the "big idea"; they expect agencies to show commercial thinking, category insight, and real empathy, TrinityP3 general manager Lydia Feely said.

Key expectations that marketers are now looking for, according to Feely, include:

Social media as a core discipline, not an add-on. Social platforms are now expected to be fully integrated into the pitch narrative. Brands want to see social-specific strategy, content ideas, influencer angles, and clear channel rationale — not just media extensions of TVCs.

Brand portfolio thinking. Especially for larger clients, there's growing demand for agencies to demonstrate capability across an entire brand ecosystem — not just the hero brand. Agencies



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must show how they handle brand platforms, differentiation, and portfolio synergy.

Cross-channel cohesion is a must. Clients are favouring agencies that can show seamless creative thinking across paid, owned, and earned channels — particularly how social, digital, PR, and traditional media can work as one storytelling system.

Client empathy and cultural understanding. Agencies that succeed tend to display a strong grasp of the client's internal dynamics, competitive pressures, and category nuances, including cultural insights specific to the Australian market.

Credentials are evolving. Clients now expect pitch decks to include live campaign case studies, data-led results, and proof of integrated thinking — not just a highlight reel. Having a solid, up-to-date brand portfolio included is table stakes.

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