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Pitch: Has the rule changed?

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Adetunji Faleye, Amechi Obiakpu and Godwin Anyebe write on issues around pitches and 'dirty tricks' agencies employ to win pitches in Nigeria's business environment.

Introduction

The issue around pitching for business in the marketing communications industry has continued to generate debate among stakeholders. While it's believed in some quarters that brands still call for pitch, others are of the view that, what is supposed to be on the basis of professional prowess is relegated to a man know man affairs.

It's worthy of note that, a pitch isn't just a means for an agency to pick up some new business, it's also an opportunity for the agency to promote its culture, belief system and ways of working to the client. Without doing that, it's not really a relationship with any chance of longevity, it's a transaction.

For marketers, according to Trinity3.com, the agency pitch creates a fantastic opportunity to take stock of skills and services needed from an agency (or agencies), as well as to glean expert opinion on the brand's market situation and creative opportunities to better meet consumer needs.

Findings shows that, in Europe, some brands impose hefty penalty on agencies for failing to deliver the promised Gross Rating Points (GRPs).

A prognosis that made advertising body in Europe to have initiated the process of drafting a rule book that could help make the pitching process less taxing for the agencies. There are speculations that advertising bodies in India may consider bringing all agencies together and draft guidelines that can make the process more fluid.

Pitch

Speaking on this issue, Akonte Ekine, chief executive, Absolute PR and the Chief Brand Officer, BrandExchange said; "we are in a situation where everybody in the industry seem to be clever than the industry. So, the first thing is that people arrange things and say they are doing pitches, they have made up their minds on what they want, and who they want and have had all sorts of meeting and the person comes and present to make it look like they have done the right thing- so what are they pitching for?"

According to him, "look at the atmosphere in the industry and you will tell me that people are genuinely doing pitching and winning. Or people are saying I have worked with this person before he is here, let me give him the job, I have confidence in him."

While reacting to the issue of pitch fee, Ekine disclosed that, it does not do brand owners any good

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especially with regards to rejection fee. "My summation is that anybody that is calling people for pitch these days based on the pitch fee is doing it at a loss. If somebody sits down in a year and attends ten pitches and losses all, he will make over N7million- just for losing pitches alone then how profitable is that to brand owners- paying you for losing pitch.

"I am an advocate of, if you think I have built a reputation and you want me to offer you a service and approach me for solution to a challenge, I will give you solution. You pay me I will write a proposal for the solution, you pay me for execution. That is the way I work." He noted.

Continuing, he stressed that, the ARCON law that was created and want to be dictating for advertisers, under minding the fact that, there is a business cycle, cash flow cycle need to be looked at, stressing that, you cannot be doing regulatory changes without calling all stakeholders at various levels to table.

"So, for me there are so many issues around the regulation that I usually don't like talking about. Because regulators sometimes wear funny caps forgetting that whatever happens in the industry affect everybody in the industry." He noted.

Also commenting on this issue, Timothy Ogundele, head marketing, Checkers Africa Limited said, "I believe people still attend pitch which is one of the ways to get quality hands to attend to any brand at any given time in terms of projecting the brand to its customers and potential customers through a well-defined and adopted means as highlighted by the proposing agency."

Corroborating Ogundele's view, President of Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN), Osamede Uwubanmwen pointed out that, brands still call for pitching but, the only problem that exist is the regulation around pitching which they don't think is supposed to be. He said that the law said brand must pay agency 1.5 million for coming to pitch for a business.

According to him, "when we argued that, why are we supposed to pay money for people that come for job? The regulatory body responded and said if we don't want them to appear before us, we should ask them for their resume. And I said to them, there's no minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria whose resume is not known to the public but, he or she must appear before the senate. Though, we are not equating them to the senate.

"There are processes for everything, if you tell me that you have five Harvard graduates in your resume, it's when I interface with them that I can confirm that they truly went to Harvard." He noted.

Speaking on the duration that agencies work on brands, he stressed that, brands do appraisal every year and in some cases, agencies do ask for a review of their payment, so also the brands have the right to retain or terminate its contract with agencies if they feel the agencies fail to deliver on promise.

Analysts' opinions

Pitching for business is a crucial skill that entrepreneurs, sales professionals, and anyone looking to secure opportunities must master. Whether one is presenting a product, service, or an entire business concept, an effective pitch can make the difference between success and failure. But are agencies get equal opportunities?

Obinna Inogbo, chief executive officer, Worktainment said, "Even a jobseeker cannot depend solely on advertised vacancies. He or she must tell as many people as possible that they are looking for employment as not all vacancies are advertised. Let us also not forget that a job can be created for someone by an organization.

"Agencies are no different: established agencies are more likely than the not-so established ones to be invited for pitches so what are the latter to do? They have to look for clients differently – by looking inward at their network and telling them about their services to get work or by cold-calling prospective clients."

Interestingly, while most business pitches adhere to ethical standards, there are instances where agencies or organizations may resort to "dirty tricks" to gain a competitive advantage. These tactics are generally deceptive, manipulative, or unfair. Analysts are of the opinion that engaging in such practices can have severe consequences for agency's reputation and legal standing. They said some dirty tricks that agencies or organizations use include misrepresentation of fact.

Instances abound in the industry where false information were presented about services, or company's achievements to create a more favourable impression. This often involve exaggerating capabilities, inflating statistics, or making unsupported claims.

Investigations conducted by Intelligent Unit of MediaConsortium revealed that agencies have also gone to the extent of sabotaging competitors. These do occur by deliberately spreading false or damaging information about competing agencies to undermine their credibility or harm their reputation. This is usually done through anonymous smear campaigns, spreading rumours, or manipulating reviews.

Some agencies employ deliberate undercutting prices to drive competitors out of the market temporarily, with the intention of raising prices once competitors are eliminated. This is anticompetitive and monopolistic behaviour that is frowned upon if detected.

Sadly, agencies leverage confidential information about a potential client or competitor gained through unethical means to have a competitive advantage. This usually involve exploiting personal relationships or using illicitly obtained data.

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There are often times when some agencies have instilled fear or doubt in the minds of potential clients about the reliability or security of their current solutions providers without providing concrete evidence.

Not only that, some fabricate positive testimonials or references to create a false sense of credibility. This can involve creating fictional clients or exaggerating the endorsement of real ones.

Conclusion

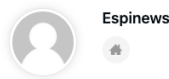
Industry watchers say employing these unethical strategies, or other incentives to deceive decision-makers within a client organization undermines fair competition. They believed that it is essential for agencies to operate with integrity and transparency, adding that engaging in dirty tricks not only harms competitors and clients but, can also have severe consequences for the perpetrator's own reputation and legal standing. They say agencies or organizations that prioritize ethical business practices are more likely to build trust, foster long-term relationships, and ultimately succeed in the marketplace.

Credit: MediaConsortium


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