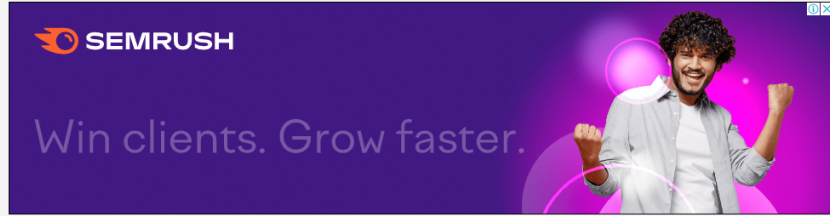


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11-15-2023 | FAST COMPANY EXECUTIVE BOARD

Reviewing the agency review process: There's a better way

Friendly advice for marketers to run a more effective pitch process.



[Images: Adobe Stock / Marharyta Hanhala]

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BY **ROB DAVIS** 4 MINUTE READ

BY **ROB DAVIS**

Modern dating has nothing on the current agency review process. Matches made in heaven certainly happen regularly, but dates from hell remain all too common. Clients are ghosting agencies, turning their metaphorical backs on video pitch presenters by turning cameras off and running cattle calls with dozens of agencies without disclosing budgets or selection criteria. It's a tough world out there—not made easier by those who ignore basic decorum.

We've been fortunate to win several key pitches, but no one bats 1,000. Win or not, it can be painful if the process is unnecessarily cumbersome for the agency and prospective client.

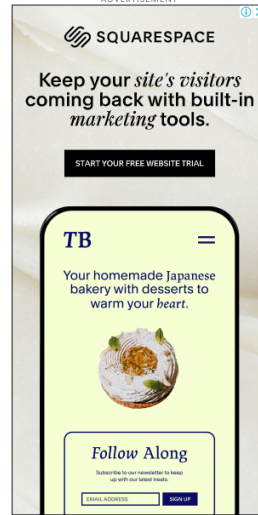
In 2021, an average agency pitched for new business 11 times, spending nearly 2,000 hours of work on pitches, [according to TrinityP3](#).

Thankfully, most client-side organizations understand the work agencies put into pitches, and professional pitch consultants can bring discipline and fairness. But consultants are only involved in roughly 35%-40% of pitches, and there are still marketers who run the process like agencies have limitless time and resources—which is also a financial drain for the potential client. When the process isn't optimized, they don't get the agencies' best work and have to spend time and resources refining their search amidst unclear objectives, questions, and decision-making protocols.

A review costs both clients and agencies significantly, reaching an average total of \$1.2 million for both agencies and clients, according to a recent [joint ANA – AAAA report](#).

While acknowledging agency reviews are the process that makes the advertising world go round, how can it generate better returns and be fairer for everyone? Here's some friendly advice for marketers to run a more effective pitch process.

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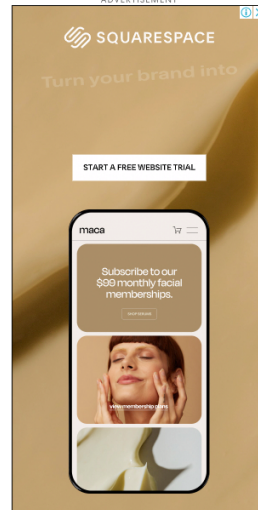


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1. MAKE TIME OF THE ESSENCE

We recently vied for a client's business that involved five different cut rounds, with multiple stages of in-person presentations and assignments. We really liked the company, but simultaneously, starting with 20+ agencies and enduring so many rounds of cutdowns didn't seem like the best use of their—or our—time. A prospect recently told me that the first step was “just an RFI; that doesn't take you guys any time.” Spoiler alert: Even RFIs—the first step typically including many agencies—can require 40+ hours to generate a great response that does the client and potential assignment justice.

To address this, select the right number of agencies to pitch. [Steve Boehler of the Mercer Island Group](#) says that companies should RFI no more than 10 agencies with four or fewer finalists.

2. ATTENTION IS THE GREATEST GIFT

Relationships unravel when partners don't pay attention when the other is talking or don't show up when they're needed most. You wouldn't turn your back to someone speaking to you in person, but that's very much what turning off your camera on Zoom pitches feels like to agency presenters. We don't know if you're paying attention, whether anything we're saying resonates, or how your facial expressions could tell us to tell the story differently or move on to the next slide. In our darkest fears, we imagine you're watching cat videos on YouTube instead of keying in on our ideas.

Thankfully, in-person pitches are returning with speed so, hopefully, Zoom pitches will become an exception instead of the rule. But if you are conducting pitches virtually, please keep cameras and microphones on.

3. GHOSTS ARE FOR HALLOWEEN, NOT PITCHES

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In love, friendships, and yes, agency relationships, it is never appropriate to end things without telling the other party.

Recently, I was comparing notes with a competitor who'd been ghosted many times in recent months. As in, the clients literally stopped returning calls and emails without notifying the agency they'd lost. The humans spending countless hours crafting the perfect pitch for you deserve to know they haven't gotten the assignment. While it stings, they get over it. But it's not fair to leave them guessing.

4. GIVE TO GET

If you're sharing your life stories by the first date's end, it's probably meant to last. Agencies and clients should be similarly forthcoming. One of our most successful pitches was when the prospective client gave us a trove of data—historic advertising performance information, organization goals, and current media plans—and told us their budget upfront.

Be transparent with the agencies pitching for your business; We'll all sign NDAs to protect that information. Trust us: The presentations and work from all agencies in the pitch are measurably better if we understand as many of your challenges as possible.

5. CUT TO THE CHASE

Wouldn't you rather someone you're dating tell you right away they found someone else than find out months later? The same holds true for agency reviews. Tell it to us straight: Do we have a chance? Clients sometimes keep agencies on a string purely as a “comparison” point, or “safety backup” when they have no real intention of selecting them. This has the unintended consequence of both wasting the agency's time and deteriorating the marketer's reputation in the market.

6. GIVE BRUTALLY HONEST FEEDBACK

Look, no one likes losing a pitch. But if an agency does come up short, a fabulous consolation prize is knowledge and growth—understanding *why*, in order to become better. Whether you filter this information through the pitch consultant or provide it directly to agencies, it's incredibly valuable information that can help them craft better pitches in the future. It also allows you to verbalize what you value most in agencies, strengthening your relationship with the agency you select.

The pitch process is complicated and full of difficult decisions. Most marketers follow best practices, or at least have positive intent. And certainly, agencies aren't perfect. But the process needn't be onerous, or cold and impersonal. Engage in a spirited, honest dialogue with the right amount of pitching agencies, and share what you know so they can give you their best work. At the end of well-run pitches, the review of the review should be two thumbs up.

Rob Davis, President & Chief Marketing Officer at *NOVUS*.

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Modern CEO

from the publisher of *Fast Company* and *Inc.*

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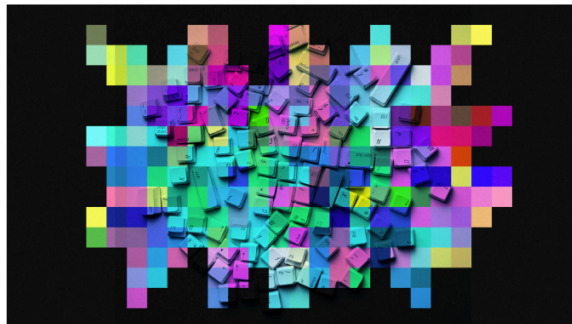
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01-08-2024 | TECH

35 AI tools you can try for free

Whether you want to search, summarize, write, transcribe, or generate art or music, there's a free artificial intelligence tool (or several) out there to help.



[Photo: oxygen/Getty Images]

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BY **JARED NEWMAN** 6 MINUTE READ

Thanks to the hype around **ChatGPT**, we've entered a weird new world in which generative AI tools are suddenly everywhere.

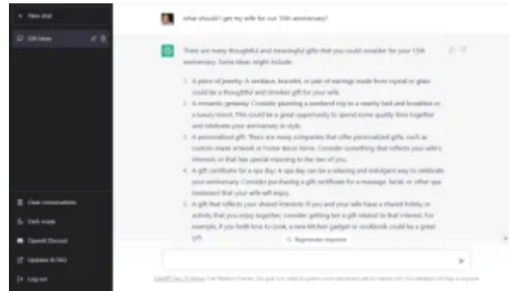
But this **AI tool boom** has just as quickly become a glut, with countless **concept services** and ones that demand up-front payment just to see

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copycat services and ones that demand upfront payment just to see what they're about. Trying out generative AI tools is a great way to understand their upsides and limitations—and yes, there are many limitations, despite the hype—but it can be hard to know where to start.

Here, then, is a big list of free artificial intelligence tools you can check out. Use them to explore new knowledge areas, sharpen your prose, summarize lengthy articles, and even come up with fresh images and sounds.

FREE AI CHAT AND SEARCH TOOLS



1. ChatGPT

ChatGPT is a chat-based bot that's frighteningly good at looking stuff up for you, generating ideas, writing complex missives, telling stories, and a whole lot more. It's taken the term "artificial intelligence" to a whole new level.

Answers to your requests are returned in conversational, human-like language, so it feels like you're having an actual chat with someone—albeit someone with an encyclopedic knowledge of just about everything. Be careful, though: As remarkable as ChatGPT is, it sometimes gets its facts wrong—either in maddeningly subtle ways or hilariously obvious ones.

Free, but costs \$20 per month to speed up responses and use during peak demand.

2. The new Bing

ChatGPT-based conversations and search results inside Bing.

3. Perplexity.ai

Ask questions and follow-ups, get direct responses with citations. Free to use with the option to upgrade to Pro.

4. YouChat

Ask questions and follow-ups, and engage in ChatGPT-style conversations. Free; sign-in required.

5. Poe

Conversational AI from Quora that includes multiple assistants with differing strengths. Free; sign-in required.

FREE AI ARTWORK GENERATORS

6. Stable Diffusion Online

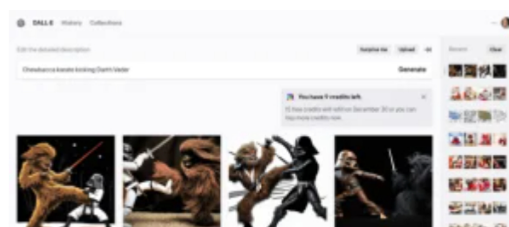
Free Stable Diffusion artwork generator; no login required.

7. El Pintador

Free Stable Diffusion artwork generator for iOS with a "Learn" section that provides prompt crafting advice.

8. DiffusionBee

Stable Diffusion artwork generator for MacOS, works offline with no usage limits.





9. Dall-E

Your weirdest, most obscure art creations can finally come to life thanks to DALL-E. Type anything just about anything into the search bar and watch as OpenAI's image generation tool churns out multiple pictures for you to choose from.

You can try Dall-E for free through Bing, or use it with a paid ChatGPT Plus subscription.

10. Craiyon

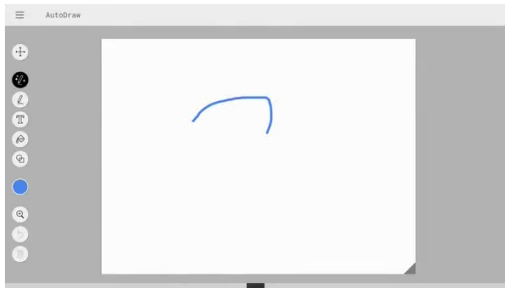
Online artwork generator that uses the Dall-E Mini model. Removing watermarks requires a \$5-per-month subscription.

11. Nvidia Canvas

Windows software that turns brushstrokes into artwork. Requires an Nvidia RTX graphics card.

12. Playform

Online app that turns sketches into artwork. Free to try, but requires paid credits to download watermark-free images.



13. AutoDraw

A venerable old-timer, AutoDraw has been around as a Google project since 2017. This free tool turns your haphazardly scribbled doodles into actual drawings by offering up suggestions based on what you've put on the page.

It's great for when you need to mock up a design quickly but you need it to look, well...like you didn't draw it with your mouse. And it's free to use, with no account or subscription required.

FREE AI WRITING TOOLS

14. PicsArt AI Writer

Generate marketing copy, slogans, product descriptions, LinkedIn headlines, Instagram captions, and more. Free.

15. NotionAI

Use prompts to create text inside any Notion document, activated by pressing Space on a new line. You can try it for free with a limited number of complimentary AI responses, then it's \$8-10 per month for the add-on subscription.

16. Chatbot tools

Tools such as ChatGPT, YouChat, and Poe can be used to generate copy as well.

FREE AI CONTENT SUMMARIZERS

17. Eightify

Create text summaries of YouTube videos, with highlights you can click on to jump to the relevant video section. Up to three free summaries per week (on videos less than 30 minutes). For unlimited summaries, a subscription runs \$4.95 per month, or \$3.95 per month if you pay annually.

18. Summarize.tech

Another YouTube summarizer that's less in-depth than Eightify. It allows you to summarize a few videos a day for free or, with a \$10 per month Premium subscription, you can summarize up to 200 videos a