



Pitching in a Pandemic

ARTICLES

As remote working has become business as (un)usual for our industry, how have pitches evolved to manage COVID-19 restrictions? We ask pitch consultants Trinity P3, about how pitching in a pandemic is being run and speak to some agency leaders about what they think about the experience.

Nathan Hodges
ANZ Managing Director -
Trinity P3

What's the mood of clients pitching during COVID-19? Have many decided to put the process on hold or run them under different conditions?



NH: It's a mixture. Some continued regardless, and we worked with them to adapt the process. Some decided to put things on hold while they tackled other priorities and are now returning to the task and ready to go. A few decided at the outset to try and wait out the lockdown because they were concerned about judging things like chemistry through a remote process - and obviously we respect that. What's interesting now is how that concern is quickly evaporating as everyone gets used to the new working environment. The longer we work like this, the more normal it becomes for everyone. And in any case, it is likely to be the new normal for quite a while yet, so we're all better off just getting on with it.

For those pitches that have gone ahead, how has the process changed? Are there any opportunities that have arisen from this?

The overall objective of the pitch process remains the same - to get as close as possible to what it would actually be like were the marketer and agency to work together on a day-to-day basis.

Once you keep that in mind, then the process changes fall into place. So, for instance, we're finding there are more Zoom meetings between client and agency than there would be face-to-face meetings in the standard process. These meetings tend to involve fewer people, they are generally shorter, and they tend to require a lot more structure and preparation if they are to be successful. It's just not as easy to 'wing it' or 'read the room' in a pitch meeting when there is no 'room' to read.

How is the concept of 'agency / client chemistry' being judged in the era of social isolation? Are 'chemistry sessions' still being run?

NH: Of course they are! Chemistry is the critical element in any successful pitch process - without good chemistry between the marketer and agency teams, you're just building on sand. So chemistry is essential, and the idea that you can't test that through remote working is actually absurd. We all form opinions and make judgments about the people appearing on our TV screens every evening. We establish and cultivate relationships on the phone every day. So of course it can be done through Zoom - you just have to manage it carefully. Just like in a standard pitch, the process needs facilitation to ensure success.

Are there any learnings both agencies and clients can take from this period?

NH: Plenty. For agencies - rehearse. Lots. Have a plan for every formal encounter with the marketing team. Nominate a moderator for each Zoom meeting, and make sure there is an agenda and speaking order and that any questions and answers go through him/her. Recommend how the client sets up the Zoom view - side by side if you're presenting charts, speaker view, gallery view.

Treat it like you would a TV ad and get professional about it. We're all done with the novelty of meeting pets or working in your pyjamas or using wacky backgrounds.

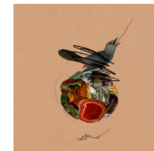
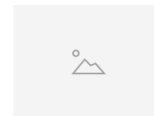
We're sick of everyone talking at once or forgetting to mute their microphone. Remember - the objective of the process is for the marketing team to find out

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remember the objective of the process for the marketing team is not get what it would be like to work with you. Show them. For marketers – don't forget, you're on show and being assessed too. Pitches work both ways, and opinions are being formed on the agency side too.

Mandie van der Merwe and Avish Gordhan
ECDs – M&C Saatchi, Sydney



AG & MV: The fundamentals of pitching are heightened when you're doing it in a pandemic, largely because you're dealing with the key decision makers right from the outset. So the rigour around strategy and the creative idea are paramount, and any flimsiness can be picked apart pretty quickly.

There's no hiding behind fancy boards and a slick-looking deck. From an internal perspective, everyone seems to muck in more than usual. There's a strong sense of camaraderie that makes you appreciate the team you surround yourself with.

Ryan Petie
ECD – Publicis Worldwide, Australia



RP: All my jokes are falling flat. Even my cute iso kid stories aren't getting a comment. Yep, it's really hard to break the ice and tell jokes when everyone's on mute.

Chemistry is definitely the hardest thing to create and judge when pitching in COVID times. It's important that everyone knows who's leading the meeting, they need to take firm control of the video – call right from the start, and try to limit the number of speakers so they can build more rapport in the scant chances you get. And keep telling jokes. It might be endearing.



Phil McDonald
Partner, BCM Group

PM: I think it's quite hard for a client to confidently 100% appoint an agency based on a traditional pitch process that relies on all the phases happening via on-line channels. We've had a number of more traditional

pitches placed on hold due to the remote environment we are all working in at the moment and honestly I think that is the right decision.

That said we have also recently won a client that started as a project in the new remote world and we have continued to work with them, but our teams proved themselves by delivering and deploying an effective campaign for the client on a live project. We still haven't met them physically yet, so that worked quite well.

If an urgent agency change needs to be made, I would advise clients that appointing an agency that you would have short listed to a live project could well be the best way to move forward in this environment.

Emma Hill
ECD – M&C Saatchi, Melbourne



EH: We just pitched in lock down. It was a frickin' new experience for all of us.

What we missed in visibly seeing each other running like crazy around the agency, we made up for by seeing each other build a pitch deck in Google docs like ants on an icy pole.

We Zoomed like mo fo's, we relied on each other more than ever before, and we communicated on some other surreal level.

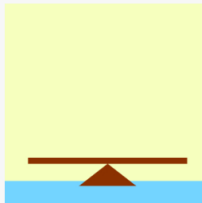
Technology is our favourite teammate right now. And it doesn't forget to do its timesheets.



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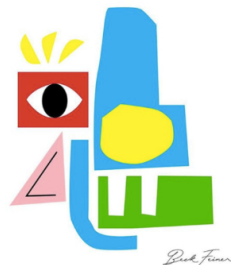
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