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NZ Leaders Say “Inherently Rigged” Pitch Process is “So Exhausting and So Taxing”



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Thinkerbell's Jessica Allison and The Sweetshop's Melanie Bridge believe a stronger focus on chemistry sessions and more transparency would help correct a process that has only become more burdensome in a tough NZ economy, reports LBB's Brittney Rigby



New Zealand creative agencies and production companies have argued the “inherently rigged” pitch process needs to be more transparent so as not to waste time and money, and unnecessarily erode staffers’ mental health.

Last month, global pitch consultancy [TrinityP3 released its annual State of the Pitch research](#), which showed agencies’ pitch satisfaction had sunk from a C- to a D+. Creative agency pitches fared the worst, rated just 2.88 out of 5. Asked on a panel at LBB’s Auckland Immortal Awards showcase whether the process felt fair in the New Zealand market, Thinkerbell general manager Jessica Allison emphasised the necessity of a robust creds and chemistry process.

“Pitching is just a bit of an inherently rigged system. It’s fucking great for clients and great for brands, but a bit shit for agencies. Hopefully we all agree with that,” she said, speaking on a panel held at DDB Group New Zealand’s offices.

“But we’ve had a few pitches in the last year, and some have been not so great, but the ones that have been great for us since is where we’ve been able to maintain a really open dialogue with the marketing manager.

“One thing we’d probably like to see a little bit more of is just more of that creds and chemistry up front, because that’s the most important thing. It’s such a small market, and we find that when brands are going up to pitch, they know who they want in the room, and by default, they

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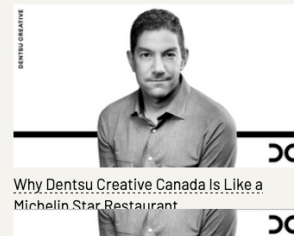
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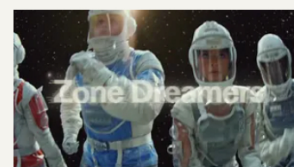


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up to pitch, they know who they want in the room, and by default, they probably also know who they want to work with.

"But going through the whole process, and especially for a small agency like us, going through that pitch process, going through the creative process, and we've still got all of this client work that we need to fulfil as well, is so exhausting and so taxing. So some of the best client wins we've had is when there's been more focus on creds and more focus on chemistry."

Melanie Bridge, the co-CEO of The Sweetshop, observed the three-way pitch process production businesses like her go through to win jobs from agencies is "brutal" but wondered whether another option exists since "it works for many reasons."

"It would feel fairer if there was full transparency, because it feels like often there isn't," she said.

"If there was absolute full transparency and honesty, we would be able to do the best possible pitch, no matter what, and collaborate through that process, and I suppose, not feel blindsided at the end, because you sort of realise that they were always going to go with somebody else.

"We pitch all the time, we do hundreds and hundreds of pitches every year, and lose so many of them, and pour our heart and soul in it, and it's hard, it costs a lot, and it's hard for everyone's mental health, to be honest. But I think if there was a lot more full transparency all the way through, it would make things a lot easier, and it would feel a lot fairer."



The process, and investment, is made more taxing in the context of economic strain in New Zealand, which is experiencing client contraction in key sectors like government. Jessica, a Kiwi who previously spent 10 years in Australia, found the contrast stark when she returned to New Zealand in 2023, "which just felt like a really tough time to not only move countries, but come back into an environment where things felt really tough economically."

She confirmed it's, "just a really, really tough time for New Zealand," while Melanie added, "Things have been definitely getting a lot harder in the entire industry, and particularly we notice [it] in production, with budgets going down and a lot more competition. So I suppose we're just trying to still be as creative as we can despite that. And Kiwi ingenuity, we always find a way."

Jessica agreed with that assessment, arguing despite the squeeze, "it's been amazing to see how creativity is still thriving in this industry and in this country ... it just shows that we can thrive despite the odds."

The Thinkerbell exec, who has a background in earned media at agencies like Mango in Melbourne and HerdMSL in Auckland, said retrospectively, Australia's media market feels like a "luxury", with a range of outlets and channels to pitch, and "more than one newspaper."

In contrast, two of New Zealand's primary news outlets axed programs — including news bulletins and current affairs shows — and made sweeping redundancies a year ago. Later in the year, 14 community newspapers shuttered, and job cuts and closures still loom over the print and TV sectors.

"If you think about broadcast media and where we would traditionally pitch an idea to, we've lost one morning show. We've now only got one and a half news shows," Jessica said.

"We've got one magazine, long-form style, but if you're doing consumer campaigns, it is likely really the only place that you're going to get any decent pickup. So for us, it's really thinking about how we can build an ecosystem of social noise around things.

"It's really sad, because I think about this a lot as well, if you don't have those broadcast, print media, the traditional media to turn to for

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earned, and it's the same for advertising in a certain respect, you're then pushing a lot of money into social, which is going offshore, and it creates a self-perpetuating cycle that erodes the media landscape here in New Zealand."

Matty Burton, DDB Group AUNZ's chief creative officer, wondered whether the industry, which is notable for its camaraderie and sense of collegiality, should unite to crack such problems, just as it wrestles with knotty business problems for clients. He suggested the answer might lie in playing more.



"Honestly, the best creativity is always and the best results come from just playing, throwing it around," he said.

"As an industry [in New Zealand], there's not many dickheads in it, which is kind of special over here. And I think we could play more as an industry, and we could probably help answer some of those bigger questions as a group, which would be pretty cool. We're competitive on our clients and work and stuff, but if we played a little bit more, it could be a whole lot more fun."

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