# Same old pitch problems, 'couple of surprises': Darren Woolley breaks down 2026 State of the Pitch

by Vihan Mathur
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The wolf of marketing sat down with Mediaweek to unpack this year's state of the pitch report.



**TrinityP3 has released** its 2026 ***State of the Pitch report***, revealing a marginal lift in pitch satisfaction, with agencies giving Australian marketers and procurement teams an average score of 3.22 out of five.

The report, now in its third year, surveyed agencies across 59 pitches over six months, covering 24 industry categories and agency fees ranging from $50,000 to $10 million.

But while the score has improved from 2.99 out of five last year, **Darren Woolley, global CEO of TrinityP3**, said the result should be viewed in context. The number of pitches recorded was lower than in previous years, down from 70 and 77.

## What stood out this year?

In a chat with *Mediaweek*, Woolley said one of the most notable shifts in this year's report was TrinityP3's decision to publicly identify the advertiser categories where agencies reported the most challenging pitch experiences.

The reason, he said, was simple: the same categories of advertisers keep showing up every year. Those categories include financial services, utilities and telcos.

"These services clients appear more likely to run pitches poorly from the agency's perspective than, say, consumer packaged goods," Woolley said.

There were also a 'couple of surprises in there', as Woolley flagged.



"Charities were particularly bad at communicating with agencies or providing feedback, and that was a bit of a surprise," he said.

Woolley said part of the issue is that marketers often run their own pitches without realising how time-consuming and labour-intensive the process can be.

"We estimate that if three people in the marketing department are intimately involved in the pitch process, collectively they'll spend around 400 hours during that process. And this is on top of their already full-time job."

"They take on the responsibility, only to find that, at the end of the day, they don't have the resources or time to do it," Woolley explained.

### The 30% problem

Woolley said the uplift in scores should be treated with caution, arguing that there are still too many marketers and procurement teams "scoring a D or even an F when it comes to how they run a pitch."

"If you look at the graph on page 10, under question 28, what you'll see is that the big improvement is in the number of agencies that scored pitches four out of five," he said.

Woolley said the previous dominant score was three out of five. While this year's lift points to improvement, it does not erase the number of pitches still receiving one out of five.

"We talk about 'ditch the pitch' and people say the pitch process is ruined and doesn't work, but what we're talking about here is around 30% of pitches being run poorly. That means 70% are being run in a passable way, or even really well."

In other words, Woolley said the perception that the pitch process is broken is largely being driven by the bottom 30%.

### Unpaid pitch work still rules

The report highlighted that more than 80% of pitches did not pay agencies for their time, while almost 30% required agencies to assign IP as part of the process. It also found the number of pitches taking six to 12 months had doubled.

Woolley said there has been some movement on pitch fees, but much of it remains tokenistic.

"It has gone up a little bit, but it has mainly gone up in the sort of token payment of $5,000 to $10,000, not the $20,000-plus range," he said.

"At least marketers are starting to acknowledge the agency's investment. It just isn't very commercial."

When *Mediaweek* asked why unpaid pitch work remains so normalised, Woolley said agencies also need to confront their role in sustaining the system.

The simple answer, he said, is that agencies are still willing to pitch for free.

"While there are agencies out there that are very happy to pitch for free, why would you pay if you can get enough agencies to do it for free?"

While $5,000 or $10,000 may be better than nothing, Woolley said it often falls short of covering the time, resources and materials agencies put into pitches.

### Procurement outperforms marketers

One of the report's more notable findings was that procurement and finance-led pitches scored better than marketer-led pitches for the first time.

While procurement is often seen as a source of frustration for agencies, Woolley said its stronger performance may stem from clearer commercial requirements.

Procurement teams were more likely to define what agencies would actually be expected to deliver, giving agencies a better sense of whether the opportunity was worth pursuing.

"Marketers really struggled with defining that," Woolley said.

"That clarity is a good thing for agencies, because they can start to evaluate whether the size of the prize is worth the effort of tendering or pitching."

However, Woolley said procurement still has work to do, particularly when processes become overly reliant on tendering systems and limit direct communication between clients and agencies.

"These are the sorts of things that go to the very core of dissatisfaction among agencies, and they are the things that make agencies dislike the procurement process," he said.

But he added that the issue is not universal across procurement.

"This is not either-or. Some do it, and others don't."

### A fair pitch code, or not?

The report also raises the question of whether Australia needs clearer standards for how pitches are run.

Woolley said guidelines can help lift standards, but warned against treating pitch reform as a one-size-fits-all exercise.

"That's the problem: the industry is obsessed with one way to run a pitch," he said.

He said the focus should be on the principles behind a fair process, rather than prescribing a single fixed model.

TrinityP3's Tender Charter is built around five principles: transparency and fairness, respect for resources and people, mutual accountability, confidentiality and trust, and commitment to partnership.

"They are the things we think every marketer should abide by and build into their pitch process," Woolley said.

But he cautioned against any code that dictates exactly how every pitch should be structured.

Education, Woolley said, is the solution.

"As an industry, we need to spend time educating clients, not on how to run a pitch, but on the things they need to consider if they are going to run a pitch and not get a bad reputation."

### Agencies need to know when to walk away

For agencies, Woolley said the uncomfortable lesson from the report is that change will be slow unless agencies become more disciplined about which pitches they choose to enter.

He said agencies need to treat pitch invitations as commercial decisions, rather than automatically accepting every opportunity and challenging the terms later.

"What we are seeing is a lot of agencies saying, 'I'll be in the pitch,' and then complaining about the rules," Woolley said.

He compared it to agreeing to play a sport, then discovering halfway through that the umpire plays for the other team.

"It's a bit too late. You can complain about it, but that's not going to change the outcome."

Woolley said agencies need to do more due diligence upfront, including asking about timelines, the number of competing agencies, evaluation criteria, pitch fees and the expected scope of work.

"Agencies need to show more rigour and more diligence in assessing whether they will play or not, because until then, nothing will change."

The issue is not unique to Australia.

TrinityP3's *State of the Pitch* survey is now in its second year in the US and Canada, and is set to be rolled out in Germany and Asia-Pacific later this year. View the full report **here**.

***Top Image: Darren Woolley***

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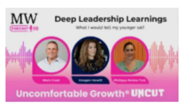


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