

OPINION

Fixing the RFP: A better way to choose agencies

Shai Luft, co-founder and COO at Bench Media, on how the request-for-proposal model is broken, and how it could be a much better process for everyone involved.

July 2, 2025 10:00
by [SHAI LUFT](#)



Last year I wrote about [why the RFP process needs a marketing makeover](#) and I certainly didn't expect the wave of feedback that followed.

Clearly, I wasn't alone in thinking the current system is outdated, overly bureaucratic, and ultimately detrimental to the kind of strategic partnerships marketers are trying to build. This is particularly true for smaller request-for-proposals, where size makes it unlikely a pitch consultancy would be involved, and where the process can be even more inconsistent. But the issue goes deeper than timelines and templates.

If we want to get better outcomes from the RFP process, we need to look not just at procedure, but at the culture around it – and that starts with how agencies are engaged. This isn't a complaint. It's a reflection shaped by many years in the industry and reinforced by recent research.

According to the 2025 TrinityP3 State of the Pitch report, some pitch processes involved as many as 45 agencies, creating an overwhelming and inefficient experience for both marketers and agencies. The report also revealed a decline in overall satisfaction with pitch processes, with the average score falling to just 2.99 out of 5, down from 3.13 the previous year. And creative pitches fared the worst, recording an average satisfaction score of only 2.88. Additionally, 66% of all pitches required speculative creative work or media trading exercises.

These statistics highlight that the current process isn't just hard on agencies, it's also suboptimal for marketers. A flawed pitch process results in weaker responses, missed opportunities, and damaged relationships.

Improving how brands run RFPs isn't just about being nice, it's about getting better work. When brands are more transparent and collaborative from the outset, the results are stronger, more innovative, and more aligned. Everyone wins.



Shai Luft

Clarity on budget isn't a luxury, it's a necessity

Another pattern evident in the industry pitch process is the reluctance to share budget parameters. The assumption seems to be that withholding this information creates a level playing field or invites the most competitive pricing. In reality, the opposite is true.

Without a clear budget, or at least a realistic range, agencies are forced to



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either guess (and risk over-or under-servicing) or ask back-channel questions that should be front and centre. It also makes it difficult to determine whether there's genuine commercial fit. A five-figure retainer and a seven-figure scope of work are two very different things.

Transparency helps everyone. It allows agencies to tailor their response, propose appropriate structures and commit to the partnership with confidence. It also builds trust early in the relationship, something any successful engagement and ultimately partnership, depends on.

Be honest about the workload

Sometimes, briefs are high-level and light on detail. That might seem efficient on the surface, but it obscures critical information. What's the true volume of work? Are we talking two campaigns a year, or ten? Is there a heavy demand for reporting and internal presentations? Are we supporting a lean marketing team or a fully resourced department?

When this detail is hidden or vague, the risk is misalignment down the track. Agencies might win the work, only to discover the scope was far larger (or messier) than expected. Being upfront about internal challenges, resource constraints, and expectations enables the agency to assess whether they can genuinely deliver and to price accordingly.

Break the wall between procurement and marketing

In large companies, it's often the case that the marketing team does not have full control or final authority over the entire RFP process. Procurement teams usually lead RFPs to ensure compliance, cost control, and risk management, which sometimes creates a disconnect where agencies communicate mainly with procurement and rarely have meaningful engagement with the marketing stakeholders who will ultimately work with them.

That said, marketing teams still have an important role to play and can influence the process significantly by proactively providing input and advocating for clearer communication channels. When marketing stakeholders actively participate, share strategic context and make themselves available for direct conversations, it helps bridge this gap.

Agencies need to understand more than just budgets and timelines. They need insight into the brand's culture, ambitions, and challenges, all intangible factors that determine whether an agency is a true fit or not. Simple initiatives like chemistry meetings, structured Q&A sessions, or even brief calls with key marketing team members can transform the experience for both parties.

By working collaboratively with procurement, marketing teams can also help design a process that balances compliance with transparency and relationship-building. This shift doesn't just benefit agencies, it helps marketers select the right agency partner that will deliver stronger, more aligned results.



The respect deficit

At their best, RFPs aim to foster new partnerships that deliver innovation, efficiency, and results. But all too often, the process is defined by one-way demands, generic communications, and radio silence after submission. Agencies are asked to put in significant strategic and creative thinking, often over many weeks, only to be met with a templated rejection email, or worse, no feedback at all.

One example from our own experience: after four months of follow-up on a major pitch, we received a generic message advising that the engagement would not proceed due to budget reallocation. No conversation. No feedback. Just an abrupt end after months of work.

That kind of treatment doesn't just waste time and resources. It sends a message that the agency's effort isn't truly valued and is disheartening for the agency team involved.

But even when feedback is offered, it's often vague or surface-level. "You were close" or "we went in a different direction" doesn't help an agency improve or understand where they fell short. Truly valuable feedback includes what the agency did well, what could have been stronger, and most importantly, the key factor that influenced the decision. Whether it was pricing, service model, cultural fit, sector experience or proposed strategy is valuable for the next time the agency enters a new RFP process.

This level of insight not only shows respect for the agency's time and effort, it also fosters goodwill and continuous improvement. It allows agencies to recalibrate and strengthen future responses and keeps the door open for future collaboration.

How marketers can lead the change

Marketing teams may not be able to overhaul the entire RFP process overnight, but they can shift the tone and outcome by doing a few key things:

- Be transparent with budget expectations and structure
- Include real workload detail in the brief
- Offer feedback, even if the agency is unsuccessful
- Create opportunities for direct communication
- Set realistic timelines and respect the agency's time

Ultimately, the RFP process should be about finding the best partner for your brand – and that works both ways. Agencies should be assessing clients just as much as clients are assessing them. Respect, transparency, and open communication are the foundations of any strong partnership. That can start well before a contract is signed.

If marketers want better results from their agencies, they need to start by treating them like the partners they want them to become.

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