



OPINION

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## When is too much more than enough for Easter – or for pitching?

*The open tender for selecting advertising partners is flawed for two reasons, writes David Angell, general manager and head of media at TrinityP3.*

April 20, 2022 9:07  
by [DAVID ANGELL](#)



Watching the children collecting eggs on their Easter egg hunt at the weekend, I was again amazed at the enthusiasm and energy they put into the process.

Even when the baskets they were carrying were overflowing with chocolate treats, they kept going. It was living proof of the concept that too much is never enough.

But on reflection, I wondered if I then told them that once the yard had been stripped bare of Easter eggs, that they could only choose one or two of these to keep, what would they do?

In much the same way that children want it all, there is a trend with marketers to also want it all when it comes to selecting agencies.

This is evidenced by Tourism Fiji recently going to an open tender through LinkedIn, with a reported 100 agencies responding to the invitation.

The issue is this is potentially a trend; in the past 12 months, another brand, Guzman y Gomez also when to open tender, with the [CMO reporting on LinkedIn](#) that 115 agencies had responded to their invitation to pitch for the business.

Trends can be cyclical; open tenders are not new. The difference today is that the advertising is increasingly through social media and the process is often less robust and rigorous than the traditional RFP.

Nonetheless, the open tender for selecting advertising partners is flawed for two reasons. First reason: it's bad for the advertiser. Second reason; it's bad for the agencies. Pretty compelling, right? But why do I say this?

### Bad for The Advertiser: The Paradox of Choice

The Paradox of Choice started as a behavioural science study in 2001 and was popularised by Barry Schwartz's book 'The Paradox of Choice; Why More Is Less' in 2004.

To explain it, I'm going to quote directly from The Decision Lab, who sum up the basic premise better than I could: Imagine that you need milk, so you go to the grocery store to pick some up. When you get to the dairy aisle you see that there are dozens of options. These days, not only do you have to make a decision on the percentage of fat you want...but also what source you want your milk to be coming from...the list goes on. Almost dumbfounded, you stand in front of the aisle and have no idea what milk to pick. There are so many choices that you are overwhelmed.

In short, the more options we have, the more challenging it becomes to make the right choice.

If milk is this hard, how hard are agencies?

Too much choice results in more effort and paradoxically less freedom and can therefore lead to an unsatisfactory choice being made. The decision will end up being 'good enough' rather than 'best fit'. The chooser won't feel great about it.

It's a fine line. But think about it. Of all the agencies out there, only a few

It's a little time, but think about it. Of all the agencies out there, only a few can claim to be truly differentiated in the way in which they position themselves.

This means that the more agencies submitting credentials at the early stage of a pitch process, the larger the sea of sameness becomes.

## **Bad for Agencies: Wasted, Sub-Optimal Work with (far less chance of) Pay**

Before we get to the open tender, let's be clear: the challenges faced by agencies in any pitch are now particularly acute because of the pandemic, and the associated talent and staff shortages.

Considering all agencies operate with little or no human resource margins, exacerbated by increasing costs and stagnant fees, agency staff must take up the ebb and flow of pitching through unpaid overtime.

Despite everything, pitching can be exciting. The camaraderie of the late-night pizza, the frantic energy spent nailing the brief, the kudos of winning.

But after two years of COVID, agency personnel are tired or burnt out. It's harder to overcome the downsides pitching has on health and work-life balance.

Add to this an open tender process, and the likelihood of causing undue stress to an agency increases.

It follows that the more agencies involved, the less chance an agency has of winning. Additionally, due to the paradox of choice, it is more probable that a perfect fit agency may lose due to the advertiser's inability to make the right call.

There is also higher likelihood of fuzzy or 'all you can eat' briefing (and I'm talking RFP and credentials here, not just finalist pitch briefs), committing the agency to spend more time producing sub-optimal work. And that work not even being properly considered by advertisers swamped with too many submissions.

So why don't agencies decline open tenders? Well, many do – it just doesn't make the news. But such is the cut-throat nature of the business, that many are forced to submit. Agencies have long complained about the capriciousness of pitching. But they must stay on the new business treadmill.

What I'm saying is not anti-pitch. It's simply this: if you're going to market, do it right. With research and refining, it's possible to avoid an open tender, and focus on a properly constructed set of candidates, which will benefit all.

Hope you had a Happy Easter, and you didn't indulge in too many chocolate eggs.



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