Agency Culture Pitching Marketing

Agency pitch satisfaction just 3.13 out of 5. If this was an Uber, we'd walk

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By **Darren Woolley,** Founder And CEO
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Agencies from New Zealand and Australia have rated the pitch process. TrinityP3 Global's Darren Woolley explains the findings and welcomes more clients to commit to change.

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Everyone in advertising knows and understands the problems that surround the pitching process. These problems are nothing new. But the 2021 launch of the Pitch Positive Pledge perhaps represented the first meaningful initiative. We created a 'pitch charter' to drive the market to better outcomes (where the default, when marketers need or want a new agency, is not always a complex, time-consuming multistage pitch).

It has become a model for other markets two years after its inception. This week, TrinityP3 published its underlined inaugural State of the Pitch report, which focused on the Australian and New Zealand ad market. The report detailed the survey response of 77 agency pitches run over six months, representing around half the pitches run across the market during the period.

How Australia and New Zealand rated their pitches

Overall, the agencies we surveyed gave the pitch processes they worked on a score of 3.13 out of a possible 5. That's a score that's not entirely damning, but also, it's not great (if the pitch were your Uber driver, you'd have concerns…).

Among the feedback, two things stood out for us as driving lower scoring: one is that too many marketers take a 'one size fits all' approach to pitching, which fails to account for the specific needs and circumstances of that client and the size of the account.

The other is a lack of what we call "table stakes." The pitching client isn't always instigating a fair and respectful process, let alone sticking to it: keeping agencies informed, running a fair and timely process, and giving honest and timely feedback.

In our experience, it can be challenging to be both the client and the person running the pitch. But one other thing that stood out is that procurement-run pitches actually scored lower than marketer-run pitches, with a score of 2.94 compared with 3.21 for the latter. This shows us that even if you get procurement to run your pitch, you can still run into trouble in the process.

So what's next for pitching?

Since we published The State of the Pitch, one of the things that has been most interesting is how some agency leaders have responded and looked to the UK's Pitch Positive Pledge underlined as a model that the Australian market needs to emulate.

While the Pitch Positive Pledge is a worthwhile initiative to guide the industry, several issues should be addressed before it is rolled out to other markets, including Australia.

Foremost of these issues is a somewhat underwhelming support from UK advertisers. The Pitch Positive Pledge was a joint initiative by ISBA and the

IPA; however, in two years, only 32 advertisers have pledged a commitment compared with 53 consultants, other partners, and 252 advertising agencies.

Ultimately, the power to change the pitch process and bring about positive change sits with the advertisers and their advisors, including procurement and yes pitch consultants such as TrinityP3 (for the record, we were foundation supporters). Without this comprehensive industry support from advertisers, this is, at best, tokenism.

Second is the continued industry acceptance that 'pitching' involves preparing a brief for agencies to respond with speculative creative concepts or media trading promises, neither of which are foolproof in selecting the right agency.

Instead, we need to educate advertisers on the vast range of more effective options, including The Pitch In A Day (first popularised by the IPA Good Pitch Initiative), the Reference Pitch (based on interviewing a selection of agency clients), the Qualification-Based Selection (QBS) process (promoted by the Institute of Canadian Agencies) and more. The industry needs to develop and promote a toolkit of pitch types and guide advertisers on how and when to use the appropriate type.

Finally, this is the most challenging, and there need to be consequences.

The ANA and the 4As have had the Rules of the Road for pitching for many years. Within that document was a list of all those who had committed to the rules and also a list of those who had not. This is important because it forces marketers, agencies and everyone in between to nail their colors to the mast.

What better way is there to highlight those on board with a better pitch process and hopefully drive better outcomes for all concerned?

- **One year on, has the Pitch Positive Pledge helped stop bad pitching behavior?**

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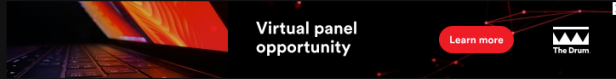
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