

## PITCH PERFECT

This article starts with your view of marketing communications. If you see this as something that you outsource to other partners, then you can skip it and read the rest of the magazine. If instead, you see it as a spark that comes from collaboration, then read on.

With the Olympics behind us, this is likely to be the season of broken marriages and agency pitches. Many brands will have been battered by the onslaught of so much competition and noise. Others will have the knives out as their communication partners turnover will likely increase. So what are the best strategies to work through this period?

### 1. NEW AGENCY – OR JUST NEW TEAM?

In a lot of the cases when we are called in to help on an agency review, the best scenario is just to 're-cast' the talent within the same agency. Most agencies are large enough to have this flexibility. The smart ones even hold 'internal pitches' to showcase fresh thinking to clients. Changing agencies is much tougher than just having a concubine – you need to seriously think through first the turmoil and pain you will go through in meeting and briefing a whole new group of people in how to collaborate with you

### 2. GET EXPERT HELP

Whether it's using a consultant like us for an agency review, or seeking out like-minded marketers, you need experts to help on this. An average marketing director might run three or four big pitches in their career – and in our research, they have awareness of around four or five agencies. That's insufficient to consider the universe of options, and pales against a consultant or specialist. Last year alone, we sat through over 100 agency presentations. China, for example, might have 50 – 100 candidate agencies today for a typical assignment – how can you be sure you're meeting the right three or four?

### 3. GO BEYOND CREDENTIALS

Most agencies look good in credentials – it's no longer a key differentiator when making a selection. When we manage a credentials session, we spend more

time on initial thinking and current client views. Demanding no more than five charts on the prospect's category will give you an immediate read on whether you have a connection. And we seek out four clients and ask how *they* feel their agency performs – after all, they are the ones living with the work every day. Last year, JNJ reviewed their global media in this way, seeking to really understand how other companies use their media agencies to develop solutions. Right now, VISA is doing the same.

#### **4. MAKE THE FINAL ROUND COLLABORATIVE**

Asking an agency to come back three weeks later with creative ideas defeats the purpose of why you're hiring them. You're looking to find a partner to *collaborate* with you, not work in isolation. It would be akin to having two synchronized swimmers practicing apart – you will end up in the final pitch watching some great moves, but no idea on how it will connect with you. We've found a workshop as a final round of a pitch can be much more illuminating than the 'beauty pageant' of a formal presentation. The relationship is then started from a much sounder footing and tends to last longer.

Finding an agency to work with you has never been more challenging – there's more choice, more specialization and more need for collaboration than ever before. The marketers that invest the time to have a good process, and with the right intentions are going to reap the rewards

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