

AAR ADVICE ON CHOOSING A NEW AGENCY

Finding the right agency isn't difficult - choosing the right one may be

- First of all - do you actually need to change agencies if you already have one? Has the relationship with your current agency irretrievably broken down? Can the relationship be fixed? An average agency search process costs approximately £50K in staff time and resource - marriage guidance is cheaper than divorce.
- Don't include the incumbent in your shortlist of agencies if they don't have a chance of retaining your business. Be cruel to be kind, don't make them put resource behind something which can never result in success for them and give yourself the opportunity to consider another agency in their place.
- If you are calling a pitch, make sure you have the authority to see the process through, involving all the relevant people in the decision-making process.
- Know what your requirements are of an agency; type, size, core skills, experience, conflict issues, culture, people. Use the process to decide which agency rather than which type of agency. Agencies will sometimes offer to do everything even if they can't.
- Advise your procurement department of your intentions to review or involve them at the earliest opportunity. They can help you with issues such as agency contracts, appraisal of costs and the negotiation of both. They will also prevent you falling in love with an agency before you know you can afford them.
- Prepare a timing plan for the pitch, involving the diaries of all necessary decision makers, and stick to it. Allow a minimum of two months for the process to be completed.
- Choose a manageable number of agencies to pitch: 4, if the incumbent is re-pitching, 3 if they're not. Never invite an agency to pitch if you have the feeling that you wouldn't want to work with them.
- Consider offering the pitching agencies a pitch fee. Whilst it is unlikely to cover the costs the agencies will incur in pitching for your business, the gesture will be hugely appreciated and demonstrate your intent and status as a serious client. You don't have to pay a pitch fee to the successful agency; after all, they have just won your business!

- Issue a written brief for the pitch to the agencies but still give the agencies access to, and enough time with, all relevant decision makers.
- Prepare a press release about your review (before the marketing trade press do it for you). And tell the losing agencies that they haven't won your business at the same time as you inform the winner. Don't let them find out from the press. Make time to give a full and honest de-brief to the losing agencies once you have made your decision.

If you need further advice on any of the points above or would like to talk to AAR please call Nadia Martins at AAR on 020 7612 1200 or email nmartins@aargroup.co.uk