

AAR WORKSHOP PITCH

Background

The traditional pitch process has been to brief agencies and allow six weeks for strategic and creative development.

Each pitching agency is given an allotted time to present their case and answer any questions, after which the client will discuss remuneration proposals with the preferred agency.

Much of the decision making is based on the agencies' performance on the day and them getting the 'right answer'.

This process has several flaws in helping clients decide on the most appropriate agency partners and in giving agencies the opportunity to demonstrate how they operate at an optimum level.

An Alternative Approach

Our belief at AAR is that just as the three most important factors in retailing are, according to marketing folklore, 'location, location, location' so we believe the most important factors in agency selection are 'people, people and people'.

There are a surfeit of agencies and consultancies in all the marketing disciplines that can execute the functional requirements that marketers have to a high standard. The differentiation therefore becomes the people rather than the products and services that each agency has.

The workshop approach to pitching turns up the volume on the people side of the equation, without ignoring the quality of their discipline specific functional capabilities.

How Does It Work?

The first step is for the client to identify an issue relevant to their business that each of the pitching agencies can address. This will be something that is pertinent to their business and will often be strategic in nature.

For example:

'Does sponsorship have a contribution to my company's marketing and, if so, how might this be exploited?'

or

'Most of my sales are through high street retailers, how can I increase direct selling without upsetting the retailers who are currently my main route to the consumer?'

How does it work Cont'd

Each agency is given about 10 days to consider the issue prior to the workshop taking place. This is driven by diary availability as much as anything else.

In this time the agency can undertake whatever research and preparation it feels necessary for the workshop session. They are not expected, however, to know the minutiae of the client's business or the market.

Those who attend are the team that will be working on the business should the agency be successful together with the team from the client company.

For the three hours or so that the session lasts the agency is at liberty to do with the time whatever it wants.

Agencies can run blue sky sessions, SWOT analyses, get a moderator to host a discussion about the topic, discuss alternative strategies, involve people from any inhouse disciplines or indeed others from outside the agency.

The over-riding brief is to convince the client team of the agencies appropriateness to work on their account.

Unlike the traditional pitch where the agency is expected to come up with the 'right' answer, the workshop is as much about approach and style, their methodology and chemistry, is the agency a team that work well together.

Indeed it's not so much about getting the 'right answer' as it is giving the client team the opportunity to assess the approach that an agency takes to judge how appropriate and appealing they are.

The session is intended to be collaborative and involve both client and agency teams.

What Are The Benefits Of This Approach?

For the Client...

1. A faster result, few clients have the luxury of a 6 week+ review and want the agency on board as soon as possible.
2. A realistic environment in which to assess the agencies and their teams.
3. Fewer resources are diverted to agencies 'crawling all over the clients business' for them all to demonstrate their understanding of it, something which most people agree is unrealistic in the time-scale.

For the Agency...

1. A more focussed approach to new business
2. The opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of their capabilities
3. Less reliance on their performance in a 'set piece presentation'.

Agency Remuneration

It is recommended that where possible all discussions about remuneration are conducted in tandem with the workshop or in advance.

This ensures that both parties are broadly happy with the financial arrangements prior to the workshop pitch session and that no time is lost or effort wasted on either side.

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