

Want a better agency relationship? Run a better pitch process

TOBY JENNER, WORLDWIDE COO, MEDIACOM 23 AUG 2018

When a brand treats agencies as true partners during the pitch process, it has a huge benefit, MediaCom's Toby Jenner says, after working on a series of major reviews this year.

Agencies sell. We're selling our services, our skills, our tools and our talent every day.

We work collaboratively with a diverse client base to produce and execute successful communications plans. And we simultaneously navigate the often-bumpy road of the pitch journey to turn prospects into business partners.

Recently there's been a lot of talk about what makes a good or even, dare I say it, an enjoyable pitch. Some believe it's a well-run process, as defined by clear client stakeholder

alignment from the off. This is important, but it's just the brilliant basics.

Having been hugely inspired by a recent pitch experience, I think this ignores three key facts.

Firstly, agencies work on multiple concurrent pitches. The onus is on clients to inspire the teams pitching to want to work with them more than anyone else.

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Some intermediaries and clients still believe in tying the agency in knots with aggressive cost-management and contractual stipulations built upon punitive approaches: this isn't the best way to get the most out of your pitch team and new agency.

In a recent global pitch, not only did the client contribute towards the cost of the process but also rewarded the pitching team with \$100 gift vouchers to spend on merchandise after the pitch presentation.

Behaviour like this has restored my belief that combining process and rigour with inspiration, mutual respect and a good dose of collaboration will always lead to the best results.

This is not about having clients that are happy to agree to anything and everything. It's about treating people and agencies as true partners; to jointly address the challenges we will face together from the moment the pitch starts.

Secondly, pitches are becoming longer, not shorter, and that makes agency engagement

with the client even more important. Large global pitches by their very nature take months, requiring the time and effort from hundreds of stakeholders across an agency network, way beyond those in the pitch team.

Recognising the effort that all participating agencies make helps keep energy and enthusiasm high. It's not about covering the full cost of the pitch but a token amount. A gesture like this goes a very long way. As does, in the case above, the client offering vouchers to reward the agency pitch team.

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In a world where agencies are often taken for granted, such recognition transforms perceptions and will have the best people in an agency banging down the door to work with them. It's a small investment that delivers an unbelievable ROI.

Every client says the right thing – but there's a big difference between saying it and doing it. Experiencing a client that walks the talk is something I applaud.

Finally, everyone wants to be challenged, but they also want to be treated considerately and compassionately.

A pitch process is a perfect opportunity not only for the client to audition the agency but the potential agency team to experience the client first hand. It's a chance for the agency to discover just who they'll be dealing with, should they be successful.

In an industry built around a millennial workforce, demonstrating true client authenticity is increasingly critical to securing the best possible team.

Having been part of many, many successful pitch teams (as well as a few losing ones), I know there is only one consistent truth: good people want to work with good clients and good people can positively change a client's business results.

So, if you are thinking of holding a pitch, ask yourself that simple question: how can you inspire a team of brilliant minds to drive amazing business results for you? You'll be one of the few to actually do it.

Get this right and you'll be cherished, whichever agency you appoint.

The best talent in the agency will proactively ask to be part of the team that changes your business fortunes forever.

Credit to the clients that already have the vision to want to inspire us, today, tomorrow and in the future. They've already discovered that good things really do happen to good people. Their competitors had better watch out.

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