

The changing face of the pitch process

 By [Johanna McDowell](#)

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The new business pitch is the way agencies win most of their business, and it is the job of a selection company to help reduce long lead times, long pitch lists, layers of consensus needed to select a partner, requests for spec work, lack of access to decision makers and cost pressure from procurement departments.

The Full Monty

With the increased complexity of the pitch process, we as an intermediary, identified three trends that have evolved over the last year.

The 'Full Monty' - for clients who need direction through the entire pitch process right up until the contract is signed, is the first noticeable trend.

Most agency pitches arise, not as a result of poor commercial performance, but as a consequence of a breakdown in the relationship between client and agency teams. Consequently, it is essential to both client and agency that each make every possible effort to address any differences that may arise between them in a managed process.



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However, the relationship often changes during the negotiation process and what one thought was the preferred agency during the pitch process changes during the negotiation process.

At this stage other issues come into play - such as the procurement teams (from both sides) and the client service team.

Remember, the client service team is an integral part of making sure that the relationship works between client and agency. If the team isn't right or if it isn't a good fit, this affects the nuts and bolts of the relationship process and like any bad fit the wheels are sure to come off.

It's quite a contrast from the pitch process to the reality of the day-to-day negotiation process. It's important that a stringent negotiation process is in place as it is too late to negotiate afterward. This might take more time and money but it saves distress later.

This makes the role of an intermediary more important than ever in order to achieve the best pairing between the brand and a creative partner and an intermediary has the skills and experience to achieve this with the minimum of inconvenience.

The quick and dirty

What is also happening, this is second trend - is clients are asking for a 'quick and dirty' meaning they want help in putting a pitch list together, but they don't necessarily want help in managing the pitch process - they do not need help with arrangements for meetings and admin.

They know what they want and they want it fairly quickly. In those cases the intermediary would do the homework and make sure that the client has maximum options taking the client through specific credentials.

The intermediary helps the client develop a shortlist and then the client will do the rest themselves. This is useful for a client if they are knowledgeable about agencies and they believe they have the ability to run things on their own. It is a much shorter process and the intermediary role is almost an adjunct to procurement.

The absence of procurement specialists

Another aside that is worth mentioning, which I consider a third trend, is that in our experience there are hardly any marketing procurement specialists in this country, we know of one. With procurement becoming more and more involved in pitches this is a big gap in the process.

While the involvement of procurement executives is likely to remain a permanent aspect of the pitch process, the need for refinement and influence of their contribution needs to be carefully managed.

ABOUT JOHANNA MCDOWELL

MD of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS), and partner in Scopem Africa, with a background that includes being on both the agency and the client side of the fence, Johanna McDowell is well-placed to offer commentary on marketing and advertising in the South African and international contexts. She built her career in marketing and advertising since 1974, holding directorship in both SA and British advertising agencies. She was MD of Grey Phillips Advertising in 1988.

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