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Marketers Warned Not to Use a Pitch to Measure Current Agency's Performance

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Trinity P3's Darren Woolley says Australian agencies see the pitch process as inherently inequitable and inefficient, writes LBB's Tom Loudon



Marketers are using pitches to measure an incumbent agency's performance, to both the client's and agency's detriment, argues pitch doctor Darren Woolley.

"Procurement and marketing use pitching to review contracts," the Trinity P3 founder said. "But pitching isn't an ideal way of measuring incumbent performance, but for measuring new agencies."

With agencies increasingly voicing their concerns over the pitch process, Darren stressed that there is a pressing need to rethink how pitches are conducted to foster healthier relationships between marketers and creative partners.

There is a "one-size-fits-all" approach to pitching that results from a lack of clear client requirements when initiating the process, he explained.

"Many clients adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, leading to agency confusion and frustration.

"This method not only undermines the potential for creative collaboration but also sets the stage for significant resource expenditure without any guarantee of compensation.

"Procurement teams set the rules for how we run pitches, and agencies can either choose to play or not."

When he unveiled the [State of the Pitch](#) research, Darren noted that agencies were facing pitch costs of \$50,000-\$150,000, including out-of-pocket and head hour costs.

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An absence of feedback post-pitch exacerbates the situation, he argues, as agencies are left in the dark about why they were unsuccessful, often learning about the outcome only through industry gossip or trade publications.

"Pitches are still a big creative, media buying exercise, but so many pitches are for small projects," Darren said. "Successful agencies can spend the money they would earn just on the laborious pitch process."

As the State of the Pitch report indicates, agencies view the system as unfair, resulting in feelings of disillusionment and stress. When agencies were asked to score the pitch process, the average was 3.13 out of 5. Trinity P3 GM Lydia Feely noted at the time, "agencies were reporting a lack of 'table stakes', the minimum requirements that make sure the client pitching business has a clear and reasonable process that they know they can stick to."

Procurement teams play a pivotal role in shaping the pitch process, which Darren emphasised as focussing more on governance and risk management than on cultivating quality agency relationships.

"Only 30% of pitches are run by procurement, yet they scored lower than marketers and pitch consultants in terms of satisfaction," Darren said.

"When you run a pitch that leaves a bad feeling, that has an impact on your personal reputation as a marketer - and you can end up with really good agencies no longer pitching for particular clients."

However, Darren noted that this reputational damage seems to affect individual marketers more than brands, with some marketers developing reputations for favouring "friends" or friendly agencies, which not only alienates potential creative partners but diminishes the quality of work produced for brands, ultimately leading to a cycle of diminishing returns.

This imbalance raises questions about the effectiveness of procurement's involvement in the creative process.

To counter these challenges, Darren advocated for a fundamental shift in how agencies and marketers approach the pitch process, with successful collaborations focusing on long-term partnerships rather than one-off speculative campaigns.

"Marketers need to be clear about their objectives and what constitutes success before initiating a pitch," Darren said on the webinar hosted by B&T editor Tom Fogden, underscoring how clarity can streamline the process.

By moving away from a transactional mindset and embracing a more relational approach, Darren hopes marketers can foster an environment conducive to innovation and creativity.

To achieve this, industry bodies must promote best practices and encourage different pitch processes to marketers and procurement teams, Darren added.

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