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‘A bit more pessimistic’ and ‘nothing worth celebrating’: Darren Woolley gives stark analysis on the 2025 State of The Pitch

by Alisha Buaya
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For Woolley, the industry appears not to have had much improvement since the 2024 findings.

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“There’s a theme running through this report: pitches being used for a cost reduction tool. A lot of focus is on the price of agencies, or the cost of the agencies, rather than necessarily the best agencies,” **Darren Woolley**, global CEO of TrinityP3, told *Mediaweek* as the pitch consultancy releases its second State of the Pitch **report**.

For Woolley, the industry has not made significant improvements since the initial 2024 findings. The agencies that participated in this year’s survey participated in 70 pitches from July to December 2024.

‘It’s a bit more pessimistic than it was last year’

This year’s State of The Pitch report, which saw the surveyed agencies take part in 70 pitches from July to December 2024, highlighted an overall decline in pitch satisfaction, with the average pitch rating dropping from 3.13 out of 5 last year to 2.99.

Woolley noted that there was nothing worth celebrating.

“When you look at the number of agencies that weren’t successful this time, last year it was 44%. This year it’s 30%. We’ve got a lot more agencies this time that didn’t win. When you look at the scores that they gave, winning certainly made them feel better about the process.

“In the sample, there is a reason why it’s a bit more pessimistic than it was last year. But the actual reasons for the types of things they’re pessimistic about are cost-focused.”

Woolley highlighted a prime example of this was the growing number of extended payment terms, citing the rise in 31-to-60-day remuneration periods jumping from 19.50% last year to 51.40% in the current survey.



“There’s very much a trend towards putting the financial pressure on the agencies and not on the clients. And you would have to say the state of the economy is having an impact there.”



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Darren Woolley

It's all about the money

Uncertainty in the economy over the last year has been the contributing factor to dissatisfaction in the pitch process as budgets tighten, brands look to save more and marketers want to pay less.

"I don't think there's a marketer around that would tell you they have enough budget to do everything they need to do. If they can find ways of saving money so that they can do more, then they'll do it.

"Whereas procurement will be trying to save money so they can return to the bottom line.

Woolley said that while they each have very different motivations, marketers and procurement are focused on cost reduction, which is highlighted in the survey.

Still boiling the ocean

In the 2024 State of The Pitch report, Woolley told *Mediaweek* that marketers are "boiling the ocean" to find the right agency, and the statement still holds true in this year's findings.

"What we did notice this time was that there were more pitches for very specific roles, like social media influencer, a production agency, pitches for digital agencies, digital/technology suppliers."

He noted that pitch lists continued to include long consideration lists, though not as gargantuan as 45 agencies in a pitch, as reported last year. Woolley said: "To start with more than 13, that is still boiling the ocean. It's not as widespread as it was last year, but it's still present."

Woolley said a lot of work still needs to be done on improving the pitching process to make it fit for purpose.

"It's still got a long way to go. There still could be a place, occasionally, for running pitches the way they're being run at the moment. But that should be in the minority, not as the standard approach."

Where did the industry go wrong?

"The industry hasn't changed for the changing requirements," Woolley said.

He noted the changes in marketing, media and advertising over the last decade greatly contrast the lack of change in the process and requirements in pitches.

"The fact that there's still so many pitches that require speculative, creative work, it's just crazy. In most cases, you're appointing people to do lots of different campaigns, and lots of different ideas, not just come up with one.

"The fact that agencies keep lining up for full pitches, whether it's for a \$50,000 project or a \$10 million contract, regional or global contract.

"For an industry that prides itself on creativity and innovation, the pitch process is largely stagnated and hasn't changed in the last 20 years," Woolley said.

ESG and DEI: 'They're important for business'

The State of the Pitch report also interrogated ESG and DEI compliance and highlighted how it has become less of a priority for consultants and procurement, in contrast to marketers which has shown slightly better figures.

Woolley shared two theories, the first being clients shifting focus to saving money rather than compliance to modern slavery, zero net emissions, DE&I and gender equality commitments.

The second is the rise of the anti-woke movement in the US, which he noted appears to have already had an impact.

"There's more of a focus on price, delivering savings rather than worrying about risk mitigation around issues like gender equality and DE&I".

Woolley said some agencies are already leaning into the anti-woke movement and withdrawing DE&I initiatives to keep government business.

"I think there's a real risk that this move away from doing the right thing, for very good reasons, is becoming a negative. I think that's a worry for anyone because zero net emissions are more than just saving the planet. It's also making your business much more effective.

"Diversity, equity and inclusion are not just giving a fair go. It's also building creative and innovative companies through having a diversity of ideas and opinions. Gender equality is about increasing the pool of talent by 50% by giving everyone the opportunity to perform.

"All of these things are not just things that we should do to feel good or to be good, but they're also important for business."

What agencies, marketers and procurement teams need to consider

Woolley noted that marketers and procurement teams need to think about what they are trying to achieve before they go to pitch. He said that comments about going to pitch to

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see what else is out there are “incredibly wasteful”.

“They need to consider why they’re going to pitch, and have they designed a process that is the best way to achieve what they’re trying to achieve.”

Meanwhile for agencies, Woolley said they need to think hard about the pitches they are willing to participate in. He encouraged them to understand what the pitch was about before throwing their hat into the ring.

“Agencies need to interrogate the pitch process more and decide whether this is something they want to participate in.”

Woolley highlighted that the nature of the pitch process has shown the negative sides of both marketers and procurement, as well as agencies.

He noted that marketers have relied on agencies turning up to take part in pitches while agencies have been left feeling jaded and deceived by the experience.

One respondent quoted in the report called the process “deceptive”, “unethical”, and “wholly unacceptable”, and that they would blacklist senior executives and procurement and never do business with them again.

“This is the level of anger and resentment that badly run pitches deliver,” Woolley said.

Outlook of trends for the next State of The Pitch report

Looking ahead with predictions for the next report, Woolley highlighted the high level of pitch activity in the market for the first half of this year.

“It’ll be interesting to see if that continues through to the second half of the year.

“I suspect the only thing that could stand in the way, particularly on global pitches is the uncertainty around things like tariffs and the global economy’s response to what the US government’s doing.”

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By **Alisha Buaya**

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