

Mumbrella
COMMS
CON

GET READY FOR
THE NEXT ERA
OF PR & COMMS

OPINION

Why the RFP process needs a marketing makeover: Balancing cost and innovation for effective partnerships

As an indie media agency owner, Bench Media's co-founder and chief operations officer, Shai Luft, has seen how tender and Request for Proposal (RFP) processes "can often miss the mark". Here, he explores who should be responsible for writing RFPs.

September 2, 2024 8:41
by SHAI LUFT



As an independent media agency owner, I've observed first-hand how the traditional RFP (Request for Proposal) and tender processes can often miss the mark, particularly when they are driven primarily by procurement teams rather than by marketing teams. While procurement's role in ensuring cost-effectiveness and compliance is vital, the overemphasis on these aspects can stifle creativity, hinder innovation, and ultimately compromise the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, especially when committing to a partner for the long term.

Countless RFPs are built by procurement teams who are primarily focused on procuring goods such as office supplies or equipment, and often have limited understanding of the nature of digital marketing. Unfortunately, in the process of producing the RFP briefing and requirement documents, marketers tend to take a back seat resulting in 100+ page documents that are an administration nightmare to read, let alone respond to. RFPs often lack vital details such as budgets, current challenges, preferred pricing models creating a detached process that lacks meaningful human interaction or relationship building along the way until the very last pitch meeting.

This is not to say I haven't been privy to some very well structured and throughout RFPs that utilise a proper modern age response system which are a delight to respond to. Sadly, they are rare examples.

The procurement-driven approach: A double-edged sword

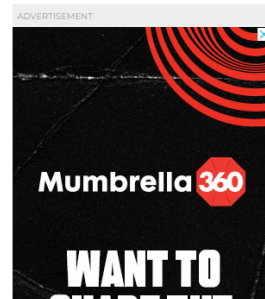
Procurement teams excel at evaluating proposals based on cost and compliance. They are trained to look for a partner that has robust processes, structure and stability. However, marketing is not just a compliance game; it's a nuanced field that thrives on creativity, strategic thinking, and a deep understanding of the target audience. When the RFP process is dominated by procurement, the selection criteria often prioritises compliance and low cost over creativity and execution excellence.



The majority of RFPs I've read in the last few years have been overly focused on looking for a large, process-driven agency instead of one that is quick, nimble and proactive. While I acknowledge that choosing a smaller, nimbler independent agency may seemingly pose more risk, there is also much to be gained as a competitive advantage for the brand.

When it comes to marketing in 2024, economies of scale and the so-called "negotiation power" that larger agencies used to possess, in my opinion, is more a hindrance than a benefit. The real advantage to marketing teams is now held by smaller independent agencies that are data focused and can learn and adapt quickly to changing sentiments. These agencies are also not encumbered by group deals, mandates and preferential deals that larger agencies are often beholden to.

Unfortunately, the average RFP is still skewed towards sourcing an agency that will run uninspired, cookie-cutter campaigns that fail to engage consumers or differentiate the brand in a crowded marketplace. It's no surprise then, that in spite of a long and arduous process the satisfaction levels from the process and the outcome are so low. Procurement-run



pitches scored an abysmal 2.94 satisfaction score out of 5 based on TrinityP3 data. Marketing led RFP scored slightly better at 3.21, but both are barely a pass.

The importance of marketing-led RFPs

Where marketing teams lead the RFP process and the procurement team offers support the engagement level with the respondents is vastly different. Marketers understand the brand's vision, the intricacies of consumer behaviour, what data points to track and the importance of aligning campaigns with broader strategic goals. When marketing professionals lead the RFP process, the emphasis shifts towards finding the right partner who can deliver innovative solutions that resonate with the target audience and drive long-term brand loyalty.

A marketing-led agency RFP process should prioritise the following:

1. **Creative vision and strategy** – Evaluating agencies based on their ability to understand the brand's vision and develop strategic, innovative campaigns that execute on that vision.
2. **Audience insight** – Assessing how well agencies understand the target audience and their ability to create campaigns that genuinely connect and drive action with consumers.
3. **Track record** – Considering the agency's past work, their successes, and how they have tackled similar challenges in the past.
4. **Collaborative potential** – Gauging the agency's willingness and ability to collaborate closely with the brand's internal teams, fostering a true partnership rather than a transactional relationship.

A call for better RFPs

The ideal RFP process should strike a balance between procurement's need for fiscal responsibility and marketing's need for creativity and strategic alignment. This can be achieved by fostering greater collaboration between procurement and marketing teams. By working together from the outset, they can develop RFP criteria that ensure both cost-effectiveness and campaign excellence.

Additionally, including a diverse panel of evaluators from both procurement and marketing can help in assessing proposals more holistically. This approach ensures agencies are evaluated not just on price, but also on their ability to deliver compelling, effective marketing solutions that drive business outcomes.



Shai Luft

The RFP brief needs to be very detailed and provide adequate time to pull together a well thought out strategy as the main focus rather than procurement box ticking. The marketing team needs to go into as much detail as possible including covering their team structure, budgets, existing channels, current pain points, and more, to get the most out of the process.

While procurement plays a crucial role in managing budgets and ensuring cost-efficiency, it is imperative that marketing professionals have a significant say in the RFP process. Only by valuing creativity and strategic insight alongside cost considerations can brands hope to select agency partners capable of delivering truly impactful campaigns.

It's time to rethink the traditional procurement-driven RFP model and move towards a more balanced, marketing-led approach that fosters innovation and drives brand success.

I say: "Stop playing it safe."

Shai Luft is the co-founder and chief operating officer of Bench Media.

Keep up to date with the latest in media and marketing

GOT A TIP?

topics [BENCH MEDIA](#) [REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL](#) [SHAI LUFT](#)

f Share

🐦 Tweet

in Share

LATEST



Tourism Fiji, Fred&Co Digital Advertising, Tourism NT amongst winners at Mumbrella Travel Marketing Awards 2024



'It's been a bad investment': Nine's Catherine West and Matt Stanton grilled at shareholders meeting



Mick Molloy back in Melbourne for Triple M breakfast



Travel Marketing Summit: 'Boring is a waste of space' - Emily Taylor and Cam Blackley on challenging marketing's conservatism



'I knew it was going to be a big change': Chris Freel talks making the move oOh!media

 **MumbrellaPro**

[SIGN UP NOW](#)

Don't stop learning while working from home