

Pitch meetings go both ways

 By [Regine le Roux](#)

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Recently I was called to help a company with some damage control as a result of negative online reviews they received. During the initial call, I did say that online reviews are generally a symptom of a larger issue. We may be able to help with the immediate containment of the situation, but, this would just be like putting a plaster over an unknown wound; we would need to dig a bit deeper and treat the root cause to avoid similar future situations.



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On prepping for the meeting, I found it rather interesting that there was very little information about the company on their website, apart from a generic photo, logo and a telephone number, there was absolutely no information about who they are or what they do. I prepped as best as I could.

What are your values?

At the meeting, I was greeted by a rather monochromatic male-dominated boardroom. Which I found very interesting as their core target market is people living in communities, so I did find it a bit odd that the board wasn't more demographically representative. For about the first 20 minutes, before I had even started my pitch, Mr Dominant Monochromat (DM) explained to me what he wanted done from a Google Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) point of view. His ideal scenario is that when people Google his company's name and include the word liar or crook, he wants articles and keywords to pop up saying, 'I thought the company was a crook, but they are not...'



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When I managed to get a word in edgewise, I suggested that they should perhaps consider steering away from negative words such as crooks and liars and rather use more positive associations to build a positive reputation. This encouraged Mr DM to mansplain his desired approach, and that he was glad that he could teach me something new. When I, at last, had the opportunity to pitch my ideas and proposed plan of action; I just wanted to confirm what their vision was as I was not able to find it before the meeting. Mr DM, asked rather defensively, 'why?! It's to make money!'. When I went on to ask

what their values were, he replied a bit annoyed with, 'money, money, money, why what is yours?'.

I then did something that I have never done in a meeting before. I wasn't even half-way through my presentation, but I closed my laptop, packed it away and said, 'one of our core values is respect. It is very clear that you have no respect for your customers, your employees, or for me. Your approach and values do not resonate with ours. We are not the right company to help you.' I packed my things and left.

Two-way pitch

The experience made me realise that when we pitch for work it's very much a two-way pitch. As much as you need to impress the potential client with your methodology and credentials. There must be mutual respect gained. They also need to pitch themselves to you. You need to ask yourself whether this is a company that you want to be associated with; is this someone you can work with.



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It is our vision to be Africa's go to reputation specialists to build resilient businesses. We believe in changing the reputation of our country and continent one person and one company at a time. But, the other party also needs to put in the work, do their bit and respect that the advice and guidance that they are given is based on a track record of years of experience.

We would have made meaningful recommendations until the cows came home, but Mr DM would only have been happy if his company's name and words such a liar and crook popped up on Google. Not the reputation building route recommended for anyone.

Sometimes saying thank you, but no thank you, and stepping away is necessary and good.

I think in this current economic climate we need to remember the fundamentals. Compromising your own values will be detrimental in the long run. When you pitch for new work, don't be shy to ask questions, they have to impress you as much as you have to impress them, it's a two-way street.

ABOUT REGINE LE ROUX

Regine is a reputation specialist. She founded Reputation Matters in 2005; where they measure and manage companies' reputations using their unique Repudometer® measurement tool.

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