

Winning teams are more than just pitchers

 By Johanna McDowell

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The primary way a client appoints an agency is through the good old pitch process, writes Johanna McDowell, CEO of the Independent Agency Search & Selection Company (IAS) and Scopen partner. But is that because clients don't know there's a better way?



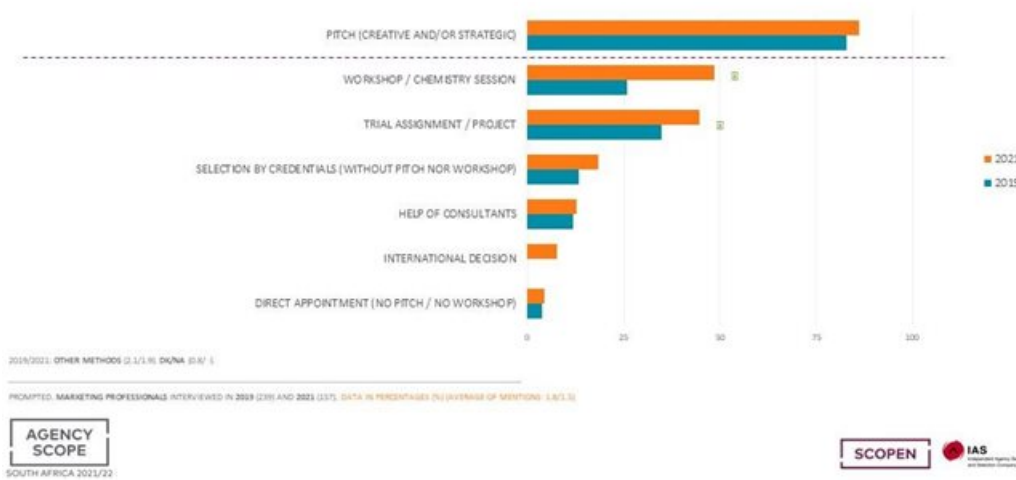
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Although the pitch process is part of agency life – in fact, the lifeblood of agencies to a certain extent, the whole experience has become very draining over the last 12 to 18 months. The stories we're hearing from across the industry is how agencies put together a heart-and-soul pitch, an energetic presentation... and the client ghosts them.

Ghosting is currently very prevalent in the industry across all advertising and communication disciplines, where agencies will put proposals together, often accompanied by creative work. Post presentation, nothing happens.

Scopen research shows that 86% of accounts awarded happens via the pitch process. However, what has grown in the last two years is the use of workshops. Instead of weeks of putting together a full-on pitch, the two parties collaborate in a workshop to determine their combined potential.

Methods for Selecting an Agency (creative and/or media agencies)


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From an IAS viewpoint, this is a healthy development in the industry. Even while the percentage of participation in workshops is smaller, we believe growth in this area would show huge benefits.

The third preferred way of awarding business is to work on projects, either from an idea suggested by the client or an agency being proactive enough to come up with an idea that would excite the client. In fact, where an agency approaches a potential client with a suggestion and proposal, they may well get some business even if the client has an agency of record. Per-project work can lead to more work, and is a good way to get a foot in the door.

What South Africa is missing out on

Here's what clients want to see: An initiative that's relevant, from an agency that takes the time to really consider the business it is targeting. Approaching armed with research on the potential client's market sector, along with a proposition that is different, attractive and interesting, results - nine times out of ten – in the client appointing the agency.



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When reviewing Scopen research, it's quite disappointing to see how poorly South Africa performs in relation to its international counterparts when it comes to winning new business. What's required is a shakeup that indicates a hunger for business and zest instead of blandness in approach.

Note that the agencies in South Africa who are consistently successful know exactly what they're doing - and that's why they win. Winning agencies make a point of finding out all they can about a client.

With the research and tools available to everyone today, there's no reason why one agency should be armed with more intelligence than another. Businesses that have been following Scopen research understand the client and the effort required to win – and they've become measurably more successful.

Opportunity may not knock...

Bottom line, then, must be: Don't rely solely on a pitch process or statutory RFP. Complement that with workshops and a project using ideas others haven't already given to a client. Use the tools and resources available to note how others work and what a client wants, and chase the business instead of waiting for that knock on your door.

Sometimes opportunity doesn't knock. It gets distracted by an energetic team with great ideas and a desire to win business.

ABOUT JOHANNA MCDOWELL

MD of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS), and partner in Scopen 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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