

08: Choosing the right agency for your brand

The eighth [Thought Leadership Digibate](#), recently hosted by [Aegis Media](#) in conjunction with [Bizcommunity.com](#) in Johannesburg, focused on choosing the right agency for your brand. If you missed the Digibate, download or listen to the podcast which is now available.



Panel of experts

The panel of experts that was moderated by [Dawn Rowlands](#), CEO of Aegis Media Sub-Saharan Africa, included

- Tony Koenderman, editor & co-publisher of *AdReview*
- Mike Joubert, CEO, BrandsRock!
- Zahn Rossou, head of agency search & selection, Yardstick
- Luisa Mazinter, founder, CUBE (on the square) and TheMarketingsite.com
- Lwandile Qokweni, media manager, Carat SSA
- Nigel Morris, CEO, Aegis Media Americas & EMEA (via Skype).

A chemistry check that covers the following key factors is vital:

- Is the agency relevant to your brand?
- What local insights can it bring to the party that will bring consumers closer to your brand?
- Does it offer digital integration into the centre of mix?
- Can it deliver consistency and control?
- Does it have the technical expertise to actually implement what it offers?
- Most importantly - *people*, does it have the right people to execute and does it connect and truly understand your brand and business goals?

What would lead a client to making the decision to change agencies?

- One of the main drivers to approach a pitch consultant is poor servicing - agencies win accounts based on creative, and lose it because of poor service
- The campaign is not delivering the required results
- The clients suspect they can get a more cost-effective service elsewhere

How does the conversation start and what are the client's concerns around its current agency relationship?

We all need to understand that marketing and advertising is a hard business and it changes so rapidly, becoming more social and relying more and more on data and therefore it is vital that both client and

agencies need to have the right skills in place to be able to navigate a brand towards achieving its business goals as clients are now demanding a true return on every R1 they invest in a campaign.

It was noted by Tony Koenderman that "Agencies do not *listen!* They are often so stuck in the way they do things that all they can focus on is how *they* will do things, as opposed to listening to the client's true business objectives and then strategically working out how they can assist the client in achieving these goals".

"There also seems to be a lack of respect around what the client's actual budget is vs. what the agency wants to produce creatively and the budget that comes with that," said Mike Joubert of Brands Rock!

Following this comment closely was one made by Lwandile Qokweni: "Does the agency truly understand the client's market, its language, its culture and can it speak the language that the consumers converse in?"

Deal with the emotions, but make a decision based on business goals

It's often a very emotional decision to change from agency and to approach a pitch consultant, but by the time the client gets to this point they have truly given it a lot of thought as the process is costly and risky. There will be a transition period between agencies and this needs to be well thought out as the brand needs to remain consistent in the market place. It is advised that clients take their time before switching agencies and it is recommended that they select two or three agencies that they feel may work well with their brand. Get credentials, if this process is not possible then call in a pitch consultancy to assist you through this process. If you are the agency being called to pitch, the key factor is to be true to your competency - do not say you can do things that you can't.

From pitch to procurement

Is there a difference between putting out a pitch to creative vs. media agencies?

The process is not that different - the bottom line is to make sure you have a well-designed process that will strategically take you from a large pool of candidates to a select few looking at the following criteria:

- Credentials
- Track record
- Right skill set
- Chemistry

This is just the beginning of the process. Once you get into the pitch room there are a number of game-changers that can influence the awarding process. By this time all the "health checks" should be done and you should use this time to see if the agencies in the room truly understand your brand and if they are the people with whom you want to partner. If in the pitch room the agency starts debating the costs and budget - then you know that they are not the agency for you as they do not really understand your business and what sort of financial position your business is in - this should be a red flag as to how the relationship is going to progress.

Currently the way in which the process works is that both the client and agency understand that this is a start of a relationship - which starts with the dating process, then moves into the commitment phase, and along the way reviews/evaluates where the relationship is. Traditionally there is a three-year contract between agencies and clients with reviews along the way. What one should be asking however, is if that particular

contract is a dating game that will lead to marriage? How can one say upfront that the marriage is only going to last for three years with an option to renew? The way in which one negotiates a contract with an agency may currently be flawed and this needs to be re-evaluated.

The pitch process itself should not be questioned, but rather whether this is the right way to go about finding the right advertising/media partner for a business.

Before you get "married" to an agency, make sure you have the discussion about the "marriage contract" and get the difficult issues out in plain sight before you have the "wedding ceremony".

Converged pitch process

Successful brands are not built around the strength of the relationship with the creative agency only, it also comes from every single other specialist agency's input and that true partnership and convergence model. There should be a converged pitch process across all aspects of the client's business, taking the following into consideration:

- Firstly establish if you want a supplier/vendor relationship or if you want a partnership. Based upon this the terms and conditions can be identified.
- The procurement manager is guided by the marketing department and if they are happy with your service, then the business is procured - but is this the right way to do things?
- Procurement departments look at the terms and conditions, ROI, execution, budgets and not at the relationship between the client service people - their jobs are to ensure that the client is getting from the agency what it said it would deliver and this often leads to conflict between the departments. You may have won the business, but problems can arise soon in the process. This again takes us back to the process of looking for an agency, being very specific about your business objectives and ensuring that the agencies you are considering are able to fulfill all the requirements and not just the creative elements.
- Often in the relationship changes are inevitable and the agency is expected to be able to keep up with the changes. It could be the implementation of a new strategy half way through the execution process. Does the procurement process and its terms and conditions allow for these changes and how are they handled?

Calling an agency out of the blue is like calling an estate agent - you get on their radar and then they don't leave you alone. So what is the best way to approach an agency, other than the formal pitch route?

You are in the marketing arena, you are aware of players in the industry and you can make inquiries informally through general discussions via your own network, but then you have to go the formal route and get a selected group of agencies to pitch. Another way to track what agencies are doing/thinking is to follow them on Twitter - this gives great insight into their thought processes and actions.

Professionals in the advertising industry need to be *professional*, realise that there is competition and focus on what they can offer the client, and not spend their time "rubbishing" the competition.

Valuable insights from the social media arena

Go online and see what is being said about different agencies - remember that an agency does not control what is said about its brand in the marketplace and valuable insights can be gleaned from the social media arena. Remember that many creative agencies have their preferred partners/suppliers/buddies and will

include their offerings into the pitch, but this might not be what you, the client, needs or what is best for your business.

The brief is the most vital part of the pitch process - ensure you get this right, be specific about what you are looking for, what you need and also what you do *not* need. Be open to collaborating with more than one agency - at the end of the day you want the best people around the table to help you achieve your business goals.

In conclusion there was a challenge from media present (*Advantage Magazine*) at the Digibate for agency to open their doors so that the way in which they work can be seen and understood by all, thus making the decision to look at a new agency - one that can be based upon true understanding of an agency process rather than speculation. This challenge was publicly accepted by Dawn Rowlands, Aegis Media's CEO and she has announced that the company will be opening its doors to media and clients to come see how it does things.

Open days

The open days will include Aegis Media's network brands Carat; iProspect; Posterscope; Vizeum; Trigger Isobar and Full Circle Media.

- 14 September 2012 at Slow Lounge in Johannesburg from 9am-12noon
- 19 September 2012 at Aegis Media HQ in Cape Town from 9am-12noon.

The debate was held on Friday, 24 August 2012.

Listen to the podcasts

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Listen every month

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