

IS IT TIME TO REINVENT THE AGENCY REVIEW PROCESS?

Agency Review Process Survey
Findings and Implications

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JOANNE DAVIS CONSULTING INC.

IS IT TIME TO RE-INVENT THE AGENCY REVIEW PROCESS?

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Background

- Based on the importance and frequency of agency reviews, we created a short survey for client leaders in marketing and procurement and agency leaders to give a sounding board for what's good and less good in the new business process. The focus was on the lead creative agency.
- We decided on this initiative as the topic does not appear to have been robustly surveyed recently. In addition, we are always interested in feedback from both agencies and clients on improving crucial processes and believed this would be a good addition to our last survey on how clients can get more from their agencies.
- The survey focused on U.S. based clients and agencies, although many have global responsibilities.

Methodology

- Conducted online – launched: April 14, 2016; closed: April 26, 2016.
- Agency version sent to 411 agency management and new business leaders. Client version to 1,017 senior and mid-level marketing and procurement professionals.

Response Rates

- As expected, agency response was fast and significant. In less than a week, 101 agency responses were received with a total of 126 responses received overall (31% response).
- Client responses (marketing and procurement), were 66 of 1,017 (6.5% response rate.)
- This makes perfect sense considering that agencies typically find themselves in new business reviews at least monthly while clients might be in a review for one or two assignments every several years.

Time to Reinvent?

The survey yielded results that both surprised and didn't surprise us. We were surprised that there was more alignment between clients and agencies than we expected. We were not surprised that agencies felt more strongly about being compensated for spec creative than did clients, but clients were not as resistant to the idea as we expected. Both sides felt very strongly that more time should be spent on getting to know each other. And it was a good confirmation to see that clients recognized that they need to work harder to ensure that they know and communicate what they need at the start of the review process.

Key findings are outlined below and explored in detail on the following pages.

1. The agency review process is not fundamentally broken, but is in need of improvement.
2. Clients need to work harder up front to clarify their needs, scopes and budgets prior to reaching out to agencies.
3. Reviews should focus more on both sides getting to know what it would be like to actually work together.
4. "To spec or not to spec, that is the question."
5. If big creative shoot-outs remain a necessary part of the process, then clients might consider compensating the agencies for their work at a fair rate so that clients can own it.
6. Both agree that the RFI should be relevant and focused. Client priority for Semi-Finals is to meet the team, while the agency priority is to talk strategy. Both agree that Finals are about showing that the agency can listen.
7. Review consultants were viewed favorably by both clients and agencies with the overwhelming majority agreeing consultants should only be paid by clients and the least expensive consultant is not the way to go.
8. Extra Note and Final Recommendations: Although we did not ask explicit questions about procurement, there were only three comments from agencies about the role of procurement. Several Final Recommendations are provided.

#1 The agency review process is not fundamentally broken, but is in need of improvement.

- There was general consensus across comments and answers to questions that there should be more emphasis on exchanging “high-value” information or interaction that is crucial to identifying the long-term components of a successful relationship, and less focus on creating and reviewing “low-value” agency information.
- Lower-value information includes general agency information, historical work, and anything that can be found on the agency website. Higher-value information includes relevant case studies, the team and initial strategic thoughts on the client’s business and challenges.

“A successful relationship boils down to a client's ability to provide clear objectives and priorities, an agency's ability to provide proactive solutions and the culture/talent fits of the teams. The evaluation process should focus on getting to those answers rather than the standard presentation dynamic.”

Client

“I want to spend more quality time with the agency candidates so it is less speed dating and they can be more informed and we can then see more into their ability to serve us. The current traditional process is too “blind” e.g. the agency candidates and clients cannot get a good enough sense of one another - feels too much at arm’s length.”

Client

#2 Clients need to work harder up front to clarify their needs, scopes and budgets prior to reaching out to agencies.

- One of the most frustrating aspect of reviews for clients, as well as agencies, is when the client has not conducted a rigorous needs assessment or invested time in outlining objectives and a detailed Scope of Work. Most crucial is the alignment of scope to budget so that expectations are in line.
- It's important to note that clients were highly self-critical acknowledging they are not as ready as they should be to launch a review. It's also good alignment that both had the same top two of six choices.
- This is an area where consultants can potentially play an increased role as an experienced, independent expert who ensures that the necessary upfront work is completed to ensure a productive review.

"Consultants and agencies could design a much better system to help clients get to a clear idea of what they want. 90% of the time, they do not know and everyone wastes valuable time/money using the creative process to figure it out."

Agency

Question: What is the most frustrating thing for agencies in the review process?

Answer Choice	CLIENT Top Two Choices	AGENCY Top Two Choices
Clients that aren't clear about what they need in the assignment	81%	72%
Clients that have fee expectations out of alignment with the work	63%	40%

#3 Reviews should focus more on both sides getting to know what it would be like to actually work together.

- The ability to work together and the feeling that clients and agencies “get” each other are most important for a long-term successful relationship. But currently, agencies are asked to provide significant information (RFIs) and prepare for chemistry interviews prior to having met the client or even “heard their voice.”
- A significant improvement could be to determine an efficient way for invited agencies to get a sense of the client culture and vibe much sooner rather than later in the process.
- Workshops are universally considered to be very valuable by both clients and agencies as they come closest to the actual process of working together, but clients don’t have time for more than one workshop.

“The more time spent getting to know the agency people, how they think, how they work, the better.”

Client

“We always believe in face to face meetings or phone conversations in the beginning of the process...”

“Consider having the client present to the agencies to kick off. Gives the agencies a sense of the client and how they think, what’s important to them, their style.”

Agencies

Answer Choice	CLIENT	AGENCY
Prefer No Workshops	8.2%	2.0%
Prefer One Workshop	73.5%	51.5%
Prefer Two Workshops	18.4%	46.5%
	91.9%	98.0%

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#4 “To spec or not to spec, that is the question.”

- Spec creative for reviews has always and likely always will be a controversial topic. Clients feel that they need to see the agency in action, and agencies feel that they are asked to “give away” their most important intellectual property.
- Comments from the survey participants were consistent with this feeling from the agency side and perhaps a bit surprisingly, some clients also indicated that creative shoot-outs do not answer the more important question of whether or not “you can work together.”
- Reviewing a combination of work from current/prior clients and evidence of insights into client's issues can be a better practice. This is especially true if the work was done and would be done by the team assigned to the client, rather than agency work performed by other teams. People create the great work, not the agency.

“Eliminate the need for spec work. Past and previous creative shows the agency's creative prowess. It should be about what goes into their process and chemistry. Together, the creative work will be solved. Rarely ever does the pitch creative get produced as the final, consumer-facing creative.”

Agency

“Eliminate the traditional ‘creative shootout’ as the ‘go to’ way to choose an agency. Use the internet to find out if the agency has done great work, and use the selection process to test the ‘relationship’. It's easy to find out if the agency can do great work, the critical question is whether or not they can do it for you. The only way to tell that is to see if you can work together. You don't learn that from a creative shoot out.”

Client

#5 If big creative shoot-outs remain a necessary part of the process, clients should consider compensating the agencies for their work at a fair rate so that they can own it.

Question: Are you willing to pay an honorarium to agencies for finalist presentations, without owning the work?

	CLIENT	AGENCY
Yes	28.6%	78.4%
No	71.4%	21.6%

Are you willing to pay a higher agency presentation fee if you did own the work?

	CLIENT	AGENCY
Yes	51.0%	86.1%
No	49.0%	13.9%

- Very interestingly, over 50% of clients were willing to pay a fee in order to own the work. Not one client said they'd pay over for \$300K while 43% of agencies said they should be paid \$300K for client to own the work (see Q12 tables in Appendix). A good practice would be to agree upfront on what a client is willing to pay.
- Perhaps guidelines for reasonable compensation should be developed by a joint committee of the ANA and 4As. Variables would include size of opportunity, length of contract, and how many concepts and executions are expected in the review.
- Such an arrangement could have positive effect in two ways – it demonstrates true respect for a most valuable asset that an agency offers while ensuring that clients have more skin in the game of the review process itself.

"Significant payment for pitch work based on time invested would be a significant step forward. So many of our reviews these days are solving larger business issues vs. a marketing campaign and this thinking is undervalued with our current practices."

Agency

#6a Clients and agencies agree that the RFI should be relevant and focused.

- Clients saw more importance in receiving general agency information, agencies rated it as much less important.
- Even Procurement respondents agreed that clients should not utilize the standard procurement questionnaires for their RFI.
- Clients and agencies were very similar in agreeing that “deeper must haves” should be emphasized.
- Submitting agency videos was a low priority to both clients and agencies.

“Start at the chemistry check. RFPs (especially ones with videos) take so much time without having any actual client engagement so it's difficult to gauge whether or not the relationship would be right for both agency or client.”

The RFI phase of the creative review process often has a long list (7-14) of possible agencies because clients want choice and options. Check which of the following are Very Important, Somewhat Important, or Not Important:

Agency

Answer Choice	Very Important	
	CLIENT	AGENCY
Agencies submit standard RFI with current factual information similar to what the 4A's previously recommended (client list, office locations, areas of expertise, size/number of employees, etc.)	60%	22%
Agencies must respond to the same procurement RFI the client company uses for all vendors even if the questions are irrelevant because it's client company or procurement policy	24%	14%
Agencies respond to RFI with deeper “must haves” to proceed (cases, creative reel, bios, etc.)	62%	69%
Agencies prepare custom video of their leaders discussing the client opportunity and why they are qualified even though the client hasn't briefed the agencies yet	12%	9%

#6b Client priority for Semi-Finals is to meet the team, while the agency priority is to talk strategy. Both agree that Finals are about showing that the agency can listen.

What are your preferences for semi-final meetings? (Please divide 100 points among the following.)

Answer Choice	CLIENT	AGENCY
Meet the leaders	13.4%	14.6%
Meet the team	29.4%	23.3%
See agency's capabilities, unique processes, and new methods they are using to engage	19.4%	15.5%
See relevant work for our category, targets, and agency's best work	20.9%	16.5%
Initial observations on client business	16.9%	30.1%

- Fortunately both parties agree that meeting the team is the number one or number two priority.
- Interestingly, the agency respondents' highest priority to show initial observations on client business is only the clients' fourth priority, although all client options after the first are closely grouped in priority.
- This indicates that agencies are willing to go a step beyond at the semi-final phase.

#6c Client priority for Semi-Finals is to meet the team, while the agency priority is to talk strategy. Both agree that Finals are about showing that the agency can listen.

What are your expectations for finals presentations? (Please divide 100 points among the following.)

- Happily, both clients and agencies agree in the value of listening to direction from the workshop.
- Interestingly, both chose “show me work close to what I could run” as the second answer, indicating that spec work is still wanted/needed.
- The third topic of interest is to get to the point and “present in 60 minutes” beating out “take a couple of hours to present,” indicating that everyone is time pressed.

Answer Choice	CLIENT	AGENCY
Show me the work close to what I could run quickly	18.4%	22.5%
Show that you listened to direction we gave in the workshop	30.6%	31.4%
Get to the point and present in 60 minutes	15.5%	16.7%
Take a couple of hours of presentation to include how you got to your recommendation	17.0%	11.8%
Allow time for Q&A	18.4%	17.6%

#7 Review consultants were generally viewed favorably by both clients and agencies.

- There was strong agreement that review consultants bring important expertise to the process. Very few felt that “we don’t need a review consultant.”
- There was an overwhelming consensus that review consultants should only be paid by clients and not by agencies in order to avoid conflicts of interest. This was the highest scored question in the survey at 90% by clients and 83% by agencies.
- Almost 60% of clients felt that fees paid to review consultants are easily recovered by better contracts, agency teams, and an elevated bar.

Answer Choice	CLIENT AGREE	AGENCY AGREE
We don’t need a review consultant	12.%	4%
Clients should use review consultants because they know agencies better, manage many reviews versus occasional reviews managed by clients	82%	60%
Clients should only use a review consultant who gets paid by the client, and does not get paid by agencies to avoid conflict of interest	90%	83%
We would prefer the least expensive review consultant even if they also get paid by agencies	0.0%	0.0%
To save time, it’s good for the consultant to get to the short list faster, but we can manage the rest of the process ourselves	10%	23%
Consultants fees are easily recovered because they get better fee deals, more client beneficial contracts, better/more advanced agency teams and/or helping us raise the bar	59%	Not Asked

#8 Extra Note: Less negativity from agencies about procurement and Final Recommendations

Procurement

- There have already been extensive industry surveys on procurement's role with agencies so we did not need to ask questions about procurement.
- However, we'd be remiss if we didn't include the point that only three agency respondents who wrote in comments in the open-ended question were critical of procurement. Only 3 out of 62 comments or under 5%.
- Qualitative we know, however the optimist in us believes that perhaps agencies have finally learned to accept procurement as a natural member of the client agency review team, rather than write in a comment that procurement is the main problem.

Final Recommendations

- The pragmatist in us adds that there are far more pressing issues than ineffective procurement in the new business process that need improvement ...
- Our advice to clients:
 - Ready, aim, fire – be sure of what you need before you embark on a review
 - Spend sufficient time in person with agencies – 60 minutes for Semi-Finals and 60 minutes for Finals is not enough with millions of dollars at stake for the lead creative agency
 - Gauge agency listening and include process steps about what it would be like to work together
 - If you want to own the work, consider candid discussion up front
- Our advice to agencies:
 - Share your questions with the client so you too can get ready to aim, before you fire
 - Have the courage of your convictions and balance your enthusiasm for the client's business with your own business needs
 - That said, recognize that the process will likely always include some form of spec
- And our thank you to the many busy people who took time to share with us.



CLIENT...



...AND AGENCY

FULL COMMENTS

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- Both clients and agencies would benefit from **simplicity** in both asks and responses. A successful relationship boils down to a **client's ability to provide clear objectives and priorities**, an agency's ability to provide proactive solutions and the culture/talent fits of the teams. The evaluation process should focus on getting to those answers rather than the standard presentation dynamic.
- While client visits to agencies should be part of any review. Are there new ways to learn about agency culture and **interaction with new technologies** today? What about **inter-agency communication**? As a client I'm going to wonder how a potential agency will interact with other agencies already on the roster.
- I want to spend more **quality time** with the agency candidates so it is less speed dating and they can be more informed and we can then see more into their ability to serve us. The current traditional process is too "blind" e.g. the agency candidates and clients cannot get a good enough sense of one another - feels too much at arm's length
- Agency structure and model is outdated. In a world where speed and agility are key, agencies need to relook at teams and **build flexibility into their model**. Clients are not looking for larger teams, but teams with cross channel skills so there are fewer touch points, leading to efficiency in time and cost.
- Not sure I can answer this in limited space. **99% of incumbents should not participate** because the client has already decided to move on. More time in workshop meetings. I think I said only one workshop, but changed my mind. The more time spent getting to know the agency people, how they think, how they work, the better.
- A lot of time is wasted on negotiating fee with agency. It is comparable to how buying a car used to be. However, buying a new car now has transparency services that has simplified and removed stress from the process. **Review consultant should set expectations for client as to what an appropriate ad agency fee** should be and make sure all potential agencies are willing to work within that range or they should be excluded.
- I think it's important for agencies to identify their "weaknesses" or areas of development up front... however big or small they may be.
- Eliminate the traditional "creative shootout" as the "go to" way to choose an agency. Use the internet to find out if the agency has done great work, and **use the selection process to test the "relationship"**. It's easy to find out if the agency can do great work, the critical question is whether or not they can do it for you. The only way to tell that is to see if you can work together. You don't learn that from a creative shoot out.

- Perhaps include a process where the clients interacting with the agencies day-to-day could **spend time one-on-one with the key agency team** members prior to selection to do a "chemistry" test, level of commitment and passion, etc. A dream, but it would be nice.
- I always think it is **good when an agency has done their homework**. Live in the customers shoes, show us how our brands appear to our customer that we maybe don't see (e.g., audit of our brand perception in the market)
- I wish clients would **not waste time on RFI/RFP if they have a predetermined outcome** going in. I think there is pressure to RFP so it looks 'fair' Also, all my prior responses are based on my experience. I think every company has different internal skill/ability to lead RFPs effectively. I think some absolutely would benefit from a consultant, others it would not be necessary, and everything in between.

Agency Comments on Importance of Working Together

- I'd like to see **more collaboration upfront** and less focus on the final creative presentation. The client definitely needs to determine if the agency is creatively capable, but a reel and case studies – if not reputation alone – can accomplish this. Anyway, the winning agency rarely produces the same campaign they showed in the pitch. If I were a client, I would want to determine (1) does the agency understand my business, (2) do we get along well and are we the right cultural fit and (3) am I confident in our ability to get to great solutions together? I'd want several meetings early on where we actually create and solve together. Once I know I have the right people, I'd feel very confident in our ability to get to creative, effective work together.
- More access to clients **More time to partner with clients** How about paying agencies for a test run - working together is the best way to understand the potential of the partnership.
- Much more time up front in the process for chemistry, **face to face interaction** with client and agency...more access to client, less stringent "rules"...speed dating leads to few long term relationships...
- Less 'work' of any sort and **more face time**/discussion at every stage to get to fewer agencies on long list & short-list. You can tell in minutes if you can work together, like each other, and think you're smart. A short-list with a strategic (not creative at all) assignment the client can be an active participant in...which approximates to working together...may therefore mean a list of only two.
- There is so much data already available about the agencies and their expertise. Narrow down quicker and don't waste agency time completing a long process. **Pick 3, spend time with them** making them do a few real small paid assignments so you can get a real feel for how you work together. Then pick one to move forward with for long-term. The long-term RFP process helps no one. It just wastes critical non-billable time.
- We always believe in **face to face meetings or phone conversations** in the beginning of the process, even if that's just :30 minutes...instead of relying on a written RFI and case studies (much of which lives in the agency's website).

Agency Comments on Importance of Working Together

- My personal belief is chemistry trumps even brilliant thinking, so spending time with the clients would be key. We had one client many years ago that actually did a **chemistry dinner** as part of the pitch process. Another interesting way to do this would be almost like a "speed dating" set up. Thanks for asking our opinions on this!
- Start at the **chemistry** check. RFPs (especially ones with videos) take so much time without having any actual client engagement so it's difficult to gauge whether or not the relationship would be right for both agency or client.
- Meeting the **client face to face** early in the process is critical. Access to clients is important. Site visits on both sides helps for culture and collaboration. I think that agencies are taken advantage of in the process. They pour usually hundreds of thousands of dollars in resources and I am not sure the client gets that. I think shorter reviews with chemistry, strategy and big idea and proof of concept are enough to know if you want to work with someone. Stricter guidelines on deliverables so agencies don't burn too hard. Thank you
- Having the hard and honest conversations about **what they really want and need**, and the kind of work they will actually buy, from an agency partner well before we put pen to paper?
- Have clients and agency **have lunch** to really get to know one another. small group. no business talk. chemistry is so important for a long term relationship. same restaurant for all lunches.
- More **client interaction**.
- Structure the time to foster more of a **trial "work together"** and include less agencies. It's a lot like dating - focus on more quality candidates - less quantity
- Less about exchanging documents, more about **human to human** interaction.

Agency Comments on Procurement

- Procurement departments yield too much control influence in the selection process. Often they are unhelpful or harmful. Often they request large amounts of work/information that is not relevant or useful to the decision. Their views on cost vs value/benefit are skewed and can make it harder for client to pick who they want to work with. Many CMO would say this too. Their role should be revised
- Be sure that procurement only has a secondary, support role in the process. They rarely understand our business and their drive to reduce scope/cost only ends up causing problems for agency and client once the engagement gets "real"
- Procurement must have discipline in the area for which they are sourcing. -- Standardized RFI or RFP would be helpful if a must. -- Thinking out-of-the-box, remove the RFI and RFP process and let consultants determine best fit agencies based on their work. Agencies should always have an updated credentials with each consultant that includes standard RFI/RFP facts, figures, management bios, client list, etc. This would provide more efficiency and allow agencies more time to focus on strategy and recommendations.

Agency Comments on Consultants

- Every client going through an agency selection process would **follow the 4A/ANA guidelines** so agencies don't have to plead for them to do things that just show common respect for what it is we do. When consultants are involved, that is almost guaranteed. When consultants aren't involved, it's hit or miss.
- Consultants and agencies could design much better system to **help clients get to a clear idea** of what they want. 90% of the time, they do not know and everyone wastes valuable time/money using the creative process to figure it out. Similar to what companies do before investing in a new product, clients should be assisted in getting to the purest expression of what they want.
- Too often, the consultant's "process" masks important differences in how agencies work with clients--differences that would inform the client's agency choice. Don't share my questions with other agencies, don't limit my access to clients, insist that the client visit my agency for a meeting where I control the agenda. It'll **help the client see better** what it's like to work with us and help them discern the real differences (good and bad) between the agencies on their short list.
- Please **don't allow clients to leave agencies waiting** in the wings while negotiations are happening with the presumptive winner. Thank you, this was a fun survey.
- I believe Joanne Davis does the best job at this, but a couple of quick tidbits that I believe will be very helpful for both client, agency, and search agency consultant
 - 1) Transparency
 - 2) Some times the best responses or ideas won't have the chance to bubble up to the top, by following an excel spreadsheet with limited information. Human interaction is an important component to any relationship or partnership.
 - 3) Make sure the project or initiative is approved by the client before engaging the agency's time on a proposal.
 - 4) Provide a range of budget for services, so it could be determined if the scope is equitable for services being rendered.
 - 5) Smaller subset of participating agencies
 - 6) Provide an equal and fair opportunity to compete for the business

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Agency Comments on Consultants

- I completely respect the role of the consultant, but many block access to the main clients throughout the process. The agency/client relationship will be a partnership... it's important to get to know each other along the way. So while this isn't a "new idea", I believe the **interaction** would be beneficial to all involved.
- Consultants = better briefs. **More time with clients is always better** thus have smaller number of agencies in process and final review. 2-3 no more. 25% chance is becoming small with a lot of different new business opportunities working through. Thanks
- Even though I'm neutral on the use of consultants, **the need is 100% predicated on the capabilities and knowledge of clients themselves.** In most cases, there is a definite need. Unfortunately, many feel the need to further demonstrate value by inserting themselves too much in the process. For most, search consultants serve a very useful purpose, as long as they are up to speed on agency capabilities. The ideal situation is of course when a client contacts an agency/agencies directly, but the same can be said for unknowledgeable clients being introduced to agencies of whom they were previously unaware or did not have in their consideration set, by a search consultant. Status quo, with the caveat that agencies are seen as valuable partners whose time is worth something and compensated. When that is the case, clients are far more vested in the outcome.

Agency Comments on Speculative Creative

- Accountants, Lawyers, Doctors, etc. get new clients based on their success with others like them. They've proven they are good at what they do. In fact, every successful business operates that way. Do a good job, people will hire you/buy from you. Why do we have to essentially reprove ourselves every time? **Why do we have to give away our product, which is intellectual capital?** Hire a company that has proven their chops, that you like and go into battle together to solve the problem.
- Significant payment for pitch work based on time invested would be a significant step forward. **So many of our reviews these days are solving larger business issues** vs a marketing campaign and this thinking is under valued with our current practices.
- **Let's stop giving free ideas** in pitches. Let's be honest clients rip them off and don't pay. Also, it's too expensive to do pitches. Clients should pick on previous experience and initial conversations not be business that are strategic.
- Eliminate the need for spec work. **Past and previous creative shows the agency's creative prowess.** It should be about what goes into their process and chemistry. Together, the creative work will be solved. Rarely ever does the pitch creative get produced as the final, consumer-facing creative.
- **Do a paid project instead** of a pitch. Get assigned a real team, with a real deadline, for real work. Evaluate the work and the experience and go from there.
- Yes. Simply stated, the entire idea of speculative pitch work is a fallacy. There should be a two step process. First, clients should thoughtfully choose a list of agencies based upon work that those agencies have done for other clients. Second, the client should then meet with their chosen finalists and make their decision based upon a thoughtful discussion of how the agency would staff, manage and approach the business. Spec work - creative or strategic - is a ridiculous notion. I refer to it as an agency playing a game of pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey: going from zero to final idea in 6-8 weeks, with a client you don't know, is illogical. Also, the least believable client statement within a spec creative pitch is "we're going to pick an agency, not an idea."
- **Eliminate spec.** Hire for the work
- Agencies should **take a page from the playbooks of other professional services providers like law firms and management consultants and not give away work** for free. Fact is, agencies, even those hired after a pitch process, give away millions of dollars in thinking and creative during the pitch without getting paid a penny. Over time I'd like to see this system evolve to a more equitable state.

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- Recently participated (and won) a pitch where, once finalists were selected (after breezy RFI) the "pitch" was: Show up at Hotel at 8:30, 30 minute credential followed by client brief, work alone until noon, workshop for an hour with client, present final at 4:00. One day for whole pitch assignment. It was invigorating and efficient for all. One other finalist in different room. Two remaining finalists day after. Might have felt differently if we'd have lost :) Did think we showed client who we were. Do think we got a chance to work with them. Know it was a lot less time-intensive (expensive) for us. Bonus: no hand-wringing or overthinking because there simply wasn't time. Not right for every pitch. But an interesting format to say the least.
- All decision makers in the room throughout entire process 2) No more than 7-8 agencies competing 3) Make decision quicker 4) determine how important agency brand names are to clients (and other stakeholders)
- RFI as you have it, then no more creds. One short strategic assignment and one short, focused creative challenge. Both in work sessions with no final presentation. Chemistry assessed through work sessions and then only a final meeting that is a Q&A session with the core working team to get a final read on the team on the business and to address any remaining issues, concerns, etc. Agency and clients have the opportunity for Qs for an hour total.
- Be more candid and honest especially on the key expectations and parameters - e.g. objectives, goals, milestones, budget. The less assumptions made, the better.
- We'd love to see as much context as possible for the clients business and any information as to what's prompting the review at the beginning for the best information to assess opportunities.
- Might be cool if clients/agency signed and displayed a **statement of the goal** for the work to come at the outset of the relationship to keep in the mission in the forefront.
- Ensure a decision is made. Too much waste in review processes that for whatever reason results in no decision.

- Show worst as well as best case histories. forbid creative work at chemistry meetings.
- My preference for an agenda would be that the agencies receive the business outcome and the timeframe in which the client wants to achieve it. 3-5 prior years of relevant data to provide context. Agencies are asked how they'd achieve.
- BE HONEST - Be upfront with (real, dedicated) budgets - Be honest with your shortlist - no straw dogs - Be very clear on the selection criteria - Be honest about the ideal agency's geography - Be honest about whether you want the best agency partner for the challenges at hand, or just a well-known brand agency to possibly appease a board - Be honest if a project RFP can lead to a bigger relationship opportunity - Give us real business challenges, not fake ones you make up for the pitch - We need to engage with the true decision maker(s) throughout the process BE RESPECTFUL - Treat us how you'd like to be treated - Prioritize efficiency and process simplification over excessive detail - Don't give us massive RFPs before holiday breaks - Don't procurement us to death or call us "vendors" - Don't ask us to provide information like employees' salaries - Don't expect to own the work unless you pay for it
- Consultants and agencies could design a much better system to help clients get to a clear idea of what they want. 90% of the time, they do not know and everyone wastes valuable time/money using the creative process to figure it out. Similar to what companies do before investing in a new product, clients should be assisted in getting to the purest expression of what they want.
- I find it odd that clients don't outline their budgets or fees up front. I also find it interesting that in a people business, a lot of weight, goes to "legacy brands".

- The shift to multiple agencies on a roster and project oriented engagements must be taken into account in agency reviews. The opportunity to take on a project and build an AOR relationship should be considered more frequently
- Complete fee transparency up front. 2. An initial chemistry check with clients at the very start 3. Does it really need to be a pitch - do they know who they want to save the effort that agencies invest?
- I think it is becoming increasingly common for clients to ask for pitches even for projects which I feel is absurd - agencies have to do as much work as an AOR pitch but then get paid far less for the ideas because clients then want to pay only to get the work made as opposed to the conception of the work - the return on investment for the agency makes this practice financially untenable
- Inject as much transparency into the review process as possible. At the end of the day, it's a big interview. And sometimes, process gets in the way of what should be the main goal of the review - which is understanding which team is the best fit for the brand to work with. The more the process can open up to how agencies actually work with clients, the better feel both sides will have for chemistry and if all the ingredients are there for a healthy relationship into the future.
- The expectations in the ad industry on how to win new business is flawed. What other industry do they give their product (in this case strategic thinking, ideas, creative resources) away for free for months at a time? Chemistry between the client and agency can make all the difference. How can we have a more productive chemistry meeting - having the hard and honest conversations about what they really want and need, and the kind of work they will actually buy, from an agency partner well before we put pen to paper?
- Client Needs to have a Scope of Work Signed off with fee before they call agencies and they should share that SOW and Budgets Upfront. After every meeting the client should provide the agencies feedback one on one and document it with a follow-up email. Clients should set clear agendas for each meeting. Clients should pay agencies for the pitch process. It's a rather large investment for the agencies. Agency Profile Videos or Team videos are irrelevant.
- Not new, but important for agency to understand the budget for agency fees prior to any pitch. Also, would be good to know if the client has a favorite. if they do, it's fine - but agency should know out of fairness to help them consider the costs and risks associated with the pitch.

- Three thoughts: 1) Allocate appropriate (more) time for strategic and creative thinking 2) Be more transparent on process, compensation, decision structure, etc. 3) Don't ask for the answer - that is what an agency does for a living a should be compensated accordingly
- After narrowing down the short list (via RFI), give the agencies a final presentation date and time and nothing more. This would allow agencies to run the process as they would if it were one of their client accounts. We will request the touch points and information that we need to arrive at the ideas and the clients can truly see what's it's like to work with us!
- Be straight when calling on agencies. If the client knows or worked with in the past different people in different agencies tell the new agencies you call to enter the competitive process that fact. In other words Tell it how it is
- Clients should base more of their opinion on historical results. That's what shows the agency has a track record of producing results (or not).
- Functionally, I do not believe there is one way everyone should adhere to. The process should make sense and reflect the culture and needs of the client organization. After all, Agencies can say no. In general, if I could reinvent the process, I would be adamant in ensuring there was transparency on all sides as much as possible, a more sensible RFI process and make them faster. Speed kills in today's world.
- Shorten the timeframes for reviews - 3-6 month reviews drain Agencies and their financial stability.
- Don't require so many custom elements for the RFI. If the agency wants to customize and shoot video and more, then have at it. But let it be the agency's choice. You will learn a lot about how the agency operates and thinks by allowing them the freedom to express themselves as they want to.

General Agency Comments

- Consider having the client present to the agencies to kick off. Gives the agencies a sense of the client and how they think, what's important to them, their style. Second keep the review time short and condensed. Helps the agencies to focus. Reveal score card to agencies so they understand how they are being evaluated.
- If nothing changes other than the following, I would be satisfied: clients must promise in writing that they will inform the agencies that do not win or make the final round with honest, thorough, and fully transparent feedback. This almost never happens, and probably will continue to almost never happen, but it is critical to the entire process. Agencies would learn a tremendous amount if this were to occur. Hearing that you "finished second" and "it was a very difficult decision" is useless information.
- A little less structure and a bit more allowance of natural selection - let agencies carve their own process or path.
- I like the sentiment behind this survey but there are few black and white answers. So much depends on the strength of the client as to whether they require a consultant to drive the process. I've worked on pitches with consultants where the consultant seemed like an unnecessary third wheel and others direct with clients that really could have used some help. I've also seen procurement driven pitches as well as been handed business based on relationships with the c-suite, senior level marketers, or simply on the strength and reputation of our agency. The truth is, we're becoming increasingly more selective about what pitches if any we participate in as our healthiest client relationships have not come via formal pitches but from meaningful introductions (including other brands, and 3rd parties i.e. consultants, vendors, partners, where it's quite obvious that our skills and capabilities are what they need and it becomes very clear that a formal pitch is a waste of time and resources. To me, the most important part of any new relationship and or pitch is the opportunity to sit face to face with a client to get a feel for who they are, what they need and if they are aligned with our overall pov. I think this is the #1 thing missing from the review process as it would save all the time and resources invested if we could begin there. Perhaps a "speed dating/ chemistry session" upfront to match the RFI would be a step in the right direction. Lots of thoughts to share... especially as I'm fairly new to the agency side of the business and in 1.5 years have probably seen and participated in close to 100 pitches of some sort across categories, practices, regions and structure. Happy to chat more at anytime.

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A large blue oval at the top of the page contains the text 'APPENDIX' and 'Detailed Data Tables'. A blue arrow points downwards from the bottom center of the oval.

APPENDIX

Detailed Data Tables

Q1: What do you think turns CLIENTS off the most about agencies in the new business process? (Please rank, with "1" being most important, "5" being least important.)

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5
Agencies that don't listen to the brief, feedback or the assignment	44.0%	34.0%	10.0%	8.0%	4.0%
Agencies that gossip with the press and violate the mutual NDA	25.5%	14.9%	17.0%	14.9%	27.7%
Agencies that bait and switch teams and have teams present but don't appear on the staffing plan	23.5%	23.5%	27.5%	17.6%	7.8%
Agencies that don't follow the rules and go around the process (either calling us directly rather than the client point person or consultant)	3.8%	22.6%	32.1%	35.8%	5.7%
Agencies that are too needy	11.8%	0.0%	19.6%	15.7%	52.9%

CLIENT

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5
Agencies that don't listen to the brief, feedback or the assignment	57.9%	24.2%	8.4%	6.3%	3.2%
Agencies that gossip with the press and violate the mutual NDA	19.1%	14.9%	30.9%	19.2%	16.0%
Agencies that bait and switch teams and have teams present but don't appear on the staffing plan	19.4%	37.8%	27.6%	11.2%	4.1%
Agencies that don't follow the rules and go around the process (either calling us directly rather than the client point person or consultant)	5.1%	16.2%	22.2%	41.4%	15.2%
Agencies that are too needy	4.0%	7.9%	13.9%	18.8%	55.5%

AGENCY

Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q2: What do you think is most challenging for AGENCIES in the new business process? (Please rank, with "1" being most challenging, "6" being least challenging.)

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	6
Clients that aren't clear about what they need in the assignment	60%	21%	13%	2%	2%	2%
Clients that have fee expectations out of alignment with the work	18%	45%	22%	6%	6%	2%
Lack of time to complete all the review work phases	7%	11%	21%	26%	26%	9%
Procurement using procurement processes irrelevant for agency work	4%	8%	16%	22%	22%	27%
Clients playing favorites	2%	7%	16%	16%	16%	42%
Lack of access to the clients	11%	9%	11%	24%	24%	20%

CLIENT

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	6
Clients that aren't clear about what they need in the assignment	47%	26%	14%	7%	2%	4%
Clients that have fee expectations out of alignment with the work	11%	29%	27%	14%	15%	4%
Lack of time to complete all the review work phases	5%	6%	14%	18%	26%	30%
Procurement using procurement processes irrelevant for agency work	8%	14%	21%	28%	17%	11%
Clients playing favorites	9%	6%	13%	17%	20%	36%
Lack of access to the clients	24%	21%	14%	16%	16%	10%

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Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q3: The RFI phase of the creative review process often has a long list (7-14) of possible agencies because clients want choice and options. Check which of the following do you think clients find Very Important, Somewhat Important, or Not Important:

Answer Options	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Agencies submit standard RFI with current factual information similar to what the 4A's previously recommended (Client list, office locations, areas of expertise, size/number of employees, etc.)	60%	36%	4%
Agencies must respond to the same procurement RFI the client company uses for all vendors even if the questions are irrelevant because it's client company or procurement policy	24%	26%	50%
Agencies respond to RFI with deeper "must haves" to proceed (cases, creative reel, bios, etc.)	62%	38%	0%
Agencies prepare custom video of their leaders discussing the client opportunity and why they are qualified even though the client hasn't briefed the agencies yet	12%	30%	58%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Agencies submit standard RFI with current factual information similar to what the 4A's previously recommended (Client list, office locations, areas of expertise, size/number of employees, etc.)	22%	67%	12%
Agencies must respond to the same procurement RFI the client company uses for all vendors even if the questions are irrelevant because it's client company or procurement policy	14%	25%	62%
Agencies respond to RFI with deeper "must haves" to proceed (cases, creative reel, bios, etc.)	69%	31%	0%
Agencies prepare custom video of their leaders discussing the client opportunity and why they are qualified even though the client hasn't briefed the agencies yet	9%	46%	45%

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Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q4: How much time do you think clients spend reviewing RFI submissions and how do you think they like to review them? (Check yes or no.)

Answer Options	Yes	No
I'm prepared to spend an hour with each submission	74%	26%
I like viewing the agencies' work with the full client team together	58%	42%
I like each member of the client team to review on their own, score and rank and share at a selection meeting	74%	26%
I'd rather have a call or WebEx to learn about the agencies than read questionnaires, even if this takes 10 hours of my time	40%	60%
I still like a hard copy book with the response	52%	48%
I'd rather have someone on my team narrow down the long list	34%	66%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Yes	No
They spend an hour with each submission	28%	72%
They view our work with the full client team together	21%	79%
Each member of the client team to reviews on their own, score and ranks, and share at a selection meeting	77%	23%
They'd rather have a call or WebEx to learn about the agencies than read questionnaires, even if this takes 10 hours of their time	27%	73%
They still like a hard copy book with the response	62%	38%
They'd rather have someone on their team narrow down the long list	76%	24%

AGENCY

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Q5: What are your preferences for semi-final meetings?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Agenda should be up to the agency	30.0%
Agenda should be up to the client	70.0%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Response Percent
Agenda should be up to the agency	50.0%
Agenda should be up to the client	50.0%

AGENCY

Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q6: What are your preferences for semi-final meetings. (Please divide 100 points among the following.)

Answer Options	Response Average
Meet the leaders	13.4%
Meet the team	29.4%
See agency's capabilities, unique processes and new methods they are using to engage	19.4%
See relevant work for our category, targets and agency's best work	20.9%
Initial observations on client business	16.9%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Response Average
Meet the leaders	14.6%
Meet the team	23.3%
See agency's capabilities, unique processes and new methods they are using to engage	15.5%
See relevant work for our category, targets and agency's best work	16.5%
Initial observations on client business	30.1%

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Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q7: What are your preferences for workshop meetings with clients before the finals?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Prefer not having a workshop	8.2%
Prefer one workshop	73.5%
Prefer two workshops - one for strategy and one for creative	18.4%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Response Percent
Prefer not having a workshop	2.0%
Prefer one workshop	51.0%
Prefer two workshops - one for strategy and one for creative	47.0%

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Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q8: What are client expectations for finals presentations? (Please divide 100 points among the following.)

Answer Options	Response %
Show me the work close to what I could run quickly	18.4%
Show that you listened to direction we gave in the workshop	30.6%
Get to the point and present in 60 minutes	15.5%
Take a couple of hours of presentation to include how you got to your recommendation	17.0%
Allow time for Q&A	18.4%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Response %
Show me the work close to what I could run quickly	22.5%
Show that you listened to direction we gave in the workshop	31.4%
Get to the point and present in 60 minutes	16.7%
Take a couple of hours of presentation to include how you got to your recommendation	11.8%
Allow time for Q&A	17.6%

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Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q9: Should clients pay an honorarium to agencies for finalist presentations, without owning the work?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	28.6%
No	71.4%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	78.4%
No	21.6%

AGENCY

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Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q10: What is a fair amount, without owning the work?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Under \$15K	0.0%
\$15K-\$24K	35.7%
\$25K or more	50.0%
Other (please specify)	14.3%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Response Percent
Under \$15K	6.3%
\$15K-\$24K	40.5%
\$25K or more	53.6%

AGENCY

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Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q11: Should clients pay a higher agency presentation fee to own the work?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	51.0%
No	49.0%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	86.1%
No	13.9%

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Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q12: What is a fair amount for the client to own the work?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Under \$100K	40.0%
\$100K to \$199K	36.0%
\$200K to \$299K	4.0%
\$300K or more	0.0%
Other (please specify)	20.0%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Response Percent
Under \$100K	17.9%
\$100K to \$199K	25.0%
\$200K to \$299K	14.3%
\$300K or more	42.9%

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Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q13: Who do you think has the most say at the client in the final agency selection? (Please choose two only).

Answer Options	Response Percent
Core team	31.3%
Senior marketing leadership	46.3%
Mid-level marketing	6.3%
Procurement	2.5%
CEO/President	10.0%
Other C-level (COO/CFO)	3.8%

CLIENT

Answer Options	Response Percent
Core team	20.8%
Senior marketing leadership	48.1%
Mid-level marketing	2.7%
Procurement	2.7%
CEO/President	23.0%
Other C-level (COO/CFO)	2.7%

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Detailed Responses – Client and Agency

Q14: What are your thoughts on clients using a review consultant? Select Agree, Neutral, Disagree.

CLIENT

Answer Options	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
We don't need a review consultant.	12%	12%	76%
Clients should use review consultants because they know agencies better, manage many reviews versus occasional reviews managed by clients	82%	12%	6%
Clients should only use a review consultant who gets paid by the client, and does not get paid by agencies to avoid conflict of interest	90%	8%	2%
We would prefer the least expensive review consultant even if they also get paid by agencies	0%	4%	96%
To save time, it's good for the consultant to get to the short list faster, but we can manage the rest of the process ourselves	10%	31%	59%
Consultants fees are easily recovered because they get better fee deals, more client beneficial contracts, better/more advanced agency teams and/or helping us raise the bar	59%	35%	6%

AGENCY

Answer Options	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
We don't need a review consultant.	4%	45%	51%
Clients should use review consultants because they know agencies better, manage many reviews versus occasional reviews managed by clients	60%	33%	7%
Clients should only use a review consultant who gets paid by the client, and does not get paid by agencies to avoid conflict of interest	83%	16%	1%
We would prefer the least expensive review consultant even if they also get paid by agencies	0%	13%	87%
To save time, it's good for the consultant to get to the short list faster, but we can manage the rest of the process ourselves	23%	40%	37%

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