



White Paper

Identifying Solutions Delivering Results

10 Commandments Of New Business



What I Learned From Being A Client

I've spent 30 years in the "agency business" (client services), and I've participated in literally hundreds of pitches. These pitches—initiated by receipt of the dreaded RFP—are a maligned prerequisite of the industry. I can't tell you how many times I've been left confused, abused, and (all too many times) refused.

For the first time ever, I had an opportunity to sit on the client side of the desk as I dispatched several RFPs for various purposes. It was an eye-opening experience for me, because it reinforced exactly what it takes to stand out in a complex and competitive environment where calendars are crowded and attention spans are short. In response to this experience, I felt compelled to assemble (and share) the Ten Commandments of successful new-business pitches:

1. Understand That This Isn't Your Party

Sure, your company is cool and unique—that's why you're there. If you didn't have a distinct value proposition, then you wouldn't be in the room. The discussion needs to focus on the client—e.g., what you know about their business, their pain points and your plan to address them.

Focusing the conversation around your expertise and capabilities versus how you plan to address client needs is wasting an opportunity to have a dialogue with them about their business.

2. Find a Sherpa

Access to inside information and insights is critical to success. You need to find a resource (a contact that works or has worked) with the client to help guide you. This perspective gives you an opportunity to proactively address the client's needs and demonstrates a keen understanding of their business.

Resources like LinkedIn and/or aggressive networking will come in handy. It's all about the network. (Hint: helping others creates a strong network of people who are happy to help when it's your turn to ask for a favor.)



White Paper

Identifying Solutions Delivering Results

3. Read Their Minds (Not Really)

Sometimes clients (people in general, really) don't know how to express what they want and/or need. This is especially true of large companies in which procurement runs the process; you may even receive an RFP template that's meant for another discipline. To make sure you understand the client's needs (and make yourself look good), ask smart questions that play to your strong points. This makes sure you're heading down the right path from the very beginning (as well as teeing up how your agency can address client needs).

Proactively asking questions will ensure you're on the same page as the clients, which will lead to a stronger and well-received pitch.

4. Become a Partner

The decision-making process has a cadence—internal constituents need to weigh in and approvals need to be received. You have an opportunity to help your prospect manager navigate this process by checking in with him or her and offering additional information and/or clarifications as needed.

Checking in with your prospect manager establishes you as a partner and keeps your company top of mind.

5. Know Your Competition

This is difficult; however, if you've found a Sherpa and/or diligently networked, then sometimes you can learn who you're up against. This allows you to tailor a message that not only addresses the client's need, but also demonstrate your unique value proposition.

Understanding your competition gives you an opportunity to differentiate your company and decide where you need to be offensive vs. defensive.

6. Know Your Audience

There are always biases in the room—e.g., someone who has a relationship with current suppliers or a friend at one of your competitors. This is where leveraging all your connections really pays off. A briefing from your Sherpa (or even thorough LinkedIn research) allows you to prepare thoughtful and intelligent responses to these biases before you even arrive. *The more you know about your audience, the easier it'll be to successfully address and overcome their inherent biases. This brings you one step closer to sealing the deal.*

7. Tell 'em what you are going to tell 'em, tell 'em again, then tell 'em what you told 'em

Your story needs to be simple and strong—you need to make it clear that you've thought it through and done your homework. You must communicate the story clearly and provide an easy-to-understand summary at the end. (How are people going to repeat your story if they can't articulate it?)

Don't assume your audience is going to remember all the pieces of a complicated story. (Hint: they won't.) Make your story simple and easy to repeat.



White Paper

Identifying Solutions Delivering Results

8. Read the Room

Someone on your team must be tasked with reading the room to see who's engaged, when they're engaged, and where you may have lost folks. Coming out of the meeting, it's important for you to understand questions and areas of confusion so that you can proactively follow up with answers and/or clarification.

Proactively follow up to address content that may not have been clear (or have fallen on deaf ears) to help round out and distinguish your presentation.

9. Be First or Second on the Docket

There are many opinions about where in the lineup it's best to present. While many believe that the last presentation is the most memorable (the recency effect), I beg to differ. In today's business environment, people have short attention spans, join remotely, multi-task, and (especially senior managers) are often called to other meetings. The later in the day you present, the more people will be literally and figuratively somewhere else.

Getting on the docket with an early slot helps ensure that you're dealing with fresh, attentive minds. If you go second, then it's likely all late attendees will have arrived.

10. Seal the Deal

You've done the work and nailed the presentation (I assume). Now, it's time to do everything possible to seal the sale. It's not enough to send a thank-you note; you need to communicate with the decision-makers and continue to extoll your value.

You will always have an opportunity to stand out after your meeting. How you do it depends on the client and opportunity—e.g., you send an article that supports the very strategy you just pitched. It's important to keep up the dialogue until a decision is made.

Responding to RFPs is a critical part of the agency business. By leveraging the Ten Commandments, I'm confident you'll increase the chances of winning new business. Of course, this doesn't take into account the strength of the pitch itself...but that's a topic for another day.