



Agency Search Consultants Advice for Agencies "One-Piece-of-Advice" For Agencies January 2015

"One-Piece-of-Advice"

4A's asked industry leading agency search consultants to provide "One-Piece-of-Advice" that the association could share with members as they begin thinking about their 2015 new business plans.

The 4A's consultant request noted *"Based on your knowledge of client marketer needs/wants and industry dynamics what is the one thing that you would recommend that an agency either do or not do that can help the effectiveness of their new business efforts. We'd welcome your advice in any area of the agency search and selection process (prospecting, RFI/RFP submissions, creds, chemistry, presentations, etc.)."*

Search Consultant Advice

The advice shared by industry agency search consultants is noted below. The sequence is in alphabetical order based on the name of the consultancy.

AAR|Partners

"New business is not a sprint. It's a marathon. There is no magic formula except to practice patience, perseverance and exemplify true passion for a particular brand. Build relationships, identify pain points and offer relevant insights/experience at the appropriate time. Don't stalk prospects. Share knowledge without appearing self-serving. When you teach (in whatever form), you become a trusted source and being a trusted source leads to new business!"

Lisa Colantuono

Ark Advisors

"My "One-Piece-of-Advice" would be for agencies to hire and/or identify a primary New Business contact and:

1. Make sure that the receptionist (and all temps, lunch cover, etc.) knows who this person is and is able to disclose their name to callers
2. Make sure that person's name and direct contact information are available on the agency website (not simply info@agency)

You would be surprised how often our efforts to identify the correct contact at an agency are stymied by emails to info@agency that are never returned."

Ken Robinson

"I agree with Ken completely — it can be very frustrating to try to reach an agency that is not properly prepared to receive new business calls. The only thing I would add is that whenever possible, if we are only given an automatic voicemail system to dial into, the agencies offer an option to reach either the New Business Department or, even better, an actual new business person by name."

Ann Billock



Avidan Strategies LLC

“For every pitch you enter turn down 3.”

Avi Dan

The Bedford Group

Less is More. Despite the ongoing fragmentation and growing complexity of marketing, one thing still holds true- Clients rely on their agency partner to Keep it Simple. The agency is considered an expert, and with that opinion comes a belief that as experts, you can analyze masses of data to uncover the most meaningful insights, identify emerging trends to drive impactful solutions and articulate messaging strategies to help grow their business..

The first way to prove this capability is to demonstrate it through your actions in the new business process.

- Written submissions are well received when they are succinct, customized and only include the most critical information to move you to the next stage. If there is uncertainty of what might be critical - rely on the prospective client or consulting contact. Interrogate the “ask” and the opportunity and have some clarity around the business goals the client wishes to achieve. When you have this, you will be able to address the right information to include in your RFI.
- When meeting the client for the first time, a cast of thousands is not as impressive as a few key people who really understand the client's challenge and have a point of view about how to solve it. If the presenting team are your principals, that's fine, if not, bring the most relevant/articulate representatives. Avoid adding someone to the presenting team who is not totally immersed in the client business. Otherwise, it may give them a reason to "de-select" your firm even though many times, the day-to-day members of your “Team Client” are requested.
- If there is a creative speculative assignment included in the pitch, keep your response conceptual, use "ad-like" objects or representative samples. Creative is subjective and going too far into the details may allow a potential client to make a faulty judgment about a less-than-perfect execution off a very solid platform. Focus on your strongest campaign ideas, bring less extensions and more demonstration of macro thinking and rationale for what will resonate with the audience.

An area where less is not more is how much you share with consultants. TBG is always interested in learning about what's going on at your agency - wins and losses, important new hires, and changes in proprietary offerings. Unfortunately, our time is limited so email is usually best but we do make our consultants available for Agency Update conference calls every third Thursday. To schedule a call, please contact Natalie Cerone (ncerone@bedfordgroupconsulting.com). Or, simply update your profile on our website at www.bedfordgroupconsulting.com"

Kerry Kielb & Jane Bedford



Drexler Fajen & Partners

“Our one piece of advice would be to have the agency root their entire presentation and related initiatives in the prospect’s business. The reviews should not be creative or media exercises, but rather a demonstration of how the agency can use all of its resources to grow the prospect’s business.”

Steve Fajen

External View Consulting Group

“As far as one piece of advice, I would like every agency to reacquaint itself with a New Business 101 skill – train your receptionist to understand the importance of new business to your agency. If a caller asks for the “head of new business” or “business development person”, your receptionist should not only know who that person is but understand the importance of any caller looking for a new business person. “I don’t think we have a new business department” or “I don’t know who is in charge of business development” are not acceptable answers. And while you are at it, put the name and phone of your business development lead on your web site rather than the pervasive newbusiness@ouragency.com. You will find that most clients shopping an account will not respond to an anonymous email address.”

Russel Wohlwerth

“I think agencies would be well served to remember that chemistry meetings are just that: chemistry meetings. Agencies too often (i.e. almost always) use the chemistry meeting as a way to tell prospective clients more about who they are and why they’re a good choice for the client. They can’t help but sell. In the process, they fail to establish a more human (chemistry) connection and the client walks away feeling “talked at,” not “connected with.” The winning agency in one recent search handled the chemistry meeting by spending the first hour of the meeting just listening to the client’s challenges – they simply asked questions and then truly listened. This was on couches in a living room kind of atmosphere. I had never seen anyone approach a chemistry meeting like this. Bottom line – the client loved it. This approach helped the agency make a connection and that carried through to the finals and, ultimately, to winning the assignment. Of course not all clients are the same, so I’m not saying this is the right approach every time. But the right approach every time is to focus on chemistry and not on selling.”

Gerry Preece



Hasan + Co.

“Don’t forget to pack your enthusiasm along with everything else you need for the pitch! Most of the time, the client invites additional company stakeholders to the final presentations and that can dramatically alter your chemistry and the meeting dynamics. You may find that the core client team that is usually warm and receptive towards you has suddenly gone cold and stoic. What happened? Well, they’ve got their colleagues and ceo and perhaps their grumpiest franchisees in the room and the core group is rooting for you. Actually, they’re counting on you. They want their invited guests to be wowed by you but they need you to do it on your own. So they sit back and hope you kick ass. Agencies, however, will wonder where the love has gone and tend to lose their steam as a sea of blank faces stare at them. Don’t let them control the energy in the room! Dial up your volume and share your passion and enthusiasm. The audience will follow suit. If you don’t look excited, why should they be?”

Hasan Ramusevic

Joanne Davis Consulting

“Focus: Just as the essence of great strategy is sacrifice, same with you. By trying to be all things to all people you waste time and money. Don’t call us one week and say you are best at social and a week later saying you’re best at building website. Or saying you are best at fashion and a week later saying you are best at B2B. Very few are best at everything. You need to interview “clients” just as they are interviewing you and focus your time and talent where you WILL win.”

Joanne Davis

JLB:R3

“The highest order of business in a pitch is quickly and perfectly threading the needle on "The Team". Who's going to be leading and fronting the business on a day-to-day basis at the senior and mid-levels? Do this ahead of checking your agency executives' calendars for meetings. Agencies don't pay enough attention to this and it's the thing clients are salivating over. Get the fit right. The right kind of experience, the right chemistry, and a clear fix on roles/responsibilities. Put those people out front in meetings. Let the client fall in love with them. Because they are the agency in the client's eyes. Fake pitch teams led by agency executives are very transparent to clients. And agencies lose business for lack of transparency.”

Mary Conrad

“Focus on what you rightfully ask your clients to focus on: the prospect you are trying to sell to. What are the client prospect's issues and needs? What can you specifically and relevantly bring to the table to help address their needs? Even when the prospect's agenda is asking you to talk about your agency, your case studies, your tools and resources, your team, etc., at the end of the day they want to hear about themselves, and how you can help them. This does not mean ignoring questions about your agency; rather it means thoughtfully responding to those questions in a way that relevantly connects to the prospect and their issues.”

Dave Beals



Juel

“Make sure your agency’s positioning is both distinctive, and true to who you are. You would be amazed at the number of agencies whose pitch still goes something like this, “The thing that makes us different is that we are truly integrated”. Unless your positioning is grounded in your firm’s history or culture, there is a good chance that you are not standing out.”

“Also...Think about how to make a better user experience for consultants. From a process standpoint, it would be great if we could get your facts/figures more quickly. An agency search consultant portal perhaps? We are often trying to find out very basic information on an agency, and/or visit your site again and again for various inquiries. And while we love a dazzling website like everyone else, the user experience could be enhanced for serious shoppers”.

June Blocklin

“Agencies think prospective clients buy Work. They buy Teams first - Teams that hold the promise of being great partners. Agencies do a terrific job of sending continuous updates on their work, but the main question on consultants’ and prospective clients’ minds when narrowing to a shortlist, is all about the people. Specifically, “Are we getting the A-Team? Are they committed to staying at the agency and each other? Will they work well together on my business?” For many agencies, more time should be invested in forging tight leadership teams and showcasing that to clients.”

Elizabeth Zea

MADAM

“My advice to agencies as a Don't:

I would avoid the words "we are digital at the core"....and dragging out a traditional ECD and a digital ECD and say they work together to create digitally driven communications. Any agency that is still saying stuff like that clearly isn't. I'm surprised that some well-known agencies are still plying that trade. Agencies should demonstrate how they think and work through the work. Don't set up 'digital native' as a mantra. Just be it.”

“My advice to agencies as a Do:

Focus on the business issues, the underlying issues/problems/opportunities that the clients business faces.

Forget about marketing. Become the person/group/agency that the client believes fully understands their business and can impact that.”

Michael Lee



Mercer Island Group

“Few agencies have positioned themselves in a clear and differentiated way in the marketplace. 40 years ago we knew what a Leo Burnett was and how it was different from an Ogilvy or a JWT. Very few agencies these days enjoy such unique identities. Agencies seem to be the shoemakers’ children when it comes to positioning – they get paid to position their clients and forget to position themselves. Agencies should ask themselves: is it clear (to the marketplace) why my agency is special and different? If not, it’s time for a serious positioning effort.”

Steve Boehler

“Agencies often focus on the wrong things during new business conversations: talking mostly about themselves. Prospects don’t want to hear about the agency – they want to talk about their business challenges. Agencies need to focus their new business efforts first on understanding what their prospects’ business issues are and only then on how the agency can help solve those challenges.”

Robin Boehler

“Most buyers find and research agencies before the agency ever knows they are interested. Despite this basic fact of life in B2B selling, most agency websites fail to help inform prospects as they research. It’s hard to find their capabilities; basic facts like headcount and client lists are often missing or hidden; and the presentation is often chaotic and overly stylized as opposed to useful. Agencies should design their websites with their prospects’ and consultant needs in mind.”

Barry O’Neil

“Few agencies treat search consultants like an important channel that requires clear and ongoing communication and nurturing. Rather, many agencies make the entire process difficult through irregular communication, slow turnaround of NDAs, and heavy handed holding company interference. I can’t think of another industry that makes it as hard for buyers to buy. Agencies should have tailored, one-to-one marketing efforts to each key consultant; there aren’t that many.”

Matt Driscoll

“How does the agency consistently solve client problems? If you can’t articulate your process, then you likely don’t have one. And if you don’t have a clear and proven approach to solving problems then I certainly wouldn’t want to pay you to solve mine. If you don’t have a process, create one; if your process isn’t clear, then make it clear.”

Lindsay O’Neil



Pile + Company

“When we asked a client of ours what set the agencies they selected to move forward in the review process apart from the ones that didn’t move forward, he said, “They connected the dots.”

What does that mean? Agencies that made it easy for the client. They didn’t make the client work hard or make assumptions to understand their cases or capabilities.

This holds true for the initial stage of the review process as well as the final presentation. Tie it all together. Don’t make the client guess or make assumptions.”

Judy Neer + Meghan McDonnell

Recommended Agency Register

“I’d say that agencies need to think more carefully about the context their new business approaches to clients. Work harder to understand the client contacts and context of their approach, being mindful that clients are not always in-market for agency services.

Also and this is a wee extra, take care when using new automated/content marketing tools. These kinds of approaches can come across as lazy and quite impersonal when used in the wrong way.”

Steve Antoniewicz

RCG: Rojek Consulting Group

“Agency leaders and owners continue struggle to engage employees in meaningful ways, influencing attitudes and behaviors, often battling client and staff turnover in an era where talent moves fluidly.”

“Leaders who articulate core values will have a fresh starting point to redefine their agency brand and engage employees in brand behavior that is critical for long-term success. A core values orientation is also the compass by which agencies can navigate rapid change.”

“Agencies benefit from heightened organizational cultural awareness as they seek to create environments in which their people can thrive and excel. Strong cultures improve performance by motivating employees – appealing to their higher ideals and values, and rallying them around a set of meaningful, unified goals.”

Lorraine Lockhart

SelectResources International

“My one piece of advice is very simple. Be strategic. Determine as an agency who you are right for and who is right for you. Think long and hard about your vision and strengths and linking those to your new business efforts. Do not over pitch. Select only the best opportunities that align with what you are good at; not those that are flattering or sexy that you can’t win. You should believe the client and its opportunity is tailor made; that you’ve been there and done it before. You should believe you can win before even starting out. When the stars align like this then you play to win. No second guessing. No handicapping the competition. Heads down and pure focus. If you select right, you’ll win more than you lose. Opportunistic pitching is rarely successful. Unfortunately most agencies are not strategic about new business. The shops that usually say “no thank you” the most frequently, close the most when they do pitch.

P.S. We are OK about agencies saying, “no”. We do not judge an agency’s decision. We try to respect it and share their rationale with our clients. Hopefully, we’ve got a good enough sense of which agencies should be in which pitches to have a fairly good conversion rate. That said, it is not our decision to make.”

Catherine Bension

Tina Fegent Consulting

“My one piece of advice is to treat procurement as a friend and not as a foe. Whist inevitably there will be a focus on costs (please accept that but stand strong if you feel you should) and value for money, procurement can add a lot of value in a commercial relationship and can aid discussions that can benefit - in areas such as process, ways of working, technology and future proofing.”

Tina Fegent

TrinityP3

“Pitch less and win more.

The best way to win new business is not pitching. (And certainly not filling in mindless RFPs). It is building relationships to get new projects from existing clients or getting new projects from new prospects and growing these into more business. But if you are going to pitch then be professional and be cautious. Remember, the invitation to pitch is not a gift, it is the start of a business transaction so make sure you know what you are in for before you commit to participate. Ask questions about the process, the criteria and the requirements. But more importantly understand what the ultimate prize represents. No one should commit hundreds of hours of agency resources, not to mention thousands of hours of costs for an underwhelming piece of business. So to grow your business make sure you pitch less in 2015 and focus on winning more rather than simply pitching more.”

Darren Wooley



Bob Wolf Partners/TPG

“Heading Off the Need For Another Agency Review...It's an old adage that the two times an agency delivers its best work is when they are pitching your business or trying to save the account. While this may not be true always, it's more true than you may care to believe.

Rather than always going through an agency review to get the best work, clients can create both the tension and incentive for doing good work by having regular performance audits. Reviewing quality of briefs, execution, collaboration, success and failure in a transparent fashion...at least twice per year, can prevent all kinds of drop-off in the quality of work. Feedback on communication, staff continuity, sales/KPI results and potential incentives can go a long way to foster the kind of long-term relationship you'd prefer.”

Dan Pearlman