

## The Dirty Half-Dozen That Will Doom Your Agency Review

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### Viewpoint: Reviews Are on the Rise and So Are Problematic RFPs and Pitch Behavior

Posted by Tom Finneran on 12.01.09 @ 03:00 PM



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What's that rumble in the air? Could it be the distant drumbeat signaling a recovery from a long and tough recession?

Perhaps calling it a recovery is overstating a bit, but if the generally positive and optimistic conversations occurring among 4A's member agencies are any indication, there may be -- finally -- a light at the end of the tunnel.

Agency leaders report that marketing dollars and agency search activity are on the rise. I've heard this in the chatter gaining momentum in recent weeks at industry conferences, meetings and on the 4A's Business Development Blog.

While there is a sense of cautious optimism, agencies know all too well that along with the good of new-business opportunities comes the bad of problematic RFPs and the ugly of errant pitch behaviors.

Now is the time that advertisers, along with their agency partners, need to audit their existing marketing capabilities. During these evaluations, some marketers will determine that they want to retool their current agency arrangements. Alternatively, some advertisers may determine that it's prudent to explore the marketplace in order to assess the caliber of agency resources and diversity of skill sets that are available beyond their existing roster.

Recently the 4A's New Business Committee -- represented by 30 or so shops ranging from TBWA to Wunderman to Carat -- flagged six critical areas of

agency search behavior that result in inefficient or ineffective searches. Here are the dirty half-dozen mistakes that can doom an agency review:

**1. Client non-disclosure provisions that mandate client ownership of all agency-developed new-business ideas and work product (even if the agency is not selected to handle the assignment).**

The 4A's advises agencies to preserve ownership of agency new-business ideas. Industry thought leaders have called out unilateral assignment requirements as a worst practice. Many premier agencies, including Crispin Porter & Bogusky, BBDO, Deutsch and TBWA/Chiat/Day, have stated that as a matter of principle, they will not participate in reviews that require unilateral assignment of rights to their new business ideas and work.

**2. Process rules that limit access to and interaction with key client personnel.**

The best long-term marketer-agency relationships involve ongoing dialogue, personal interaction and collaboration among the decision makers and teams that need to deliver the expected results. The lack-of-access problem includes: limited or no access to decision makers; limited or no access to the marketing departments; and the late-entry of decision makers into the process. It's critically important that access and chemistry be inculcated as early as possible, starting at the review process.

**3. Inadequate or poorly constructed briefs.**

A well-constructed brief is a summation of business challenges, marketing opportunities and brand expectations. The brief should ideally form the platform upon which final stage agency-client interaction is built, and an inadequate or poorly constructed brief invariably kicks off the process on wobbly footing.

**4. Lack of transparency and specificity of decision criteria and decision maker(s).**

Marketer decision makers should establish comprehensive agency specifications at the outset of conducting an agency search. All assessment criteria should then be formally communicated to both client-side and agency-side participants in the process. The old-school adage, "I'll know it when I see it," has never been -- and will never be -- an effective mechanism for making important decisions.

## **5. Unreasonable time frames.**

The agency-selection process involves significant time, money and opportunity cost for both the marketer and the agency. Marketers must give participants enough information, access to key decision-making personnel, and enough time to do the work effectively and efficiently. If speed to market is an issue, marketers should narrow their search in an expeditious and structured manner, in order to allow adequate interaction with a manageable and focused number of candidates.

## **6. Lack of disclosure of compensation expectations early in the search process.**

There are uncertainties that surface during any agency review. That said, there are a number of core search considerations such as conflicts, service expectations and compatibility of economic expectations that can be reasonably calibrated early in the review. Clear communication of economic expectations at the outset of a search should minimize unpleasant surprises that can be disruptive later in the process.

The wisdom of embracing solid fundamentals is more important than ever before because now it is imperative to get it right the first time.