

# Focus on competitive differences rather than pitch order

Traditionally, advertising agencies have always wanted to be either first or last in a competitive pitch situation fearing that they may be forgotten otherwise by the client, but, in our view, position in the pitch order does not matter. As long as the various pitches take place over a maximum of two days, there is no danger of client becoming confused about the various attributes of the presenting agencies.



By [Johanna McDowell](#) 21 Nov 2011

Over the years we have noticed that agencies have a tendency to focus on what their competitors might or might not be saying during a pitch as opposed to remaining focused on their own work. We believe that agencies should curb any tendency to make comments about other agencies to client as such comments may be inappropriate and therefore not appreciated by the client.

We recommend that agencies should rather focus on their own thoughts regarding their key competitive differentiators as is those factors which will set them apart and give them a winning edge in a pitch situation.

Here are a few pointers that will help agencies to communicate their competitive edge.

- Agencies need to avoid gimmicks or contrived situations. Clients are often very uncomfortable in situations which may be "over the top"
- Proposals must be well rehearsed and presented by the team who will be working on the account if awarded
- Good presentation skills definitely make a difference. Slides need to be clear and concise. Do not read the slides out, summarise them
- Give a budget and refrain from giving hourly rates if possible. Always rather try and quote on scope of work
- Timing and implementation of a campaign should be included. Clients feel confident when agencies present timing plans and schedules
- It is worthwhile for an agency to indicate their BEE Level and to show commitment to transformation, even if this factor is not asked for in a pitch situation
- Include measurements for success of a campaign; demonstrate that results are important to you as an agency. These results must relate to client sales or market share ideally
- Look for ways to save time during a presentation and always allow time for questions. These questions could come from either client or agency
- Show real results through case studies which can demonstrate both creativity and real commercial return on investment

In our view, focusing on the agency's competitive edge is far more beneficial to an agency than worrying about which position they may be placed in the pitch order. Clients do not forget excellence no matter how complex a pitch process may be.

## ABOUT JOHANNA MCDOWELL

MD of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS), and partner in Scopen Africa, with a background that includes being on both the agency and the client side of the fence, Johanna McDowell is well-placed to offer commentary on marketing and advertising in the South African and international contexts. She built her career in marketing and advertising since 1974, holding directorship in both SA and British advertising agencies. She was MD of Grey Phillips Advertising in 1988.  
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