



New Business Talent

INSIGHT ARTICLE

Horses for Courses

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In-House: Can you tell us how many different agencies/consultancies you work with on a regular basis? How many of the agencies did you choose and how many have you inherited and continued to work with?

In my current Australian role, I work with several different agencies. These include an 'insourced' design agency and an external advertising and communications agency in Australia, along with an Australian market research outfit. I also get good advice from a media planning and buying agency. On an international scale and as a member of our global brand council, we work with a number of design agencies, an online specialist agency, and have ongoing relationships with various marketing, communications and ad agencies. That's before I get onto the broader subject of recruitment agencies, events support consultancies, PR agencies and the like. It's horses for courses.

In-House: If you have selected any of the agencies you are working with, how did you go about drawing up the pitch list? (how did those agencies get on your radar?) If you went about it in different ways for different disciplines, then please let us know the different methods you used for drawing up the various pitch lists.

Drawing up a pitch list for a major international program is always a collaborative process, and while I have my own opinions on who's hot and who's not, we always consult extensively as a team in narrowing down who we think might be interesting to work with. Working for 20 years in creative services on the client and agency sides obviously gives you a good bank of knowledge about who's good at what, and keeping one's ear to the ground – reading the trade press, checking out the 'latest work' sections of websites, and keeping in touch with old contacts does the rest. References from colleagues in the industry and from other clients is an important source of validation for individual talents and teams. Speaking personally, my radar isn't really tuned to awards ceremonies, billings lists or who's on what roster. It's alerted by the quality of work I see anywhere – design work I see appearing in various media, great ads, and integrated market strategy I

see working effectively in different channels. Ultimately if an idea is brilliant, captivating, compelling and pure, I'm curious as to who came up with it. Same with the execution and delivery. Great ideas can be squandered by lousy implementation. As far as methods for different types of agency, it's pretty consistent across the board. The basic criteria are quality of work and reputation for results, backed up by references for a collaborative approach, attentive client service and insightful account management.

In-House: If you have one agency that offers a total integrated solution rather than different agencies for different specialisms, then please can you tell us why you chose this route? (a lot of agencies still wonder whether they should offer integrated solutions or be specialist so your views would be really useful).

I am not a fan of bundled services, and tend to seek specialist skills in each of the fields we need strategy and creative. Having worked in a global branding and design agency, a web outfit and a consultancy, I've (unfortunately for many agencies) worked for a little too long behind the curtain to know the strengths and weaknesses of the agency model. Generally one discipline is in the ascendant at any one time, with all the other service strands feeding off the leaders and teams within it. The lead discipline could change over time – it could move from corporate identity systems to environmental and interiors to consumer packaging – but it's pretty difficult to imagine one agency containing a range of skill sets, each of which is best in class at once. Ultimately it depends on the importance of a project – if it's critical to the corporate marketing strategy, I go for specialists. If it's a minor promotion with an internal comms element and messaging to be driven through interactive and print, then I'm fine to go with one agency – but they need to convince me first that the idea's execution will be seamless.

In-House: Our previous client side interviewee felt that `chemistry` was probably the most important aspect of selecting his agencies. However, other senior marketing decision makers talk about the importance of understanding their market place. Where do you put the most emphasis on agency selection – either with reference to the above criteria or other criteria?

I'd agree with both these points of view, and add the third dimension of advice. Like any other client/supplier relationship, I look for agencies which have the capacity to become trusted advisers. This means the courage to challenge my organisation's thinking with sound reasoning, the passion to understand our business, and the natural inclination to collaborate and co-create rather than to maintain distance or false mystique. On the chemistry aspect, you can't underestimate the importance of a natural energy flowing between agency and client. If there's genuine rapport, and a shared sense of humour, intellectual

curiosity, compatible taste, you naturally get a degree of repartee and ideas which tend to spark off each other. Funnily enough, I don't think liking each other has a lot to do with it – respect for each other's intellect, track record, and courage to challenge each other with sound ideas is the foundation for a great working relationship. I regard a good understanding of a client's market place as table stakes. I've become a little tougher in my expectations of agencies over the years due to the progressively higher standards which I see my firm's clients holding us to. If I feel that an agency will be using my firm to learn about our market, then I'll look elsewhere. This is entirely consistent with the position that our own clients maintain towards Deloitte: increasingly, they feel that any time they have to spend educating us about their market is a waste of time. They expect us to go to them with deep knowledge of their markets, audiences, trends and possibilities – and moreover, that we go to them with ideas and information about developments that may still be over their horizon. It's a high bar, but that's the beast we are dealing with in a very competitive space. So when an agency comes to me without real knowledge and insight of our industry, the regulations affecting it, what our competitors are doing – then they're immediately at a big disadvantage.

In-House: How much of your selection process is governed by a procurement department?

Personally speaking, apart from the necessary compliance procedures, I have rarely worked through procurement departments in signing up agencies – in Spain, the UK, US or Australia. They simply are not equipped to identify or judge the qualities a marketing team is looking for. They are great at ensuring suppliers are signed up with confidentiality agreements, contracts are examined and fine tuned, but in terms of guiding my selection process, they have had no influence whatsoever on the pitches I've run.

In-House: Being an agency/consultancy person by background, what would be your biggest criticism about how agencies go about business development in general?

I find it extraordinary that so many agencies advocate customer-centric marketing, yet persist in spending the first half of their pitch presentations talking about themselves.

It's been accepted wisdom in the marketing community for the past 15 years that the biggest turn-off for a potential client is an agency team coming in and beating their chests about their achievements and track record, talents, global networks, and client portfolios. Yet time and time again I see the same pattern, with at least one and up to three out of four agencies on the average pitch devoting the first section of their pitches to 'why us'.

Starting off a pitch with 'why us' is tantamount to telling a client 'Why not us – we're self-centred, lack real insight into your industry or your challenge, and are more focussed on simply winning your business than motivated to solve your problem.'

In-House: Occasionally we hear great stories about guerilla tactics that an agency might have used to get on a pitch list or the radar of a Marketing Director? Have you got any stories like that, either as an agency person or on the client side?

I wouldn't like to use concrete examples, as I've seen a hundred different techniques which once they've been used – whether successful or not – are past their sell-by date. However I do think that guerrilla tactics need to be carefully thought through and a targeted marketing director's potential reaction analysed. I've seen highly personalised pitches go to government targets who felt threatened by the degree of personalisation used – a sort of 'how did you get this information about me?' paranoid reaction. I've seen conservative and prudish decision makers ambushed by sexy ideas with predictably cool results. And I've received full-blown mock-up advertising and communication campaigns – unsolicited – from agencies who may have thought they were stealing a march on an incumbent provider, but which suggested a degree of desperation and underutilised talent as well as reinforcing the value of the incumbent agency. Ultimately, no gimmicky tactic will ever substitute a clearly expressed articulation of a client's problem, and a straight talking, authentic approach. It's less about an agency answering the question, and more about demonstrating how it will address the question.

In-House: We're collating the best pitch stories from around the world. Is there a pitch that you've been involved in either as the client or when you ran your own agency that stands out for any reason? (it could be a genius idea or a desperately embarrassing moment, or something else that stood out).

Once again, I'll keep my cards close to my chest there. On the positive side, I apply the best lessons I've learned in the agency space to the pitches that Deloitte runs, frequently on a much larger scale – and the most successful are worth keeping secret. On the negative side, I have to be careful about citing specific examples. I am not just being coy – given this is an online medium, whatever I say will be there forever, and will probably get back to people I would prefer it not to. Let's just say, however, that the most embarrassing moment I've ever witnessed was in a distant past life – an agency pitching my company who started out by getting our name wrong, tried to course correct and promptly mixed up the industry we were in, and wound up their presentation with a slide on PowerPoint that included in-house commentary – and a piece of pointed personal advice to one of the pitch participants – that would have been infinitely preferable had it not been displayed behind the oblivious team for us to read

while they wound up their pitch. As one of their team left, he shook hands with me and said "We're not going to win this one, are we?" It was hard to keep a straight face at that point...

In-House: Do you foresee any opportunities for any new agencies to work with Deloitte in the short to medium term future?

Not for me to comment on a global scale. In Australia, I am very happy with the agencies we currently work with, but as the business continues to diversify I am always happy to hear from agencies with a big idea.

In-House: If you could be Marketing Director of one brand, which one would it be and why?

Do you mind if I take two? Go on, indulge me!

It would be tempting to work on a great, category defining brand like Google, Apple or Virgin, however I'd have to say the hard work for the most part has already been done and they are doing quite well without my help! So in the corporate space, I'd say that working on Deloitte's brand is the single greatest challenge, and the most fulfilling one, of my career. I am a member of a fantastic global brand team of eclectic skills and high aspirations, being driven by a visionary CEO with a clear idea of the power and potential of our brand. More broadly, the category of professional services is the most exciting space to be working in branding right now. While marketing consumer products is a century-old science, the language of professional services marketing is still being written. When people from my old agency ask me why I'm using my experience to market accountancy, tax, consulting and advisory and not working in some 'sexy' IT or products space, I'm fond of replying that it's because I find selling ideas and people more challenging than widgets and dog food. That's probably a cruel simplification, but you get the idea. If we're talking about a non-corporate, it would have to be the national brand of Australia, through working for the Australian Tourism Board and any of several inward investment agencies. I think my country has generally done a lousy job of selling itself to the world and of creating a brand which reflects our reality or our promise. I read recently that the space program of the past 50 years had taught us more about our own planet than the universe outside it, and identified with that - having spent 20 years abroad, I am acutely aware of how Australia is perceived in its target markets, and of the many misconceptions about the country that we seem eager to reinforce through our marketing. We're too ready to reinforce the clichés. Like most brands, the answer lies in a combination of playing to our differentiating benefits, and harnessing the people delivering the brand to the vision. For example, there are millions of Australians living outside Australia, a veritable army of ambassadors who are virtually ignored when it comes to promoting the brand. It's not just about Paul Hogan, kangaroos and shrimps on the barbie!