

10 tips to win

During his 20 years in the global advertising business with McCann-Erickson, Lowe Worldwide and Interpublic, Kevin Allen won many client accounts, including MasterCard with the 'Priceless' pitch. Here, he offers his advice on winning the business

PURSUCE CLOSABLE PROSPECTS

1 My very first advertising boss made it clear to me that there was only one kind of prospect that mattered: one that had the inherent proclivity to be your client. It was very wise advice. There are a million prospects out there but only a segment of them that have the likelihood to see the world your way, to value what you value and see you as the answer to their prayers. It's vital to develop the criterion that not only focuses on the objective criteria - size, budget and so on, but to focus on the human elements. That is, what sort of corporate culture do they have, what do they believe makes good marketing communications, or how have they behaved in the past towards their agency partners? All these will identify a pattern, which will allow you to identify, long before you have met your prospect, whether they will immediately find you compatible. In short, birds of a feather flock together.

UNCOVER THE HIDDEN AGENDA

2 The brief is not the brief. While the client may tell you the facts and figures and provide countless pages of PowerPoint presentations surrounding their business problem, it bears no relationship to the basis upon which the decision will be made. It's a little-known fact that in the final stages of the MasterCard pitch, we at McCann were paired with a final contender. The established criterion was that the agency with the winning test score for the work that was submitted would be declared the winner. When the results came in from the two remaining contenders 'Priceless' bombed. In a courageous move, Larry Flanagan, MasterCard's then celebrated chief marketing officer, prevailed upon the board to award McCann-Erickson the business. Based upon our connection with their hidden agenda, as Flanagan put it: "We bonded because not only did the McCann-Erickson people understand the deep desire of the MasterCard customer, but they understood MasterCard's hidden agenda - we knew this was a group of people who could win."

Hidden agendas take three key forms: wants, about people viewing their circumstance through the lens of ambition and confidence; needs, a prospects fear or concern; and values, their closely held belief systems.

IDENTIFY YOUR LEVERAGEABLE ASSETS

3 I know it's true that it's vitally important to focus on your prospect, but it's equally as important to focus on you. Your leverageable assets in the form of your real ambition (what you seek), your credo (what you believe), and your core (what truly makes you special), these are the bases upon which you connect with a hidden agenda and you are seen as the answer to your prospect's prayers.



ESTABLISH YOUR PURSUIT STRATEGY

4 Running from your client's brief to all corners of the agency is no formula for a unified winning team. A disciplined pursuit strategy meeting where the agenda of the client is discussed in detail, and a process of determining what it is about you that they will connect with, should be organised. This can help as you match up your credo, your core for your real ambition to the three possible hidden agendas.

DEVELOP A CONTACT PLAN

5 Far too often, we view the pitch presentation as the deciding moment. In fact, a winner is declared in many respects before you walk in the pitch room, provided profound human contact and connection is made with your prospect during the course of the pitch process. Get out there. Go see your prospects. Ask them to lunch, have a coffee, bring them something to think about. No

the pitch



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one ever takes off points for enthusiasm or for being wooed.

ARGUE LIKE A LITIGATOR...TELL LIKE A STORYTELLER

6 A boring linear recitation of facts does not persuade. A highly energetic argument centred on the very essence of the agenda and how you connect to it, does. A litigator creates a single thematic at the core of the case and then presents evidence to prove its merit. So it should be with any great pitch. I avoid at all costs the use of 'presentation'. Instead, in its place I use what I call the advocates approach, where all the elements of your findings and recommendations accrue to an overarching powerful meeting thematic.

DETERMINE YOUR CLIENT EXPERIENCE STRATEGY

7 Profiling the prospect. There are many ways to do so, including some excellent personality profiling tools based on Jung/Myers-Briggs.

However, it is up to you to conduct this profiling and to determine whether your prospect is highly analytical and process-driven, a 'just-the-facts' decider, a human relations-centred individual, or a big ideas person. This thinking will shape how you craft the experience. What's most important is to remember that when they visit you, it's not enough to be shuffled into a conference room awaiting a litany of PowerPoint slides, but to ensure that they receive a spirited, engaging, exciting and human experience.

BE YOURSELF

8 I know of an agency that, without question, had the best recommendations for its clients. They were brilliant and after their presentation they learned to their horror that they were not awarded the business. Later, forensics revealed that they were perceived as machine-like and the client simply could not get a feel for who they were as people. Over my many years, when our successful pitch team would get together with the client for a wonderful post-meeting celebration, after a few Chardonnays, I would always ask the question: "Why did you give us the business?" The answer was always the same: "Well, you get it." Get it? Get what? It is down to the fact of making your connection with what lies in the heart of your prospect. There is no way on earth that that connection is ever going to happen when the team presenting sets out to be perfect, machine-like automatons of marketing facts and figures. The more authentic, quirky, likeable and engaging you are the better.

REHEARSE, REHEARSE, REHEARSE

9 A friend of mine who presided over reviewing literally hundreds of agency pitches over the years told me once of a cheeky little tactic. He carefully observes the other presenters in the room while the lead presenter holds

the floor. He found out some remarkable things and can judge whether or not the team is together or whether they are, in fact, a divided group of 'individuals'. Rehearsal is utterly vital, as it not only serves the purpose of you being confident about your materials, but over the course of the rehearsal process – and I indeed recommend two separate sessions – your group is transformed into that of a cohesive high-performing team that can basically finish each other's sentences. This is what clients hire.

IT AIN'T OVER TILL IT'S OVER

10 Though many pitches give the appearance of a rigid and formulaic approach to decision-making, make no mistake, the decision is taken by humans with all of their uncertainties and desires. At the end of the day, decisions are made with the heart and not with the head, and, as a consequence, the process of influence can take place beyond the presentation day itself.

In fact, it is vital at this stage to swing into action, engaging with the client counterparts you established during your contact strategy phase. Vital clues can be garnered about what might be missing or need be emphasised that can still factor their way into what I call the 'jury room'. Client advocates, with your help, can take vitally needed information into the room to make your case.

At the end of the day, remember it's all a human game. A wonderful family friend I have known since I was a kid who sold encyclopedias door-to-door once reminded me, "Look honey, it's really simple, a mother doesn't want a set of encyclopedias, she wants her kid to be President."

Keep your eye on the prize... by uncovering and connecting with the all-important hidden agenda.