10 Tips for New Business success

Prospecting

While New Business can be the most exciting and rewarding part of agency life, it can also be the most daunting. Whether you're a pitch pro or new to the role altogether, we have created a series of 10 top tips to help you navigate the process - taking you from prospecting and completing RFIs at the start, through to keeping up morale at 2am on pitch day and staying in control of the pitch budget.

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10 Top Tips for Realistic Prospecting

Having a good prospecting strategy is basic housekeeping. How you approach it will depend to some extent on your agency's culture and leadership style, but here are some best practice steps to get you off to a good start.

1. **Look at gaps in your client list:**
which sectors are you not conflicted in; which sectors do you have previous experience in; do they meet criteria for what you look for in a client e.g. do they have big budgets; will it be a creative opportunity, will they be good people to work with?

2. **Keep a list of your clients' people moves:**
track clients that were good to work with and are advocates of the agency; keep them up-to-date with your work and news; invite them to events.

3. **Delve into your leadership team's little black books:**
which clients do they know from previous roles? Are they in an organisation which you would like to work with? Help them formulate a contact strategy.

4. **Build relationships with complementary agencies:**
whether in your immediate network or not, clients of partner agencies you work with may need other services at some point e.g. media if you're creative, creative if you're media.

5. **Tap your new hires:**
whether they work in finance or account management, new hires will have client intel from their previous company? If they are client facing, which brands did they have a close relationship with and would they be a good prospect? Help them formulate a contact strategy.

6. **Foster relationships in the wider industry:**
get to know the press and intermediaries who can keep you abreast of up-and-coming pitches (and vice versa); if you have a separate PR team get them on board and align with them on their journalist contact strategy.

7. **Capitalise on loss:**
if you are unfortunate enough to lose a client, look at their competitors - who would be a good target now you have some knowledge about the sector?

8. **Think strategically about prospecting materials:**
be efficient about the materials you create e.g. broader thought pieces that can be repurposed (either within a sector or a skillset) for a more personal touch to your chosen prospects.

9. **Do a PR push:**
raise your profile by speaking at events and conferences where your prospects might be; put out thought pieces on the industry you're targeting to show off your knowledge of the field; scour attendee lists at industry events for potential prospects and instigate an introduction.

10. **Persevere:**
clients are rarely in the market for a new agency, on average every 3-5 years, so it's often a waiting game but worth it if you can pull it off!

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Completing an RFI

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10 Top Tips for completing an RFI

Having a solid plan for completing an RFI is essential. How you go about fulfilling it will of course be different for every agency, but here are some best practice tips to get you off to a good start.

1. **Remember who you are writing for:**
ensure you are answering their specific ask, and not simply submitting an 'off the shelf' response. Tailor your case studies, use their language and be relevant.

2. **Understand what they're looking for:**
review their competitor landscape, do some 'light' research, share your own proprietary thinking, get to know their product so you can talk knowledgeably about it in the RFI.

3. **Express your enthusiasm:**
show your interest for the business. This is the stage where you're up against the most number of competitors, and a bit of passion goes a long way.

4. **Make sure you are expressing your agency's personality:**
if you don't need to stick to the template, then don't. Think creatively about your response.

5. **Measured and memorable:**
tell a consistent and compelling story throughout the whole narrative that ladders back to your agency positioning.

6. **It's ok to have opinions:**
to set yourself apart from the rest of the stack, give an opinionated opinion about their brand. Be interested and interesting.

7. **Keep it to the point:**
the clients will have a lot of these to read. Keep the copy concise and to the point.

8. **Help them choose you:**
explain why you are the right partner. Make it an easy decision for them.

9. **Give yourself time:**
if you need to get it printed externally, give yourself plenty of time to get the RFIs back from the printers and delivered to where they need to go. Lateness is never a good first impression.

10. **Check, check, check:**
read and re-read requirements at the beginning and the end. Make sure you've ticked all the boxes. Make sure it is proof-read at least once before hitting submit.

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Choosing the right pitch team

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10 Top Tips for choosing the right pitch team

Every pitch has different requirements and having the right team is fundamental. Here are some best practice tips to help you pick the best team whatever the situation.

1. **Appoint the pitch leader:**
they chair pitch meetings, hold the relationship with the key clients and have ultimate responsibility for the delivery of the pitch. There should only be one pitch leader and and everyone (including the CEO) should be in mutual agreement.

2. **Ensure relevant client or sector experience:**
your first port of call should always be to search your agency for anyone who has experience working with the client you are pitching to or with similar clients in their market sector.

3. **Team Diversity:**
make sure your team is representative of your agency. Show that your agency is forward thinking and appreciative that creativity and brilliant teams consist of the coming together of different cultures, backgrounds and experience.

4. **Marking the client team:**
it is essential you know who will be attending at each stage of the process. Every person has boxes to tick and every vote counts. If possible, mirror your pitch team to the client team, and task each person to 'mark' one particular client.

5. **Role and responsibilities:**
spend time dissecting the brief and creating a 'strategy to win'. List all the key elements and match that list to the key disciplines in your agency. Then you can establish who in those disciplines will give you the best possible team.

6. **Pitch as the client team:**
clients want to be wowed by the people who will work on their business. This is great because it opens up the pitch process to the entire agency and gives everyone the chance to have that career defining moment when they present in a pitch.

7. **Consistency is key:**
pitches can often be very long processes with many stages before the final pitch meeting. It is crucial therefore, that the pitch team remain consistent to enable them to build a relationship with the client over the entire pitch period.

8. **Keep the team lean:**
the pitch should be the teams' number one priority during the pitch period. Keep the team as small as possible and avoid people drifting in and out of the process. It is better to have 80% of 5 peoples time than 20% of 20 people's time.

9. **Appoint a pitch doctor:**
this crucial role should be played by someone senior who has not been involved in the pitch process but understands the brief and can be involved at various stages before key meetings, to provide an objective point of view on the pitch response.

10. **Create a fun environment:**
new business is something agency folk should want to be a part of, so team wellbeing is vital. A team that is enjoying the process will work better and more importantly, demonstrate a sense of unity to the client.

10 Tips for New Business success

Tissue meetings

While New Business can be the most exciting and rewarding part of agency life, it can also be the most daunting.

Tissue meetings all about the opportunity to test your thinking and learn about your client and get under the skin of their brand. Here are some best practice tips to ensure you maximize this time.

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1. If there isn't a tissue, demand one

More opportunities for feedback and collaboration will help you get to a better response and it gives the client a better insight into what you'd be like to work with.

2. Learn how brave the client is

Use the opportunity to gauge how brave or safe the clients want to be by making sure there is a spectrum in the initial concepts you present.

3. Don't go in with too many routes

Be confident in your best ideas. Allow space for discussion. Less is definitely more when it comes to tissue meetings.

4. Keep the team consistent across all pitch meetings

The clients will be meeting so many new faces at each agency and they will want to hear from the team working on their business.

5. Get under the skin of the brand

Visit the stores, buy the products, see the factory, speak to the staff. Demonstrate passion for their business.

6. Treat it like a pitch

Make it feel special and use the time to build relationships - but make sure you go one better at the next stage.

7. Get creative when collating feedback

Think creatively about how you present the ideas and how you elicit constructive comments. Not all clients are experienced at feeding back on work, so find innovative ways to capture responses from everyone in the room.

8. Look for opportunities to generate discussion

In a virtual world, look for ways and tools to make the process of tissue and discussion, interactive – breakout rooms and collaboration tools like digital white boards and google slides are all useful starting points.

9. Validate your thinking

Use different types of research to validate initial strategic thoughts and foundations for the creative territories.

10. Share the limelight

This is the time for your strategist and/or your creative lead to shine and connect with the clients. Think carefully about the role for each agency attendee, and make sure that each team member has a clear role. Most importantly of all, listen to the clients' feedback and demonstrate where you have done so at the next stage.

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Chemistry Meetings

While New Business can be the most exciting and rewarding part of agency life, it can also be the most daunting.

Getting to know who you are speaking with and making the right first impression is vital. Here are some best practice tips to help you set off on the right foot.

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1. Know your audience

Do your research on who's coming, their career experience as well as current roles. Gauge what they will bring to the room and the conversation.

2. Chemistry doesn't happen in large group

Keep numbers as small as possible; relationship chemistry doesn't happen with a committee line-up. Even if it's a broad integrated pitch, avoid the long line of experts and look for your best multi-position players.

3. Casting for chemistry

Get the right balance (context dependent) between 'real team' and your management 'rockstars'. Clients want to see people they will work day to day with but don't underestimate the effect of some star power.

4. Chemistry is contagious

Make sure your team have brilliant chemistry together, particularly when mixed level. The real deal can't be faked, and it's contagious for the clients. Confidence and fun will then win out over nerves and pressure.

5. How to give more than expected

This doesn't have to mean volume of meeting content or jumping ahead to early creative work. That is a high risk strategy which can go either way. But work out how you and your agency can stand out from the rest – in a way that's true to who you are - in your research / passion / thinking about their brand and the opportunity.

6. Leave them wanting more

The chemistry should be a taster of how good your team can be, and how much you seem to gel with the clients. Use the time wisely – don't burn it up on 'transmit' mode. Have the confidence to follow a good conversation off the prepped slides.

7. Get under the skin of the brand problem or opportunity

Assuming you get through to next stage, this is your chance to get crucial insight and understanding for the pitch itself. Like a date, your new prospect is only interested in your past performance (current clients) up to a point, and while they need to get to know you, no one falls in love with a self-interested bore.

8. Vibe and scribe

Nominate one person on the team (probably the one with the least to do) to write down all the client comments and points – exactly as they come. When hopes are high, everyone tends to hear what they want to hear, especially on the back of newly formed brand theories.

9. Plan for the right questions

What are the questions – what you're likely to be asked and what you want to ask. Who's going to field what? Plan to be slick and give everyone their chance.

10. Use of theatre

Whether it's an icebreaker, proving your passion and effort or making yourself memorable. The golden rule is: think twice before you do anything that you would feel embarrassed about if you don't make it through.

10 Tips for New Business success

Faultless pitch day

While New Business can be the most exciting and rewarding part of agency life, it can also be the most daunting.

Being able to facilitate a successful pitch day is a fundamental skill. It is imperative that you manage all elements of the day and really showcase your agency and all it has to offer in the best way possible. Here are some bast practice tips to get you off to a good start.

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1. Welcome

Brief your reception. Let them know the names of the clients and to make sure reception is tidy. Have names badges ready if required. Set up a welcome screen or boards for when they enter the building (unless the meeting is confidential). Decide who greets the client - and have the person waiting in reception.

2. Agency walkthrough

Show your best self - Ensure the agency is clean, tidy and looking its best.. Give the agency notice that important guests are visiting, and remind everyone to be their lovely selves. If they are an existing client, make sure previous work is displayed around the agency.

3. Dress code

Decide on dress code a couple of days before the pitch. The last thing you want to worry about the night before is what you will wear or to realise that the planned outfit is in the laundry basket. Also you don't want your whole team to show up wearing black - unless it's part of the pitch theatre.

4. Food and drinks

Consider who the clients are, what food they are likely to appreciate and ask for dietary requirements. Think about your agency brand and how that can be reflected in the way you present your food and drink. Always look to impress and to feel like you already understand the clients need.

5. IT

Keep your IT magicians on standby (outside the room) just in case. If you are pitching off-site, confirm what tech they have. Ask IT to help set up and possibly come with you on the day.

6. The pitch room

Think about the right pitch setting e.g. flowers, lighting. Think about the seating plan. Think about props that will help the presentation: boards, products, display. Allow time to set up the pitch theatre - ideally that would be done the day before the pitch so the final rehearsal can happen in the room.

7. Agency team

Send them to bed early the day before. Clients buy teams and people - the people in the room are what you are selling. Brief them on their role, the script and how to handle questions, etc. Once in the room, make sure they speak to everyone in the room (not just the most senior person). Support each other and show that you are a close team.

8. Clients

The pitch is about them, not us. Listen. Observe. Ask questions. They are interested in you, otherwise they would not be there, so show that you are interested in them too. Make them feel part of the team. Refer to the clients by name is a good way to do that.

9. Follow up

Even though the clients have left, that is not the end of your pitch. Make sure you follow up with all necessary materials and try to continue the conversation.

10. Rehearse

Make sure the team have done at least one timed-out dress rehearsal. Everyone knows their points and slides, this allows everyone to enjoy the pitch more. Have one timed rehearsal with the team and one with a senior management member not involved in the pitch – they will help you sense check your flow quickly.

10 Tips for New Business success

Building the relationship after the pitch

While New Business can be the most exciting and rewarding part of agency life, it can also be the most daunting.

Once the pitch is over and the business has been won now is the time to bed in the business and build a long term, profitable and sustainable relationship. Here are some best practice steps to help you not only get off to a good start but to secure your working relationship for the future.

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1. Establish the on-boarding team

This could include people from the growth team, the pitch team, the day-to-day account team (if different from the pitch team), or the commercial team. Agree and communicate an action plan covering at least the points below. Make sure the client knows who's who, and what they'll be responsible for.

2. Understand the client's world

Since that first meeting with the client you've gathered reams of information on the client organisation, key stakeholders, team structure, reporting lines, their marketplace etc. Don't lose this valuable knowledge in transition. Establish a central knowledge bank to be maintained by the client team.

3. Set the commercial terms

Proactively engage with marketing and other relevant teams (such as finance, legal, procurement) to agree the terms of business. This should cover things like the SOW, SLA, contract, remuneration method, terms and incentives. Always identify the best people within the agency to lead any negotiations.

4. Engage procurement

Where appropriate, work with your direct client teams from day one to establish a channel of open dialogue with procurement. Proactively demonstrate the value of what you're doing and a willingness to learn how to evolve that in line with procurement's accountabilities to the business.

5. Set KPIs

Agree the destination before you start marching; this will most likely be a combination of commercial objectives for the business and specific marketing measures that support them. Consult stakeholders to ensure their requirements are built into the KPIs and agreement is reached before work starts.

6. Establish ways of working

Document your commitments to one another. Encourage open conversation; make it crystal clear what the client can expect from you on a day to day basis and in return be clear about the behaviours you'll need from them to create a brilliant working relationship.

7. Get immersed

Run an induction programme to properly introduce the agency, the core team and other relevant key people to the wider client stakeholder group. Ask for the same in return by establishing a programme of immersion activities and knowledge-sharing sessions.

8. Agree a communication timetable

Have an honest conversation about the best cadence of communications to suit both parties. Start with a plan and agree both the method and frequency of core team communication to prevent potential relationship glitches early on. This includes daily emails, check-in calls through to quarterly temperature check meetings.

9. Agree review framework

Agree what methods you'll use to audit the relationship going forward and how frequently it should happen. Establish clear KPIs for this (as well as the work).

10. Get to work

As well as the forthcoming campaign that triggered the agency review, it's likely there are ongoing projects that have been deprioritised during the pitch process. Quickly get to grips with everything and set up a timeline of work. Support a sensitive, and efficient handover from the outgoing agency.

10 Tips for New Business success

Re-pitching for an existing client

Deciding whether to re-pitch for an existing client can be difficult. It's important to consider many factors, including the potential impact on your agency new business rankings and staff if the pitch doesn't go in your favour. On a positive note, if you do choose to withdraw, or are unsuccessful, you could take the opportunity to target another advertiser in the category, who might be looking for a new agency – you have a wealth of category knowledge and an agency team raring to work on another similar piece of business. If, you do decide to re-pitch, here are some best practice tips to help you.

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1. Be clear on why the client is looking to re-pitch

A client's decision to re-pitch should be made clear prior to agreeing to participate. For an incumbent agency, a competitive and comparative pitch is not the ideal time to convince the client to remain with you.

2. Refer to the Pitch Positive Pledge

Ensure that all parties, including pitch intermediaries refer to the principles of Pitch Positive Pledge. Importantly, the client must ensure that they address any problems that may have arisen in the client/agency relationship before calling a pitch.

3. Ensure you have an equal chance of success

Pitches are a huge financial and emotional investment, so if an incumbent agency decides to re-pitch, it is up to the intermediary and client to ensure that they have a genuine chance of success and are not only invited as a courtesy gesture.

4. Approach the pitch as if it's a new client

For the incumbent, it's important to put history to one side. Be brave, introduce 'newness' in terms of the team, ideas and thinking and always remember, the pitch is an opportunity to approach the brief in a new way.

5. Consider the casting of the pitch team

The casting of the pitch team is very important. Ensure that you have a good blend of old faces (that have a close connection with the client) and new faces to inject energy and freshness into the team.

6. Get the edge over your competition

Be honest about what you've done well on the business and where you could have improved. Take learnings from what you know the client likes and doesn't like into your pitch delivery and response.

7. Use your connections with the client to your advantage

Ensure that you have continual communication during the pitch. The client will often be more receptive to additional meetings with the incumbent, as you are currently working with them.

8. Remember to think bigger

Most pitch briefs are hypothetical, so use it as an opportunity to inspire and provide the client with a vision of what could be done. Don't let the current day-to-day relationship that you have with them hinder your ability to think bigger.

9. Ensure full transparency with your team

The team will be naturally disheartened at the prospect of having to re-pitch for a client that they've been working hard on. It's important that they understand why the client has decided to re-pitch and why you've agreed to, or equally why you've declined to re-pitch, otherwise you risk a team with low motivation and morale.

10. Consider the potential impacts if unsuccessful

The AAR have reported that only 20% of incumbents succeed at retaining the business when it's up for review, so it's important to think about any negative impact or comms if you don't retain the account.