

Pitch Perfect

A photograph showing the back of a man in a dark suit and white shirt, gesturing with his right hand as if speaking to an audience. The audience is visible in the background, blurred.

In furtherance to my last bit about selling your ideas I was reminded of some of the cool stuff, and often shameless, stunts performed to win competitive pitches.

Let me start again with American adman George Lois. He was the very chap that the TV show *MadMen* was based on. But Lois was not smooth and urbane like Don Draper, he was a gruff looking, follicley challenged gentleman of Greek stock. There are many apocryphal stories about his antics. Apart from porking the client or the client's wife and apart from the weeing on the boardroom table, he once, according to legend, when in a pitch, was faced with critical comment from the client. So

upset was George he opened a window on the 25th floor of his Madison Avenue building and threw out all the layouts. As they floated gracefully down to the New York street way below, the client had a flip-flopping fit, backtracked and withdrew his critique. It ended up with a bevy of secretaries dodging lorries and yellow cabs in an attempt to retrieve the work. Did Greek Georgy and his balls of steel win the pitch? Was the client fearful that he might follow the layouts out of the window? History doesn't record. (*worth a try kids. Ed.*)

Malaysia's PTMThompson, as JWT was called in the 1970s, due to its partnership with Pernas, TDC and MAS, (PTM)

SHUT- UP ABOUT ADVERTISING

fired their partner, MAS in 1978 for almost bankrupting the agency (a complex, painful and instructional story for another time). Well, later in 1981, after a management change at Thompsons, it was decided to repitch the account. This took quite a lot of chutzpah. But the tactics were smart and somewhat risky.

In a sickeningly creepy act, across the end of the conference room Thompson hung a banner which said, in very large and bold letters, 'We want to come home Ayah'. Now a reading of the average advertiser is that they need to know they are in charge; they are the munificent giver of gifts. Master and servant, or in this case, father and son. Rather than be sickened by such blatant, obsequious anal fawning, they saw humility, regret and a plea for forgiveness. They were delighted and awarded the business to Thompson. Understanding the client/agency dynamic is the key, as long as your ego is buried deep down inside. (*And you can keep down your biryani! Ed.*)

Furthermore, rubbing salt into the wound, Thompson had elected to pitch first. So having

finished the smarmy pitch, they pinned up all their work outside the presentation venue so that all the competing agencies had to walk past, admittedly, some great work. Psycho much?

In a similar vein here is the story of a pitch by a mid-sized agency for a large, possibly the largest, client in Malaysia. Another good example of the understanding of the agency/client relationship. The presentation was made in a neutral venue and the agency's work was of course, excellent. But, the advertiser, in typical fashion, could not make a decision based on the work alone, so they elected to visit the premises of each of the competing agencies. Sniff, sniff. Poke, poke. Well, this put our agency in a bit of a bind. The agency head would not be around on the appointed day, the guy would be in London for some kind of worldwide meeting. The advertiser was made aware of this but showed no concern, but you can bet their score card was marked accordingly. The visit was still on. Thus the agency CEO made an executive decision. Without informing the client the guy

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jumped onto a plane, flew from London to KL overnight, and was standing in the agency lobby when the clients arrived for their forensic investigation the next afternoon. "Oooh! But you were in London" they exclaimed. "Oh I wouldn't miss this for the world" came the response. The guy flew back to London that evening. Thus an executive massage of the client's self-importance for the price of an airfare won the business. 'The very top guy in the agency will bend down and shine my shoes' they said to themselves, as they shivered in ecstasy. (Orgasmic? Ed.)

Other pitch gimmicks like flying in the world-wide president or using life-size cardboard cutouts of missing team members or lavish dinners and special treats or any antic like that can work too. Feed the client's fragile ego at the expense of your own or frighten the crap

out of them like George.

Because, in the final analysis, the work might be important, but the sell is equally vital, understanding the agency/client dynamic cannot be understated especially if you believe, as I do, that the advertiser rarely can distinguish between ideas. It needs more.

So just kiss their arse. But don't shag the client's wife.

PS. It seems that the local Malaysian agencies did an impressively good job of laying out strict rules and rationale to support fair remuneration for a pitch. So the advertisers turned around and suggested a deposit from the agencies for the honour of pitching. So tell me again, 'who's the boss?'

Paul J Loosley is an English person who has been in Asia 45 years, 12 as executive creative director and regional planner for JWT and 26 making TVCs. Retired some years ago yet still, for some strange reason,



he can't shut-up about advertising. Any feedback: mail p.loosley@gmail.com (please use protection).