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Most marketers ignore industry guidelines

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Nearly two thirds of advertisers are not familiar with advice from the Communications Agencies Federation (CAF) which tells them how to deal with incumbent media or ad agencies, and also advises on confidentiality agreements during pitches.

According to research from Reardon Smith Whittaker (RSW), 12 per cent of advertisers are not even aware the guidelines exist, while just 10 per cent claim to have read them.



CAF is a collaboration between the five industry bodies, set up in 2003 to help client/agency relationships: the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), Marketing Communication Consultants Association (MCCA), Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA), Direct Marketing Association (DMA) and ISBA.

The guidelines suggest clients should be prepared to choose the winning agency within a week of the pitch, however, 41 per cent of marketers in 2007, have taken two weeks or more.

CAF's guidelines also state that a minimum of four weeks should be permitted for full creative pitches, yet 42 per cent of those surveyed admitted they allowed only two weeks or less for their last pitch.

There is also advice for clients about how best to inform current and losing agencies of the pitch outcome, before it's announced by mad.co.uk.

According to RSW, 75 per cent of marketers fail to follow the agency search and selection guidelines produced by the major trade bodies.

Adam Whittaker (pictured), chief executive of RSW, said "It often surprises me how few clients refer to the trade bodies for advice or information during the pitch process. Perhaps it's not surprising that they've yet to discover, yet alone act, on these guidelines. After four years though, if this is as far as we've got, then more must be done to publicise and endorse them."

However, Allan Dutton, marketing director at Quiet Storm, was not convinced the lack of awareness surrounding CAF guidelines was a problem.

He said: "I think most people would agree that the pitch process has got a lot better over recent years and there are less incidents of pitch abuse. This is partly because industry bodies like the IPA have set up a New Business Group to help promote best practice within the industry and also that there are now universally endorsed IPA/ISBA guidelines.

"The vast majority of clients I've dealt with over the last few years have a solid process in place and handle the pitch extremely well. This includes the initial briefing session, paying a pitch fee, the NDA, to the pitch itself and they provide feedback. Of course there are exceptions to the rule, but in the main I really believe we've turned a corner on this. If an agency is about to be involved in a pitch, it can always ask if the client has seen the guidelines and if not download a copy which is free on the IPA website."

Richard Hammond, founder of Spirit Advertising, added: "Given the growing number of bodies across the industry and third party advisors, increasingly clients are overwhelmed by legislation and process."

Marina Palomba, legal director at the IPA, said: "The IPA sends out these guides to every advertiser we hear that is holding a pitch. The fact is that client advertisers do not wish to adhere to them, not so much that they do not know of them. It is well known that pitches are frequently unfair, badly run and waste agencies' hours of time and money.

"We frequently write to advertisers advising them of the Guidelines and best practice to help prevent waste in the industry generally but because marketers move so frequently and because they have to justify their own existence by holding a lot of needless pitches the rules are all too often ignored, despite the fact they benefit everyone. We promote the Guide and the fact that advertisers ignore it because its within their power to do so and because a lot are inefficient and unable to comply with even the most basic requirements of this best practice."

The RSW survey canvassed 154 marketers across a representative range of businesses. The clients were responsible for the appointment of marketing agencies of all types and each controlled marketing budgets in excess of £1 million.

Among the specific issues, CAF is also involved in are the European representation and the growing threat to freedom to advertise.

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