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The Product Manager's Guide to the Pitch

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The Product Manager's Guide to the Pitch

The pitch meeting is where pharmaceutical advertising agencies get to strut their stuff. Here is an in-depth look at how 11 firms approach this all-important part of the account-courting process.

By Meredith Matthews

The pitch meeting is the advertising equivalent of the Scholastic Aptitude Test—with all of the attendant pressure, preparation, and last-minute cramming. If an agency has done all of its homework and truly shines in the pitch meeting, it has a good shot of winning the account. Unlike college applications, however, no “safety school” exists for teams that flub the pitch; all they can do is go home and get started on the next pitch.

Clients come to the meeting ready to be wowed, of course, since they have the power of the purse. Still, it is helpful for product managers to understand what their ad agency counterparts go through to develop a successful pitch. It can make the process easier and more productive for everyone involved, and provide a glimpse of how the agency may approach assignments if awarded the contract. PRODUCT MANAGEMENT TODAY surveyed some of the pharmaceutical industry's most highly regarded advertising firms on how they face the pitch-meeting challenge. We found a wide range of creative and strategic ideas.



Anshal Purohit

DO THE MATH

The account teams at Donahoe Purohit Miller (DPM) Advertising, with headquarters in Chicago and Morristown, New Jersey, place a high premium on strategic thinking. Specifically, the agency approaches the pitch meeting with a process called, “thinking

to the power of three,” which draws on three components: (1) define, (2) create, and (3) connect. Anshal

Purohit, Director, New Business Development, described the define portion as comprising research, strategy, and positioning. After market investigation and analysis, the team designs a roadmap to the brand's desired position, complete with key messages to carry out marketing objectives. “We then define a strategy and several positioning statements to articulate these messages,” said Ms. Purohit.

The create part of the process lies in developing a unique identity for the brand. Ms. Purohit noted, “We aim to provide creative concepts for all pitch opportunities, even those that do not specifically request creative, as we feel this is the best way to demonstrate DPM's expertise at injecting character and life into the ‘define’ process.”

Included in the connect element are tactic development and feedback. After a pitch is completed, DPM always seeks feedback from product teams, even if it has not won the business. “Though some companies are hesitant to have these discussions,” Ms. Purohit concedes, “we feel strongly that after the time and consideration we put into the pitch process, we must do our best to understand our strengths and weaknesses so as to improve our performance in future pitches, provide the best service, and ensure our success as an agency.”

“We must do our best to understand our strengths and weaknesses so as to improve our performance.”

Based in New York, Ms. Matthews writes frequently on health care issues.

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we can truly uncover every stone, and show dramatically different ideas supporting the same position." Simply put, the more maps that are used, the greater the chances become of finding treasure.



Ron Pantello

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

Ron Pantello, CEO of New York City-based Euro RSCG Life, has a purely practical take on the pitch meeting. "Most clients schedule pitch presentations over a one- to three-day period and are 'bombarded' with a tremendous amount of thinking, including some overlap," he acknowledged. "The more you can help your agency stand out, the better (provided you deliver on it!)." Therefore, a top goal of the presentation should be to point out the one thing that the agency can do better than anyone else.

Mr. Pantello stressed foresight throughout the rigors of the pitch process. Rather than simply assembling a huge glut of research to sort through, he said, "It is far more effective to be selective in the things that are most important to know." Instead of throwing together dozens of PowerPoint slides in hopes that something sticks in the client's mind, agencies should "Challenge each component of the presentation to ensure it is making the desired point (visually and verbally)," with a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Euro RSCG also tries to "ignite excitement" about the opportunity among all levels of agency staff, not just the pitch team. Before heading into the pitch presentation, Mr. Pantello concluded, agencies must "Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!"



Charlene Prounis

LISTEN UP

Threading together the entire pitch process at Flashpoint Medica, also located in New York City, is an emphasis on keeping ears open to good ideas. Once preliminary research about the marketplace and the drug has been culled, the agency convenes an immersion meeting, noted Co-President and Managing

Partner Charlene Prounis. At this meeting, a "diversified group of account-, creative-, medical-, education-, Internet-, and patient-marketers assesses the issues

"Challenge each component of the presentation to ensure it is making the desired points (visually and verbally)."

together and formulate a game plan of what to explore further." One-on-one dialogue with stakeholders is also conducted to uncover insights that can drive the creative. An example, said Ms. Prounis, was a recent breast cancer drug about which patients felt so strongly that they chose to stay on therapy even when a key marker for a significant side effect developed, in exchange for cutting the risk of recurrence. "That insight—the emotional need to put all else aside, to have a better chance—became the underpinning of our campaign."

Certainly, ongoing communication with the potential client helps the agency "make sure that we 'get it'" and decide where to focus attention. More voices are often better internally, as well. To that end, Flashpoint hosts creative reviews with multiple teams working on pitch concepts (as well as client work), "so the end product is spectacular," Ms. Prounis stated. Lastly, she pointed out the importance of selecting one main idea to build the pitch or campaign around, since clients "want the brand to go in one direction, on a path that is set strategically based on insights, using one core idea."

FREE TO BE

"At GSW Worldwide, we find the pitch process to be very liberating, because it is an opportunity to bring together some of our best people around a new challenge with relatively few restrictions to encumber our thinking," said Phil Deschamps, President and CEO of the Westerville, Ohio-based agency. He explained that

each new pitch opportunity calls for the formation of a unique team with a mix of talents, including senior-level creatives, marketing strategists, and insight planners as well as pitch managers, designers, copyeditors, and editors. Once in place, the team works hard to learn as much as possible about the product, the market, and the customer. "Understanding how customers think



Phil Deschamps

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