

Should middle men control the pitch process?

With Emaar turning to a consultant to co-ordinate one of its pitches, Tim Addington asks whether a

LIVE ISSUE

Ask any creative director from a reputable agency across the region what they do in a typical day and it is likely all will say a large majority of their time is spent working on pitches for potential clients.

Winning new business is the lifeblood of an agency that wants to go places and with ad spend increasing year-on-year, clients are not holding back when it comes to marketing.

Organising, co-ordinating and managing the pitching process can be time consuming and, for companies that have little understanding of the advertising scene, fraught with difficulty.

But as *Campaign* reported last week, help has arrived. The decision by property giant Emaar to use consultants to manage a creative pitch for one of its international projects is believed to be a first in the region.

While the services of consultants to manage pitches is now commonplace in markets such as the UK and the US, the concept is new to the Middle East. So why should a company use the services of a consultant to manage a pitch and what exactly do they do?

Imad Kublawi, CEO at IK Consult, who is managing the Emaar pitch, says the answer is a simple one: "best practice". His agency is the Middle East partner of the UK's Agency Assessments International — one of a handful of companies around the world offering this type of service to advertisers.

"We facilitate the process, but it is up to the client to decide at the end of the day. We provide the tools to help them make the decision," he says. "There is a statistic that says 30% of new ad business around the world passes through consultants. That is huge, and it is growing in the US and the UK. The process has been tried and tested for over 18 years now. Everybody that wants best practice and agency selection has to follow a process."



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The first thing a pitch consultant will do is understand the needs of the client, whether it is appointing a new agency or trying to fix an existing relationship — or, as Kublawi puts it, looking at the "big picture".

From there potential agencies that would best fit the client's creative brief are approached and then no more than four agencies are asked to submit their ideas. Kublawi argues that in the Middle East too many agencies are asked to formally pitch for accounts, with the number sometimes running into double digits.

"What we don't do is go to six agencies, give them creative and strategic briefs and tell them to do it, which is what is happening at the moment. We don't recommend a creative pitch takes places with more than four agencies. That

is crucial for the industry and for the agencies."

He adds: "When I came here in February there was a huge pitch going on and I couldn't see any of the agencies because they were all working on this big pitch. My question to everyone was 'who is handling your account business?' because that will suffer. Most clients hire agencies based on creative work and most clients fire agencies based on service. There is no point running around trying to do the best creative work for pitches if you are not spending enough resources on existing clients."

The consultant will help the client write the brief and prepare a scoring system as well as talk about how much the agency is to be paid.

He says: "We facilitate and co-ordinate all the pitches. Our job is to

make sure the client is aware of all the ins and outs of the pitch. What I want the client to see at the pitch stage is the best presentation that best meets the brief.

"We sit and show the work to the client, and they decide on the winner. It is then my job to stand down the unsuccessful agencies. The process could be four steps or 14, it depends on how complicated it is."

In the UK, some agency selection consultants charge the agencies a yearly fee to have them on their books. The theory is that when a client comes knocking at the consultant's door, they will recommend a member agency to be put on the pitch list.

But Kublawi says his consultancy operates differently. "We are different from our competitors. We are a client-facing business. We

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