

Rehearsal. The Discriminators

It's what the prospect audience "takes out" not what we put in that matters.

In the rehearsals – and throughout the pitch process – keep evaluating these eight "discriminators".

Assess with objective outsider (who is not part of the pitch) audience likely response.

Assume competitor content solution is as good as yours, and their people performances. Look for differentiation in the way you say it.

Rehearsal will help achieve this. Investment in 'discriminating' rehearsal – not the last minute resented kind – pays off. It can be the winning difference.

1. Powerful, attention-getting opening

“You never have a second chance to make a first impression”
(Will Rogers)

Assume prospect bases decision on first five minutes. Capture interest fast with wit and surprise, not “introductions and agenda and rehash of brief”.

Remember also that each fresh speaker is most interesting when they first start. Allow space to introduce themselves, before charts take-over.

A common error: the CEO/MD who does not rehearse but opens with “something appropriate”.

2. Pitch an experience

Aim to engage the prospect in a memorable, personal way by staging a relevant experience. More effective than the slickest, professionally enthusiastic presentation.

Only in rehearsal can you judge how the experience will work – is the space/environment distinctive?; are the prospects able/encouraged to take part?; what activities (apart from powerpoint) engage their understanding of your concepts; is it enjoyable?!!

Common error: It takes thought – early in the process - and planning to stage an experience. It can't be done last minute. That's why most fall back on familiar powerpoint, sequential, presentations.

3. Effortless comprehension

Is it really easy to follow? The logic, steps in the argument, exactly what it is that is being recommended.

A good test. If you can't easily summarise the pitch clearly in three minutes, without visual aids, then the chances are you do not have a workable structure.

Common error: Assuming intense interest and alertness from audience! They probably dislike sitting through presentations (don't you?); may be distracted, fatigued; and have differing views – within their group – of the brief. And the bigger the audience, the more these apply. Keep it (even) simpler.

4. People buy people

Best content pitch in world won't win if prospect not (already) happy with the people. Are they a genuine team? Are they 'my kind' of people? – which varies by individual client.

Most of initial relationship building must take place before or during pitch process. “Casting and chemistry” should be under review throughout.

Good rehearsal can reinforce the people dimension – the sense of teamwork, individuals' comfort in their roles, infectious enthusiasm, crackling energy. It will increase confidence.

Common error: people avoid rehearsal – “I'm better in the real thing” – nonsense. The more you rehearse, the more natural and engaging you will be. Rehearsing makes nice people nicer.

5. Unforgettable expression of idea

Whether strategic, creative or programme solution, there will be (or should be!) single-minded idea at heart of proposal.

A compelling, unforgettable expression of this is essential. Repeated, reinforced, many times.

Client should find it easier to recall or report on it than any competing pitches. Rehearser (particularly if previously unexposed to it) can assess impact on the prospect audience.

Common error: in the pitch, the idea can get lost in strategy justification and endless executional detail, and process.

6. Harness your brand!

Your brand will already be part of the reason why you are pitching; why you were “sought out” in first place; it will have been reinforced in creds process.

In pitch itself, overt brand sell probably not appropriate. But, the intangibles – attitude, personality, positioning – must be evident. Play to and reinforce brand strengths.

Common error: Branding – name on charts and pads etc – does not harness the brand. Rehearser looks for unspoken, brand signals throughout.

7. “What’s in it for me” insight?

Rationally, the brief tells us what client prospect is looking for. And sometimes that’s enough. Sometimes.

Most times the ‘unspoken’ are the critical questions you need to respond to. Questions that emerge through relationships, through listening, listening: why are they reviewing, who is the real decision taker, what he/she wants (for themselves) – challenge/easy life; create internal change and so on.

By time of pitch, a view on “what’s in it for me” must guide tone and style.

Common error: spending more energy and time listening to clients’ consumers than to the client. “Client insight” essential.

8. Even more powerful finale

One final chance to make the lasting impression.

And tell them what you've told them – as if it was the only basis for competitive judgement.

The 'close' itself. No props. No charts. No videos. Just the team leader. Heartfelt. Personal. It's not what you say. It's the way you say it.

Common error: The least rehearsed element and yet the most important. Planning it early in the process helps bring strategy and content together.