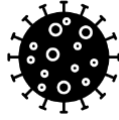


thenetworkone's helpful
guide to pitching
during a pandemic

September 2020



what has changed?



For many of us, the Coronavirus pandemic has meant that we've had to re-visit business practices and adapt them quickly to the current environment of lock-downs, little international travel and fewer face-to-face meetings.

Perhaps no more so can these changes be seen than in the area of agency new business.

With the traditional mix of in person chemistry meetings and face-to-face pitches now mostly replaced by Zoom calls with prospects and clients, what are the new 'rules for pitching'?

Well good news is that, in reality nothing has fundamentally changed. Whilst it might not always be possible to meet in person, the 'theatre', dynamics and requirements of the pitch situation are as they have always been.

So, with the help of our good friends at the 4As of America, The Observatory International in Germany, plus the AAR, and Codefinery in the UK, we have compiled the following list of things to do, don't do and watch-out for, when it comes to pandemic pitching.

But before we dive in, the first big consideration must be, is the opportunity right for you at the moment. Successful agencies do not pitch for every brief they receive, and they manage their resources carefully.

"Receiving a pitch briefing during the pandemic can be a relief and a burden at the same time. Many agencies are desperately in need of new business, but struggle to have the appropriate resources and talent available. In times like this, it is more important than ever for agencies to sensibly estimate their realistic chances of winning the pitch." – Felicitas Lentz, Director, The Observatory International.

pre-meeting basics



Don't automatically assume you can't meet in person, ask the client what their preference is for, but do take into consideration:

- a) The government guidance on social distancing in your country / region.
- b) The team who'll be presenting. Some maybe shielding or uncomfortable in this situation.
- c) Often neutral venues such as hotels are good places to meet. Such venues can limit the opportunity for cross-contamination of employees and office spaces which might result in potential large-scale quarantine situations – the client will not thank you for that!
- d) If you can't meet in person, confirm which technology (Zoom, Skype, Teams etc.,) the client would like to use. Remember not all parts of the world have access to the same applications plus larger corporate client will have preferred options as determined by their IT departments.
- e) Ensure you know how to use the technology and practice if you don't.
- f) Test it! Make sure everything works. According to the 4As *"Sentiment in the US has quickly evolved from dismissing technical issues as part of the learning process, to an expectation that the agency knows the technology perfectly."* Matthew Kasindorf, 4A's Senior Vice President – Business Intelligence & Insight

preparation



- a) As with any pitch presentation rehearse, rehearse, rehearse – especially where technology is involved.
- b) Have a back-up plan. If the WiFi goes down, can you jump on a ‘hotspot’? If a mic stops working do you have a spare? If the films don’t play, have a version pre-loaded on YouTube or Vimeo.
- c) Start on time. There is a high expectation that calls should start “as advertised” and finish on time – to the minute. Practice your presentation timings and remember hand-overs and Q&A take longer in a virtual meeting environment because there’s often less spontaneity between participants.
- d) Pre-plan the running order of the presentation and practice the hand-overs to colleagues. In the virtual meeting environment this has to be less adhoc and more like TV chat show in nature. Perhaps, consider having a moderator for the meeting – especially during the Q&A session, who can direct questions to specific individuals and keep an eye on the time.
- e) Consider the acronym W.A.I.T* (Why am I talking). In a virtual environment where an audience has a limited opportunity to read body language, what you say carries more emphasis. So, think about what you are going to say, make sure it adds value and be clear at all times.
- f) Virtual meetings take longer. Watch the timings and don’t over run.

the presentation



- a) If you are planning to share a presentation be sure to keep each slide simple, clear and legible so that they can be viewed easily on a wide array of devices from smart phones to projectors.
- b) Avoid 'fussy' fonts and over designed templates that make readability harder
- c) Balance face time and slide time. Nobody wants to sit through hours of slides plus it's hard to build a relationship with a disembodied voice!
- d) Remember video playback can be problematic if the bandwidth low. It's also better to embed media files into the presentation to avoid having to swap between applications during the presentation. Do have a back-up on YouTube etc.
- e) Have the deck ready to share with the client in case of any serious connection issues. You might wish to have it uploaded to Dropbox or WeTransfer so that you can quick send the link to the client.

chemistry



- a) Chemistry is still an important aspect of a pitch meeting but it's harder to achieve in a virtual environment. Here are a few tips that might prove helpful
- b) Have one camera and mic per presenter so that you don't have multiple people crowding around a single webcam
- c) Look down the lens and not at the screen- this is about making eye contact with the person watching and appearing open. According to Tony Spong, Managing Partner at the AAR, *"if you are naturally good at building chemistry face-to-face, then chances are you are equally good at it on video. Many of the same rules apply."*
- d) Demonstrate the friendship and chemistry between your team. Maybe tell short stories or use nicknames. This can be infectious.
- e) Don't speak across your colleagues. In a virtual meeting when the screen view switches between speakers, this can be confusing to watch, hard to hear what's being said and emphasises that you've just interrupted a colleague.
- f) Think about the structure of the meeting. Build in specific opportunities for discussion because this rarely happens spontaneously in a virtual situation.
- g) Expect silence when you stop presenting. It's an odd thing but often virtual audiences don't offer up approval, applause or even comments. It is often worth having a colleague thank you just to make for a more 'comfortable' closure.
- h) Consider sending bios and pictures to the client ahead of the meeting so they know a bit about the people on the call. Maybe include some personal information so that there's a more human level connection.
- i) Passion and energy for the client's business also goes along way to making a positive connection.
- j) Stand up. The convention on with virtual meetings is to present whilst sitting down but for important presentations, you may want to stand up. This frees your arms and legs to move and more akin to 'presenting in the real'.
- k) Don't forget to smile... even when it goes wrong!

post meeting



All the same rules as before the pandemic apply now...

- a) Send the client a copy of the presentation the same day.
- b) Ensure it has your contact details clearly on the document.
- c) Thank the client for their time.
- d) Follow-up a few days later. It is okay to demonstrate that you are keen for their business.
- e) If the client is using a 'pitch broker' be sure to keep them in the loop – ultimately, they can be ally to your cause.

Good Luck!

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**Stephanie Scott, SmartBrief, 24.08.20, <https://www.smartbrief.com/original/2020/08/reclaim-home-court-advantage-virtual-presentations>*