

In the 1990's, the UBA and the ACC developed a charter. All the major players signed up to it, and it defined the rules of the game for agency pitches for over a decade.

There's not much left of that charter now. For example, one of the things it states is that no more than three agencies (plus the incumbent) should ever be invited to pitch on any piece of business. But in recent competitions, we've sometimes seen more than 10 agencies throwing their name into the ring.

Why does that matter? Well. Pitches, like boxing, work in rounds. You get through one round and go to the next. Last man standing wins. Unlike boxing, however, pitches rely on the participants punching themselves in the head. A big pitch can cost an agency upwards of 80 000 euro. Just getting into the second round takes huge amounts of energy. And if you're lucky enough to get that far, you then have to invest even more resources just to have a chance of getting something out of it. And if 10 agencies are taking part, that's a 90% chance that you're taking a bruising for nothing.

If that were the end of it, who would care? Nobody's going to lose any sleep if there are a few less advertising agencies in the world. But the thing is, it's not us who'll suffer: it's you we're worried about.

Pitches use up energy. Energy an agency would normally use to provide its existing, paying customers with the best possible work. So the logical conclusion of the system as it now stands is that at some point you will become a victim of it yourself. The day will eventually come when your agency has to divert the creative and strategic energy you're paying it for into a pitch for someone else's business.

Our idea of a sane world is where you do your best work for the clients you do have. Not the ones you don't so, we think it's in everyone's interest to get back to where we started: the charter.

The charter that was put together by wise men not to protect themselves, but to protect their industry. The charter that makes sure a downturn doesn't turn into the demise of Belgian communications. The charter that ensures advertisers are matched with the agency they need. And that agencies are protected from their instinctive hunger not to miss out on opportunities.

Besides, judging an agency isn't rocket science. Our work is on every street corner and all over the internet every day. (Except today, of course.) Our reputations, our beliefs and our individual visions aren't exactly trade secrets. And our awards... Well, if you haven't heard about them yet, you soon will.

Talk to an agency and you'll know right away if they see things the same way you do. But don't delude yourself. Asking an agency to pitch is not the same as briefing one. In a pitch the only target audience is you. The only question an agency can ask itself is, "What do we need to do to get the client?"

But it's never too late to change. We recently confronted a major advertiser with how they were running their pitch. And they changed their speculative competition into a much more motivating and much lower-cost procedure.

Great idea. Great result. But we didn't think of it... It was just in the charter. So let's not all lose hope just yet.

Thanks for listening.