

Must-Do Tips No 30: The Perils Of Pitching

An unpalatable truth it may be, but many clients and prospects are less than favourably impressed with the business development skills of the professional firms that they come across. In fact, in a recent London Business School survey, over 50% of clients rated professionals as 'Poor' at selling.

Working with law, accounting, consulting and other organisations, the same symptoms present themselves consistently and with about the same regularity to us. So this month, we offer three big perils to pitching excellence and some paths to pursue to overcome them.

Tip 1 - do your homework

This is THE fatal mistake. No preparation, no research, no background gathered...and we wonder why the prospect is less than impressed with our ability to engage with them in the meeting. And even if it is 'done', sometimes it isn't. In our experience, some professionals are not skilled or open-minded enough to do it properly. Because they don't see it as important, it's a quick skim of the financials and that's it (in one situation, recently, this proved fatal as the professionals failed to pick up on the fact that a large multinational parent company had recently announced the sale of the subsidiary who had asked the firm to pitch for their business).

We have found that direct feedback from real clients or prospects on what they are looking for helps. In some cases, professionals simply don't know what background resource is available and need business development or marketing help and support.

Tip 2 - first impressions... (out for the) count

"When we go to a potential supplier's office, we expect to be treated a bit specially". Contrast this with the typical scenario we have witnessed - sat in the lobby observing - of professionals who turn up to a meeting late, flustered, preoccupied and unprepared (having just raised their noses out of the fee-earning trough). Most prospective clients judge us using the filters through which they view their world. Many of them go to great lengths to attract customers. So if that means presenting ourselves on-time and focused, and leading the prospect to a light airy room with flowers and decent food and drink, so be it.

Tip 3 - empathy: what's that feel like?

An imaginative understanding of what it feels like to be in another's shoes. Apologies to the sensitive, but many professionals we have come across are totally rubbish at this.

They cannot translate what they know into information communicated to appeal to non-professionals: their use of jargon, legal or any other 'eses' being typical but by no means isolated examples of this. Thus, they come over as detached and incapable of "sitting on our side of the table" as one client put it. The best professional service empathisers (don't worry they do exist!) can tell stories of and describe people whom they have helped in situations that the prospect can relate to directly. And they win more business as a result.

People Scope offers advice and workshop programmes to professional firms on business development and pitching. For more information, hit 'Reply' and type **Perfect Pitching**. For more general information about what we do, go to www.peoplescope.com.

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Best regards.

JAMES NEWBERRY

People Scope, 6 River Court, Chartham, Canterbury CT4 7JN, United Kingdom. Telephone: 01227 730411.

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