

Strategy vs creative: The number one pitch killer

By [Johanna McDowell](#)

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Over many years in our industry, we see trends coming and going. There's one issue that continues to come up for marketers and agencies, however, and carries the unenviable moniker, 'number one pitch killer'.



Image credit: Alex on Unsplash.

Briefly, it is the disconnect between strategy and creative.



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13 Aug 2019



Amid pitch fever, creatives are pressured into winning the business with their "one big shot". Many fit in as much creativity (of course) and as many innovative ideas as possible to show what they're capable of. You can't blame them – after all, what would be considered an "audition" has become a fully directed production – without the marketer acting as producer, as would happen in the normal course of events.

Looking for strategy, quality of thinking and then the creative bells and whistles, the marketer judges the fever pitch and sees a massive disconnect between the show and the strategy.



A conversation about strategy, ad agencies and the role of strategists inside ad agencies

Bogosi Mbtshegwa 22 Aug 2018



Stop. Think. Align.

In my view, the creative agency could spend more time aligning their ideas with the marketing strategy – albeit with their inventive angle – before putting the pitch on stage.

The disconnect between the agency's communications strategy and its creative work is probably even more apparent during the pitch than it would be at any other time. Creative directors should take the time to see that the picture fits into the frame, rather than creating a picture and trying to cobble together a frame to suit.

Strategy speaks to the objectives that must be met; creative is what gets user buy-in for the job to be done.

“ [#expectation](#) vs [#reality#Creative](#) without [#strategy](#) is called [#art](#) Creative with strategy is called [#advertising](#)
pic.twitter.com/6BnmUYCTha— TechUzman (@TechUzman) [October 10, 2016](#) ”

However, in the frenzy of the pitch, all parties should view this as the dress rehearsal and not the opening night show. In trying too hard to cram every act of creativity into their pitch, agencies are burning out before they include strategy or cobbling it in as an add-on, not a business imperative.

I advise marketers not to immediately assume that the agency isn't strong on strategy and dismiss their efforts and should rather be looking at the agility and versatility of the creative agency, noting whether they believe their part in the collaboration would bring strategy centre-stage and still deliver a standing-ovation campaign.

ABOUT JOHANNA MCDOWELL

MD of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS), and partner in Scopem Africa, with a background that includes being on both the agency and the client side of the fence, Johanna McDowell is well-placed to offer commentary on marketing and advertising in the South African and international contexts. She built her career in marketing and advertising since 1974, holding directorship in both SA and British advertising agencies. She was MD of Grey Phillips Advertising in 1988.

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