



Pitching Guidelines

Media Agency Pitching Guidelines

For Marketers, Agencies & Pitch Consultants



Introduction

These guidelines are published by the Creative & Communications Association as a professional standard for agency selection across Ireland's creative and communications industry. They cover three parties: the marketers who initiate and lead selection processes, the agencies who respond to them, and the pitch consultants who manage them.

The case for change

The 2025 Census and the 2024 Sentiment Survey put numbers on what the industry already knows: pitching has become a significant and growing burden on agencies, with real costs for people, businesses, and the industry as a whole.

28

Average pitches per agency in 2024, up from 20 in 2023

€1.1m

Average annual cost of pitching per agency in 2024

€40.8k

Average cost per individual pitch

4 months

Average time to break even on a new business win

10,000

Staff hours spent on pitching per agency in 2024 - equivalent to 5 full-time employees

65%

Of agency revenue represented by staff costs

41%

Of senior managers reporting always being stressed at work

40%

Rise in pitch volumes year-on-year

Despite revenue growth of 24% year-on-year, the average agency profit margin in 2024 was just 4%, half what was reported the previous year. Staff turnover is rising, skills gaps are widening, and agencies are spending more on pitching than they can sustainably afford. The traditional pitch model is not working.

Pitching remains important. Just under half of new business for media agencies originates from competitive processes, and 95% of responding agencies won new business in 2025.

While much of the focus on pitching has rightly centred on the strain placed on agencies, it is equally important to recognise the demands placed on marketing teams. Running a pitch process requires significant time, coordination, and accountability; from developing the brief and aligning internal stakeholders, to evaluating proposals and managing sometimes complex decision-making. These processes often take place alongside day-to-day business pressures and competing priorities. A well-structured, transparent approach to agency selection is therefore not only fairer for agencies, but

also supports better, more efficient outcomes for marketers, enabling them to make confident decisions and build stronger, more effective partnerships.

The Creative & Communications Association will review and update these guidelines regularly in consultation with members, agencies, consultants and the broader industry.

Guidelines For Marketers

01 Establish whether a pitch is necessary

- A pitch is a significant commitment of resource for you and every agency involved. Be clear on why a pitch is necessary and why now and work with your current agency first. A re-brief or a direct commercial conversation will often resolve the issue without the cost of a full process.
- If your media budget is under €500,000 per annum, use a Profile-only approach based on the 5Cs: Credentials, Capabilities, Chemistry, Culture, and Client references. Examples below.
 - Credentials – agency track record, sector experience, case studies, awards, scale of clients.
 - Capabilities – disciplines and services offered, specialist skills, breadth of resourcing.
 - Chemistry – the fit between proposed team and client, communication style, energy, and day to day collaboration.
 - Culture – agency values and ways of working: internal culture, D&I practices, sustainability approaches.
 - Client – the client servicing model. How the account will be run; team structure, seniority and continuity of staffing, responsiveness, governance and reporting processes and commercial transparency.

02 Write a clear, honest brief — and share it equally

- The quality of agency responses reflects the quality of your brief. Be specific about budget, media billings, and what is in scope. Do not ask agencies to respond to activity that is not genuinely part of the brief.
- All agencies must receive the brief at the same time, in the same format, with equal access to information. Any question from one agency must be shared with all.
- Set a realistic timeline, define expectations at each stage, and do not change scope once the process is underway.

03 Design a process proportionate to what you are buying

- Process length should match contract value and strategic importance. Accounts under €500k suit a Profile-only process. Accounts between €500k and €2m may warrant one or two additional stages. Larger accounts may justify a fuller process.
- Consider the workload you are placing on agency teams. Excessive outputs, tight turnarounds, and scope changes mid-process have a direct impact on the wellbeing of the people doing the work.
- Chemistry meetings and final presentations should take place in person. These are the moments where strategic fit and senior engagement are genuinely assessed. Virtual formats work for information exchange. They are not appropriate for major agency appointments.

04 Commit senior time and conduct the process with integrity

- The most senior marketer responsible for the decision must be actively involved from the outset, not only at the final stage. Include procurement from the beginning.
- Unreasonable deadlines and late changes compound pressure on agency teams. Be specific about timelines and stick to them.
- Communicate decisions promptly at each stage. If an agency no longer has a realistic chance, tell them. Do not retain agencies to maintain competitive pressure. Every finalist is entitled to a specific verbal debrief within ten working days of the decision.

05 Champion fair and transparent commercial terms

- Media agencies operate on standard 30-day payment terms. Extended terms have a direct impact on cash flow and their ability to pay staff and suppliers.
- Evaluate media pricing and agency fees as separate cost elements. Do not ask agencies to cost media they are unlikely to purchase. The agency sets its price, negotiate from there.
- If a pitch consultant is engaged, establish and disclose how they are remunerated before the process begins. You are responsible for understanding your consultant's commercial model and its implications for agencies.

06 Respect the value of agency expertise

- Asking agencies to provide strategic advice, detailed planning, or proprietary analysis as part of a selection process is asking for work.
- A pitch fee is best practice. The Creative and Communications Association encourages marketers to consider one, particularly where the brief asks for significant strategic output. Where that is not possible, reduce the scope of unpaid work rather than expanding it.
- Intellectual property developed during a pitch remains the agency's unless paid for on agreed terms. This is a professional standard.

07 Require transparency on technology, data, and AI

- Ask agencies to explain clearly what technology and AI tools they use in planning, buying, and reporting, and whether these are proprietary, licensed, or third-party.
- Establish who owns the data generated on your account and what your rights are if the relationship ends.
- Ensure any data-sharing or audience modelling proposed is compliant with GDPR and applicable Irish data protection law.

Guidelines For Agencies

01 Know your right to decline

- Pitching is a commercial decision, not an obligation. Assess each opportunity against the likelihood of appointment, the resource required, and whether the client is a viable long-term partner.
- Declining a poorly structured process is sound practice. It also raises the standard for the market.
- If you raise concerns rather than withdraw, do so promptly and directly with the marketer or pitch consultant.

02 Protect the wellbeing of your people

- Your team's wellbeing during a pitch is your responsibility. Do not pressure them to over-deliver, pitches are won on quality of thinking, not volume of output.
- Monitor workload actively. If pressure becomes unsustainable, escalate internally and, if necessary, raise it with the client or withdraw.
- Be honest with your team about the odds. Unrealistic expectations make the pressure worse.

03 Respect the process — and expect it to respect you

- If you commit, deliver. Respond to the brief as set, demonstrate your thinking clearly, and represent your agency honestly.
- If a process is not being run fairly: unequal briefing, late scope changes, absent feedback, raise it with the relevant party and notify the Creative & Communications Association.
- A fair process carries a reciprocal obligation. Engage seriously, meet deadlines, and treat all parties with the respect you expect in return.
- Where a process does not specify in-person attendance for chemistry meetings and final presentations, request it. A media pitch involves significant commercial and strategic decisions. If remote is proposed as the default, it is reasonable to push back.

04 Present your real team

- Present the team that will run the account, not talent brought in for the pitch alone.
- If you plan to recruit upon appointment, say so. Clients are entitled to know who will work on their business.
- Be specific about roles and time allocations. Clarity at pitch stage is the foundation of a functional working relationship.

05 Assert and protect your intellectual property

- Thinking, frameworks, and analysis developed during a pitch remain your IP unless explicitly transferred on agreed terms. State this upfront.
- If a brief asks for output beyond demonstrating capability, push back or price it. Do not let the pitch become a vehicle for free consultancy.
- If you believe IP has been used without authorisation after an unsuccessful pitch, raise it. The Creative & Communications Association can provide guidance.

06 Be transparent about technology and data capability

- Be accurate about the technology and AI tools you use. Do not overstate proprietary capability or present third-party tools as your own.
- Be clear about who owns the data generated on a client's account and what their rights are if the relationship ends.
- Under GDPR, technology transparency is part of professional practice and an increasing client governance requirement.

07 Give and receive feedback constructively

- You are entitled to a meaningful debrief, win or lose. If it is not offered, request it.
- Receive feedback professionally. Honest criticism is more useful than a polite non-answer.
- Give feedback on processes constructively and through the right channels. Debrief internally after every pitch and use it.

Guidelines For Pitch Consultants

01 Disclose your commercial model — fully and upfront

- Before accepting any engagement, disclose to the marketer exactly how you are remunerated, whether client-funded, agency-funded, win fees, or a hybrid model.
- Any financial relationship between you and a participating agency must be declared to the marketer before the process begins and communicated to the agencies involved.

02 Act in the marketer's interest

- Your primary obligation is to the marketer. Every recommendation must be grounded in the client's needs, not your commercial relationships.
- Do not favour agencies with whom you have financial arrangements, or disadvantage those with whom you have none.
- If a conflict of interest arises, declare it immediately. Agree with the marketer how it will be managed, or withdraw.

03 Design and manage a fair process

- All agencies must be briefed simultaneously, in the same format, with equal access to information. Any question from one agency must be shared with all.
- Process length must be proportionate to contract value and scope. Design the process to serve the marketer's decision.
- Set a clear timeline and hold to it. Last-minute changes place disproportionate pressure on agencies, particularly smaller ones.
- Require in-person attendance for chemistry meetings and final presentations. Do not default to virtual for convenience. State the in-person expectation in the brief from the outset and make reasonable accommodation only where geography genuinely prevents attendance.

04 Treat agencies with professional respect

- Agencies investing in a pitch are entitled to be treated as professional partners. Communicate clearly, respond promptly, and keep them informed of their status.
- Eliminate fairly and early. If an agency no longer has a realistic path to appointment, tell them directly.
- Every finalist is entitled to a specific verbal debrief within ten working days of the decision. As process manager, this is your responsibility to ensure.

05 Uphold pitch fee and IP standards

- Advise your client to consider offering a pitch fee where the brief asks for significant strategic output. It is not yet standard practice in the Irish market, but it is best practice.
- Ensure the brief does not extract deliverables the client intends to use. The pitch should evaluate thinking, not produce free work.
- IP developed by agencies during a pitch remains theirs unless transferred on agreed terms. Do not allow ambiguity on this point to persist.

06 Maintain confidentiality and data integrity

- Information shared by agencies is confidential. It must not be shared with other agencies or retained beyond its intended purpose.
- Do not share one agency's response, pricing, or approach with another under any circumstances.
- Handle all data in accordance with GDPR and applicable Irish data protection law. Your responsibilities as a data processor must be actively managed.

07 Be accountable to industry standards

- As a consultant operating in the Irish market, you are a steward of the standards these guidelines represent.
- The Creative & Communications Association's pitch consultant accreditation framework sets out the competency and conduct standards expected of consultants working with member organisations.

Summary

These guidelines are intended to set a clear and consistent standard for how agency selection should be approached across the industry. They are not about restricting choice, but about improving how decisions are made, ensuring that every process is fair, proportionate, and aligned to the value of what is being commissioned. When marketers, agencies and consultants each play their part with transparency, respect, and professionalism, the result is stronger partnerships and a more sustainable industry for all. The responsibility is shared, and the opportunity is collective: to raise the standard of pitching in a way that benefits not just individual organisations, but the long-term health and reputation of the communications sector as a whole.

The Creative & Communications Association is the business representative organisation for Ireland's creative and communications industry, providing professional member services to more than 70 companies.

Supported by a full-time executive team and governed by a board of ten directors, CCA brings businesses from across the industry together, represents their shared interests and helps create the conditions in which they can thrive.

CCA builds evidence, brings the industry's priorities to government, regulators and other decision-makers, provides practical business and regulatory support, develops people and creates opportunities for the industry to connect, learn and share expertise.

CCA is a member of the European Association of Communications Agencies, the licence holder and official representative for the Effie Awards in Ireland, and the Irish representative for Cannes Young Lions. It also has representation on the Advertising Standards Authority, the Government's Creative Industries Forum and JNLR.

CCA is the proud collective voice of Ireland's creative and communications industry.

What we share, we strengthen.