

GRANT'S

SUMMER 2003 **REPORT** VOLUME XI, NUMBER 2

HOW TO LOSE A PITCH

Has it ever been any tougher out there? Almost daily we hear how competitive new business pitches have become. Where's that low hanging fruit when you need it? Maybe you'll learn a few things from our friend Bob's recent experience.

Bob runs an agency that's handled a lot of bank and healthcare accounts since he started it over 20 years ago. He's survived bank mergers and buy-outs and ridden the healthcare boom up and down. Along the way he's picked up a 5-store swimming pool/recreation retailer, the biggest Chevy dealer in town, the local minor league baseball club, and a couple of B2B accounts that generate nice income from high end collateral.

Still, he just never had a crack at any national business until earlier this year, when a well known plumbing fixture company (think faucets) headquartered about 50 miles away put Bob's agency on their list. If he got this account, agency billing and revenue would more than double...and status would soar.

Pitch day arrives and Bob and his crew are psyched. They walk into the presentation with nine of their top people, roll out the PowerPoint gear, turn off the lights and begin talking about who they are and what they've done for other clients. They were a little surprised to see some folks from the contractor side they didn't know would be there.

Lust for new business plus hubris is a dangerous mix.

They had 90 minutes. The credentials recap including several case histories took close to 40 minutes, longer than they wanted it to.

There were a few cute moments, when an agency duo donned wigs and acted out a couple shopping in a home center and then broke into the jingle they proposed. Following that bit of theatre they showed more creative, but ran out of time and couldn't present media or answer more than two quick questions. Good-byes were reserved but cordial enough.

At the post mortem lunch (Bob bought) everyone felt pretty good about how they did. They all talked about redoing their bathrooms and kitchens with the soon-


to-be new client's fixtures.

Several nail-biting days went by. Bob contacted us right after the prospect called him with the decision. You can guess the outcome: "They said we were terrific but, uh, then they said they decided to go with another agency."

Why?!

A commercial here, if you'll permit. One of our management services is contacting "lost prospects" (clients who choose another agency) to discover the underlying reasons the agency struck out, particularly useful when losing becomes a pattern. Prospects rarely level with a bridesmaid agency because it's just too unpleasant. We unearth the real issues and offer a plan for improvement. It's like working with a golf or tennis pro... hurts a little, helps a lot.

continued on page 2



INSIDE:

- ▶ REAL LIFE Q&A
- ▶ MINDING THE RIGHT STORE
- ▶ ABOUT US
- ▶ FREE NEWSLETTERS

continued from page 1

We did this for Bob's agency and discovered they had made all the classic mistakes:

Talking too much about yourself

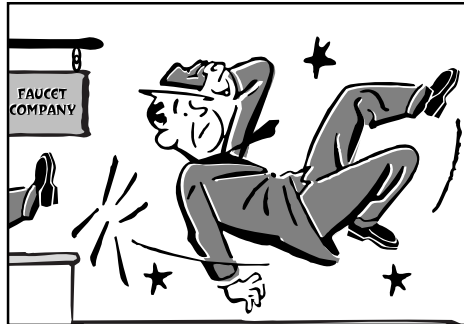
As someone once said, it's not about you, it's never been about you, and it will never BE about you – *it's about the client!* No matter how much you think your case histories inspire and motivate, most of the head-nodders in the room are just being polite when they appear to be transfixed by your marketing exploits. The only reason you're in front of them is to solve *their* problems. Move quickly to a *solutions conversation* about their issues and save the self-serving narratives for the leave-behind. Clients and clients-to-be tell us five minutes or so is about right for the agency to talk about past successes (which one client said was like listening to someone reminisce about ex-boyfriends).

Overloading the room

Don't try to outgun the client by packing the benches with agency staff. The choreography gets complicated and you can look like jacks-in-the-box popping up and down. Make sure the daily contact folks do most of the talking; it's flat out insulting to sell in senior people who the prospect *knows* will not be working on the business. Give 'em some credit, huh?

Not knowing everybody

You should have spoken at least once to everyone who'll be there. There's no better way to find out what the real issues are, why the previous agency got canned, and to get as much marketing intelligence as possible. Most important, it's the first step to developing the personal relationships which are, after all, what agency/client partnerships are built on...it's



simply easier to do business with friends. It's also a lot easier to present to folks you know a bit about.

Paralyzing with PowerPoint

Unless you're presenting to more than 50 people, forget PowerPoint. It's a crutch! And it's too easy to default into reading the slides out loud: "Now please read along with me..." With the lights up so they can see your eyes, captivate them with your conviction and mastery of the material, and connect 1-to-1 with everybody in the room. Another tip: budget for presentation coaching at least

twice a year for your key players. Presenting is not something you learn once and get permanently good at it. Lots of agencies we counsel do great work but fail in the pitches because they don't know how to effectively communicate when they're at the plate. Get some training.

Failing to listen

A big oops. In the follow-up interview with Bob's almost client, they told us they'd been crystal clear that presenting creative was prohibited. But Bob and his team decided to ignore the rules, figuring their creative was so great it would blow the faucet guys away. Lust for new business plus hubris is a dangerous mix. Yes, we've heard of cases where this kind of rule breaking won the day, but it's pretty much in the category of an average fan making a half court shot to win a million bucks. More often than not you'll end up throwing a brick.

Now for some good news. After our audit Bob circulated a "stop doing" list of mistakes to the new business team. As the agency prepped for the next opportunity and once again started to fall into familiar traps, someone had the guts to read the list aloud. And believe it or not, they won the next pitch.

Joe Grant, President

Q & A
YOUNG AE'S AND
SURLY CDS

We get some interesting questions at our workshops and speeches and thought we'd share a few from time to time. Just send yours along to joe@joegrantconsulting.com

Q. I'm a young AE. How do I quickly build credibility with my clients and peers?

A. Credibility is not bestowed. It springs from confidence, preparation and knowledge. The first rule is never stop learning. Put yourself on an enrichment program, studying how effective influencers and deci-

sion makers do it. *Fortune*, *Forbes* and *Investor's Business Daily* run insightful articles about key personalities — you'll learn a lot by analyzing how the big players behave. Prepare for *every* phone call, meeting, and conversation — too many AEs try to skate through their careers on superficial personality. Watch how others in your company whom you admire rise to challenges and copy their techniques. Face down your personal fears by doing something beyond your comfort zone — skydive, climb a mountain, learn to fly, go whitewater rafting. The confi-

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continued from page 2

dence you gain will spill over into your work. I myself am never reluctant to admit I devour self-help and personal discovery books because we all need every advantage we can get. Remember that 1) whether you realize it or not, you're learning and growing from every situation and experience, and 2) advertising is a great business and even though it may not always appear so, the rewards do come to those who work for them.

Q. Our CD must eat nothing but raw meat and small animals! He loves to intimidate AEs and brags about "teaching those suits a lesson." How do you work with someone like that?

With collaboration. Your goal is to forge a relationship with this person so the

agency can produce outstanding and effective work for its clients. Start by talking to your CD about how he gets ideas. Ask questions...what are the best ads out there now...whose work do you admire? Make the effort not just with your CD, but all your creative people. I believe CDs, copywriters, and ADs are more serious about their work — they study, debate, and think about creative all the time — than many account people, so show a genuine interest in what they do. If they're not along for the meetings, always report on how the presentation went, what the client liked and didn't, and why. Get to know them personally, too. Socialize a bit, do something nice now and then, buy 'em a lunch or small gift. Above all, your job as an

account leader is to create an atmosphere of teamwork. Don't talk behind their backs; never set an imaginary deadlines just because it's convenient. You don't have to like everything about your creative group, but believe me the best work comes from agencies that don't tolerate adversarial relationships between AEs and creatives.

Grant Consulting provides training and skill enhancement courses for account service and creative departments including executive coaching. Find out more on our website www.joegrantconsulting.com — just go to "What We Do" and click on *Agency Training*

WHOSE BUSINESS SHOULD YOU MIND?

We heard this story second hand about an agency that's now out of business. It teaches an important lesson about how *not* to run an agency.

Seems there were these two guys, who we'll call Max and Charlie. They each started their own agency about the same time in the same town. There was plenty of business for both, but they competed against each other on nearly every opportunity.

Both agencies grew but Charlie's place grew faster and larger. This irked Max no end. So much so that anytime Charlie's name or agency was mentioned he'd launch into a tirade, slamming his fist on the table, swearing, and pumping his blood pressure up dangerously high. Sometimes he'd get so upset he'd have to leave the office. We're told he developed an abdominal health problem requiring serious surgery due to harboring all this hate.

Max was truly obsessed. He was

inordinately interested in everything Charlie and his group did but — this is important - paid little attention to improving his own firm. Problems and shortcomings he could easily fix were ignored as he ranted about

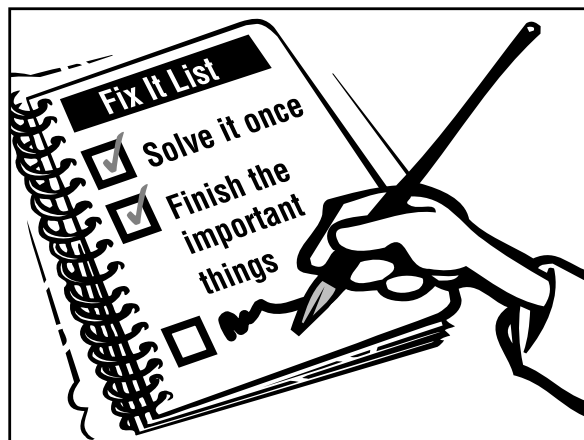
where it went) and he just closed the doors.

Sad, huh? But preventable if he'd focused on the right things.

When we're coaching a new business presentation team, someone almost always asks "What's agency X doing?" The answer is WHO CARES? Unless you're consciously applying the old retail tenet of "if you see the other guy doing something that's working, steal it," don't worry about what you can't control.

What you *can* control is how your own agency functions. Max should have concentrated on what he could do better, not what the competition was doing. Here are two suggestions that may help you avoid a similar fate.

Solve it once Rule #1 for improving your own place is stop solving the same problem over and over. We see this all the time — agencies keep fixing and re-fixing the same issue instead of using the SIO (Solve It Once) technique. Get your senior



Charlie. Good people came, stayed a short while, then went to work for Charlie while Max tolerated the remaining mediocre talent. Unresolved matters deteriorated into chaos. Max's company slowly withered until one day his biggest account left (you can guess

continued from page 2

people together and list three things which if fixed and resolved once and for all would have the most positive impact on your success. Concentrate on those and forget about what the guy down the street is up to unless you're benchmarking his best practices.

More time is wasted when agency executive teams meet to rehash the same old problems without reaching resolution than anything else. It's a huge waste of time, talent, and money. Put a pencil to it someday. Figure everyone's actual rate, multiply it by the number of hours (days? weeks?) they keep grinding on the same issues, and grab for something solid to hang onto. If you've got well paid people on the management team and they're not solving the issues holding your agency back, do something about it!

Finish the important things

You've probably heard the story about the industry magnate around the 1900s who offered a substantial prize to anyone who could help him learn to get more done in his busy life. One day someone dropped off a letter with just one sentence: "To get more done, organize your list of chores in priority order and complete them one at a time not moving on to the next until the previous one is completely finished." After a few weeks of using this technique the big shot sent the author of the idea a check for \$25,000, a huge amount at the time.

It's simple advice. Do the important thing and *finish it* before you move on to something less imperative. As you know, it is NOT important to churn your insides into mush obsessing about things over which you have no control (like Charlie's agency).

If you're a little like Max and worried about the competition, remember that your real competition is right inside your own agency. Complaining about what your arch rival does is both a colossal waste of energy and sadly misfocused.

The answer is to seize the reins and lead your team forward — without looking over your shoulder at what the other guy is doing.

The Nitty-Gritty on Grant Consulting

The purpose of this newsletter is actually two-fold, first to discuss issues of interest to growing agencies, their principals and staff. Second, we mention what Grant Consulting does so that you know there's a qualified, experienced resource available to help you get your agency running the way you want it to.

Grant Consulting services include:

- *Management Team Focus* — it starts or ends at the top. We mold personal agendas into common purpose, facilitate strategic planning retreats, and ameliorate senior-level conflicts.
- *Agency Overview* — an objective and thorough look under the hood so you'll know for sure what you need to do better. Then we'll help you implement the changes so you can move ahead.
- *New Business* — no silver-bullet platitudes, just solid advice on what works and what doesn't.
- *Client Retention* — our specialty. We wrote the book for the AAAAs (*Understanding & Protecting Client Agency Relationships*), conduct independent client reviews so you know what your clients really think, and do behind-the-scenes "marriage counseling" to help you keep your hard-won accounts.
- *Training* — leadership skills for emerging managers, better teamwork, and account executive training. Plus, specialized individual executive coaching.
- *Confidential Counsel* — private, sensitive, seasoned. We've seen a lot in 11 years of working exclusively with agency principals.

What's the first step? Feel free to call and discuss your situation, no obligation whatsoever.

"CRISPLY & INTELLIGENTLY WRITTEN"

*That's what somebody said recently about our free e-mail newsletter *Grant's Client Brief*. By design it's a quick take on issues of interest to agency owners and executives...delivered right to your computer screen free of charge the first week of every month.

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Grant's Report is also free for the asking. If this is not your own copy let us know and we'll add you to the list.

As always if we can help in any way, give us a call.



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