



New Business Talent

## INSIGHT ARTICLE

### **Get Your Agency Positioning Right, Then Get Picky**

Positioning expert and agency consultant, Mark Clark, advises an integrated agency on how to stop losing out to smaller niche competitors.



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**Question: I'm a business development director at a well known integrated agency who have recently lost out on a few pitches to some much smaller 'niche' agencies. I've been asked to focus on what we can do about counteracting this trend - any ideas?**

I'm going to fill in a few of the gaps here so you can see some of the assumptions I've made in responding to your question.

Your agency offers scale, resources, high-end strategic thinking and multi-media executable ideas, not to mention a proven track record on well known brands.

You're being turned over by some small specialists agencies offering finely-honed expertise and experience in specific sectors/and or categories.

Have you ever played Top Trumps? ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top\\_Trumps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top_Trumps))

Whether large or small, generalist or specialist, new or established - you always have options. Your job is to find the right one.

You could segment your integrated offering into specialist areas and therefore compete on the same terms as these niche competitors. PR agencies do this exceptionally well.

You could take the high ground and argue that a single-minded over-arching strategy, and therefore approach, is more effective for brands in an increasingly fragmented communications environment. You may need to take time to develop a few proprietary tools that underpin your claims to be able to 'integrate' more effectively than your direct competitors but this certainly works for many larger, multi-national agencies

However in my experience there's only one real long term solution you should pursuing and that lies in the development of a clearer, more focused positioning for your agency's particular offering - I'm afraid a 'well known integrated agency' is

not going to be compelling enough for most potential clients in the over supplied UK marcoms market. You need to gain senior Agency management consensus...and definitely passion for...a really sharp reason why prospective clients should work with your agency out of the 1000's that they have to chose from.

This can be achieved in a day if you have the right people in the room. I'd recommend that you make this an off-site session to ensure you get everyone's full and undivided attention. Restrict participants to the key senior management team responsible for the Agency's future business growth. This is unlikely to be more than 8 people in any Agency.

You should also consider outside facilitation so that you can participate in the session yourself. But make sure you take responsibility for the output – the winning of new business ...and your new business reputation...will be made in the doing.

Don't get trapped on the day trying to find a new way to use the same words that everyone else uses but in a different order...and calling it a differentiated positioning. Your prospective clients are more likely to buy you and your agency on your attitude/ the type of people you are. Remember they are looking for like-mindedness. Partners. People they can work with. People they like. People they trust.

This means you have to be prepared to polarise. Be as clear about the kind of client's you don't want as you are about the ones you do want. You can help yourself by helping prospective clients decide if you're the kind of Agency they want to work with, before they waste your time...and decimate your pitch conversion rate.

Once you have a polarizing offer make sure you do everything you can to be let it be known. One of the best examples I can think of would be one agency's offer to clients of 'brutal simplicity'. It is the word 'brutal' that either attracts or repels prospective clients. In so doing saving everyone – agency and client – wasted time and effort in the early pre-pitch and pitch stages of courtship.

The issue you describe in your question can, in my opinion, be best avoided by being more incisive about your Agency's new business positioning and therefore being more selective about the client's you pitch for/ and ask you to pitch, in the future. This will save your agency wasting precious new business resources kissing too many frogs, significantly improve your pitch conversion rate and greatly enhance your reputation as the one with the Midas touch.

Mark Clark runs Rattle, an entrepreneurial business development consultancy, that specialises in advising creative organisations how to grow. He also works with JFDI, the New Business Training Co., as an Agency Trainer.'