

No tender loving in tendering

By [Emy Casaletti-Bwalya](#), issued by [Optimize Agency](#)

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I am sure that there are a lot of advertising and marketing agencies out there who have gone through it. Lovingly putting together a 200-page tender, long days and nights of Red Bull and coffee, rushing around for all your technical certification, spilling your ideas and concepts, brainstorming, preparing for the pitch of a lifetime... only to find that it was a sham from the very start.

Why do companies do that? Why even put out a tender when the winning agency has already been earmarked? How do they sleep at night?

Imagine how much time and effort could have been saved?

Perhaps there is little understanding of exactly just *how* much effort goes into these pitches. Perhaps it should be mandatory for CMOs to have some agency experience before being appointed. If this was the case, they would think twice before making agencies go through all the effort, pain and suffering that goes with preparing for pitches.

What we have learnt is to smell the rat immediately and identify a dodgy tender before even considering putting in the effort.

Here are a few learnings:

1. Look at the tender dates - if they coincide with the festive season and require you to submit during that time, be aware, be very aware.
2. Keep your ear on the ground and check on friendships, tight old friendships between tenderer and tenderee (purposely spelt)... there could be something fishy right there. This is as easy as checking on Facebook (its amazing how some CMOs still haven't learnt how to put security features on their private pages).
3. Don't even start on your pitch without a proper briefing. No briefing... no chance. Don't even go there.
4. How many times do we need to be reminded 'if it sounds too good to be true... it probably is'.
5. No matter how good you are and know your agency to be and the tender seems a perfect fit for your strengths and capabilities... know, that sometimes this is just not good enough.

The question is, where has the honesty gone? How easy has it become to forfeit experience and track record in lieu of 'jobs for pals'. When an agency wins a tender you will, more often than not, find them head-hunting all the staff from the incumbent just to fulfill their scope of work. They have no experience so they go out and 'buy it'.

Don't get me wrong, I can totally understand the appeal of tenders to the parastatals and government institutions - the 'transparency', the 'level playing fields', etc. But the reality of tenders is that they are counterproductive on many many levels.

Procurement is about crunching numbers. Advertising and marketing is about strategy and creativity, it's about helping a client connect with their target market. The call-for-tender approach is clearly intended to create that level playing field. The problem is that in this industry there are more and less appropriate agencies depending on the scope of work. There are specialists in every field, you cannot possibly be everything to everyone.

As the old adage goes, putting all your eggs in one basket is not ideal.

So please, agencies, don't waste your time on tenders that are already pre-assigned to the 'chosen one'. Do some

investigation and the results are easy to find. Save your time and effort and focus on your existing clients... the grass is not always greener on the other side, in fact there are already cows waiting to graze.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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