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Don't Bitch About the Pitch, Just Embrace Your Inner Draper

Six Reasons Why Agency Reviews Make You Better

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The new season of *Mad Men* is about to start. For most fans, that means a chance to catch up with their favorite 1960s soap opera, to indulge in the impeccably tailored clothes, to follow the characters' trysts and wonder who'll be written out of the script.

But for ad geeks like me, there's another agenda. We focus on the business side of the show. We're not just noting how they wine and dine clients or how they put out fires. We're watching how they pitch new business. Those are definitely the scenes that keep me coming back season after season, and I can't wait to see which clients Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce will be pitching this time around.

Remember the Kodak Carousel pitch and the time machine metaphor? Or when Don changed the entire strategy right before the American Airlines meeting? Or the Jaguar presentation, when he spoke about wanting to own something that's just beyond our reach?

For people in advertising, those scenes were more than entertaining. They were insightful. Sure, the actual ads weren't that good. But you had to love the way Don Draper sold the ideas behind them. It was raw and emotional. Just like pitching in real life, in the present day. About the only thing that's different is that you don't see the agency staff complaining about having to pitch. They relish the opportunity.

The truth is, every ad agency wants to be handed business based on the brilliance of their previous work. But magic genies are in short supply. So this wish is rarely granted. Even back in the golden age of advertising. Potential clients want to see what you can do for them. Which means pitching their business.

Fast forward to 2013, and this means a whole new world of competitors; not just the big shops

on Madison Avenue. It also means consultant-led, multi-round, competitive reviews. Often procurement is involved, so price is a major factor. And sometimes it's not even for an agency-of-record assignment, it's just for a project.

Some agencies rail against the process. They say it's too costly, too time-consuming and too disruptive to their staff. The rest of us have no such compunction about the winner-take-all competition. Like the *Mad Men* of old, we simply hitch up our pants and get to work. The reasons are obvious. We want more clients. We want more money. We want more staff. We want more PR.

But there are other, less obvious reasons, too. And I think those are the ones that should motivate you the most. So here are six reasons why you should take some inspiration from *Mad Men* and embrace the pitch.

1. We're competitive by nature. Competing is in our DNA. That's why we're called the human race. We have a basic need to see how we stack up against our peers. And what better way to measure our relative worth than with a head-to-head-to-head competition?

2. Pitches are primal. You win or you lose. And you don't get second chances. Each client presentation is another opportunity for them to weed out the weak, uninformed and arrogant. So you have to win every round. You can't hide behind an existing campaign and do the next pool out. You have to solve a marketing problem in a way they haven't seen before. But the solution has to be so perfect, it negates every other answer, from every other agency.

3. They let you stretch. There are no rules to follow or deeply understood client landmines to avoid. It's just you and a blank page, screen or white board. And that's not scary. That's liberating. The granddaddy of

backseat drivers, your internal editor, gets a much-needed muzzle.

4. The job at hand isn't about managing a client relationship. It's about giving them a reason to want a relationship. Can you come up with a provocative strategy? A compelling creative idea? An innovative media plan? An experiential site that will help them sell or, at the very least, ingratiate themselves to their customers? Every ad agency can point to a pile of successful case studies. The question is, can you do it again? And, perhaps more importantly, can you convince an almost complete stranger you can do it for them?

5. Pitches add a shot of adrenaline to your company. (And not the kind Don, Roger and Peggy get out of a bottle.) When we're in a pitch, there's a heightened sense of purpose. People arrive earlier, stay later and just plain try harder.

6. You need to think fast and work as a team. There's more collaboration, louder debate and quicker resolution. Presentation dates are usually set in stone. So decisions have to be made and next steps have to be taken. We're probably tougher on ourselves and each other than at any other time during the year. We don't have the freedom to "see what the client thinks" and then revise accordingly. We have to use whatever knowledge, experience and instincts we've accumulated over the years to make a decision and then bet the farm on it.

Win or lose, you learn a lot about yourself and your co-workers during the a new business review. So even if you don't get the golden contract, you'll still get a pretty nice consolation prize: An insight into how good your agency is at that particular moment in time. So channel your inner Don, Peggy, Pete and Roger and relish your next pitch.