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## CMO STRATEGY

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### Marketers, Give in to Agencies' Cold Calls

#### Beyond Formalities: That Aggressive Suitor Just Might Be a Fit

By Bill Colbourne



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CMOs and marketing agencies can't seem to move beyond formal processes to get it on. In other verticals they're less inhibited, but like shy sweethearts from a bygone era, we rely on third parties to facilitate romance. Why? I suspect large numbers of marketers and agencies are uncomfortable with selling and being sold to. However, while certain agencies wait for a request-for-proposal to arrive, the phone to ring or a search consultant to announce an appropriate match, others are realizing the opportunity exists to shape their own destinies. And so a new generation of agencies are knocking on your door.

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I'm not saying formal processes are dead or even on the way out. The formality of the RFP provides structure and control. For those with complex rosters, the process saves time. But CMOs have much to gain from lowering the drawbridge to agencies making direct contact, where they clearly signal how they can solve a brand's specific marketing challenges.

Some agencies are more proactive in this regard than others. According to our Intelligent New Business Survey, which polled marketers at 150 corporations, the majority tends "to be contacted by the same agencies again and again." It seems the agency market is increasingly made up of those that practice proactive prospecting and those that don't. For the latter, they're hoping a marketer will hear of their work and get in touch. But it's hardly realistic for them to believe clients spend all their time wondering which agencies are out there. Of course marketers don't do that -- they need the relevant suitors to do the hard work of reaching out to them. To do this, some techniques are effective and some are not. Those that are not include: blind cold-calling, mass e-mailing, contact based on unqualified press cuttings, gimmicky mailers, generic credentials, irrelevant case studies and self-promoting stuff on award wins. The effective techniques involve solutions to specific and well-researched issues CMOs face -- case studies on others in the sector, insightful viewpoints, innovative marketing techniques or fresh research on customer behavior. And much will depend on the caliber and manner of those conducting the outreach; humans are the weakest and strongest link in the sales and marketing chain.

#### **Increasing danger**

Proactive prospecting for agencies has its risks. Agency executives must ensure their approach is relevant and professional or they waste everyone's time and risk harming their reputations. But for clients there's increasing danger in shunning cold approaches. Because so many of the freshest-thinking, most entrepreneurially minded agencies are being proactive with outreach, CMOs now risk overlooking an ideal partner. Worse, that ideal agency could end up in the arms of

a competitor.

Further complicating the trend is a stark contrast between clients' and agencies' views in terms of who's likely to be an appropriate match. Our survey shows that in general, CMOs don't care how big an agency is, where it's based or what discipline it offers. But agencies think these points do matter and select their targets accordingly.

But 75% of CMOs said they might, or would definitely, "follow up" where an agency wanted to pitch a solution relating to one of their business challenges. Thus we are becoming more open-minded. A few years ago, many budgets, marketing plans and rosters were practically set in stone. Today, the best partnership for the business issue of the moment is increasingly being sought irrespective of discipline. Proactive agencies want to find a way to identify the business challenges you face and present you with a compelling solution. And what's wrong with that?

You're going to receive more cold approaches, like it or not. Many will waste your time, some will be of value and a few will be very valuable. So don't make the mistake of shutting the door on everybody. The landscape is changing. There's an agency out there right now that can help you dramatically improve your brand's fortunes. And you may be that agency's dream client. But unless it can directly pursue you, you won't even know it exists until it's making someone else's brand famous.

### **What they're up against**

CMOs are open to new agencies' proactive prospecting -- provided they deliver the goods.



*Source: Rainmaker Consulting's Intelligent New Business Survey of marketing decision makers from 150 U.S. corporations.*