



Factsheet: Top tips on pitching for work

Overview

Pitching for work is an essential aspect of getting work for graphic and web designers, and illustrators, photographers, and other creative businesses providing services.

First impressions count - so the first time you meet your client officially is really important - as this can turn potential clients into real clients. Pitching skills are something you will continue to need throughout your career - even if you are well and truly established.

These tips show you what pitching is and how to improve your sales presentations.

Establish why you are meeting

Assess the reason why your potential client wants to have a meeting with you. Be aware that they might not reveal their true motivation. They might want to see you because they have a confidential brief in mind and don't want to spread the news yet, or to increase their current knowledge of what is on offer or the marketplace in general, or just to spark off ideas. You might want to do a so-called credentials pitch, where you give a more general overview of what your business could provide, or a competitive pitch, where you provide a design solution to a given brief.

Communicate effectively

Effective communication is two-way, so you will need to make some assumptions about your potential client. Ask yourself: What does your client want to get out of this presentation? What do you hope to get out of it? What do you want your client to know and remember about you? What services can you provide to this client? What similar projects have you done before etc? If you know the answer to these questions in advance you can tailor your presentation and really communicate with your client.

Do your research

Show your client that you have done your research and that you understand them. Clients are people, and we all like it if somebody shows a real interest in what we do. Analyse their market and competition - not just through internet research but through talking to their clients and experiencing how business is being done. If you have done your research you will be able to ask appropriate and informed questions. Asking good questions will encourage two-way communication.

Prepare well for competitive pitches

A competitive pitch takes more time in preparation than a credentials pitch. You will need to work on your creative solutions to their brief, estimate your costs and timings, as well as all the other aspects discussed above. Provide around three creative solutions, or if you are really sure and brave you might want to go for a single solution. Giving the client too much choice is unprofessional, as they expect you to advise them to select the best option.

Double check your details

Phone your potential client in advance to get as much practical information about the meeting as possible. Confirm the appointment in writing within two days of making it, and check two days before the meeting if it is still on. Make sure that you build a rapport with others in the client company, not just the people making the design decision. The secretary or PA is often the gatekeeper to a lot of information and can allow or disallow access to their managers.

Select your tools

Decide what tools you need for your presentation. Will you use a portfolio or a computer presentation? Will you have real examples, e.g. your company brochure or other handouts? Make sure that you know what equipment is available, but ideally bring your own and make sure that you know how to fix it if something goes wrong.

Presenting effectively

It is usually a good idea to have two people at a meeting so that you can share and support each other. Identify in advance who will be responsible for which aspect of the pitch. Your presentation should start with an introduction to your company, followed by four or five main points that you want to put across to your potential client. What do you want them to remember about you? What are your strengths? Why should they hire you? This will make your presentation more focused and clear. Discuss case histories and how you worked with a client. Just showing pages and pages of projects you have worked on in chronological order is very boring for the client.

Timing

Aim to present in ten to 15 minutes, so that you have time for an introduction and follow up discussion, making the total meeting time 30 to 45 minutes. Don't forget that most design buyers are very busy people. This will mean that you should not have more than ten pages in your presentation.

End the meeting well

End the meeting appropriately. Thank them for meeting you and express a genuine interest in working with them if that is appropriate. Leave something behind, such as a prepared presentation, some work you have done previously, or your brochure and business card. Find out what the next steps are going to be, and make sure to write them down and follow them up. Whether you have been successful or unsuccessful, ask why. This feedback can be really important to improve your success rate in future presentations.

Watch out for free pitches

Be careful with free pitches, although it is fairly standard in the industry it is a hot topic debated amongst graphic designers. Try to get some expenses or fees for competitive pitches, especially as some clients take advantage of designers and are getting lots of free ideas when they don't have the intention to commission a designer at all. Clients will value your work more if they have to pay you for it.

Protect your ideas

You might want to use a confidentiality agreement when you are showing creative ideas as this provides some protection against clients stealing your ideas. For information on confidentiality agreements see our factsheet below.

Further information

Using confidentiality agreements

<http://www.businesslink4london.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=res.viewResource&resID=663&sctn=133&subctn=141>

Selling directly to the public

*These tips were produced in conjunction with the Cultural Industries Development Agency (CIDA).
Find out more at: www.cida.co.uk*