PRCA

PITCH >> FORWARD

A better pitching process for the comms industry

RESEARCH REPORT

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FOREWORD

BY JAMES HEWES MPRCA
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PRCA

The 'Pitch Forward' project is a significant step towards improving the pitch process in our industry. At the PRCA, we understand that effective pitch processes are not just about winning new business but about cultivating relationships that drive creativity, transparency, and mutual respect between clients and agencies. Yet, many of our members continue to face frustrations—convoluted procedures, unrealistic timelines, a lack of budget transparency, and, disturbingly, instances of idea appropriation. The results are wasted resources, strained relationships, and missed opportunities.

This report, borne out of deep collaboration with both agencies and clients, lays bare the challenges currently facing the PR pitching process. Our findings reflect that the industry operates in a highly competitive and dynamic environment, where agencies are pitching frequently, with 50% of agencies pitching on a monthly basis, and 16% pitching weekly. This frequency highlights the immense competitive pressure on agencies to continually prove their value and innovation, often at the cost of significant resources.

The typical pitch process lasts over two months—a timeline that could be improved with better efficiency and timely client decision-making. Too many pitches lead to wasted agency efforts, particularly when unrealistic timelines and lack of transparency dominate the process.

With 49% of agencies having experienced situations where their ideas were taken without compensation, the issue of intellectual property misuse remains a critical concern—one that must be tackled for trust and sustainability in our partnerships. The data in this report emphasises a clear need for ethical guidelines, with an overwhelming 88% of respondents supporting a code of conduct for pitching. We believe that setting these voluntary standards will help foster transparency, reduce resource waste, and create a more balanced and respectful pitching environment for everyone involved.

The PRCA's role as the industry's largest membership body is to lead these changes—to champion the interests of our members and ensure that our pitch practices reflect the highest standards of professionalism. Our ongoing initiatives, such as the Client Consultancy Partnership Charter and our Matchmaker service, are pivotal steps in this direction. We are committed to promoting more realistic timelines, clearer budget guidelines, and open communication—all of which are essential to a thriving, ethical, and sustainable industry.

It is in all our interests to get this right. By reducing inefficiencies, promoting fairness, and nurturing creativity, we can improve not only the outcomes of the pitching process but also the well-being of our people. 'Pitch Forward' is our call to action — a vision for a fairer, more transparent future where the PR industry flourishes on the foundation of true collaboration.

We welcome your input, your ideas, and your commitment to join us on this journey of change.

METHODOLOGY

Online survey to 475 respondents.

PR agencies and clients aged 18+ years completed between 9th July and 13th August 2024.

The survey was conducted by 3Gem Research and Insights to their in-house panel of "double opt-in" respondents as well as from the PRCA database and was compliant with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

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A PARTICULAR THANK YOU TO MUCK RACK

Muck Rack is the leading provider of award-winning PR software built for how brands and agencies work. The only public relations software powered by intuitive technology and the most accurate, comprehensive data provided by journalists themselves, Muck Rack combines media database, monitoring and reporting for seamless team collaboration, pitching and measurement. Purpose-built for communications and public relations, Muck Rack helps more than 5,000 companies worldwide analyse and report on the impact of their media relations. Thousands of journalists use Muck Rack's free tools to showcase their portfolios, analyse news about any topic and measure the impact of their stories.

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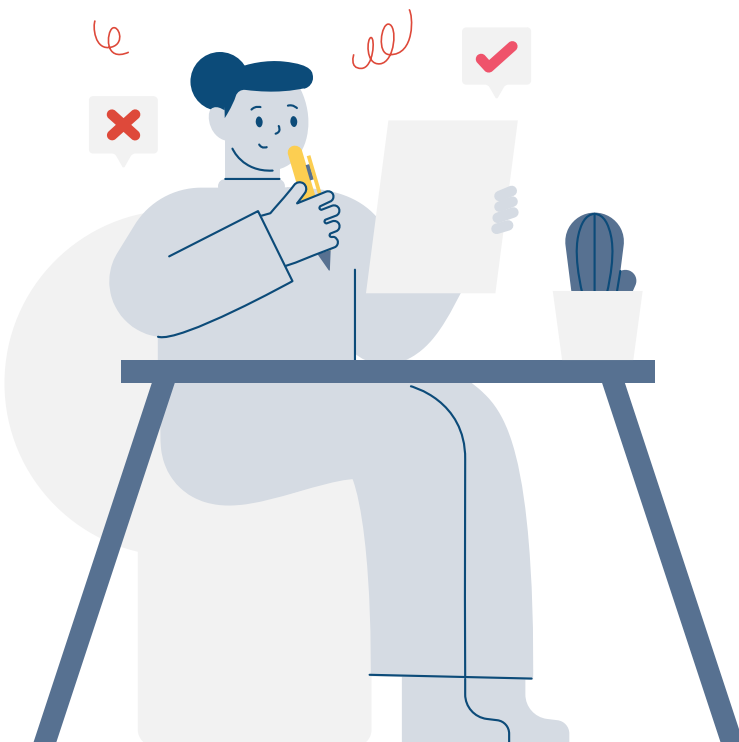
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The pitching process is crucial in building partnerships between PR agencies and clients. Yet, there are reports of significant challenges such as resource strain, communication gaps, and a lack of transparency.

As the UK's largest membership body for PR professionals, the **PRCA** is committed to addressing these challenges and promoting better industry practices.

The **PRCA Pitch Forward** research stage delves into key issues surrounding the pitching process, including budget transparency, procurement involvement, and communication barriers. Through surveys and focus groups, we collected valuable insights from both agencies and clients, offering a comprehensive view of the current state of pitching in the industry.

This report highlights the key proposed solutions and sheds light on the need for more streamlined, transparent, and ethical pitching practices. As agencies are often engaged in frequent, resource-intensive pitches, improving these processes will benefit both agencies and clients, creating stronger, more effective collaborations.

Moving forward, our next stage will be to gather further responses from clients to ensure their perspectives are fully represented in our proposed solutions. Based on this comprehensive feedback, we will develop firm recommendations and provide best practice guidelines for the PR community. Our goal is to foster an environment where pitching processes are efficient, ethical, and mutually beneficial, setting a higher standard across the industry.
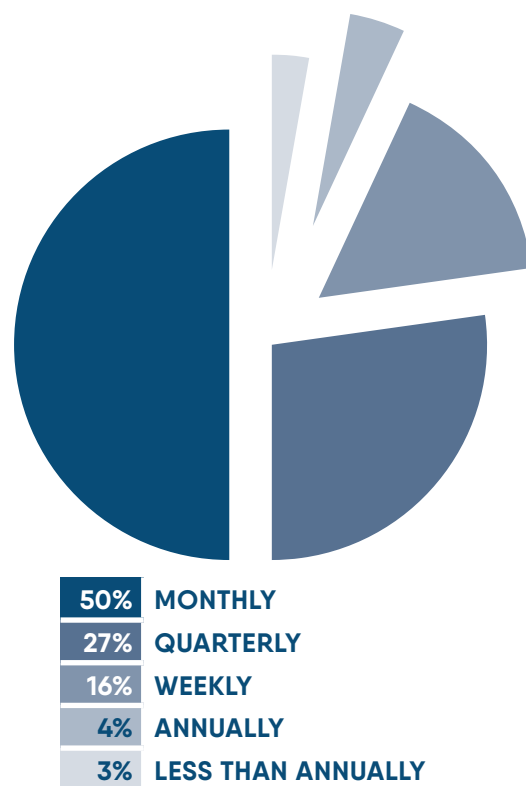
SECTION 1
AGENCY-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS

FREQUENCY OF AGENCY PARTICIPATION IN PITCHES

This data provides a valuable perspective on the intensity of the pitching process for agencies. A significant 50% of agencies take part in pitching on a monthly basis, which speaks to the ongoing competitive nature of the PR and communications sector. Monthly participation in pitches suggests that agencies are continuously seeking new business, keeping them engaged in a regular cycle of client acquisition.

16% of respondents reported taking part in pitches on a weekly basis, highlighting the competitive pressure on certain agencies, particularly larger or more specialised ones, to consistently prove their value to clients. 27% of agencies pitch quarterly, and four percent do so annually.

The fact that three percent pitch even less often suggests that there are some agencies that rely on long-term clients or more stable, ongoing relationships, possibly in niche markets or industries where frequent pitching isn't necessary.

This data reinforces the need for agencies to continually develop their business pipelines. The monthly and even weekly participation in pitches places significant strain on resources, but it also highlights the importance of maintaining a competitive edge in a dynamic industry. **Ongoing efforts to promote more streamlined and ethical pitching practices will be essential to help agencies navigate this demanding cycle**.

50%	**MONTHLY**
27%	**QUARTERLY**
16%	**WEEKLY**
4%	**ANNUALLY**
3%	**LESS THAN ANNUALLY**

NUMBER OF PITCH OPPORTUNITIES

The volume of pitch opportunities in a 12-month period varied significantly across agencies. 36% of respondents reported having between 6–10 pitch opportunities, followed by 25% who participated in 11–20 opportunities. This volume indicates a highly competitive marketplace where agencies are frequently involved in new business pitches.

19% of respondents had fewer than five opportunities, which may indicate smaller agencies or those operating in niche markets. On the higher end, 11% reported 21–30 opportunities, and five percent reported 31–50 opportunities. The four percent of agencies that had more than 50 opportunities likely belong to large agencies or those operating in particularly fast-paced sectors.

With an average of 14.4 pitch opportunities over the past year, agencies are continuously engaged in business development, and the volume of opportunities reflects the intense competition across the sector.

The competitive landscape means that agencies, on average, are engaging in more than one pitch every month. While this presents significant opportunities for new business, it also places a strain on resources. **The challenge for agencies is to continuously refine their pitch processes and ensure that they are dedicating appropriate time and resources to each opportunity**.

THE AVERAGE OF PITCH OPPORTUNITIES OVER THE PAST YEAR IS
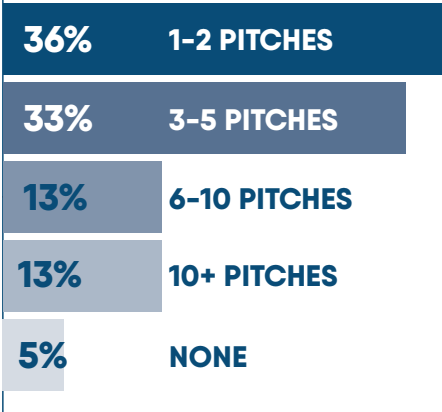
14.4

ACROSS AGENCIES

THE VOLUME OF OPPORTUNITIES REFLECTS THE INTENSE COMPETITION ACROSS THE SECTOR

PITCHES THAT NEVER PROGRESSED

A concerning 36% of respondents reported that they had 1–2 successful pitches that never got off the ground in the past two years, while 33% experienced this issue with 3–5 pitches. A further 13% had between 6–10 such cases, and 13% reported more than ten. This is particularly problematic as it represents wasted time and resources for agencies that secured the win but never saw the project materialise.

Only five percent of respondents reported having no such instances, meaning the vast majority of agencies have experienced this frustration. The mean respondent has, in two years, won 4.4 pitches that subsequently go nowhere. This clearly affects agency profitability and resource allocation.

This finding highlights a significant inefficiency in the pitching process, with many agencies expending resources on projects that are ultimately shelved. Clients should set clearer commitments at the outset of the pitching process to minimise these occurrences.
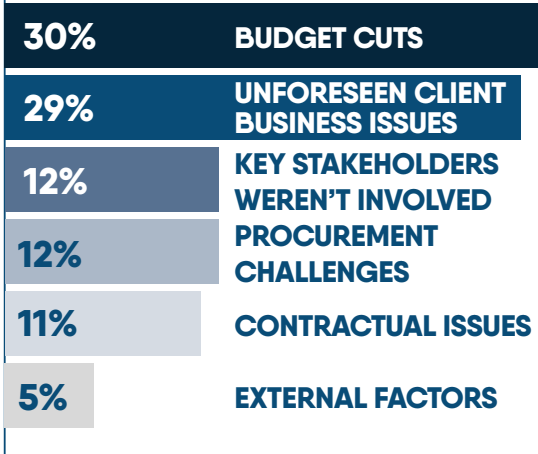
36% 1-2 PITCHES

33% 3-5 PITCHES

13% 6-10 PITCHES

13% 10+ PITCHES

5% NONE

WHEN EVEN WINNING BRINGS NO REWARD
almost all respondents report receiving no work even having won a pitch

REASONS FOR PITCHES NOT PROGRESSING

The reasons for successful pitches not progressing into active projects are varied but telling. 30% of respondents cited budget cuts as the primary reason, reflecting the financial pressures many clients face after a pitch has been awarded. 29% attributed it to unforeseen client business issues, further demonstrating the unpredictability of client-side factors that can derail projects. Other notable reasons include 12% reporting that key stakeholders weren't involved, 12% noting procurement challenges, and 11% citing contractual issues. These procedural and organisational challenges highlight the need for clients to ensure all decision-makers are aligned before engaging in the pitching process. five percent of respondents pointed to geopolitical issues, reflecting external factors outside of both the client and agency's control, such as political instability or global crises.

The findings show that agencies face a range of external factors, from budgetary issues to unforeseen business changes, that prevent projects from moving forward. Ultimately, there is a need for better client-side planning and commitment during the pitch process to ensure that awarded contracts have a higher likelihood of moving forward.
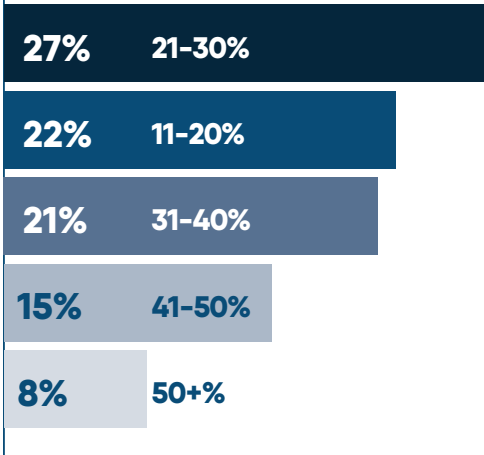
One key question is whether clients are always adequately prepared to enter the pitch process. Too often, pitches proceed without the necessary internal alignment or readiness, leading to delays or cancellations. Ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are committed, budgets are secure, and expectations are realistic will help mitigate the risk of pitches stalling after being awarded.

30% BUDGET CUTS

29% UNFORESEEN CLIENT BUSINESS ISSUES

12% KEY STAKEHOLDERS WEREN'T INVOLVED

12% PROCUREMENT CHALLENGES

11% CONTRACTUAL ISSUES

5% EXTERNAL FACTORS

THERE IS A NEED FOR BETTER CLIENT-SIDE PLANNING AND COMMITMENT

AGENCY PITCH CONVERSION RATE

Pitch conversion rates give us a snapshot of how competitive the market is. 27% of respondents reported a conversion rate of 21–30%, with another 22% reporting 11–20%. These figures suggest that while agencies are involved in numerous pitches, winning new business remains challenging. At the higher end, 21% of respondents reported a conversion rate of 31–40%, while 15% achieved 41–50%. Only eight percent of respondents reported a conversion rate higher than 50%, which is a testament to how competitive and challenging the pitching process can be. With an average conversion rate of 29.5%, agencies are winning just under a third of the pitches they participate in. This reflects the need for agencies to continually refine their approach to pitching in order to stand out in an increasingly competitive market.
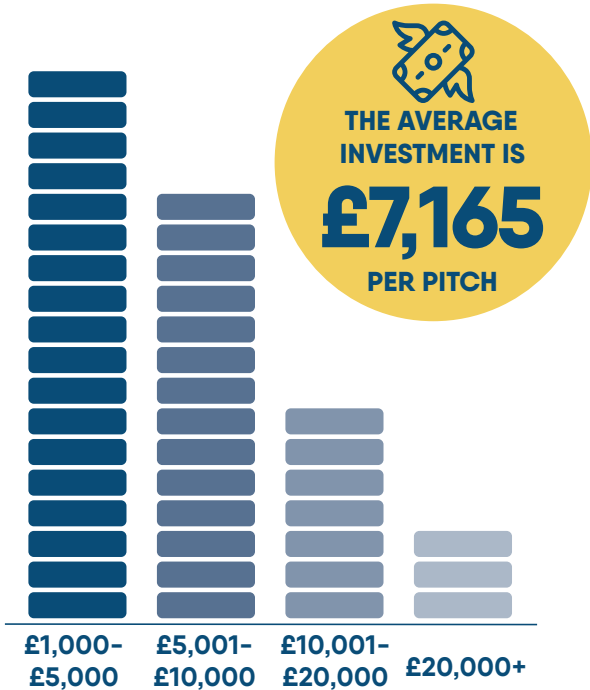
27%	**21–30%**
22%	**11–20%**
21%	**31–40%**
15%	**41–50%**
8%	**50+%**

29.5% IS THE AVERAGE CONVERSION RATE agencies are winning just under a third of the pitches they participate in

INVESTMENT IN THE AVERAGE PITCH

The cost of pitching is a critical concern for agencies, with 40% of respondents reporting that they invest between £1,000 and £5,000 per pitch. For 31%, this figure rises to between £5,001 and £10,000, indicating that significant resources are dedicated to each pitch, particularly for larger or more complex campaigns. At the higher end, 14% of respondents reported spending between £10,001 and £20,000 per pitch, whiles six percent spend more than £20,000. With an average investment of £7,165 per pitch, the financial burden on agencies is considerable, especially when factoring in the high frequency of pitching seen earlier in the data.

The significant investment required for pitching demonstrates the need for a more streamlined and fair process. Agencies are investing thousands of pounds per pitch, and when this is combined with the high frequency of pitching, the financial strain becomes even more pronounced. This highlights the importance of ensuring that the pitching process is efficient, transparent, and offers a genuine opportunity for success.

THE AVERAGE INVESTMENT IS £7,165 PER PITCH

£1,000–£5,000   £5,001–£10,000   £10,001–£20,000   £20,000+

INSTANCES OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY MISUSE

The issue of intellectual property (IP) theft is a critical concern for agencies, with 49% of respondents stating that they have experienced situations where their pitch ideas were used by a client, despite not being awarded the contract. This practice, though not uncommon, is highly detrimental to agencies as it undermines the trust and transparency required in a healthy client–agency relationship. Agencies spend considerable time, resources, and creativity on developing bespoke strategies for clients, and the misuse of these ideas without compensation is a significant ethical violation.

On the flip side, 51% of respondents reported not having encountered this issue, suggesting that while the problem is widespread, there are still many clients who adhere to ethical practices in protecting agency ideas.

49% RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCED THEIR IDEA BEING USED BY THE CLIENT WITHOUT CONTRACT

FREQUENCY OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY MISUSE

Among those who reported experiencing instances where their pitch ideas were used without compensation, 77% said it had occurred 1–2 times in the past 12 months. This indicates that the misuse of intellectual property tends to happen on an occasional basis, rather than being a persistent issue. However, 12% reported that this had happened 3–5 times in the past year, which is cause for deep concern.

A small minority, two percent, reported this occurring more than five times, suggesting that some agencies face chronic issues with IP theft. The nine percent who reported never having experienced this issue may reflect agencies that have tighter contractual agreements or are working with more ethically-minded clients.

9% NEVER HAPPENED
2% 5+ TIMES
12% 3-5 TIMES

77%
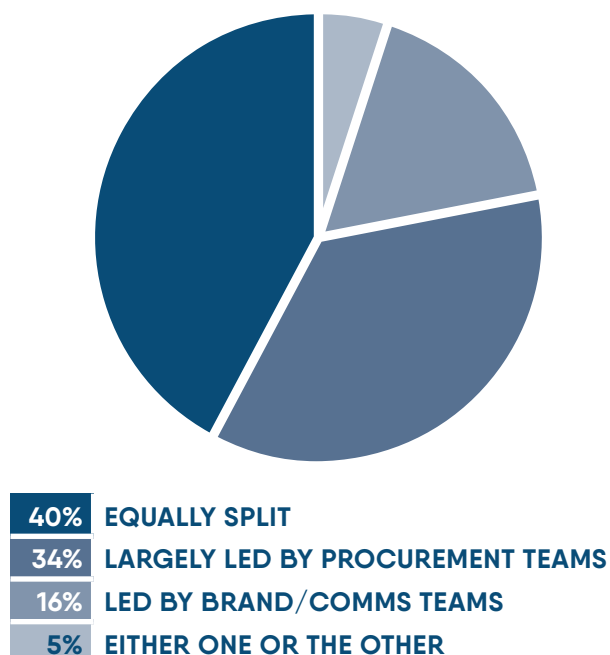**EXPERIENCED MISUSE OF THEIR IP IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS**

PROCUREMENT VS. MARKETING-LED PITCHES

According to the data, 40% of respondents reported that their pitches were equally split between being led by procurement teams and marketing/brand/comms teams. This reflects the growing role of procurement in selecting agencies, particularly as organisations become more focused on cost control and standardised processes. 34% of respondents reported that most of their pitches were led by procurement teams, while 16% said the majority were led by marketing/brand/comms teams. Only five percent of respondents said all their pitches were procurement-led or marketing-led respectively, indicating that both functions typically play a role in the decision-making process.

Ultimately, the data suggests that procurement's role in agency selection is growing. For many agencies, this shift means adjusting to a more process-driven, cost-conscious approach in pitches.

It is, however, critical that procurement's involvement doesn't overshadow the creative aspects and the team chemistry of agency selection.

Both clients and agencies should be encouraged to strike a balance between cost and the creative value that an agency brings.

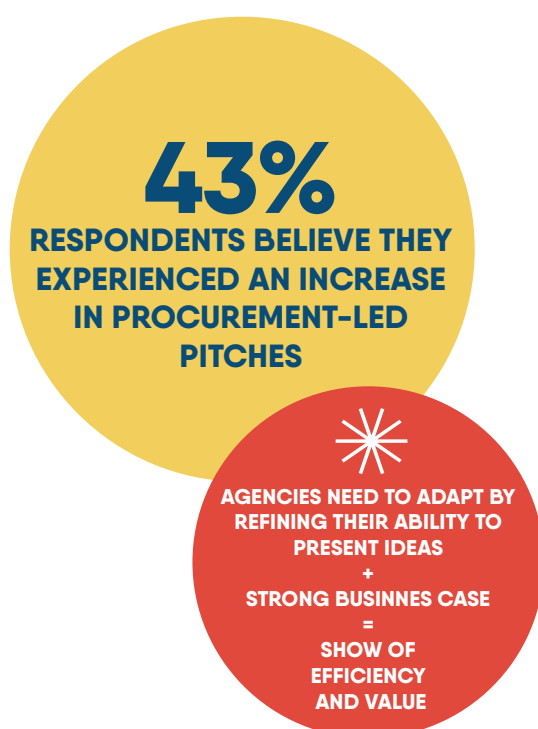|	
40%	**EQUALLY SPLIT**
34%	**LARGELY LED BY PROCUREMENT TEAMS**
16%	**LED BY BRAND/COMMS TEAMS**
5%	**EITHER ONE OR THE OTHER**

PERCEPTION OF INCREASING PROCUREMENT-LED PITCHES

The data shows that 43% of respondents believe there has been an increase in procurement-led pitches, reflecting the growing trend of procurement teams taking more control over the agency selection process. This suggests a shift in the industry towards a more cost-focused and process-driven model for selecting agencies, especially in larger organisations where procurement is responsible for maintaining consistent vendor relationships across the board.

However, 32% of respondents do not feel there has been a noticeable increase in procurement-led pitches, which could suggest that some sectors or smaller businesses are still keeping the decision-making process within their marketing or communications teams. A further 25% are unsure, which may indicate that the boundaries between procurement and marketing involvement are becoming increasingly blurred.

With nearly half of respondents observing an increase in procurement-led pitches, it is clear that this trend is shaping the way agencies must approach pitching. Agencies may need to adapt by refining their ability to present not just creative solutions but also a strong business case that satisfies procurement's focus on efficiency and value.

43%
RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THEY EXPERIENCED AN INCREASE IN PROCUREMENT-LED PITCHES

AGENCIES NEED TO ADAPT BY REFINING THEIR ABILITY TO PRESENT IDEAS
+
STRONG BUSINNES CASE
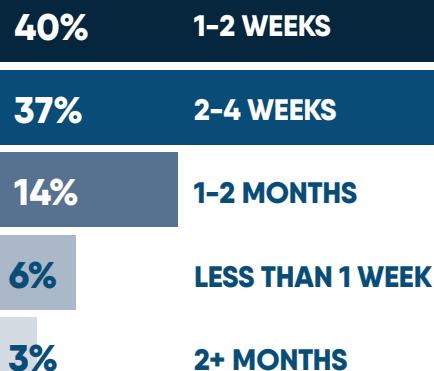**=**
SHOW OF EFFICIENCY AND VALUE

TIME TO RECEIVE CLIENT CONTRACTS

The speed with which agencies receive contracts after being appointed is a key factor in determining how quickly work can begin and how efficiently projects are managed. According to the data, 40% of respondents typically receive their contracts within 1–2 weeks, while 37% said it takes 2–4 weeks. This suggests that for most agencies, the process is relatively quick, allowing work to begin within a month of being appointed.

However, 14% of respondents said it takes 1–2 months to receive the contract, which can delay the start of a project and place additional stress on agency resources. Six percent of respondents reported receiving their contracts in less than 1 week, which represents best practice in terms of efficiency and organisation.

On the other end, three percent of respondents reported that it takes more than two months to receive the contract, which can significantly disrupt the agency's planning and resource allocation.

With an average contract delivery time of 2.9 weeks, most agencies experience a reasonable turnaround time, though there is room for improvement in certain cases.

40%	1–2 WEEKS
37%	2–4 WEEKS
14%	1–2 MONTHS
6%	LESS THAN 1 WEEK
3%	2+ MONTHS

THE AVERAGE CONTRACT DELIVERY TIME IS 2.9 WEEKS
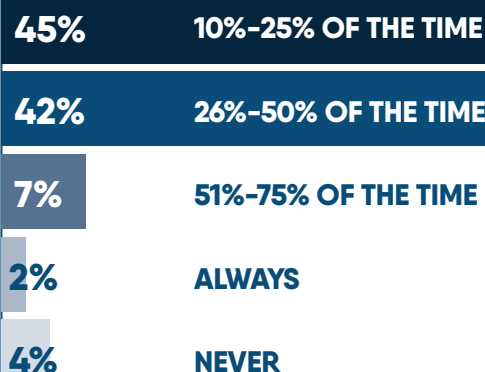
FREQUENCY OF CONTRACT DELAYS

Contract delays are a fairly common issue for agencies, with 45% of respondents saying they rarely experience delays (10–25% of the time), while 42% said they sometimes encounter delays (26–50% of the time).

Only seven percent reported regularly encountering delays (51–75% of the time), and two percent stated that they always have issues receiving contracts in a timely manner.

Interestingly, four percent of respondents said they never experience delays, which likely reflects clients that have well-organised contracting processes in place.

With an average delay occurrence rate of 29.8%, it's clear that contract delays, while not constant, are still a prevalent issue that agencies must contend with.

Contract delays can cause significant operational inefficiencies for agencies, affecting their ability to allocate resources and plan effectively.

45%	10%–25% OF THE TIME
42%	26%–50% OF THE TIME
7%	51%–75% OF THE TIME
2%	ALWAYS
4%	NEVER

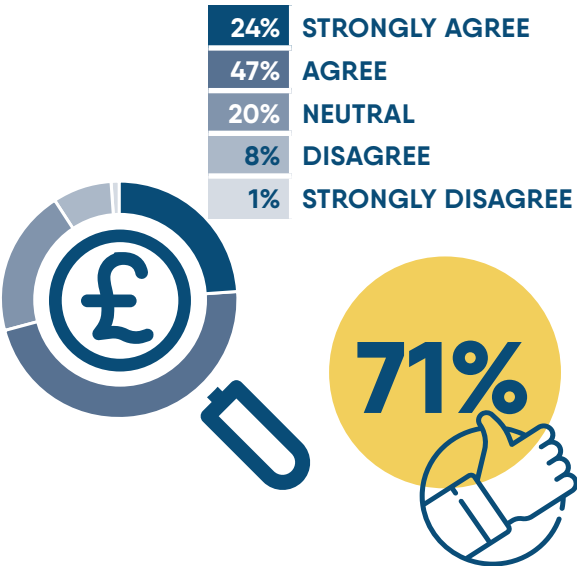**ON AVERAGE, CONTRACT TIME DELAYS HAPPEN 29.8% OF TIMES**

SECTION 2
CHALLENGES IN THE PITCHING PROCESS

LACK OF BUDGET TRANSPARENCY

Budget transparency, or the extent to which clients provide clear budget guidelines during the pitching process, has been consistently raised as a major concern by our members. This was one of the key topics we addressed in our survey, based on feedback from agencies about recurring challenges they face during pitches.

24% of respondents strongly agree that budget transparency is a major challenge, and 47% agree with this sentiment, making it a key pain point for 71% of the total sample. Without clear budgetary guidelines, agencies face the risk of over- or under-investing in the pitch, leading to frustration on both sides when expectations are misaligned.
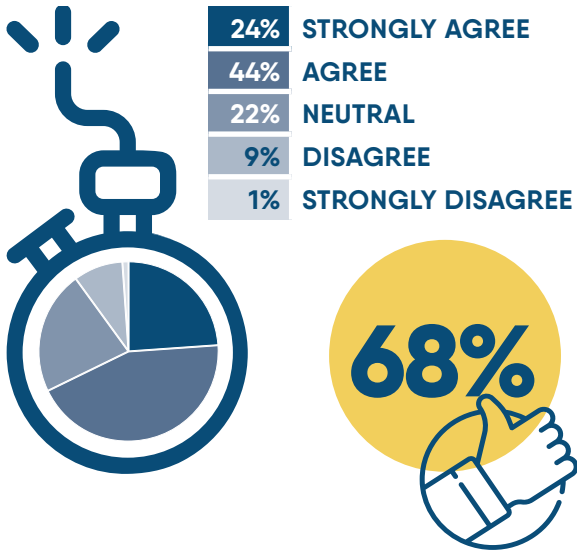
20% remain neutral on the subject, which could suggest that some clients do provide adequate budget information, or that these respondents are more accustomed to working with undefined budgets. However, the eight percent who disagree and one percent who strongly disagree might represent clients or organisations that intentionally maintain budget flexibility during pitches to assess the agency's creative and strategic thinking without constraints.

24%	STRONGLY AGREE
47%	AGREE
20%	NEUTRAL
8%	DISAGREE
1%	STRONGLY DISAGREE

71%

UNREALISTIC TIMELINE EXPECTATIONS

Unrealistic timelines also emerge as a key challenge, with 24% strongly agreeing and 44% agreeing, meaning 68% of respondents believe that tight deadlines negatively impact the pitching process. These rushed timelines may lead to rushed or incomplete work, which affects the quality of the pitch and, ultimately, the client's ability to make a well-informed decision.
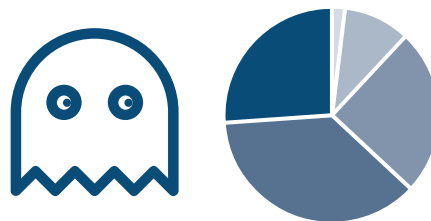
Interestingly, 22% remained neutral, while nine percent disagreed and one percent strongly disagreed, indicating that for some, timeline pressures may not be as severe, perhaps due to more flexible client expectations or more efficient pitching processes in certain sectors.

24%	STRONGLY AGREE
44%	AGREE
22%	NEUTRAL
9%	DISAGREE
1%	STRONGLY DISAGREE

68%

GHOSTING (UNRESPONSIVENESS)

26% strongly agree, and 37% agree, that ghosting – where clients go silent during or after the pitching process – is a challenge, affecting 63% of respondents. This lack of communication can be detrimental, especially for agencies that invest significant time and resources in preparing pitches.

However, 25% remain neutral on the issue, suggesting that ghosting may not be a problem for all respondents, likely those who have more structured processes or longer-term relationships with clients. Ten percent disagree, and one percent strongly disagree, indicating responsive and engaged clients.

24%	**STRONGLY AGREE**
44%	**AGREE**
22%	**NEUTRAL**
9%	**DISAGREE**
1%	**STRONGLY DISAGREE**

63%

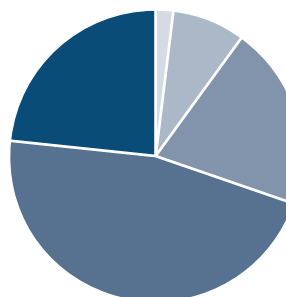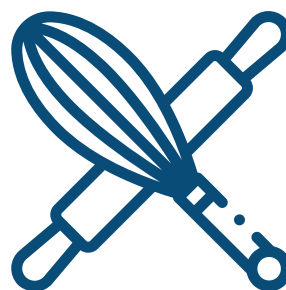## TOO MANY AGENCIES INVOLVED

23% strongly agree, and 46% agree, that having too many agencies involved in a pitch dilutes the process, leading to inefficiencies and reduced clarity in decision-making. 69% of respondents see this as a key issue, which reflects concerns about client overload and diminished agency differentiation when the field is too large.

20% remain neutral on this point, possibly indicating that some respondents are used to larger competitive pitches, while nine percent disagree and two percent strongly disagree, likely representing clients who prefer to cast a wider net to explore a broader range of creative ideas and capabilities.

One key factor in these dynamics is the role of the incumbent agency. When an incumbent is involved in the pitch process, it can complicate the situation further—often leading to a larger pool of agencies being invited to compete. Clients may feel pressure to involve multiple contenders to ensure they are exploring all options, but this can also create an unfair playing field, particularly when the incumbent has a significant advantage in terms of existing relationships and knowledge of the client's business.

Alternatively, the incumbent may have little chance of attempting to retain the business but is invited to repitch out of courtesy. Where this is the case, many incumbents would prefer to know that they are likely to be replaced before they invest time and money in attempting to retain the business.

Across these challenges, the data points to **a clear need for improved transparency and communication in the PR pitching process**. Whether it's clearer budget guidelines, more realistic timelines, or more consistent communication, clients must work with agencies to refine these elements. Enhanced collaboration will not only lead to more successful partnerships but also ensure a higher standard of professionalism across the industry.

23%	**STRONGLY AGREE**
46%	**AGREE**
20%	**NEUTRAL**
9%	**DISAGREE**
2%	**STRONGLY DISAGREE**

69%

PRCA

SECTION 3
PRWEEK SURVEY DATA INSIGHTS

QUALITY OF BRIEFS FROM POTENTIAL CLIENTS

The quality of client briefs is pivotal in shaping the success of the PR pitching process. Agencies often rely on clear, well-defined briefs to craft their proposals effectively. However, data from PRWeek reveals that the quality of briefs varies widely:

* 2.2% of respondents rated the briefs as very poor.
* 15.2% rated them as poor.
* 47.8% considered the briefs to be of average quality.
* 32.6% rated them as good.
* 2.2% rated them as excellent.

While the majority of respondents rated briefs as average or good, the relatively high percentage of poor or very poor ratings indicates there is room for improvement, particularly in ensuring consistency and clarity.

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK ON CLIENT BRIEFS

The open-ended responses provided by agency professionals offer deeper insights into the specific issues and challenges they face with client briefs. Here are the most common themes that emerged:

1. Lack of Budget Transparency:

One of the most frequently mentioned issues is the absence of budget information in briefs, which complicates the pitching process. Agencies struggle to deliver realistic proposals without knowing the financial parameters:

* "Briefs rarely mention budget, which makes it challenging to pitch at the right level."
* "One of the main issues with briefs we receive is the reluctance to give a budget or at least a budget range. 'We want to see your creativity and don't want you constrained by budgets' is all very well, but without knowing a budget level, how can you deliver a realistic proposal without wasting time coming up with blue sky thinking when they have rainy-day budgets."
* "Lots of briefs don't have a budget attached—it feels like a race to the bottom, to see who will bid the lowest amount."

2. Clarity and Specificity in Briefs:

Several respondents noted that while some briefs are detailed and clear, others are vague, making it difficult to address the client's needs effectively:

* "Clients have been very specific on the detail within a brief along with budget allocation and KPIs. Really thought through in the briefs and tender opportunities we have experienced."
* "It's not unusual at the moment for clients to want to brief without a formal written brief at all, let alone a set budget."

METHODOLOGY

To compile the Monthly Trading Tracker, PRWeek sent a brief, anonymised questionnaire to agencies that are included in the UK Top 150 Consultancies database.

The questionnaire asked about key issues, including trading in the past month versus expectations, whether they expect to reach their financial targets, redundancies, profits, and client behaviour.

The data gathered through this questionnaire was used to help shape the quantitative design of this PRCA survey, ensuring that the key concerns within the industry were adequately captured and addressed in our analysis.

* "An extremely mixed bag but it has always been thus. The best briefs set clear objectives and a decent indication of budget, but don't micro-prescribe how you might meet those goals."

3. Objective Setting and Alignment:

Agencies also pointed out that many briefs lack SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound), which limits the ability to deliver well-targeted strategies:

* "Lack of SMART objectives across all briefs."
* "Woolly briefs with half-answered questions rarely get great responses."
* Some briefs lack alignment with the client's long-term objectives, leading to short-term thinking.
* "Strengths: tangible outcomes defined. Weaknesses: reluctance to commit long-term (trials/one-year contracts)."

4. Ambiguity in Requests and Unrealistic Demands:

Agencies also expressed concerns about unrealistic client expectations and conflicting requests:

* "We had a brief that asked for BOLD and BRAVE ideas, yet we lost because another agency took a more traditional and safe approach."
* "Some briefs are still not coming through with the basics in them—budget is a good example!"
* "I'm still getting over a brief that was for £80k of work, but they'd only look at proposals coming in between £40k–£60k."

5. Timelines and Decision-Making:

Several respondents noted that tight timelines and a lack of decision-maker involvement in the briefing process often result in inefficient pitches:

* "Unfortunately, often brands don't give the pitch process enough time or respect. They see it as a chore rather than an investment to ensure they take on the right agency."
* "The biggest issue is less about the written briefs but more around having the decision-makers in the room at the right time—from briefing through to pitch."

6. The Role of Procurement:

Some respondents raised concerns about the involvement of procurement teams, which can slow down the pitching process and create additional challenges:

* "Unwieldy, time-consuming procurement processes that are often pointless for most of the agencies involved."
* "Brands should do their research and shortlist to a max of 3 agencies before expecting loads of agencies to waste days of their time filling in procurement documents."

7. Positives in the Briefing Process:

Despite the challenges, some agencies reported positive experiences with well-structured briefs and collaborative clients:

* "Clients are quite specific on what they are looking for, and it is realistic. Timelines and budgets can be tough, but they always are."
* "We love to dig in early on and co-create briefs with our clients, asking questions and adding to the process with detail, business context or audience insight."

SECTION 4
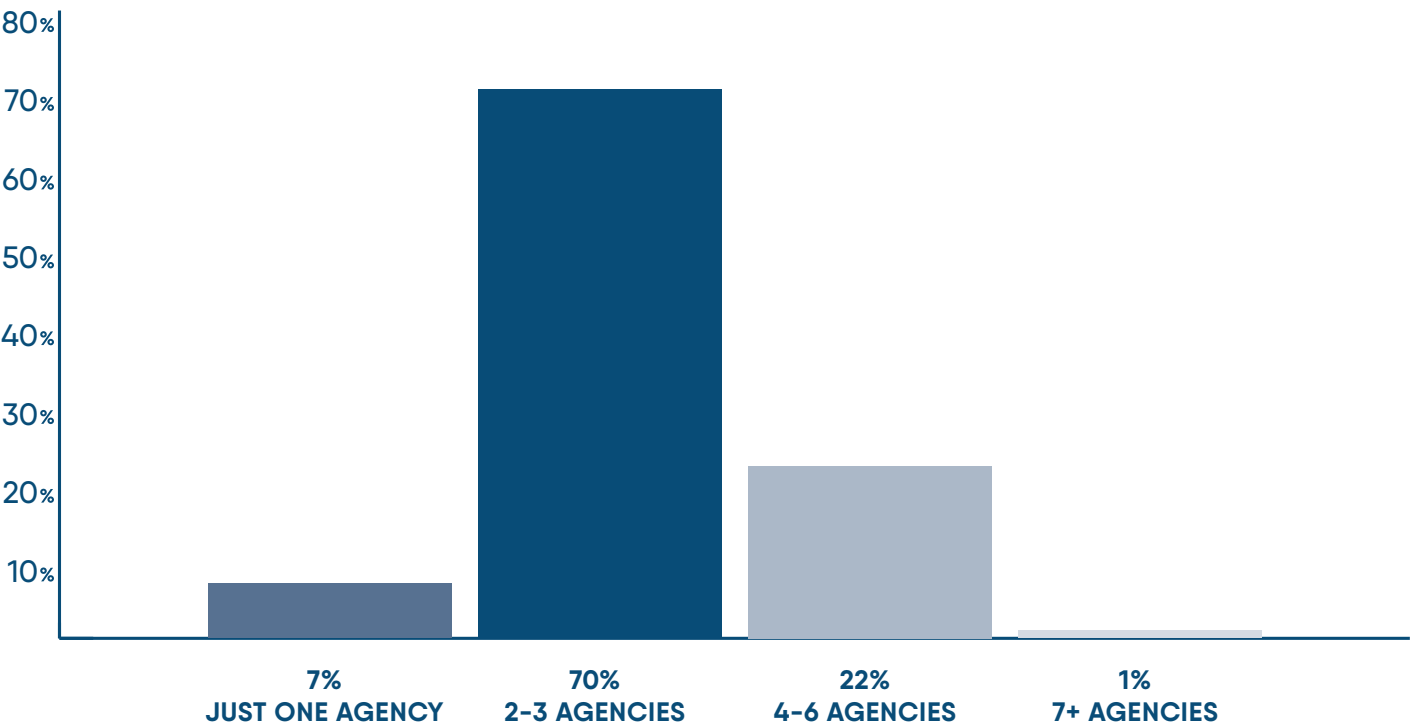# CLIENT-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS

NUMBER OF AGENCIES INVITED TO PITCH

A significant 70% of client respondents reported inviting 2-3 agencies to pitch for each project, reflecting an industry standard that balances choice with manageability. By keeping the number of participants relatively small, clients ensure they can give each pitch the attention it deserves while still exploring a variety of options.

Interestingly, 22% of respondents invite 4-6 agencies, which may indicate a broader competitive approach, particularly for larger or more complex projects. On the other end of the spectrum, seven percent of respondents invite just one agency, likely organisations that prefer to work with known partners or have very specific requirements for their PR needs.

Only one percent of respondents reported inviting more than seven agencies, showing that while competition is valued, clients recognise the diminishing returns of involving too many players in the process.

It is important to note, however, that through focus group discussions, PR agencies have expressed a concern over the growing number of agencies that they are regularly competing against during the pitching process. **Clients should therefore strike a balance between fostering healthy competition and ensuring that agencies feel valued for their time and effort**.

Inviting too many agencies can lead to agencies feeling undervalued, as they may perceive the process as a "numbers game" rather than an opportunity to demonstrate their unique strengths.

7%	**70%**	**22%**	**1%**
JUST ONE AGENCY	2-3 AGENCIES	4-6 AGENCIES	7+ AGENCIES

IMPORTANT FACTORS IN SELECTING A PR AGENCY

We asked clients to rank various factors in order of importance when selecting a PR agency, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents 'most important' and 5 represents 'least important.'

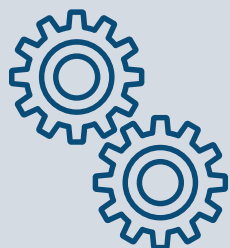|	
25% 1	**Expertise in the Industry/Niche:**
22% 2	Industry knowledge is clearly valued, as agencies that understand the
22% 3	specific challenges and opportunities within a sector are better equipped
15% 4	to deliver tailored, effective strategies.
12% 5	

16% 1	**Creative Capabilities:**
20% 2	While creative capabilities are critical to differentiating a PR agency, this
15% 3	data suggests that creativity alone isn't the deciding factor for most
20% 4	clients. It's likely that clients view creativity as important but not as critical
25% 5	as understanding the specific sector.

16% 1	**Cultural Fit with the Organisation:**
15% 2	While cultural alignment can significantly improve collaboration, it is
17% 3	somewhat less important to clients compared to technical expertise or
20% 4	strategic creativity. Agencies that mirror the client's ethos and values are
27% 5	more likely to sustain long-term relationships, though this is not always the highest priority.

24% 1	**Budget Considerations:**
20% 2	This result is particularly important in today's economic climate, where
17% 3	clients are increasingly conscious of costs and are looking for agencies
20% 4	that can provide value within defined budget constraints.
15% 5	

16% 1	**Track Record/Reputation:**
19% 2	This highlights the importance of proven results and experience in
24% 3	securing new business, though it isn't as decisive as other factors like
22% 4	industry expertise or budget.
15% 5	

Ultimately, **clients generally prioritise expertise in their specific industry**, followed by **budget considerations** and **creative capabilities**.

Cultural fit and track record, while still important, tend to be secondary considerations. For agencies, the key takeaway is the need to highlight **sector-specific expertise**, demonstrate **value within the client's budget**, and offer **creative solutions** that address the client's unique challenges.

PRCA

TYPICAL DURATION OF THE PITCHING PROCESS

The length of the pitching process provides crucial insights into the industry's efficiency and the burden placed on both agencies and clients.

A small percentage of clients (18%) reported that the pitching process is completed in less than a month. These quick turnarounds are likely associated with urgent campaigns or situations where the scope is clearly defined, and the client has limited time to evaluate options.

However, the majority of client respondents (53%) reported that the process typically lasts 1–2 months. This seems to be the industry norm, as it allows sufficient time for a thorough evaluation of proposals, chemistry meetings, and client decision-making, while also ensuring agencies have adequate time to craft meaningful, creative, and strategic responses.

For 25% of respondents, the process takes 3–6 months, indicating more complex client pitches, likely for larger contracts or longer-term partnerships. These pitches are likely characterised by a higher level of scrutiny, multiple rounds of feedback, and possibly input from several stakeholders across the client's organisation.

Finally, four percent reported a pitching process that lasts longer than six months.

The average pitching process duration is approximately 2.4 months.

With this in mind, there is a clear need to improve efficiency across the board. Streamlining processes to reduce unnecessary delays could help ease the burden on agencies and foster more agile client-agency relationships. Timely decisions are critical, not only for the agencies who must manage resources effectively but also for clients seeking to stay competitive and responsive in an ever-changing marketplace.

2.4 MONTHS
THE AVERAGE DURATION OF THE PITCHING PROCESS

18% | **LESS THAN A MONTH**

53% | **1-2 MONTHS**

25% | **3-6 MONTHS**

4% | **6+ MONTHS**

SECTION 5
ETHICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PITCHING

The overwhelming majority of respondents (88%) believe that a voluntary code of conduct would improve the pitching process.

This demonstrates a strong appetite within the industry for establishing clearer guidelines and best practices.

A code of conduct could help address some of the key issues raised, including budget transparency, realistic timelines, and open communication, ensuring that both clients and agencies are held to consistent standards.

However, when it comes to a mandatory code of conduct, the support drops to 63%, with 37% of respondents expressing concerns. This disparity suggests that while the industry is in favour of standardised practices, there is some hesitation around enforcing rules that might limit flexibility or adaptability in certain pitches.

While there is strong support for a voluntary code of conduct, the response to making it mandatory highlights significant concerns. Therefore, PRCA has decided not to pursue a mandatory code of conduct at this time. The hesitation within the industry reflects the need for flexibility and adaptability in pitching processes. Enforcing strict guidelines could hinder the creativity and responsiveness that are crucial in PR campaigns, potentially reducing the effectiveness of agency–client collaborations.

88%
BELIEVE THAT A VOLUNTARY CODE OF CONDUCT WOULD IMPROVE THE PITCHING PROCESS

THE SUPPORT DROPS TO
63%
WHEN IT COMES TO HAVING A MANDATORY CODE OF CONDUCT

PRCA

CONCLUSION

Based on the survey responses and qualitative insights, it is clear that there are areas where clients can improve the briefing process to ensure more productive and effective pitches:

* **BUDGET TRANSPARENCY**: Providing a budget or at least a range can help agencies tailor their proposals appropriately and avoid wasted effort on ideas that are financially unviable.

* **CLEAR AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**: Including SMART objectives in briefs ensures that agencies have a clear understanding of the client's goals and can propose targeted strategies.

* **INVOLVING KEY DECISION-MAKERS**: Clients should ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the briefing process from the outset to avoid miscommunications or changes in direction.

* **STREAMLINING PROCUREMENT PROCESSES**: Simplifying procurement requirements and shortlisting agencies earlier in the process would save time and resources for both clients and agencies.

In reviewing the data, we see recurring themes around transparency, efficiency, and ethical considerations in the pitching process. PRCA members, both agencies and clients, have a critical role to play in refining these processes to ensure that pitching is both fair and productive. By addressing issues such as contract delays, procurement involvement, and intellectual property protection, the PR industry can foster more meaningful and long-term client-agency relationships.

Our role is to continue advocating for best practices that ensure agencies are treated fairly, while also supporting clients in making informed, strategic decisions.

ABOUT PRCA

The Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) is the trade association for the public relations, public affairs and communications industry. We provide the space in which our members, from all corners of the world, come together to forge a dynamic, forward-thinking, and influential community. We are committed to advancing the field of PR and championing the vital role it plays in our rapidly evolving world.

We are the heartbeat of an industry that shapes perceptions, drives narratives, and fuels communication on a global scale.

Our commitment:

∗ **Building the industry:** we lay the foundation for a robust, innovative, and resilient PR industry through collaboration and collective wisdom.

∗ **Speaking up on issues of concern:** we provide a platform for our members to address and champion pressing issues, advocating for ethical and responsible practices.

∗ **Understanding industry trends and sharing knowledge:** PRCA offers an environment where industry leaders share knowledge, insights, and expertise to navigate the ever-evolving currents of public relations.

∗ **Training PR professionals:** we nurture talent through comprehensive training, equipping both current and future PR professionals with essential skills.

∗ **Raising standards:** through its Codes of Conduct, PRCA empowers members to uphold the highest levels of professionalism, integrity, and accountability.

∗ **Explaining the power of PR:** we shout about the industry's true potential and showcase its influence in shaping public perception and decisions.

∗ **Sharing ideas and collaborating:** in our shared space, creativity flourishes, and collective success is celebrated.

∗ **Facilitating discussions:** through discussion, we foster shared solutions to common problems, where diverse perspectives generate innovative solutions.

∗ **Providing a platform:** PRCA offers a dedicated platform for members to connect, engage, and network with peers and industry experts.

∗ **Showcasing expertise:** we shine a spotlight on outstanding work through events, publications, and thought leadership.

∗ **Challenging the industry:** PRCA challenges the industry to grow and evolve, empowering members to succeed in a dynamic PR landscape.

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