10 Secrets to Selling the Agency's Credentials

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"How the heck do we sell our credentials without coming off as a bunch of bragards?"

Sound familiar?

Well, here are your answers.

1. How you say things tells the prospect who you're thinking of.

Avoid using the first person phrases, "We think...." – or - "Our People...." credentials type statements. Instead replace with the second person "you" or "your" statements. This will ensure that you present the benefits of your credentials to the potential client instead of bragging about them.

2. A promise of "outcome" sells ideas.

Whenever presenting ideas, start the section with an "outcome" of what you believe the ideas will do for the potential client's business.

Examples of this include:

- (for PR) showing a newspaper headline for a future date stating the outcome you intend to achieve for the potential client such as "XYZ company pulls ahead of the competition".
- (for advertising) showing a retail store with their shelves devoid of the potential client's products.
- (for promotions) showing a store filled with customers using the potential client's products.

3. Leveraging the one truly unique asset of the agency – its people!

Start credentials presentations with an introduction of outstanding "accomplishments" by each of the members of the agency team, preferably of relevance to the potential client's business.

4. Making your case studies "generically relevant™":

Lead case credentials with an overall statement (40,000 ft) of what you accomplish for businesses.

Examples of this might include:

- re-ignite brands
- create buzz
- redefine a business
- re-generate interest
- re-capture business allure/position/place

5. Making your credentials saleable.

List credentials with what you do for a potential client's business instead of what you have to offer.

Examples include:

- Creative Package Design versus Creative Department with 25 people.

A useful technique is to list these out in Chinese menu form so people can get a quick view of the benefits you have to offer since these are the things on which buyers are making their decision. You can still indicate the "tool" or "discipline" from whence these benefits are obtained as a sub- point.

An example of this might be:

- Changing buying behavior at retail (in-store promotions)

6. Advertising your key credentials during prospect tours.

A very useful tactic in new business is Scrim signage (3 – 12ft long and about 2 – 3' wide) free hanging down from ceilings and flat down surfaces of walls.

Their use includes the promotion of agency:

- client logos
- mission and vision statements
- discipline benefits

7. Creatively bragging about the agency's creative.

A fabulous tactical method of showing the agency's pride in their work comes from a very creative agency – in the new products business. It's the wearing of a "patch" sewn onto jackets or shirt sleeves.

Each time they completed an assignment - "mission" - for a client they would present each of the team members with this mission accomplished badge each of which showed what they had accomplished for the client. One example was a patch proudly promoting "soaring to new heights" with the client's logo in the centre.

Clients all received this same badge.

8. Creatively bragging about the agency's current work.

Another wonderful promotions tactic I have seen a highly creative agency use are "Flags" all over the agency, to show latest projects they are working on extending from walls, down from ceilings and off vertical poles. One could also include cases in this format versus the typical "white board" approach.

Another method is to put work in transparent plexi holders outside the key staff doors. This is also a wonderful way to boost morale.

How about the agency that uses an "Idea Wall" where all the latest concepts and big ideas are posted weekly for the world to see, including all staff, current clients and prospective clients while taking an agency tour.

9. Seeing is believing.

The "Agency Tour" is by far the best way for a prospective client to get a hands-on feel for what the agency is capable of. Stops along the way (well choreographed and practiced) allow the agency to speak to the interests of the prospect while showcasing both case work and ideas for the specific prospect. It also allows the prospect to meet as many of the people who would work on the business as possible without all of them unnecessarily crowding the final presentation room or location, leaving that up to the key team only.

10. Knowing the role of the New Business Director

The new business director, Chief Marketing Officer or Lead Solicitor of the agency should play the role of host and matchmaker. That is by far the most productive role for this person to play for two reasons.

1. It gives them a certain "autonomy" and thus prospects are more likely to confide in them both during and especially after initial visits with the agency. The advantage is obvious. The more the agency can learn about how they are being received, the better.

2. It allows the matchmaker to position themselves as the one to ensure the prospect will be served by the best team to their best advantage. This person is frequently the person who does the initial introductions to the team members who will work on the prospect's business.

11. Bringing life to the agency's credentials

The internet is both our best friend and our worst nightmare but when it comes to promoting the agency's capabilities, its showcasing ability is unsurpassed.

* Create FTP sites.
* Create mood videos.

* Create presentations on line, show your research on line in creative and innovative ways.
* Develop flash presentations of the key agency POD's (points of difference).

Clients love this. By necessity the agency has to quickly make its points and the clients revel in the fact that they do not have to listen to superfluous jargon and bloviation.

12. It's not just about the final pitch

One of the hardest learned lessons is recognizing that the final pitch is about "validating" previous decisions by the prospect.

Inevitably, the prospect has made up their mind who the favorite is going into the finals. For the favorite, (and I know many do not like this saying, but that doesn't alter the reality that), "It's now theirs to win or lose".

Competitive advantage is also managed and gained within hours of the final sale.

One of the most impressive examples of this was a presentation being given to the executive members of the "Milk Board". Agency knew they were all flying in on a Southwest flight that morning so arranged with the airline to make an on-board public announcement that the men and woman responsible for bringing America the milk mustache were on board and introduced them. Didn't end there. Upon disembarking, everyone was greeted with milk and cookies.

Now, who do you think that prospect was thinking about when they arrived at the agency? Why's this important? Other than the obvious, it's about gaining Competitive Advantage.

Other than showing their unique benefits, differentiations and ideas the goal of any great adversary in the sales game has, the single minded purpose of "making themselves the centre of the buyer's attentions".

The lesson. Sell as hard, if not harder, before the finals versus just during them. Like an exam, it's what you do before you take it that controls the outcome.

The Five taboos of new business:

1) Bragging about agency accomplishments, clients or resources before you know what the prospect is looking for in an agency.

2) Addressing what the agency thinks the issues are and not what the client briefed the agency – thinking that obviously the client doesn't really know what the problems are or are just plain wrong about their knowledge of their issues and situation.

3) Bashing current work, approach or systems thinking "why not, that's obviously why they are looking for a new agency" – Remember, some key decision maker

on the prospect's side was responsible for approving these things you are now bashing publicly. Who's the fool now? Be guaranteed it will be the agency's hide and not that of the prospect.

4) Offering recommendations instead of options/alternatives/ideas on the client's business before one has built a relationship and trust.

5) Assuming what the client tells you are the issues, are in fact the issues, especially if that same client is junior or middle management. Oftentimes, senior management does not tell others in the organization what their true requirements are. And in other situations - due to internal politics - you get only 50% of the story, stubbing your toe royally during the presentation of ideas.

This is not, by far, a complete list of do's and don'ts however it's a good starter list to kick start a new era of success for your agency.