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Requests for Proposals (RFP's) have been known to possess the infamous, yet harrowing combination of the good, the bad and the ugly. From the client's intricate process of compiling vital questions to ask a potential account-handling agency, to the agency's detailed preparation of responses (which, oftentimes result in hundred-plus page documents), RFP's are mandatory for most companies seeking a new advertising campaign. While having choices can be a good thing, procurement can be overwhelming.

The Good: Procurement. But the clients get the answers they're looking for.

The Bad: Procurement. But the clients get to comparison shop.

The Ugly: Procurement. But the clients have *mountains* of information to filter through.

The bidding process known as procurement, has forced companies to seek out multiple candidates to handle their business – everything from creating and producing ads, to insurance policies, to what service will professionally clean the carpets – based on the premise of cost-benefits. Most of us are all too familiar with the drill of the RFP process in the Marketing Communications world: It begins with information-gathering on the client side – and industry rumors flying, as to who is preparing an RFP. It then proceeds to client-sent "invitations" for agencies to participate in the RFP and the signing of an NDA. Finally, the games begin! Agencies spend countless hours upon weeks tailoring their responses to a client's specific needs, goals and financials; they share their secret sauce; they send it off; and they cross their fingers in confidence for the callback of an in-person presentation, which, if Dr. Freud's theory of instincts is correct, is the *true* secret sauce.

Nothing compares to good information or the right price if the chemistry isn't "there" between the client and the agency. Unfortunately, many appropriate candidates do not make it to the face-to-face meeting, simply because of procurement. While it's true that procurement is a weed-out process, oftentimes companies base their decisions on the final cost, the agency's name, or the *quantity* of information alone, when selecting their Round 2 candidates.

The litmus test of a potential relationship is how well the two parties involved click. Case in point: an in-person conversation and/or presentation can seal the deal. Take online shopping, for example. There are numerous scams and fraudulent practices in existence in the e-commerce world. The products look perfect in their photos. You can zoom in for a better view. The descriptions of the products are impeccable. They have all of the qualities you're looking for – and they even come in the hard-to-find size/color/shape you *never* thought you would find. You like what you see and you want it. You're convinced this is The One, and you make your online purchase. You commit to The One. But The One arrives via UPS a few days later, only slightly resembling the photo you studied so closely. The One is not as well-made as the description you read about, and it certainly isn't the size or the color that the product profile claimed. You're not impressed. The chemistry just isn't there. You wonder if this going to work out. Is it in your best interest to keep it? Or are you going to continually remind yourself that you know there's something that's a better match for you out there?

Bottom line: You can't afford to be in this situation! Relationships, in any way, shape, or form are best created when both parties have a vested interest to understand, help, and benefit the other, and when both parties sincerely put forth the effort to make it work and *get* each other. It's the most tried and true method of selecting a DR agency to align with your vision. A face to face meeting is key. In addition, companies must do their homework to find out what makes the agencies competing for their business a perfect fit for them. Checking references and talking to other companies who have worked with the agency in question is the best way to get a feel for how your potential agency operates, how they solve problems and how they deliver. When a client comes back to an agency, it's a good sign. That's a relationship. And that's how procurement evolves into the creation of successful marketing.

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