

# 'Clients are from Mars, agencies from Venus'



By [Johanna McDowell](#)

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As with any new or existing relationship, defining your boundaries and maintaining open healthy dialogue are keys to a long lasting client-agency relationship. However, in reality, cracks in the relationship start to appear because very often clients and agencies are not on the same wavelength and don't fully understand the dynamics and the day-to-day running of their respective business.



In fact, clients often have been heard to say "They just don't get us" when talking about their agencies.

## Perfect match requirements

A perfect match requires the agency to fully understand the clients' brand and brand ethos, while clients have to understand the creative dynamics of their agency.

The truth is that while agencies would like their clients to engage more with them, executives in general have become less engaged with their agencies and probably only spend about 20% of their time working with agencies. While marketing directors are responsible for managing the advertising strategy, this is only a very small part of what they do.

It is important for the agency to take into account that they have been selected to handle the advertising campaign and to deliver effective marketing campaigns that meet the client's objectives. The client does not have time to monitor an agency and very often, if the agency is unable to meet the deadlines, a divorce could be on the cards.

According to research conducted by the UK-based [AAR Group](#), which have been experts in client agency relationships since 1975, the perceptions and reasons behind breakdowns in relationships often differ widely between the client and the agency.

The AAR has deduced from its research that it looks like "clients are from Mars, agencies are from Venus". In theory, it was obvious as to what both parties should be doing to make the relationship work.

This is where specialist consultants come into play.

## Finding the right match

When a client is looking for a new agency, specialist consultants play a valuable role in eliminating those that are simply unsuitable. Quality control is important to ensure the right agency fits the client's requirements. Before the pitching process, the consultants will research an agency's ability, track record with clients and creativity.

Their role is to manage both the agency and client expectations. They ask the client the qualifying questions. Why has the existing relationship broken down with the current agency? Why are you looking to change? Sometimes rescuing the previous relationship is more beneficial because changing agencies can be disruptive.

What is the budget? What will the client's level of involvement be? What do you want to achieve? What are your turnaround requirements? The expectations of the client and the agency need to be spelled out from the word go.

An important role that specialist consultants play is to manage these expectations. They should prides themselves on being neutral independent organisations that favours no one.

## The right chemistry

Matching the personalities is also essential to strike up the right chemistry in the first meeting. Chemistry, as in any relationship, gets each party excited, the creative juices start to flow and an environment of trust is formulated. While an emotional connection is not the most important factor to the relationship, the chemistry between the agency and client is a vital ingredient in the matchmaking process.

The role of specialist consultants as an independent body is to help both parties put in place a strong foundation that will produce high-quality advertising campaigns that everyone can be proud of and that will produce the results that the client is seeking. Above all, specialist consultants play an important part in helping both parties come to a common understanding to ensure a lasting relationship.

## ABOUT JOHANNA MCDOWELL

MD of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS), and partner in Scopen Africa, with a background that includes being on both the agency and the client side of the fence, Johanna McDowell is well-placed to offer commentary on marketing and advertising in the South African and international contexts. She built her career in marketing and advertising since 1974, holding directorship in both SA and British advertising agencies. She was MD of Grey Phillips Advertising in 1988.

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