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INSIGHTS

# Pitch Fever:

The story of how outside your comfort zone is sometimes exactly where you need to be.

By Sophie Dervan



In my opinion, inquisitiveness is a natural quality of a Project Manager; “what’s behind those fire exit doors?”, “do we have any dietary requirements?” and of course, the good old-fashioned “what do you mean the key speaker has missed their flight?!”

When we were tasked with reflecting on how our job roles had evolved over the last year and how we might see ourselves evolving into 2022, as part of our Ministry of Magic programme, I approached this as any Project Manager would. I opened PowerPoint, and I started asking questions.

One part of the touch timeline I have always had questions about is the process of pitching. Be that for brand-new prospective clients, beloved current clients, or those who may be keen to reconnect with touch, it always felt like a world and a process I couldn’t quite envisage. As the Project Manager, by the time the project reaches your calendar it has often been nurtured from a few sentences in a request for

proposal, almost fully formed into an engaging programme ready to lose its stabilisers and zoom off to the finish line.

It was that nurturing that I really wanted to get my teeth into, and so there it sat, loud and proud at the top of my list of objectives: I want an insight into the world of pitching!

No sooner did I wish for it than the opportunity presented itself; the chance to work with the pitch team, an Avengers Assemble-esque moment made up of strong, creative minds from across the company, to digest a brief from a brand-new client who was keen to hear what we could deliver for their annual kick-off meeting.



The brief was clear; this client was patient-focused, collaborative, and the more we read, the more we realised – a lot of fun.

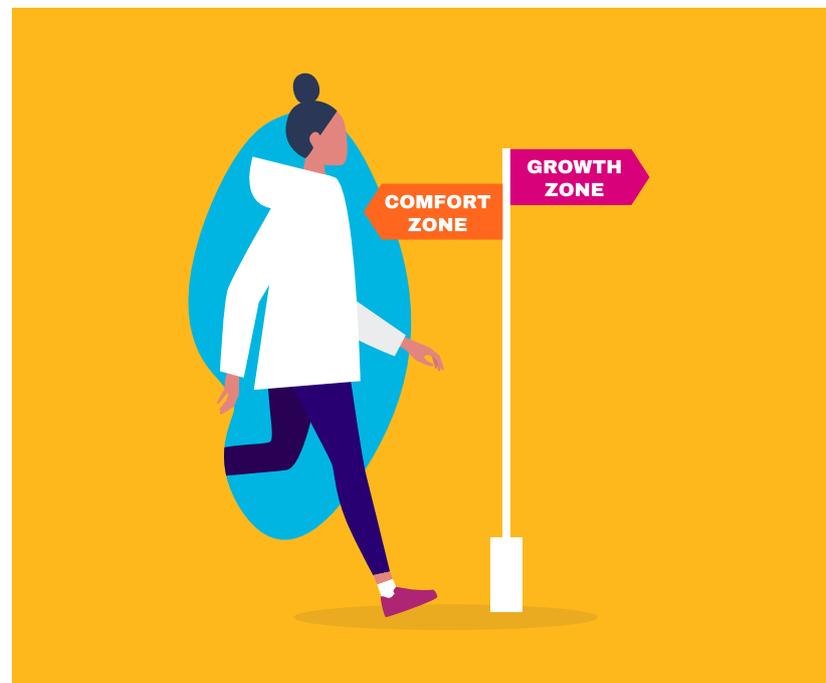
Truthfully, the very start of the process was a lightning strike into reality for me. It's not about asking the questions now, and you don't always have all the answers at first glance. There's no spreadsheet to guide you, no hour-long client calls. You may have a couple of crucial elements you can question, but the rest is all about interpreting the information provided in the way it was meant to be consumed by the client. It felt like a game of Operation, taking our tweezers, and picking out key phrases and significant elements to inform what would become our event identity, brought to life by our Creative team.

This stage of the process was really insightful. You can get so used to working in a linear style, in your own workstream with your own deadlines and goals, that when faced with an organic knowledge-sharing forum you have to shed the armour of constantly dealing in facts and start to trust your own instincts, thoughts and questions. It might sound simple, but having the confidence of your own convictions when you are so used to working in certainties can feel like a vulnerable place, even if only for a second.

We pooled our knowledge, workstream and lifestyle specific, the Creative team came together to develop the perfect identity, and from there the idea really took flight. Scheduling issues on the clients' side meant we ended up with an additional week to pull the pitch together, and the big sigh of relief brought with it the space for us to really explore the nooks and crannies of our brains, giving us the chance to fine-tune and foster our plans for a virtual green screen pitch, complete with dynamic content, TV show style stings and live presentation from the pitch team.

We worked pedal to the metal to ensure we had every element polished, including the budget, which was an invaluable step to be involved in. A budget is something that as a Project Manager you receive as part of your handover, and you may have the odd question mark around how the team came to that figure – I know I always do. Well, having now had a front-row seat to the compromises and considerations that have to be made, I have a totally different outlook on how I view budgets, and moving forwards I know I can use this as a tool to get a great understanding of the elements that are most important to that particular client on each particular event.

After a year and a half of working on virtual events from behind a laptop, predominately in my home office, the thought of actually presenting live in our green screen studio was both exciting and terrifying. How many speaker briefing packs had I read? As it turned out, I had nothing to worry about; the rest of the team were like a masterclass in cool, calm presenting, and once I had gotten over the initial terror of seeing my face on a screen, it was really enjoyable! In a process where I had to trust myself much more than normal, live presenting felt very much like the natural next step in my little journey of discovery!





## Summary

My main takeaway from this whole process is learning to trust your thoughts, because over and above it all, we have been these attendees, some of us may have been these decision-makers, but we have all been humans engaging with a concept, and therefore we all have a really valid insight into what may or may not work. I have come away from the process with a strengthened trust in my own opinions and the confidence to speak up a little louder.

I would really urge anyone in any team and at any level to take this opportunity with both hands should you get the chance. To put it simply, it is like a workstream jigsaw coming together to create the big picture we always talk about, and I think it has definitely helped me work out the shape of my puzzle piece!

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Dennis', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.