

**Everything, you always wanted to ventilate about those fucking requests for pitches, but never dared too!**

Does this sound familiar?

Wednesday morning, it is a beautiful sunny day and you are enjoying your cup of hot, black, sweet coffee?

A freshly printed, nice-smelling newspaper on your desk next to your computer.... You are, of course, checking your incoming mail.

There's one message –it looks like spam at first sight but it isn't, well it's not the usual spam– that catches your eye. It's an invitation!

An invitation to send in a pitch! It is not a personalised invitation though, 12 of your colleagues have been put in cc.

Looks very professional. You are not sure who the sender might be. Some obscure new organisation?

You take a closer look. It seems to be from an official institution, no, even better: a ministry department.

They are asking for a detailed price offer for designing & developing a new corporate identity. One sentence is really nice:

“...Can you please attach some design concepts to the price offer and make sure these proposals arrive at our offices before Friday evening?” Nearly two days to go, well that's a smooth deadline! You're only human, so now you want to read the rest. But there is not much else to read, except for some terms and conditions. Strict conditions on what you should & must do. No details of what you could or should get paid. There is no briefing, there are no criteria, there is no budget, there is no proposal for financial compensation, nothing... They are in fact asking us to design for free. Exactly what we were eagerly awaiting!

Does this sound familiar to you? Do you get these mails?

Are you also getting furious about this? It is really incredible how rude people can be. As if we just have to open a drawer, extract

a fitting pitch and mail it, no sweat. It's sad, but this is what happens in Belgium all the time and probably also abroad. This message

from the ministry is not made up: it happened to me some months ago. We all get these mails –most of the time not even personalized–

with these kinds of requests. A nice variant goes: “Can you, teachers give your graphic design students the assignment to develop a new logo for us?”...

This seems to be a rapidly spreading disease. Cultural organisations are especially keen on this method. They ask a squadron of graphic designers for proposals, select two or three for a second round and finally pick one. Possibly the one they had in mind from the start.

And all the rest? Can just get lost! Why do we –as graphic designers– always lend ourselves to these games? Don't we have any self respect left? There are even studios out there pitching things for free without having been invited to do so!

Can you imagine? Aren't we destroying our credibility by doing so? A graphic design studio is not a candy store where clients can pick and choose the prettiest sweets. Graphic design is a complex thing, Good designers are also good thinkers.

Tibor Kalman once said: ‘Good designers make trouble’. You don't have to take this literally of course, but there is some truth in it.

We should certainly make trouble about these sorts of pitches. Clients and assigners who organise these pitches often don't know what they want. They just want a selection to choose from.

What can you do about that? A lot! You could say yes. But don't complain afterwards. Or you could say ‘if’, and try to convince the client to organize this properly. You might succeed. Or you could just say no. Designing for free is your own choice. If you say yes, try this: use some strong software, NodeBox for instance, which can design a few thousand logos for you in just a couple of seconds. If you propose about 7.000 logos to the client instead of one, he has a problem! It is up to you.

Excellent, well organised –and well paid– pitches do exist. Not that many are to be found in Belgium though.

The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam organised one, recently. It was won by Pierre Di Sciullo (Paris).

Take a look at <http://www.quiresiste.com> and enjoy the professionalism of this organisation.

Remember: Work for free if you want to, don't ever work for free if you are asked to!

I do jobs for free, but only if I really want to do so.

Hugo Puttaert (Brussels, February 2009)