



This is “Meet SS+K: A Real Agency Pitches a Real Client”, chapter 1 from the book [Advertising Campaigns: Start to Finish \(index.html\)](#) (v. 1.0).

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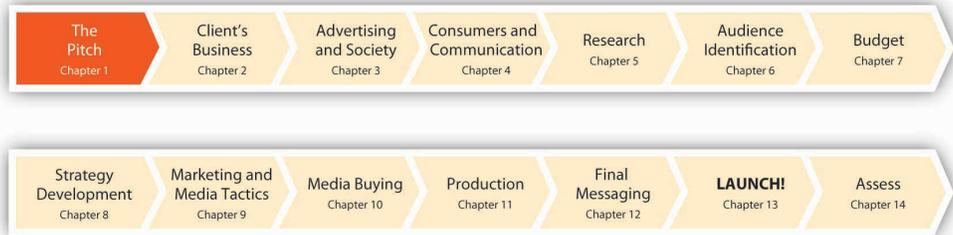
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Chapter 1

Meet SS+K: A Real Agency Pitches a Real Client

Figure 1.1 *Fourteen Months to Launch!*



1.1 Why Launch!?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After studying this section, students should be able to do the following:

1. Recognize the bold new approach for delivering information to today's college students (aka digital natives) that Unnamed Publisher creates.

Knowledge Is a Flat World

The textbook publishing industry is undergoing staggering change as many traditional business models and practices quickly lose relevance. Peer-to-peer textbook trading networks, online used-book sellers, and a gray market that allows low-priced international editions to displace expensive U.S. texts push publishers to reconsider outmoded ways of delivering content. Likewise, the digital natives who make up our university student bodies (that's you!) inspire educators to think about the transfer of knowledge in exciting new ways.

How do we best communicate the most current thinking in our disciplines to students who expect up-to-the-minute information at a keystroke and who view educational materials as community—indeed, world—resources that can and should be shared and interactively constructed?

Enter Unnamed Publisher, an innovative, open source publishing company. We've created a new kind of text—one premised on the idea that college course material can wield wider influence and be of greatest public benefit as it becomes easily and inexpensively available to *anyone* with a desire to learn.

Figure 1.2

Textbook Options	Study Aids	"All You Can Eat"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online textbook: FREE • Black and white textbook: \$29.99 • Color textbook: \$59.99 • Printable PDFs: \$19.99, or \$1.99 per chapter • Audio version: \$29.99, or \$1.99 per chapter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online quizzes: \$0.99 per chapter • Online study games: \$0.99 per chapter • Audio study guide: \$0.99 per chapter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six-month unlimited access to the quizzes, games, and audio study guide for every chapter: \$19.95

Knowledge in a Flat World...Choose only what you want. Pay only for what you use.

A new alternative to introductory texts that can cost into three figures and provide information that is extraneous or outdated, *Launch!* offers a basic text at no cost to students. Instead, we generate revenue through individually priced materials such as discretionary hard copies of the text (for those of you who still like to mark up your book the old-fashioned way), study guides, podcasts and streaming interviews (à la iTunes), user-generated content, advertising sales, and corporate sponsorships.

Learn about Advertising by Learning about Advertisers (Real Ones)

There's something else that's really unique and cool about *Launch!* Welcome to the first advertising textbook written in partnership with a real-life advertising agency. It's fine to talk about ad campaigns from the past, but we'd rather hear about one from the horse's mouth—while it's still happening. We're going to teach you about the ad biz the way you'll learn it if you choose to make it your career (and we hope you do). None of that shiny, happy, "talking heads" stuff; we're going to take the gloves off and show you how a campaign works (and sometimes doesn't) from the vantage point of the people who have to do it every day. Prepare to *Launch!*

1.2 Meet Our Agency Partner: SS+K

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After studying this section, students should be able to do the following:

1. Characterize the Shepardson, Stern and Kaminsky (SS+K) organization, a creatively-driven strategic communications firm, and how it works to secure clients.

Get to know Shepardson, Stern and Kaminsky (SS+K) as it works on a campaign for msnbc.com, a media brand in search of an identity. SS+K opened its doors in 1993 and now has offices in New York, Boston, and Los Angeles. With over \$70 million in billings, SS+K is an independent agency owned by its partners, with a minority ownership by Creative Artists Agency (CAA)—perhaps the most powerful talent and literary agency in the world. CAA also owns the Intelligence Group, a market research and trend forecasting company.

Figure 1.3

CREATIVE
SOCIAL
ENGAGEMENT

WHAT WE DO
WHAT WE'VE DONE
PARTNERS
CONTACT US

We don't easily fit in a box, but if you're trying to categorize SS+K, we could be described as a marketing + communications agency specializing in creative social engagement.

Seventeen years ago, SS+K was founded to provide great work for great clients and causes by defying the boundaries of communication at every turn. That philosophy has come to life through dozens of engagement channels over the years, from the world's first interactive cinema game to a bank blog on responsible finance. From a yellow wristband that became a worldwide phenomenon to a digital grassroots program to eradicate texting while driving.

We create movement and Movements.

We're helping big iconic brands like GE, GM, Kraft, Allstate and Citi use digital and social engagement channels to launch products, initiatives and image campaigns. We've helped smaller, iconoclastic brands

SS+K's Web site is an immersive introduction to the history and offerings of the agency. You can find it at ssk.com.

For this text, we interview the agency partners, the creative director, the account people, the creative team (copywriter and art director), the public relations experts, the account planners and research specialists, and the digital professionals who took the msnbc.com campaign from pitch to completion. And, a member of our author team knows this agency up close and personal: Amit Nizan was the account manager at SS+K who lived and breathed the msnbc.com campaign. A 2003 graduate of the renowned undergraduate advertising program at the University of Florida, Amit will help us take you through the planning and execution of this campaign as a young, dynamic advertising professional actually experienced it. Not too long ago she was a student just like you, so she feels your pain!

Through their words and documents you will follow, step by step, the thirteen-month process of bringing SS+K's campaign vision of "A Fuller Spectrum of News" to light. To allow us to bring you the inside story on how the agency created the msnbc.com campaign, msnbc.com and SS+K granted FWK full access to its creative work, internal processes, and employees. The result is a resource that offers new ways to teach and talk about the real world of advertising with course content that is affordable, accessible, timely, and relevant. Welcome to advertising education on steroids.

OK, So Who Is SS+K?

SS+K was founded in 1993 by three former political consultants—Rob Shepardson, Lenny Stern, and Mark Kaminsky—and a famous copywriter, David McCall. To this day, the agency is a mash-up of those roots in politics and creativity, bolstered by a dose of entertainment marketing via its partnership with CAA and the staff's passion to learn and apply the latest technology. SS+K has become a haven for talented refugees from every corner of the communications world.

SS+K offers a full array of services to its clients, including advertising, marketing, design, public relations, public affairs, and research. Although many ad agencies, PR firms, and marketing consultancies endorsed integrated strategies over the last decade, SS+K believes that most agencies have built-in biases toward one type of solution. They tend to treat "integration" as an item on a check-off list. Ad agencies think in terms of ads. PR shops generate PR ideas. And so on...but not SS+K. For them, it is about delivering *the right message at the right time to the right audience with the right medium*. They call their approach to these types of media-neutral ideas **Asymmetric Communications**¹. Their perspective encourages the agency to "think outside the box" by employing a mix of traditional and new media (like urban games) to engage the audience in surprising ways and uncover opportunities to connect with them.

1. SS+K's trademarked technique of mapping their client's issue, brand, competition, and target audience to develop a big idea that will drive their marketing and communications.

This perspective is a consumer-centric approach the agency uses to find unique and surprising ways for clients to connect with and engage their target audiences. For example, instead of using traditional methods and messaging to increase awareness of Qwest Wireless among high school students, Qwest worked with SS+K to design an urban game called ConQwest that involved teams of students, newly created semacodes for use on cell phones, and giant inflatable game pieces. Semacode is a trade name for machine-readable two-dimensional black and white symbols that act as “barcode URLs.”

Figure 1.4 View of the Brooklyn Bridge from SS+K's New York Office

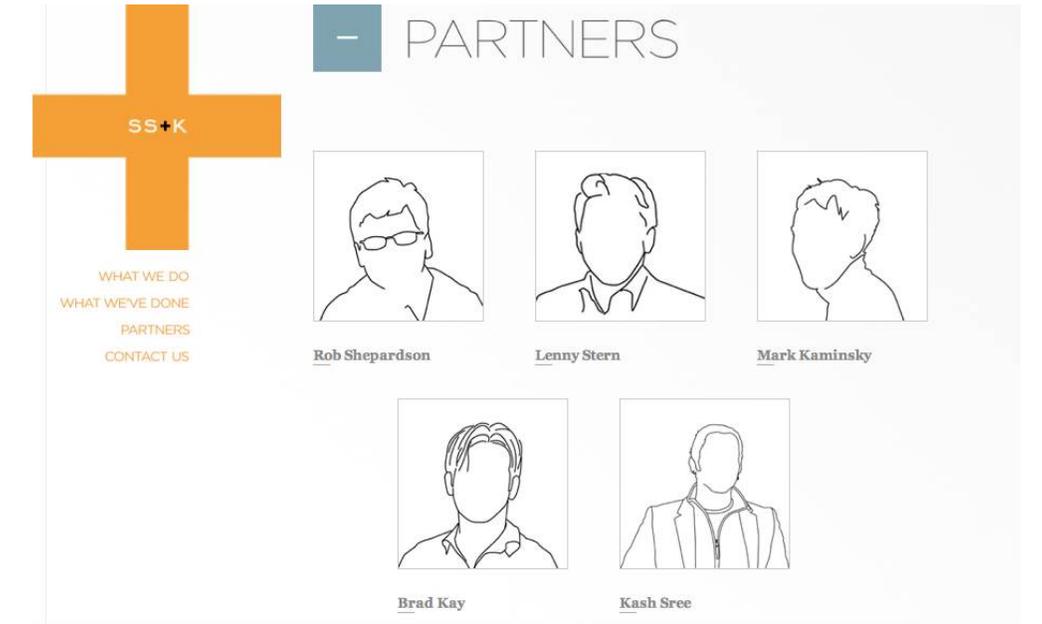


True to their political roots, the agency consulted with the Obama presidential campaign on driving more interest and participation among young voters. Since its inception, SS+K has maintained a high-profile nonprofit business, including work with UNICEF, Share Our Strength, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Lance Armstrong Foundation’s “LIVESTRONG” campaign.

The agency understands how to work with short lead times and mine for deep consumer insights that animate its work. It’s a combination that has made SS+K increasingly popular with a growing roster of clients, including Delta Airlines, Credo Mobile, Polo Ralph Lauren, AutoMart—and our client for this book, msnbc.com.

After fifteen years in business, all three founding partners—Rob Shephardson, Lenny Stern, and Mark Kaminsky—are still active in the firm, and they’ve added other key partners such as Executive Creative Director Marty Cooke to continue to provide fresh ideas and leadership.

Figure 1.5 *The Partners of SS+K*



Our SS+K Odyssey

Here's how we got started: once SS+K agreed to participate in this unique partnership, it was time for us to become familiar with the campaign. First, our intrepid author Lisa Duke Cornell reaches out to Russell Stevens, a partner at SS+K.

Figure 1.6

From: Lisa Duke [mailto:lduke@jou.ufl.edu]
Sent: Thursday, June 28, 2007 2:15 PM
To: Russell Stevens
Subject: Upcoming interview

Dear Russell,

Greetings! I thought you might like a little background on me before we meet for your interview July 9/10. Before becoming an academic, I worked in advertising and still find the business fascinating. You can find me at

<http://www.jou.ufl.edu/faculty/facultydetail.asp?id=lduke>. I look forward to talking with you about your career and your contributions to the msnbc.com campaign. Our interview will be videotaped and edited for use with a college advertising textbook. James Guardino is the director/producer who will be in charge of the taping. You may remember him from some work he did for SS+K that can be found here: <http://arguspictures.com/reel.html>.

You don't need to prepare for our interview. Our talk will be informal and I won't ask anything you need to look up or think too hard about. This should be an enjoyable experience, not a challenging one. To maximize your ease and add interest for the students, we would like to record the interview in your office.

Can't wait to return to NY and immerse myself in the SS+K culture. If I can answer any questions before we meet, please let me know.

Best regards,

Lisa Duke Cornell, Ph.D.

Advertising Department

University of Florida

Follow the e-mail trail.

Dr. Duke Cornell flew up from Gainesville (where she teaches advertising at the University of Florida) and came in to meet the whole SS+K crew, teach them a little about **Unnamed Publisher**, and learn a lot about SS+K. Throughout the text, you will find links to the interviews Dr. Duke Cornell conducted with the team based in New York. In addition, she interviewed key team members from the Los Angeles and Boston offices.

Amit Nizan joined the author team in the spring of 2008. Drawing on personal knowledge of the agency and the msnbc.com account, Ms. Nizan immersed herself in the interviews and information the team provided to Dr. Duke Cornell.

Launch! unfolds chapter by chapter across a timeline for msnbc.com's first branding campaign. Before we get into that, let's meet the full cast of characters who worked on the msnbc.com account with Ms. Nizan.

Figure 1.7

NEW YORK	LOS ANGELES	BOSTON
Marty Cooke Chief Creative Officer Partner	Joe Kessler Partner	Russell Stevens Partner
Matt Ferrin Creative	Ronit Mevorach Marketing	
Sam Mazur Creative	Melinda Moore Marketing	
Amit Nizan Advertising		
Katie O'Kane Public Relations		
John Richardson Asymmetric Intelligence Unit		
Michelle Rowley Asymmetric Intelligence Unit		
Danielle Tracy Public Relations		

Meet the core SS+K Team assigned to the msnbc.com account.

Additional SS+K employees worked on aspects of the msnbc.com account, including Jeannie O’Toole (Head of Print Production), John Kirkwood (Web and Video Production), Tim Player (Studio Manager), Kelly Kraft (Project Manager), Amy Gaiser (PR), Janetti Chon (PR), Aaron Taylor-Waldman (Studio Designer), Alice Ann Wilson (Head of Design), Natalie Cho (Designer), Sonya Fridman (Designer), Joe Sayaman (Copywriter), and Rochelle Ardsher (Project Manager).

As you can see, it takes a village to work on an account. Each of the people beyond the core team contributed their respective expertise to the production and execution of the first-ever msnbc.com branding campaign.

How SS+K Works

How is an ad agency *not* an ad agency? SS+K does not consider itself an advertising agency, but instead a creatively-driven strategic communications firm that solves problems through a variety of innovative techniques—including but not limited to

traditional advertising approaches. You're going to see throughout this book that SS+K is not alone in this regard—the advertising industry seems to change its stripes almost daily as new technologies and trends evolve!

As a remnant from SS+K's founders' days as political consultants the agency uses an **integrated model**². SS+K is **media-agnostic**³; this means it doesn't care what medium or discipline it uses to solve a client's problem as long as the solution delivers the right message at the right time to the right audience with the right medium.

Video Spotlight

Working Together

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Marty Cooke explains how different disciplines mesh at SS+K.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Welcome to a new model of textbook learning. This book is different from others in two really important ways:

- It's the first open source, professionally authored advertising/marketing textbook *ever*.
- It's the first advertising textbook written in partnership with a real-life advertising agency.

The SS+K agency is going to help us learn how to do advertising by actually doing advertising. Follow along with us as we chronicle its efforts to win the important msnbc.com account and then deliver on its strategy to make this media brand the source of news for the customers the site hopes to reach.

2. A full array of services offered to clients including advertising, marketing, design, public relations, public affairs, and research.

3. Willingness to use any medium or discipline to solve a client's problem as long as the solution delivers the right message at the right time to the right audience with the right medium.

EXERCISES

- a. List four facts that characterize the Shepardson, Stern and Kaminsky (SS+K) communications organization. Be specific.
- b. SS+K uses a distinctive trademarked approach for engaging clients and audiences in the advertising and communication process. Briefly describe SS+K's asymmetric approach to formulating communications and ideas.
- c. Discuss the integrated model of communication presented in this chapter section. Why does SS+K describe itself as being “media-agnostic” in its approach to communication?

1.3 The Pitch: Win the Account

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After studying this section, students should be able to do the following:

1. Understand the process by which an agency makes a pitch for a client's business by responding to a Request for Proposal.

How does the client decide which agencies to work with? It all starts with the **pitch**⁴, where the client invites an agency to present itself with the hope of winning the account. Once a client decides on a list of agencies to pitch their business, it may send these agencies a **request for proposal (RFP)**⁵. In an RFP, the client lays out basic information about its business and requirements for the job, along with a list of questions that will help the client determine how the agencies work and if they are suited to the task at hand.

In some cases, agencies may approach clients they feel would be a good match for their talents or would add depth or luster to their roster. Alternatively, when agencies are well known for a particular campaign or approach, clients will seek them out. However, just as when an individual is searching for work, word of mouth and personal relationships play an important role in the process. It's not just what you know, it's *who* you know.

Why the Pitch Is Such a Big Deal

The client's stake in agency pitches is high: management's jobs, the brand's future, and millions of dollars may ride on the campaigns the winning agency creates. For example, in 2007, despite having spent over \$900 million on marketing that year, Microsoft was not performing well against competitors such as Google and Apple. Identifying a key need to boost market share, the software giant embarked on a search for a new agency to enhance its brand image. By February of 2008, Microsoft had narrowed its search to two agencies; it then chose Crispin Porter + Bogusky for a new \$200–300 million “consumer blitz.” Rupal Parekh and Alice Z. Cuneo, “Microsoft Narrows to Crispin, Fallon,” *Advertising Age*, December 21, 2007, http://adage.com/agencynews/article?article_id=122776 (accessed July 16, 2008).

Just as the client invests large sums in the advertising campaign, the *costs* for agencies also are enormous, whether or not they win the business. In order to pitch

4. Process in which a client invites an agency to present itself with the hope of winning the account.

5. Communication to agencies in which the client lays out basic information about its business and requirements for the job.

effectively, the agency must allocate material resources and a tremendous number of team hours to meetings, research, and creation of the pitch. Sometimes, when the assignment, chemistry, or timing isn't right, it's just good business for the agency to walk away and leave millions of dollars in potential billings on the table.

That's what happened in 2006, when GSD&M (now known as GSD&M Idea City)'s nineteen-year relationship with its client Wal-Mart was challenged in a client-initiated review for their business. In one of the first review meetings the incumbent agency had with its longstanding client, GSD&M agency president Roy Spence played a clip from the movie *Dumb and Dumber*, in which the romantically challenged character played by Jim Carrey is told by the girl of his dreams the chances they will be together are one in a million. Carrey replies, "So...you're telling me there's a chance?" "Wal-Mart, Please Don't Leave Me," *Business Week*, October 9, 2006, http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06_41/b4004076.htm (accessed July 16, 2008).

Spence's attempt at lightheartedness hid a hard truth: there was no salvaging the relationship. GSD&M was unsuccessful in its pitch for the business, which included a poorly received report suggesting that Wal-Mart's declining reputation was at the root of its struggle for higher share prices. In an interesting turn of events, the agency that "won" the business, Draft FCB/Chicago, was dropped in a matter of months, and Wal-Mart once again invited GSD&M to pitch its business. This time, GSD&M swallowed hard and passed on a chance at the \$580 million assignment. Like the song goes, you gotta know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em.

Who Conducts the Pitch?

Marketers who work on the brand for the client are the ones who initiate the pitch process when they make the decision that they would like to search for an agency. The person within the organization who generally leads the search is the chief marketing officer or the vice president of marketing.

Some marketers choose to partner with a search consultancy whose job is to conduct the search. They use different methods to determine which agencies are the most appropriate fit for their client's pitch. They also work as liaisons between the client and the competing agencies to handle questions and logistics and to structure the pitch.

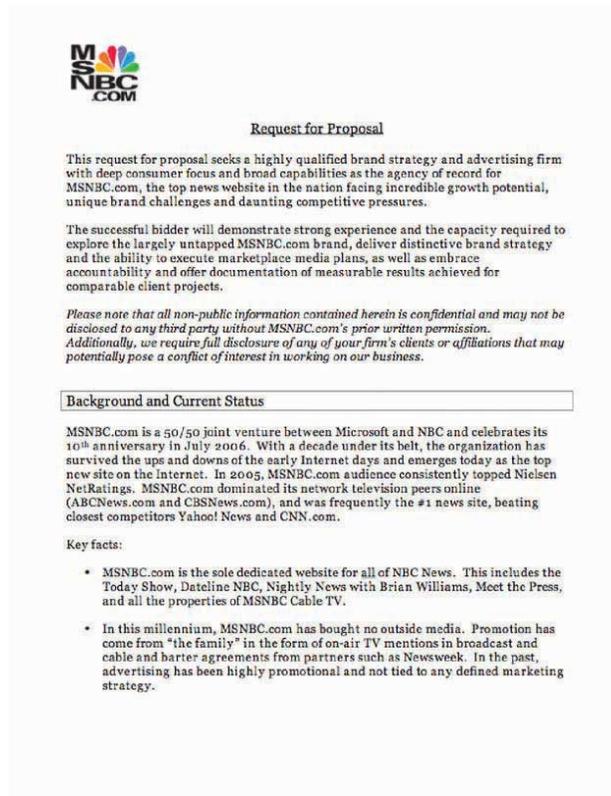
The Pitch Process

The pitch process can be short or long, depending on the information the client requests in order to make the decision. There is usually a series of steps, including but not limited to these:

- *Filing the RFP.* A client will send out the RFP, which will include some basic background information and preliminary statements of what the agency will be tasked to solve. The agency in turn will fill out the RFP with an introduction about themselves, as well as answers to any other questions the RFP asks.
- *Chemistry meeting.* Based on the responses to the RFP, the client will invite select agencies to meet in person. This meeting is generally called a **chemistry meeting**⁶, as it is designed to allow the companies to determine how well they like each other and if there is “chemistry” between them.
- *Initial strategic thinking.* Before agencies are given a specific creative assignment, there is a step to discuss the approach to the problem. This discussion can sometimes be part of the chemistry meeting but can also be a next step. The initial strategic thinking allows the agency to demonstrate the tools it keeps in its shed without putting them all to use until the client agrees to the strategic approach.
- *Creative presentation.* If an agency is given a creative assignment, this meeting is where it presents its recommendations to the client.

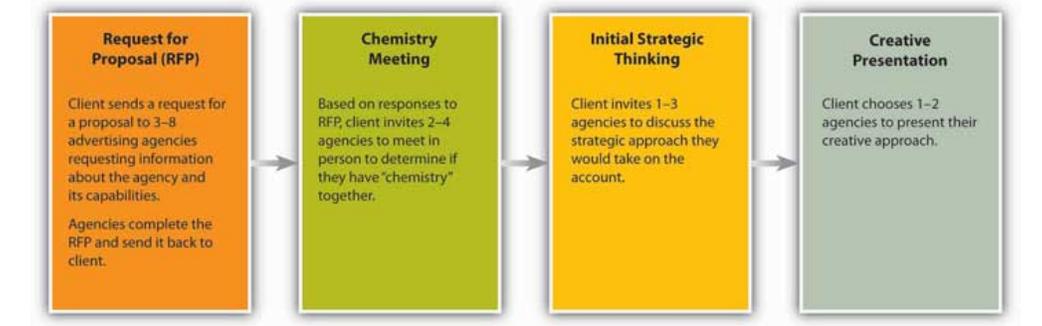
6. Based on the responses to the RFP, the client will invite select agencies to meet in person. This meeting is designed to allow the companies to determine how well they like each other and if there is “chemistry” between them.

Figure 1.8 *The msnbc.com RFP*



This is the first page of the RFP that msnbc.com sent to SS+K and other agencies.

Figure 1.9 *The Pitch Process*



How do agencies demonstrate to clients they are the right choice for the job? In a recent interview well-known account planner Jon Steel noted, "I have always believed that the best new business weapon in an agency's armory is the quality and effectiveness of the work it produces for its existing clients." However, another way

that agencies have demonstrated their creative ability is to present “spec” (speculative) creative work in pitches. **Spec work**⁷ is developed based on the agency’s best guess as to what might appeal to and work best for a client and presented in a form that is very close to “finished.”

Dig Deeper

The problem with spec work is that many in the industry feel it devalues skills such as design, art direction, and copywriting—as it forces agencies to give away for free (or at a substantially reduced cost) their most valuable product: their creativity. In the end, ownership of the ideas presented during pitches can be contested; clients who have had a number of agencies pitch creative work have been known to pick and choose among the best of all the pitching agencies’ ideas while awarding the business to just one. As a result, the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) created a Positioning Paper outlining best practice guidelines for the use of “spec” creative in the new business process: http://www.aaaa.org/eweb/upload/6712_att.pdf.

What’s your opinion? Should agencies be compensated for “spec” work even if they don’t win the account?

KEY TAKEAWAY

You can’t work on an account until you’re awarded the business. To win a client you have to present a pitch, usually along with several other agencies. Although the client doesn’t (or shouldn’t) expect to see a finished campaign, it will look for evidence that your team has put a lot of creative thought and effort into fleshing out its vision of what the advertising will look like. Preparing a pitch can be an expensive, grueling, and nail-biting experience, so an agency shouldn’t throw its hat into the ring unless it’s willing to make a commitment to go all out in order to win the business.

7. Preliminary ideas based on the agency’s best guess as to what might appeal to and work best for a client and presented in a form that is very close to “finished.”

EXERCISES

- a. Define the terms “pitch” and “request for proposal (RFP).” According to material found in this chapter section, why is the pitch such a big deal?
- b. List and describe the four-step pitch process that SS+K must go through to win the msnbc.com account.
- c. How does an agency such as SS+K demonstrate to clients that it is the right choice for a communications job? Be specific in your discussion.

1.4 Let's Meet the Potential Client

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After studying this section, students should be able to do the following:

1. Discuss the background and primary employees (characters) of msnbc.com, a well-known media brand in search of its identity.

Established in 1996 as a joint venture between Microsoft and the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), ten years later msnbc.com finds itself in an increasingly crowded field of news providers and hopes to add new users to its twenty-five million unique visitors a month. As msnbc.com's VP of marketing, Catherine Captain, says, "I am particularly concerned about distinguishing ourselves in a market where every new site is starting to look a lot alike."

It is important to understand that the client is msnbc.com the Web site and *not* MSNBC the cable channel. Although the Web site msnbc.com and the cable channel MSNBC were launched together in 1996, they have always maintained separate corporate structures and news operations. NBC and Microsoft remain fifty-fifty partners in msnbc.com, but Microsoft has reduced its stake in the television network to 18 percent. And msnbc.com is editorially and financially separate from MSN, the portal site and online service operated by Microsoft, although it acts as that site's primary news provider.

In addition to original content from its staff, which is based out of the newsroom in Redmond, Washington, msnbc.com is the news Web site for the NBC News family. It also features content from the cable television news channel MSNBC, NBC shows such as *Today*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *Dateline NBC*, and partners such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. In addition, msnbc.com made its first acquisition in late 2007 when it bought Newsvine, a Web site with community-driven news stories and opinions.

In its history as a company, msnbc.com never pursued or launched a branding campaign until Ms. Captain arrived just shy of the site's tenth anniversary. In her quest for the right agency, Ms. Captain sent RFPs "to a whole slew of potential agencies."

SS+K's Pitch to Win the msnbc.com Account

Objective: Win the msnbc.com account!

I knew that SS+K was the perfect agency for her, because we come from the same philosophy.

- Danielle Tracy, SS+K vice president

Video Spotlight

Michelle Rowley and Russell Stevens

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Russell describes the response from the SS+K perspective and how they approached the RFP from msnbc.com.

Victory! SS+K Lands the msnbc.com Account

You can guess the outcome: Catherine Captain chose SS+K to reintroduce msnbc.com to the world. Her goal was to maximize the impact of her modest \$7 million marketing budget. Instead of choosing an interactive agency, which she said would “predetermine her plan,” Captain preferred the “media-agnostic” approach of SS+K. And so, in March of 2006, a decade-old msnbc.com announced it would soon launch its first branding campaign.

The idea of integrated marketing communications has been around for a long time. But the independently held SS+K embraced the concept in a way that only people from a disparate number of camps could: there are no well-populated traditional territories in the agency. Instead, it is home for a multidisciplinary cast of communication experts as well as a collection of “formers”—former actors, scientists, journalists—galvanized by a combined passion for strategic innovation and, as Captain observes, challenging the status quo. There is no allegiance to method or medium; advertising doesn't get preferential treatment over public relations or other buzz boosters.

Video Spotlight

Catherine Captain

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Catherine describes what made SS+K the right fit, and the importance of understanding the consumer.

KEY TAKEAWAY

SS+K's team developed its pitch by doing its homework about the types of people who visit Web sites to get their information. The agency also wasn't afraid to think creatively about using a variety of media to capture their interest. As a result of this effort the agency won the msnbc.com account. Now the work *really* starts.

EXERCISE

What were the key contributing factors that allowed SS+K to win the msnbc.com account? Be sure to comment on the roles played by Joe Kessler, Danielle Tracy, and Catherine Captain.

1.5 Exercises

TIE IT ALL TOGETHER

Now that you have read this chapter, you should be able to understand how a real advertising agency pitches a real client:

- You understand that Unnamed Publisher is an innovative, open source publishing company that has produced *Launch! Advertising and Promotion in Real Time*.
- You have been introduced to Shephardson, Stern and Kaminsky (SS+K), a creatively-driven strategic communication firm, and their future client msnbc.com, a well-known media brand in search of an identity.
- You are able to identify SS+K's distinctive communications approach called Asymmetric Communications.
- You are able to recognize the pitch process and the resulting request for proposal (RFP) SS+K used.
- You can recall that the objective of the SS+K pitch was to win the msnbc.com account.

USE WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

1. As you have read in the chapter, SS+K is a multifaceted organization that specializes in helping clients with their unique communication problems. Review the listing of SS+K personnel. Once you have completed this review, link to the SS+K Web site <http://www.ssk.com> for more information on the company.

Agency Statement: “With offices in New York, Boston, and Los Angeles, SS+K has become a magnet for refugees and misfits from the most potent pillars of American society: politics, creative, entertainment, and technology. We believe that when smart, talented people from different backgrounds sit down to solve a problem, the solutions are bigger, more unpredictable and more effective. We believe it is more important to understand your business issues, delve into consumer insights and work with you to find the best solution for the brand regardless of channel. At SS+K, we don’t care what media or discipline we use to solve a client’s problem; it’s about delivering the right message at the right time in the right medium.” “Shepardson Stern + Kaminsky (SS+K),” *O’Dwyer’s Database of PR Firms*, http://www.odwyerpr.com/pr_firms_database/prfirm_detail.htm?prid=d7df07ef171a403c34e195e0ef90e0c2 (accessed February 10, 2009).

Using the SS+K Web site (or other search engines), review the agency’s past work. Carefully *examine one* of the following campaigns that SS+K has created: the Lance Armstrong Foundation, Delta Airlines, Qwest Communications, UNICEF, or the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Based on your review, comment on how SS+K seems to have applied its Asymmetric Communications model to the selected client’s communication problems. Try, if possible, to pinpoint the **Asymmetric Idea**⁸ SS+K developed that seems to be the focal point of communications. What do you think of SS+K’s approach for the selected client?

2. SS+K has made a pitch to secure the communications business of msnbc.com. Beyond material supplied in the chapter, what do you really know about proposed client msnbc.com? Visit <http://www.msnbc.com> to gain additional insight.

8. SS+K’s method of engaging the audience in surprising ways and uncovering opportunities to connect with them.

As you review the [msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com) Web site, list three [msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com) offerings that impress you. Additionally, cite any features that either don't impress you or are missing from the Web site. Once you have completed this task, visit rival news service CNN at <http://www.cnn.com>. Again, list three services that impress you and cite any features that either don't impress you or are missing from the CNN Web site. As you make your evaluations, remember to review only the Web sites of the two organizations and not their televised news broadcasts. How does [msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com) stack up against its rival? How could SS+K use your evaluation to improve the [msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com) Web site? Be specific in your comments. As we go forward in our discussion of SS+K's communication and advertising strategy for [msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com), see how many of your suggestions are recognized and addressed.

DIGITAL NATIVES

Almost all teens have difficulties with acne. Acne is not only a health issue but a social one as well. If you ever had difficulties with acne, what would you have given to rid yourself of those unsightly blemishes? To examine a new solution to this age-old problem, visit the Zeno Web site at <http://www.myzeno.com>.

Zeno is, according to its Web site, “the new secret weapon in the war against pimples.” Consider the following facts as you explore how Zeno works. The Zeno device looks like a cell-phone. It is a hand-held battery-operated device that is designed with a tip that heats to a preset temperature. Once the tip is heated properly and applied to the skin, the blemish disappears in a relatively short time. Much of the procedure is customized to the user and his or her skin type. The level of heat does not cause skin damage.

After exploring the Zeno Web site and learning about the application procedure and facts about the product, develop a brief “pitch” to present to the Zeno organization. The objective of your agency's pitch will be to demonstrate the best method for introducing the Zeno product to college-age students. Consider the basic message to be delivered to this target market and the best way to transmit that message to them. What do you perceive to be the keys in reaching the college-age students in your target market? Discuss your pitch idea and conclusions with your peers.

AD-VICE

1. Go to the Lance Armstrong Foundation's LIVESTRONG Web site (<http://www.livestrong.com>). Comment on any evidence you see that Asymmetric Communications have been used to reach potential donors and supporters. Be specific in your comments.
2. Using a search engine of your own choosing, examine sample requests for proposal (RFPs). During your search you will observe several RFP samples and possible downloads. Select a free download. Identify and describe the parts of the sample RFP you downloaded. Compare your sample download to **Figure 1.8 "The msnbc.com RFP"**. Comment on similarities and differences.
3. After reading the information provided in the chapter, take one of the following positions: (a) integrated marketing communications should be the objective of all advertising agencies or (b) time-tested, traditional media-specific campaigns have proven to be the best way to approach communication problems and opportunities. Write a short paper that summarizes your chosen position. Participate in a class discussion that evaluates the two positions.