

# How advertising agencies discuss AI in pitch conversations

Article

Agencies need to walk the line between highlighting their AI innovations and emphasizing their human creative work. Some **agencies** like VML are showing up to pitch meetings armed with an AI toolbox. Others, like Mischief USA, are letting AI take a backseat as they show off unique outputs.

For big agencies, AI is becoming table stakes for new and existing clients, said JJ Schmuckler, chief growth officer at VML. Clients aren't sure how to engage with AI, but they're interested in using the tech. Even clients from highly regulated industries like healthcare are trying to be proactive on how they can leverage AI. Still, it's not an "overtly said expectation," Schmuckler said.

AI will be involved in the pitching process in the future, Schmuckler says. He predicts brands will expect agencies like VML to demonstrate how their AI tools can be used for media planning, project management, operations, and other workflow processes.

For now, brands are looking for two AI outputs from big agencies:

- **Brand stewardship:** Making sure creative adheres to brand guidelines and leveraging AI to ensure the correct style and tone.
- **Scale and efficiency:** Creating personalized communications and testing creative like headlines and subject lines.

Brands are not requesting AI be used to create campaigns, said Schmuckler. "That is a step too far for everybody, including our clients," he said. There's also no demand for AI as it relates to anything involving liability, including moderation, compliance, and legal issues.

"I don't think clients will ever ask for the core, the soul of their brand platform to be bespoke created by AI," Schmuckler said.

That emphasis on soul in branding is why smaller creative agency Mischief USA is not hearing clients ask about AI. "I think there's going to be a premium placed on human creativity," to stand out from AI outcomes, said Kevin Mulroy, executive creative director at Mischief USA.

This does not mean Mischief USA is opposed to AI. Teams create rough comps and storyboards to help clients visualize ideas, rather than slogging through Google searches for the perfect images.

"The tech itself should fade into the background in favor of the idea or the experience," said Mulroy. "It certainly won't be AI itself that is the experience."

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