



## Five key things to remember when pitching for work

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With 30 years as an architect and now managing director of London developer Dukelease, *Paul Cook* has seen both sides of the pitch process. Here he draws on that expertise and shares five key tips on winning work

### 1) Understand the client

The outward expression of enthusiasm is a necessary part of the creative process – after all, we're not talking about accountancy here. Most developer clients thrive on optimism. On the other hand, the 'licence to enthuse' won't apply in all circumstances. Fund managers prefer to see a safe pair of hands and will only relax their thresholds once they are convinced your analytical abilities match your zeal.

Building a relationship with a potential client is crucial, as is understanding their role within the business, who they report to, and key pressures and interests. This will help guide conversations and ensure you are on the same wavelength. Finding out as much as possible about the project – if indeed there is one – ahead of making a presentation is also vital.

### 2) Don't be precious – collaborate and champion

There is a fine balance between having ownership of your design and willingly sharing it with the client. It should not be seen as wrong for the developer to end up claiming a piece of the design action – designing for property development is a team effort in any case. You need to be relaxed about promoting co-ownership of the design narrative early on in the process.

While developers shouldn't employ an architect just to tell them what to do, at the same time the architect must not come to the pitching table unwilling to collaborate or to have an open dialogue with the client. Architects need to be assertive and take the lead consultant role on a project, but nobody appreciates defensiveness, and the client certainly doesn't want to be told what to do.

Handle this well and the developer will then become the champion for your design when others in the development process need to be convinced.

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### **3) Don't come to the table with something that's too abstract**

Identify the difference between concept and demonstrable delivery. Constraints are there to be pushed against, but there won't be any mileage in playing the design hero when budgets and programmes come under pressure. Although we're not looking for a finished product at the pitching stage, there is a fine line between a concept that's too finished and one that is too abstract.

Engaging a team with the ability to move intellectually between broad-based concepts and concrete proposals at the required moment is a basic prerequisite. Property development is about enhancing communities and ultimately making a profit, not building monuments.

#### **4) Do not be technocratic**

Architects can be too process-driven, which can result in a timid approach and a lack of boldness. Creativity needs to be on show early on so you engage the client and stand out from the competition. Come ready to present your solutions and bring forward the design development with your own flair, but think about the parameters of a project and not just about making a statement.

#### **5) Do not lose your personality**

When pitching to a boardroom of property and finance people it's important to present a professional exterior – remove the bicycle clips – but a little personality helps clients remember you and link you to your design.

Don't be a 'yes man' for the sake of it. Stand up to unreasonable demands and admit when you do not know the answer to something. Lead the boardroom and be in charge of the presentation, but don't lose your personality for the sake of the suits.

Being able to put yourself in both the shoes of an architect and those of a developer can give you the perspective necessary to draw out the creativity of a brief and deliver iconic projects that work on their designed functions. Avoiding the above mistakes and embracing the opportunities can save you time and effort further into the process, as issues are flagged from the start and you build that positive client rapport that can only benefit a project through to completion.

📌 TAGS

PITCHING

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