

Keyword Creativity Episode Six

Making the Perfect Pitch

Story so far...

Bob Arden runs his own web design company. After discovering that he's about to become a father for the first time he's determined to improve the business, starting with the latest new business pitch, a website re-design. But the pitch is being run by Larry Mackay, an old buddy that he had fallen out with years ago, and the competitive agency is run by a once mutual friend, Carl Carter. Now Mike, his opinionated younger brother, has told him that Laura, his deputy at the agency, is probably working against him, helping Carl Carter win the pitch.

Bob followed Laura into Buck's, his local restaurant, to confront her about her deception and found her with Carl Carter. It ended in a fight with Carl Carter. Bob now realises that he should have trusted Laura all along. It's the day of the pitch, time to find out if he's a winner or a loser.



Last episode...

- Bob finally meets Larry Mackay again. Will Bob win the pitch?
- Can he heal the wounds in his relationship with Laura?
- Mike gives Bob some final tips on using keyword research data, including how to use it to help him market his own agency.

read on...

‘They’re finishing off in there. We’re on. Good luck, boss.’

Laura skipped back from the boardroom door and sat in her seat again. No one would ever have guessed that seconds ago she had her ear to the door, eavesdropping on Carl Carter’s presentation to Larry Mackay. We were on after Carl and had arrived after him, so I hadn’t seen him yet. My heart was like a caged animal, jumping around inside me.

The door opened and Carl Carter appeared with his deputy. He was in his late twenties, tall, dark and well-built. If I didn’t know better I might have thought he was acting as Carl’s bodyguard.

It was the same Carl Carter that I remembered from Friday night, except that he had a black eye. He must have known that we were sitting there but he didn’t look over to us, just walked towards the corridor. I stood up quickly and caught up with him.

‘Carl, I still think what you did with Laura was wrong, but I over-reacted on Friday. I’m sorry. May the best man win.’

I offered him my hand. He turned to me and I could see he was surprised by what I had said.

‘Well, maybe we both got a bit carried away. Thanks. Good luck, Bob.’

We shook hands and he smiled at me, and I saw the Carl Carter I had known when we were at Stanford together, always ready for a laugh and a beer. Then he was gone and I remembered that we had a pitch to win.

‘Right then, Laura, let’s go.’

‘There’s no room for subjectivity in web design. Every decision has to be driven by knowing what the customers needs and wants’

We marched into the boardroom together and there was Larry Mackay sitting at the boardroom table, the first time we had met for over ten years. His fair hair was thinning, but he was still handsome, tall, broad shouldered and with a Scandinavian look about him. He stood up and walked towards me, then shook my hand. I was shocked by how much he looked like his father, George. Part of it was that he was older and had that deep tan that people who work outdoors have, but it was also because he dressed in the same casual way that his father had, jeans and an old cotton shirt, more like a cowboy than a businessman.

He had a big broad smile. ‘My, my, if it isn’t Bob Arden, my old buddy.’

‘Good to see you Carl. It’s been a long time.’

‘Too long, Bob. Been a lot of water under the bridge since then. I did a lot of growing-up in that time.’

‘Good for you. I think I’ve still got a bit to do.’ I felt my bandaged hand.

‘Maybe, maybe. I heard that you and Carl had been putting a bit more into this pitch than I might have wanted, but I heard what you said out there. I was pleased to hear it. I want the best solution for my business and that means a fair pitch. Now, are you going to introduce me to your colleague or not?’

I introduced Laura and we set-up our presentation. I still didn't know if we'd win but I did know one thing, that it would be a fair contest. I had been wrong, so wrong. Larry had left the past where it belonged, in the past, and had moved on. Again, maybe I had been listening to what my brother had said too much.

The final pitch

'So, Larry, those are the website solutions that we believe could change the way the Whitewater Rafting Company does business on the web. Any questions?'

Larry looked at me, then Laura and smiled. For me, this was always the best and worst part of a pitch, when I felt that I'd given it my all and, hopefully, really believed in what we were trying to sell to the client. It was the worst part of the pitch as well because it was sometimes the moment when you realized that the client's head was in a different place, that he had his own preconceptions about the business, different to yours, and that you would never win this one.

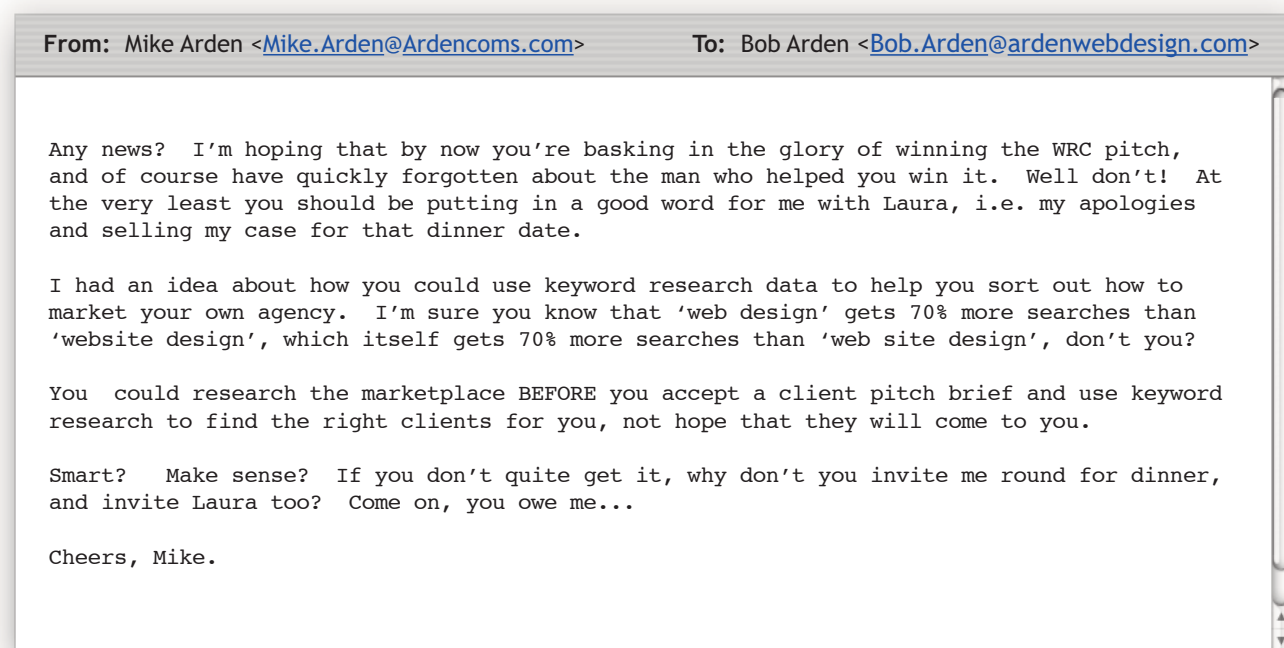
'You've done a pretty good job on the SEO recommendations, but your solutions for my website are different to every other solution that Carl presented. How do I know that what you've come up with is any better than his ideas? Why should I give you the business? Convince me, Bob.'

Normally, I would have told him about our belief in our creative solutions and the passion we had for his business, probably the same thing that Carl had said.

'Because there's no room for subjectivity in website design. Every decision has to be driven by knowing what the customers needs and wants, and that's what we done with your website, based on what your potential customers do when they go online. Let me start on the homepage, talk you through everything again, and tell you about the search engine data that drove each feature.'

I caught Laura's brief smile. She knew that I had all the answers.

One last e-mail from little brother



Mike would just have to wait, like everyone else, although I wondered how he would take the news of winning or losing. He'd helped a lot but I couldn't help but think of something Gore Vidal said about success. It was along the lines of 'every time I hear that a friend of mine has done well, a small part of me dies.' With your own blood it was even more complicated.

Laura and I were in Buck's again, on a Friday night. We were waiting for Pam to arrive. Laura had read Mike's e-mail at the same time as I had.

'So, what do think, Laura?'

'From what I can see of your brother he's cute.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, it's a bit difficult to see past that massive ego of his.'

'Very funny. I'll assume I should tell him not to book a table then?'

'I can't spend my whole life with members of the Arden family.'

I was relieved, as there'd been enough mess between Laura and I without romantic complications with Mike. It was two weeks since I'd come back from vacation. It felt like two years, thanks to the pitch. Looking back on the last two weeks I realised that I'd let myself get carried away by my determination to change things before my child was born. It was a good thing to have a plan but that plan had to make space for the rest of your life, especially friends, family and colleagues. I also needed to listen to myself more often, not to listen to others all the time. If I'd done that before I might not have convinced myself that Larry had been out to get me or that I couldn't trust Laura.

I saw the restaurant door opening and Pam walked in, looking as gorgeous as I had ever seen her, my pregnant wife. I smiled and waved and she skipped over, filled with the thrills of the start of the weekend. On cue, Aldo came to the table with champagne in an ice cooler and three glasses.

Pam kissed me and pointed at the champagne. 'What's this for?'

'I've got a bit of news. I've been a bit naughty and kept it from Laura until you arrived. Sorry.' I stopped for a moment, enjoying the looks of excited anticipation on their faces. 'Larry Mackay called an hour ago. We've won the business.'

It was a mass of shrieks, hugs and kisses and for the third time in the last two weeks everyone in Buck's was looking over at my table. I didn't know which tasted better, the champagne or the sweet taste of success.

The End