

The perils of pitching and speed dating

By [Nick Warren](#), issued by [Mann Made](#)

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Half the job of a creative director is quite literally spotting the creative idea and giving it direction.



I found that today when I went into a pitch brainstorm with low expectations. I set up the parameters for the discussion - "keep it positive and don't bleat about the negatives" - and pretty soon I found myself bowled over and rolled around by wave after wave of cool, credible creative ideas that simply didn't exist in the world before we got together.

That's the miracle of the creative process - the accidental collision of dangerous desire and deliberate design if you like. It's a constant and delightful surprise to me and one of the reasons I

love my job.

Too often I find myself going into a brainstorm with a heavy heart expecting to face a row of fearful expressions all looking to me for the ultimate answer to an evasive question that I haven't even framed properly for myself - that's what I like least about my job.

Today I was reminded that there really is great benefit in embracing this love/hate dynamic by spending the first half hour or so of a brainstorm in pouring over the brief. Doing what my old lecturer would call a 'literary analysis of the text'. When you pick a brief apart into a series of standalone sentences, and you debate the possible meaning - or at least possible intention - of each sentence or phrase then you can stimulate the kind of engaged conversation and interpretive exploration that can lead to flashes of mutual excitement ... or at least tacit agreement.

Once you've created this 'group language' - this common understanding of what this particular team of inspired and insightful individuals has arrived at on this particular day, in this particular agency, in respect of this particular brief, then you have the very beginning of what is effectively you and your company's unique answer to what is a generic pitch brief that is common to all agencies.

Everything before this point of realisation and common language is generic, and everything that comes after this - from remotely interested fellow travellers, corridor colleagues, or competitor teams is irrelevant. They just weren't there in that room with that team when that magic happened, and now anything they have to add or caution or otherwise 'contribute' is the beginning of another brainstorm with another team at another time and place in the vast universe of possible responses to that generic request for proposal.

Which is exactly why two brainstorms by two teams - or even the same team on a different day - on the same brief will yield different proposals.

This is all well and good for a creative team but how does it relate to the world of a marketer on the receiving end of these brainstorms? Here's how.

For a marketer, when he or she receives and reacts to a creative proposal. They are in that room at that time responding viscerally and emotionally and intellectually to a pitch proposal and they will feel strongly about one way or another - hopefully - and more than once in a given day if more than one agency is presenting.

At these times, on these days - a marketer with decision-making power or influence will feel like a supermodel on a speed dating extravaganza. Every agency wants you to love them and want to see them again. And if there is more than one competent, or attractive, or even vaguely presentable presentation then you are going to feel overwhelmed.

This is when you are going to feel tempted do the worst thing possible - you are going to want to step outside of that room, move away from that group dynamic, and you are going to want to consult with your corridor colleagues - or some other equally invested but totally disinterested parties.

Cue the music of doom.

Because almost every time you try to resell the proposals of your pitching agencies you will slaughter the delicate language of their unique propositions. You will sound clumsy and unconvincing and your colleague will almost inevitably tell you that he or she really liked a bit of all of them and cant you make a compromise, or ... insert horror movie sound effect ... get all the competing agencies to work together doing just the bits that your corridor colleague liked the most - or disliked the least?

Going back to the speed-dating analogy that's like asking the hot guy to bring his nerdy but funny friend on the next date - it will end in frustration.

So, here's how it goes best. Go into that next pitch presentation with the same sense of trepidation that the creative director went into those formative brainstorm around your brief - expecting less than nothing. And when you fall in love with one, or even vaguely like the best of all those uniquely special ideas, then embrace it with both arms and take it home and introduce it to your colleagues and your bosses as a done deal with a reckless enthusiasm.

Why?

Because the fact is that most good agencies are as good as each other when it comes to development and implementation, and we can all benefit from a little faith and encouragement when we come to pitch, and the best of us can turn an exciting speed date into a rewarding long term relationship - if you have the courage to take the leap and give us the chance.

Call me.

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We are a brand experience agency, strategically oriented, technically inspired, logistically defined and creatively driven to produce world-class brand experiences that inform and inspire our Client audiences.

We're all about the seamless alignment of considered strategy, compelling creative and innovative technology applied in a manner that dramatically enhances the brand experience of all our projects.

These brand experiences would include: activations, launches, conferences, roadshows, internal communications.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Warren is the Creative Director of Mann Made Media.

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