

# Brief encounters

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

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You only realise how important a good brief is when you have to work on a bad one.



A good brief is a great place to start; a bad brief is no start at all.

A good brief has a clear set of communication objectives, based on a sound strategy, with realistic expectations, as well as supporting evidence that the audience can engage with and believe in.

Given the importance of the brief in determining the direction and the outcome of an experiential campaign or communication, you would expect that they would all be shining examples of concise clarity and stunning strategy.

Not so much.

A lot of briefs are vague rambling wish lists with confused objectives based on suspect assumptions, too little (or way too much) information, minimal audience insights, no strategy, and unrealistic expectations hindered by an unachievable budget.

There are clients that excel at writing good briefs. These briefs are a joy to work on because they contain the kind of insight and information that a great creative solution can be built upon.

The problem with bad briefs is that they can cause frustration. Firstly the agency can grapple with a doomed desire to delight the client; and then the client can be unmoved by the financially responsible proposal, or horrified by the creatively extravagant budget.

Not all briefs are created equal - some are much more difficult to create than others. This is why we at Mann Made Media like to work together with a client in the earliest stages when they are grappling with the brief for a difficult project.

In these 'briefing brainstorms' we examine assumptions, analyse objectives, characterise the audience, exercise the brand muscles, explore some creative, experiential design and logistical possibilities, and ultimately make the first - and often the most important - creative breakthroughs.

The result of these sessions is a Confirmation Brief - a document that clearly and concisely sets out the expectations that we have of each other in relation to the creative scope, the communication objectives and the defined logistics of the project.

But bad things can happen to even the best briefs.

A brief for an annual event where all the factors are familiar can breed a dangerous sense of creative contempt. At Mann

Made Media we have a device for avoiding this.

In every perennial brief - such as the annual conference, corporate getaway, gala dinner, awards evening, or office party - at least three major factors will be different and unique: the client message, the historical context, and the audience needs.

Because business is moving at such a pace there is no way that even the most stable company or brand, with even the longest-term goals, will have the same strategic message that it needs to communicate every year. Once you discover and develop the detail of this year's message then you have the first unique angle on this year's event.

Equally, the world moves on in a variety of wild and unexpected ways every year. The social movements, the cultural phenomena, the political highlights, and the global economy - all these factors conspire to offer a fresh and unique set of contexts around which to frame this year's theme.

Finally the audience may be ninety nine percent made up of the same people as last year - but again they have changed.

An audience of clients have reacted to their competitor landscape in a variety of ways. They have fresh perspectives and new insights on their business - and on your brand - that were unimagined last year. You can now match your content to that unique perspective.

An audience of employees have experienced the changes in your company first hand. They are aware of the broader social and competitor context in which your brand has prospered - or not. Your communication can reflect and reward their involvement.

If your audience is the public then they have been a part of moving the world, or they have been shaken by it. Again you can match your theme, your content, and your brand communication to their most relevant popular trend, or their most powerful brand-aligned need.

Creating a good brief is no easy task, but when it is done with real rigor, with mutual respect, in an open forum, without fear or prejudice, then it can be the first and most fundamental step in the overall creative process. Every time.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Warren is Creative Director at Mann Made Media.

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