

Pitching in a monstrous economic climate (Part I)



By [Matt Rowles](#)

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human.kind has just wrapped up a punishing two months of re-pitching on several of our long-term accounts. This was not expected. The truth is, we were blindsided. In retrospect though, we probably had it coming. If you've read my previous rants, you'll know what I'm getting at. Be that as it may, being the incumbent agency is a weird trip and I'm going to share it with you.

Before we get to the fight, let's weigh in. We're a medium-sized agency, constantly pushed to capacity in terms of workload. We've got limited resources, limited room for error and, with a handful of our legacy clients, limited clout. To give a historical perspective, I think a few of our older clients see us as more of a "churn agency". That's probably what we were when we started out - when our business was young and so was theirs. It's not a nice thing to see written on a page, but when I look around at the enthusiastic, inspired faces of the beautiful, creative people that I have the privilege of working with, I can honestly say we have evolved and today we're so much more than that.

The original underdog

What we are, however, in this fight that pitted us against nine of the country's top creative agencies, is the original underdog. And as any old movie will have taught you by now, you're a dick if you don't root for the underdog.

The folks arbitrating this process will tell you that I'm blowing things out of proportion and that we were only pitching against three agencies per brand. What they won't tell you is that there was a delightful sub-clause in the legal literature that states if they're impressed with a pitch on any of the three brands, they're entitled to mix and match agencies with brands as they see fit. So yeah, nine agencies... vs human.kind. Heavy odds? You bet.

I think when you consider the odds, we could have been forgiven for throwing in the towel. But we didn't. At times during the past two months it was like watching an '80s classic where the freaks and geeks turn the tables on the opposition and get all fired up to "give it one last shot". I swear to you there were nights in the office and weird time distortions that made me feel like we were actually living a cheesy training montage. This probably had a lot to do with the amount of liquor we consumed during the process, which was staggering but absolutely necessary (and no one got sloppy). Not to mention the lack of sleep. When we were breaking bread at 2300 on most evenings and encouraging each other keep on pushing until the jobs were done, that's when things were clearest. I guess that's what it's like when people are fighting for each other and their livelihoods. I know advertising has been labelled a whorish industry and that jumping from agency to agency is not just commonplace but encouraged. We're not that agency though. Most of us choose to work here because we like each other. We've been fighting for our jobs for sure, but even in this brutish economic climate, many of us have just been fighting to keep the family together.

Learning from adversity

When we got the news, it came fast and it came hard, and when the bomb dropped we were gutted. Gutted, but driven. There were and still are about 20 jobs on the line, some with rent to pay and some with mouths to feed, and we knew if we actually had a legitimate shot at retaining the business, we could make everything better for us and for the client. And that's why we chose to fight.

Did it work? No. We got nothing back. Not a sausage. Did we ever have a legitimate shot? I doubt it. The work was logical, strategically thought out and executed beautifully with both love and craftsmanship.

Has this been a colossal waste of time? No, I don't think so. Because what I can say is that our agency is forever changed, and that's a good thing. This story doesn't end here. We've learned a couple of things about ourselves during this process and because of this - as well as in spite of it - we're going to be that ex-girlfriend who looks super-hot a year after you break up with her and you sit at home wondering why you left her for the pushy jerk you're dating now.

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