

What's Changing on Your Commercial Floor

Media & Communications

You have seen this on your commercial floor

“Your advertisers’ procurement counterparts are showing up to annual briefs with AI that already benchmarked what a defensible CPM should be. Your rate is not being negotiated in your meeting. It is being set before your rep walks in.”

01 Why are we losing annual briefs we should be winning?

02 Why is our yield eroding deal by deal?

03 What happens when our best key account directors retire?

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Every commercial director at a mid-sized Nordic media company has had the same Monday morning. Three annual briefs closed last quarter. One held full rate. One closed after a make-good you were not planning to give. One went to a media owner you do not respect. Your best key account director mentioned retirement on Friday. Your branded-content backlog is full, but the proposals are landing slower than the advertiser wants. Your subscription trajectory is improving, but not fast enough to catch the advertising gap.

You have done this job for fifteen years. The pattern used to be simple. Carry the top advertiser relationships. Protect the rate card. Build the branded-content pipeline. Keep the commercial team motivated. Coach the young ones. The business was understandable. The annual cycle was predictable.

Something changed. Advertisers arrive at the annual brief with procurement running AI benchmarks. Your rate card is being argued against numbers your rep did not prepare for. Campaigns that used to close in a week now take a month because the creative concept needs three rounds. Your branded-content yield is holding on the top accounts and eroding on the middle. Your marketing leads are converting at a lower rate. Your best key account directors are five years from retirement and there is no plan for what happens to the advertiser relationships they own. And your CEO is asking why the commercial function cannot deliver the growth the board is asking for.

This is not a you problem. Your industry is shifting and your function is shifting at the same time. Most commercial directors are treating them as two. The ones who see them as one are going to own the next decade of Nordic media revenue.

This briefing covers what is happening in your industry, what it means for your commercial floor, and the three questions your leadership team should answer before the next board cycle.

Nordic media just lost the equation that ran advertising for forty years

For four decades, every tech wave gave your commercial team a new reason to charge premium rates for audience access. Colour print. Breakfast TV. Digital display. Programmatic. Streaming. Each wave added inventory categories and audience segments the advertiser could not reach elsewhere. The big Nordic media brands stayed the only route to the big Nordic advertiser. Rate cards held. Direct-sold stayed the anchor. Your business ran on that equation for a very long time.

AI does not behave the same way. The advertiser still needs the same audience, the same brand-safe environment, the same editorial halo. The category is unchanged. But the routine preparation work your team used to charge for is now generated by the advertiser's own AI at near-zero cost: pitch briefs, rate comparisons, category analysis, creative concepts. Under a rate-card logic that assumed your team produced that work, faster briefing with lower prep means less value attributed to you. Your industry is watching the premium on direct-sold erode in every annual cycle, and it is happening at the same time procurement teams bring their own AI benchmarks into the room.

Your advertisers' procurement counterparts are showing up to annual briefs with AI that already benchmarked what a defensible CPM should be. Your rate is not being negotiated in your meeting. It is being set before your rep walks in.

The media owners in your segment are not waiting. Group-level AI investments are running across Schibsted, Bonnier, Sanoma, and Amedia. The ones moving first on commercial intelligence are closing annual briefs faster, defending rate with data, and winning branded-content pitches against competitors who still hand-craft proposals. The advertiser-side shift is the other half. Brands in your top-100 now run their media planning through AI-assisted tools that generate shortlists before the buying team calls you. In most pitches, at least one media owner is already the advertiser's preferred pick. Your rep walks in to confirm, not to persuade. If your team was not in the advertiser's preparation phase, they are not in the final brief.

Your ad sales, subscription, and rev ops are feeling it every day

Your annual briefs. Your reps walk into the briefing meeting where the advertiser has already run their own shortlist. The ones who prepared arrive with the advertiser eighty percent decided in their favour. The ones who did not are starting from forty. Close rate on the first group is roughly double the second. The reps who prepare also hold the rate. The make-good conversation is lost before the CPM is ever quoted, not in the negotiation at year-end.

Your subscription and audience marketing. The playbook changed in a single year. Readers research in answer engines before they hit your paywall. Your conversion funnel is bleeding at the top because the brand-intent traffic your subscription team has counted on is routing through AI-generated summaries. The answer is not more campaigns. The leading Nordic publishers are shifting subscription marketing from pure acquisition to audience relationship. Original research the answer engines cite. Editorial voices present where readers research. Community around specific beats. Subscription becomes a relationship before it becomes a transaction.

Your rev ops and commercial data. The function that used to run CRM hygiene, inventory planning, and yield reporting is becoming the architecture of your entire commercial engine. The agents every key account director uses. The audience data flowing between direct-sold, programmatic, and subscription. The commercial intelligence that captures what your best people know. The metrics that prove the transformation to the CFO. All of it runs through rev ops. Most commercial directors still treat rev ops as reporting. The ones pulling ahead are positioning the rev ops leader as the architect who ties direct-sold, branded content, subscription, and partnerships into one system.

Your reps' week. Pitch preparation, rate-card benchmarking, campaign reporting, proposal boilerplate, CRM entry. Eight to twelve hours a week that used to be the cost of being a professional media seller. That work can now be done in thirty minutes when your team is set up for it. Your best reps are using the freed time to deepen advertiser relationships and pitch bigger branded-content concepts. Your middle reps are using it to do the same things they did before, which is now not enough.

Your best people. Your top three key account directors carry between twenty and forty percent of direct-sold. They built it on twenty years of advertiser relationships, agency politics, creative-concept pattern recognition, and yield judgment, never written down. When your best KAD leaves, the advertisers go to review. Two of your top three are over fifty-five. The retirement conversations are already happening. You know which ones.

The winners are already running one commercial motion

Your industry is compressing because AI takes preparation out of the advertiser's own workflow. Your function is compressing because your reps have free time they did not have before, and your advertisers show up armed. Same force, two altitudes. But there is a third thing happening that most commercial directors have not named yet, and it is the one that matters most.

Look at the media owners pulling ahead. Ad sales, subscription, and rev ops are running as one commercial motion, not three separate teams. Subscription's reader-engagement data is in the direct-sold pitch meeting. The rev ops leader is in the annual-brief strategy room. Ad sales reps feed back what the advertiser asked so the subscription team's next audience piece targets the real question. The data flows between the three functions. The tools are shared. The metrics are shared. Everyone is working the same audience relationship.

Most commercial directors are still running three teams with three plans. A pitch-prep copilot for the reps. A paywall optimisation project for subscription. A new dashboard for rev ops. Twelve months later nothing compounds, because the three plans never met.

Your competitors who get this will close annual briefs in three weeks that used to take eight. Their reps walk in with audience intelligence yours does not. Their subscription is the trusted relationship before the brief drops. Their rev ops has captured what the best key account directors know and made it available to every seller. Three things compounding into one. This is what the next eighteen months look like if you do not move.

You have eighteen to twenty-four months. The AI adoption debate is over. Your question now is whether you lead the commercial transformation yourself, or the CFO hires an agency consulting arm that will.

What most firms are doing. What the winners are doing instead.

Every commercial director has had the AI conversation by now. Most are making the same four decisions. A smaller group is making different ones.

THE DEFAULT PATH

Run ad sales, subscription, and rev ops as three teams

Three plans that never meet. A copilot for reps, a paywall project for subscription, a dashboard for rev ops.

Buy a pitch copilot and declare the AI strategy done

Every competitor has the same copilot within six months. The tool is the commodity.

Push subscription marketing for more top-funnel volume

More campaigns, more paywall tests, more dashboards. Conversion erodes because readers already chose a relationship.

Wait for your best key account directors to retire, hope the handover works

The advertisers they built decay twelve to eighteen months later.

THE WINNERS' PATH

Run one commercial motion across all three

Subscription data in the ad sales pitch. Rev ops in the annual-brief room. Shared audience view.

Build the agents your team actually uses

Tuned to your advertisers, your audience data, your branded-content history. Yours to keep.

Build audience authority where readers actually research

Original editorial cited by answer engines. Senior voices on the beats readers care about. The trusted read before the paywall.

Capture what they know now, while they are still there

Their judgment moves into a system every seller uses. Retirement becomes a zero-impact event.

Same technology. Same twelve months. Opposite outcomes. The difference is the commercial operator, not the AI.

Annual Briefs. Rate Card. Retirement.

Three questions every commercial director is tracking. None of them used to be the same question. They are now.

01 · ANNUAL BRIEFS

Why are we losing annual briefs we should be winning?

The brief went to a media owner you do not respect. They did not undercut you on CPM. They showed up better prepared. They had been in the advertiser's planning conversation earlier. Their reps walked in with audience intelligence your reps had to ask about. This is happening more often than a year ago and the trend is in one direction.

02 · RATE CARD

Why is our yield eroding deal by deal?

A third of the direct-sold this quarter closed after a make-good your rep was not authorised to plan. The advertiser said the CPM was too high. Procurement had benchmarks. Your rep had nothing structured to defend it with. One to four hundred basis points of direct-sold margin per account walks out of your firm every month. Not a training problem.

03 · RETIREMENT

What happens when our best key account directors retire?

Your top three key account directors carry a third of direct-sold between them. Twenty years of advertiser relationships. You have never found a way to pass what they know to the rest of the team. Two are over fifty-five. Once they leave, the advertisers go to review. There is now a way to capture what they know. The retirement conversations are already on your calendar.

What the media owners winning this play are actually doing

Four concrete moves any commercial director can start this quarter. Each touches one function. Pulled together, they fuse your commercial engine into one system.

1

Ad sales: get your reps into the advertiser's plan earlier, and better prepared

The rep who walks into the annual brief knowing the advertiser's category trends, last year's campaign performance, the buying team's creative preferences, and defensible CPM benchmarks closes at around sixty-five percent at full rate. The rep who walks in cold closes at twenty-five and gives up four points of CPM. Six hours of prep compresses to fifteen minutes once your team is set up. Your best reps already do this mentally. The rest needs the tool.

2

Subscription marketing: shift from acquisition volume to audience authority

Your conversion funnel is eroding because the playbook is ten years old. Readers research in answer engines, editorial newsletters, and peer communities, most of which your subscription team does not track. The winning play is building audience authority where readers are looking. Original journalism the answer engines cite. Senior editorial voices on the beats that matter. Your brand becomes the trusted read before the paywall decision.

3

Rev ops: move from reporting to architecture

The rev ops function that used to run yield reports and inventory dashboards is the new centre of gravity for your commercial engine. In the leading media owners, rev ops owns the agents every seller uses, the audience data flowing between direct-sold and subscription, the intelligence capturing what your best people know, and the metrics that prove the transformation to the CFO. Hardest move to hire for and the one that multiplies every other investment. Without it, the other three moves stay siloed.

4

Knowledge: capture what your best key account directors know, before they retire

Every top key account director carries twenty years of advertiser judgment. Agency politics, creative-concept pattern recognition, which pricing positions hold. It has always been biographical, which is why your ramp for new KADs is two years. AI now extracts that judgment from meeting notes, brief histories, post-campaign reviews, and correspondence, into a system every seller uses. Ramp compresses. When the retirement lands, the advertiser relationship holds.

The only firm that joins the commercial-floor conversation to the working tools

The commercial director in 2026 has four places to go for help. None of them can do what we do.

Ad-tech platform vendors sell yield dashboards and programmatic optimisation. They do not sit down with you and talk about what to do about advertiser relationships, branded-content yield, or senior-departure risk. They sell platforms.

The big consulting firms will write you a two-million-euro "Future of Advertising" deck. They cannot put a working annual-brief preparation tool in your rep's hand in three weeks because their cost structure requires them to bill analyst hours. You can have their deck or their tool. Not both.

Subscription and audience-data platform vendors sell eighteen-month implementations that install audience identity inside their system. Their business needs you dependent on their platform for audience data. That is not our business.

Agency-holding-group consulting arms will sell you a commercial transformation programme. They run the advertiser buying desk on the other side of the table. A media owner building an intelligence advantage threatens their economics.

The market offers four things you have already said no to. GRAIL is the fifth option.

WHAT YOU GET

Senior advisory that speaks commercial-floor, not strategy-deck

Working agents your team uses the same week

Custom tools built on your advertisers, your briefs

The start of an intelligence asset your best KADs feed

No platform dependency at any phase

WHY IT MATTERS

Founded by operators who have run commercial P&Ls

Business first, technology second

Three weeks from first meeting to working tools

Your team keeps the tools, you own the IP

Every next step earned by what just shipped

Three sessions with your commercial leadership. Working tools from week one.

We start with your commercial leadership team because the change cannot outrun the team's personal understanding of what is possible. Three workshops. Each delivers standalone value. Each earns the right to the next.

WORKSHOP 01

How to think

Walk through what is happening in your industry and on your commercial floor. Build the first working tool in the room: an annual-brief preparation agent for one of your KADs, on one of your real top advertisers. Your leadership team leaves with a shared view of what to do next and the first working tool already in their hands.

WORKSHOP 02

Your team's tools

A half-day activation. Each member of your commercial leadership team leaves with five to ten working tools tuned to their advertisers, their campaigns, their branded-content pipelines. Brief prep. Concept generation. Post-campaign synthesis. Yield benchmarking. Advertiser-retention signals. Tools your team is using the same week, not slides about tools.

WORKSHOP 03

Ready to roll

Refined tools based on real use. The rollout plan to your wider commercial team. The knowledge-capture plan for your best key account directors. The yield-defence playbook for the middle. And the CEO and CFO conversation with numbers they can check.

Three weeks. No IT project. No board approval needed to start. The tools your team is already using when we finish.

For your next leadership team meeting

The questions where your leadership team cannot agree on an answer are the ones worth an hour on the agenda. Ask these honestly.

Of the last ten annual briefs you lost, how many went to media owners that showed up with audience intelligence yours could not match, not better price? If you do not know, how would you find out?

What is your average direct-sold yield against rate card, and how does it compare to two years ago? Which KADs give up the least ground, and what do they do differently in the room?

If your top three key account directors retired next year, what would happen to the advertisers they own? What have you actually transferred to the rest of the team in the last twelve months?

Where is your average rep spending their Monday morning today, and where would they need to spend it to close one more branded-content pitch per quarter at full rate?

Which of your KADs is already doing what the rest of the team will need to do by 2027 to keep winning? What would it take for that behaviour to be the default across the team?

If any of these produces a disagreement in your leadership team, that is the conversation worth having before the board asks.

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