HACKING THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

![VCCP Challenger Series logo]

Hacking the Attention Economy
is part of VCCP's Challenger Series.

VCCP's logo is a young girl standing up to a bear.
It encapsulates our commitment to face up to life's biggest
challenges. We were founded as a challenger agency
alongside O2, and when O2 went from dead last to
category leader, we remained a challenger agency.

Challenger doesn't mean underdog. It means taking on
the challenges in the category, and winning - a behaviour
that tends to keep brands at the front, not the back.

The Challenger Series is therefore about embracing
the industry's big questions, and answering them.

CAN WE HAVE YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE?

Welcome to Hacking the Attention Economy.

At VCCP, we believe that "it only works if it all works". This mantra drives our mission to challenge convention and unlock value for brands. There has never been a more urgent moment to do so. The media landscape is evolving at breakneck speed, presenting both unprecedented opportunities and mounting complexity in how we connect with audiences.

Yet as the volume of media investment grows, our collective understanding of what truly drives effectiveness has struggled to keep pace. While groundbreaking research has shed light on programmatic supply chains, the interplay between brand and performance marketing, and the role of attention in video, these insights remain isolated - siloed from one another. The result: rising media spend without corresponding returns.

At VCCP, we're bridging those gaps. Drawing on our strengths in brand design, behavioural science and creative strategy, we've developed a deeper, more holistic understanding of how brands capture attention and build memory. We've applied this thinking to decode the intricate relationship between creative and media - particularly within today's most dynamic environments: social platforms and the open web.

Our findings don't just quantify the impact of integrated thinking - they point to a new paradigm for media planning and buying. Which we hope you'll find worth your attention.

James & the VCCP Media Team
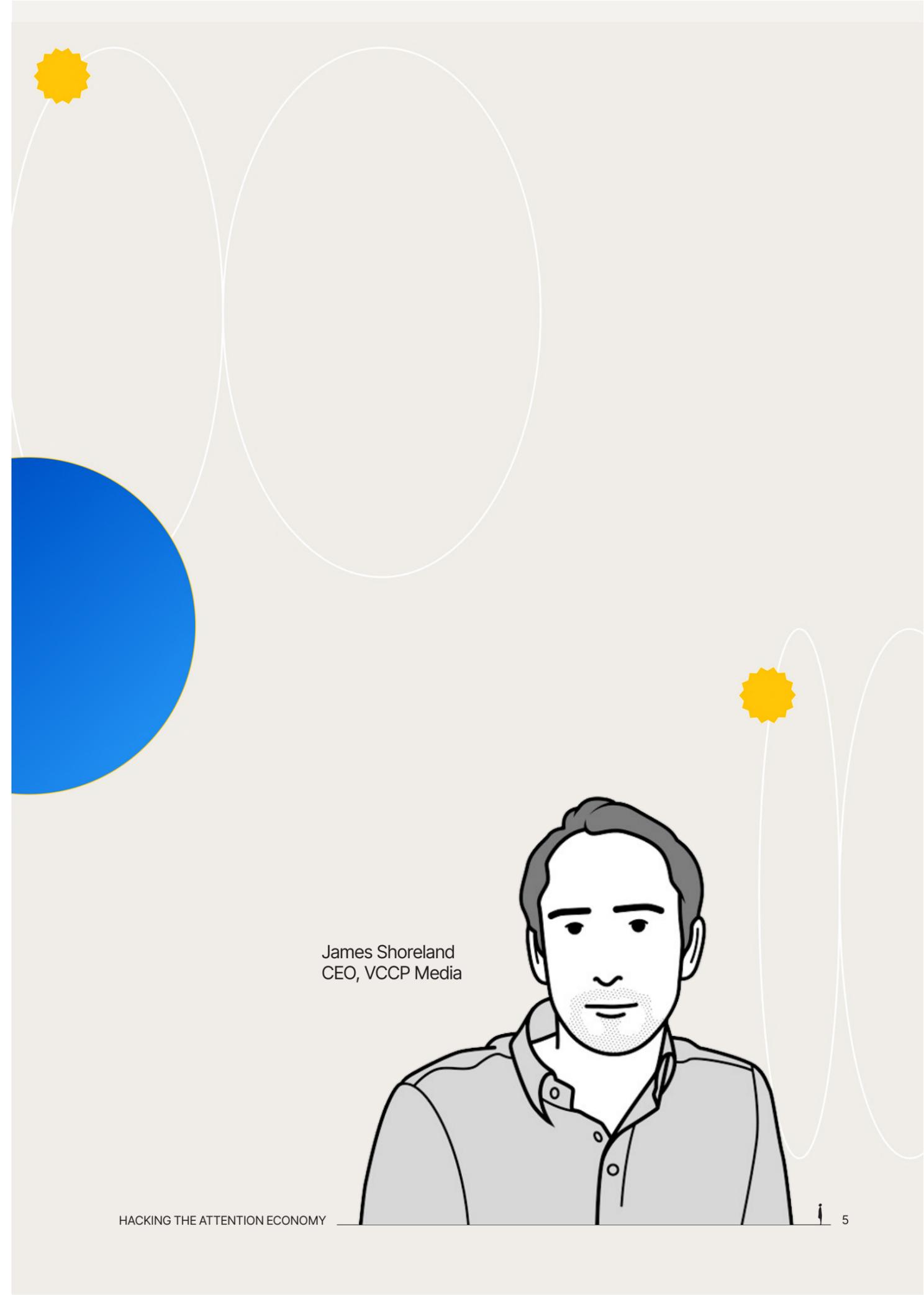
James Shoreland
CEO, VCCP Media

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IS ANYONE PAYING ATTENTION?

01

HACKING THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

With increased spend, content and data pouring into low attention environments, and platforms engineering their algorithms to be hungrier than ever for low attention eyeballs, the attention economy can cut both ways for brands. When assets aren't fine tuned to the attention realities of the environment they are being placed in, wasted seconds can be misattributed seconds. **85% of digital ads get less than 2.5 seconds of attention.** Which means poor branding in this changing economy can lead to tariffs. And just like any economy, that's a word that strikes fear into the heart of businesses.

When you aren't integrating and flexing your brand world everywhere, there's a self-imposed tariff to pay on media spend.

However, there is a way to avoid this - through codifying what makes an attentive second truly ownable for your brand, and tuning your media and creative efforts to be more integrated than ever before. Making sure that when an ad is seen, not just served - they see your brand. So you don't add more to get more, you properly own what you pay for.

That's how you Hack the Attention Economy.

In this report, with the help of Dr. Karen Nelson-Field, we uncover the smarts to do just that.

The experiment: We've taken 8 digital assets from O2, Cadbury, Sage, White Claw, Bulldog, Domino's and easyJet and removed the distinctive elements that make the brand memorable.

Then we've tested them side-by-side against their well-branded counterparts in real digital and social environments to assess attention, brand recall and adjusted equivalent cost.

Asset adjusted digital ads

| Colour | Sonics | Logo Prominence | Typeface | Characters | Visual Device |
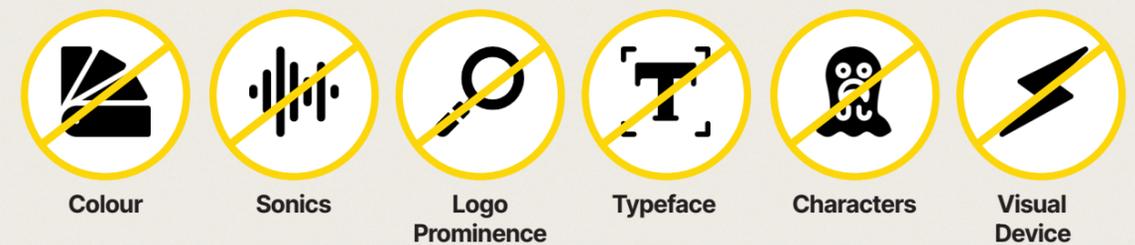
INTRODUCING DR. KAREN NELSON-FIELD

So how does attention work in the real world? How do we capitalise when most ads are served but barely seen? Introducing Dr. Karen Nelson-Field, the world's leading marketing professor in the field of attention. Together we have set out to answer this question.

> "ATTENTION ISN'T JUST A METRIC – IT'S THE FUEL FOR BRAND GROWTH. FOR THE FIRST TIME, WE'RE NOT JUST MEASURING ATTENTION – WE'RE SHOWING HOW TO BUILD WITH IT – OR LACK OF IT. MEDIA AND CREATIVE, FINALLY WORKING TOGETHER. THIS IS THE NEXT FRONTIER IN THE BATTLE TO BE SEEN."

VCCP   **Amplified**

INTEGRATION x ATTENTION

A unique partnership to uncover the creative impact on attention in the media

1.3M
Humans

38BN+
Biometric Attention data points

In today's environment, brands face new challenges. Consumer attention towards advertising is at an all-time low, driven by the complexities of modern measurement systems and the unchangeable realities of media platform experiences. As a result, creativity's role in decision-making is evolving fast.

The big question is: How can brands make a lasting impact when human engagement is not only low but hard to measure? And how can we finally break down the divide between creative and media to work more effectively - especially as technology amplifies both the challenges and the opportunities?

For the first time, we've run a groundbreaking study with VCCP Media, focused on 'training' consumers' neural networks to recognise distinctive brand assets - and in some cases, to misrecognise the 'wrong' ones - to understand what happens at the critical moment of scrolling and swiping. We ask: Can distinctive assets stop the scroll? And if they can't, can they at least spark recognition fast enough to trigger an outcome before attention disappears?

This study breaks new ground - not by theorising, but by pressure-testing what truly makes an asset powerful (or powerless) under real-world attention conditions - conditions that appear and vanish in a flash.

This work marks a critical shift: a move to unify creative and media, no longer operating on parallel tracks. In the attention economy, real impact demands they move as one.

Dr. Karen Nelson-Field
Founder of Amplified

A POTTED HISTORY OF AN ECONOMY BUILT ON TRADING ATTENTION

The attention economy emerged as a concept in marketing as early as the 1970s, but wasn't truly defined until the late 1990s. Probably no coincidence that about that very same time, Windows 98 started including web browsers and accelerating the use of the internet by the general public.

In today's world, the attention economy is big. It could be argued that 6 of the world's top 10 companies by market capitalisation are deeply embedded in the attention economy - Apple, Google, Meta, Amazon, Microsoft and Nvidia. This reflects the growing scale and opportunities in which you can 'buy' someone's attention. Great for those in marketing right? If only it were that simple.

Amidst this seemingly limitless potential, a darker issue looms - the prevalence of unclear and unreliable measurement. Ironically, contemporary measurement methods provide little insight into human engagement or the true effectiveness of brand visibility.

This leads to the question: How does this lack of transparency affect the realisation of brand goals?

GLOBAL INVESTMENT IN DIGITAL ADVERTISING SINCE 2008 WENT FROM $63 BILLION TO $333 BILLION – A GROWTH OF OVER 400%.

THE TOP 50 ADVERTISERS, HOWEVER, EXPERIENCED AN AVERAGE GROWTH RATE OF 3%. 20 WERE LIMITED TO JUST 2% GROWTH, OR WORSE, SUFFERED A DECLINE.

DESPITE SHIFTING MORE AND MORE OF THEIR BUDGETS AND (AHEM) ATTENTION TO MARKETING ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS, THEY WERE SEEING LITTLE CORRELATION.

1960s — The concept of attention is coined in marketing

1990s — PC operating systems preloaded with web browsers

2008

$63bn to $333bn increase in digital advertising

2025

THE INDUSTRY HAS UNDERSTANDABLY REACTED

MORE PLATFORMS THAN EVER

MORE INVENTORY THAN EVER

MORE IMPACTS THAN EVER

MORE PRODUCTION THAN EVER

MORE DATA THAN EVER

MORE MONEY THAN EVER

...DOES THAT MEAN IT'S DELIVERING MORE THAN EVER?

IT'S TIME TO CHALLENGE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

INCREASINGLY NO ONE IS PAYING ATTENTION TO YOUR BRAND

We're living in an era of endless scrolls and fleeting attention, where people bounce between platforms without stopping long enough to connect. It's not just Gen Z – swiping, skipping, and scrolling past ads is now everyone's default.

WE'RE UNWITTINGLY TRAINING OURSELVES

Our ability to control our own attention is eroding, not due to personal shortcomings but is a direct consequence of the nature of the user experience itself.
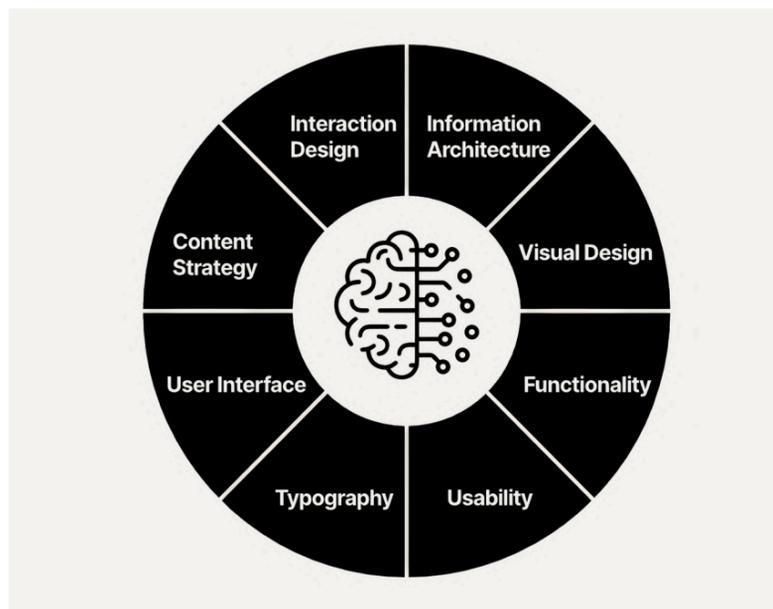

SO YOU'RE NOT GETTING WHAT YOU THINK YOU'RE PAYING FOR

So much so that, according to Dr. Karen Nelson-Field and her team at Amplified, around 75% of technically viewable ads are served to people who aren't actually paying attention. In other words, 75% of your budget is buying ad tech's version of a view - not a human one.

WHAT ADVERTISERS THINK THEY'RE PAYING FOR	NON VIEWABLE	VIEWABLE
WHAT ADVERTISERS ARE REALLY PAYING FOR	NON VIEWABLE · NO ATTENTION · PASSIVE ATTENTION	ACTIVE ATTENTION

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%
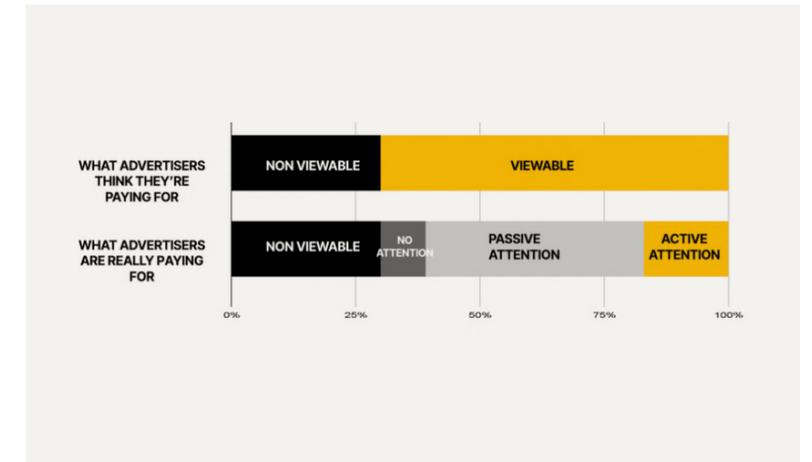
THIS IS WHAT DR. KAREN CALLS THE 'SEEN VS SERVED GAP':

Seen versus served is marketing's version of a magician's sleight of hand and this gap is one of the most costly inefficiencies advertisers face. The twist? We're not tricking the audience, we're tricking ourselves. Not seen = no memory, no brand lift, no sale.


Your Ad
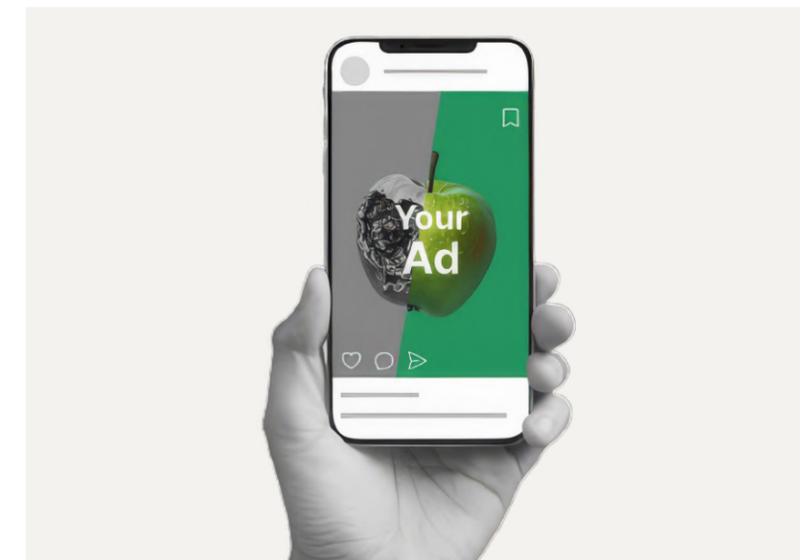
WHAT COUNTS FOR US DOESN'T COUNT FOR THEM

There is, though, an elephant in the room. Our brands' growth is reliant on attention being paid to the content we put out there - but the platforms build their data, revenue and user bases through higher volumes of scrolling, swiping and volume of content posted.

Your attention didn't collapse. It was stolen

The irony of the irony is this; our attention is largely shaped by the user experience offered by the platform, yet it is that very user experience that can hinder our attention to the ads that the platforms rely on for commercialisation.
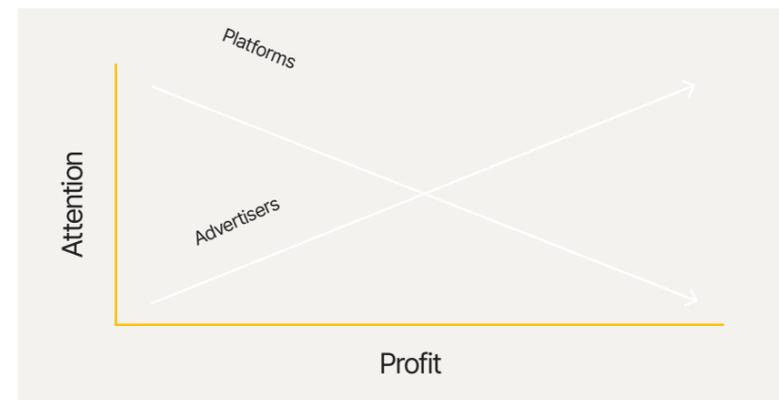
So what is the way forward for the embattled marketer - faced with less and less attention across more and more digital platforms and environments? Is it about better data for smarter targeting? Is it about more investment behind higher volumes of content? We think the answer may be deceptively simple.

85% OF DIGITAL ADVERTISING GETS LESS THAN 2.5 SECONDS OF ATTENTION, WHICH RESEARCH HAS SHOWN TO BE BELOW THE THRESHOLD FOR CREATING A MEMORABLE IMPRESSION (MA)

WHEN EVERY SECOND HAS TO COUNT...

Instagram

.. likes

It doesn't matter how much **volume**

It doesn't matter how much **data**

It doesn't matter how many **impressions**

It doesn't matter how many **touchpoints**

It doesn't matter how many **formats**

If we cannot say...

What does a good second of attention look like?

THE QUESTION ISN'T JUST... WHERE CAN I FIND FRAGMENTS OF ATTENTION?

THE QUESTION IS... HOW DO WE TURN MILLIONS OF FRAGMENTS INTO A COHESIVE AND EFFECTIVE BRAND WORLD?

MAXIMISING WHAT LITTLE ATTENTION WE HAVE

02

THE TWO TYPES OF ATTENTION

Active Attention: looking directly at the ad or content.

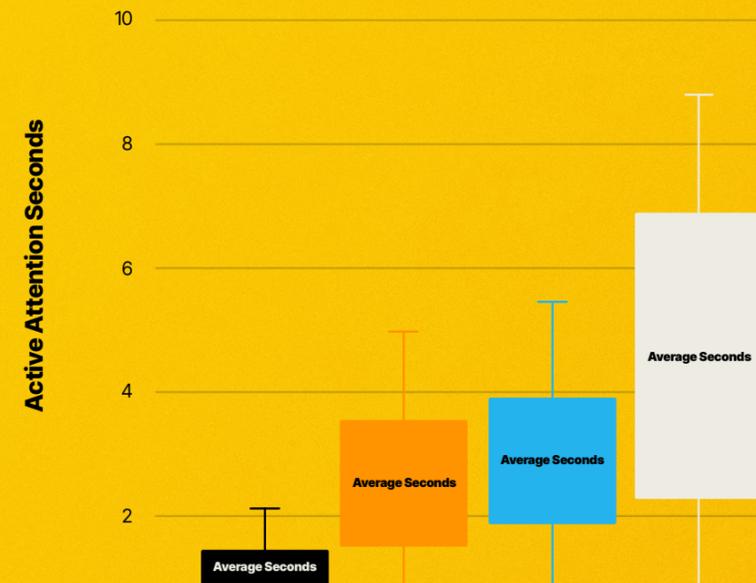**Passive Attention: looking nearby, but not directly at the ad or content.**

Active attention is deliberate and focused, but hard to sustain. It engages working memory, helping people process information deeply and form stronger memories - making it key for conscious decisions and meaningful outcomes.

Passive attention happens when we're not fully focused but still taking things in. It relies on automatic memory and is more common in everyday media use. While it's less likely to drive immediate action, it's still valuable for building brand recall and familiarity, especially when paired with distinctive brand assets.

Both active and passive attention have their roles - and each format has a different ratio.

Platform A	25%	69%	6%
Platform B	21%	38%	42%
Platform C	21%	50%	29%
Platform D	18%	27%	55%
Platform E	7%	77%	16%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Percentage of Impressions

■ MRC compliant and attention   ■ MRC compliant, zero attention   ■ Not MRC compliant
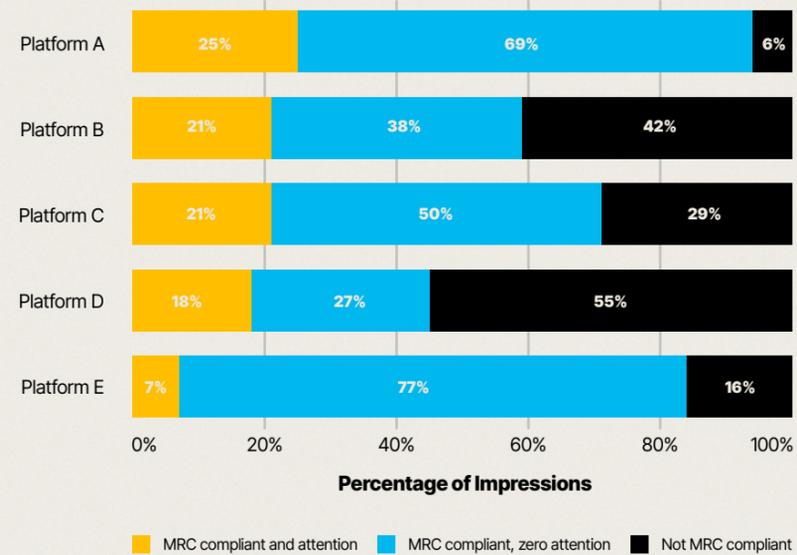
THE ATTENTION 'OPPORTUNITY' IS PRE-DETERMINED BY THE MEDIA FORMAT

Many people believe they're in full control of their attention when using social media or video platforms. But in reality, platform design shapes behaviour more than we realise. These interfaces are engineered to keep us hooked, constantly tweaked to be harder to resist.

The reality of each platform is fixed. It's this fixed range - or 'corridor' - that defines how much attention is even possible. You can work within that corridor, but you can't break out of it.

Essentially, people watch the ads the way the platform trains them to.

WE *CAN'T* BREAK FREE FROM ATTENTION CORRIDORS

BUT WE CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT KINDS OF ATTENTION LINES THEM

The attention an ad can earn is capped by the platform's user experience. Great creative can reach the top of that corridor - but rarely exceed it.

Our job is to understand those limits and optimise within them to drive maximum efficiency and impact.

Each format has its own rhythm, its own rules - and our brains learn them fast.

Attention isn't just about the ad, it's about where and how it shows up.

To win, we don't fight the format. We design for it.

15 Second Non-Skippable, YouTube
New music video from Romy, I've actively sought out on YouTube

Active	Passive
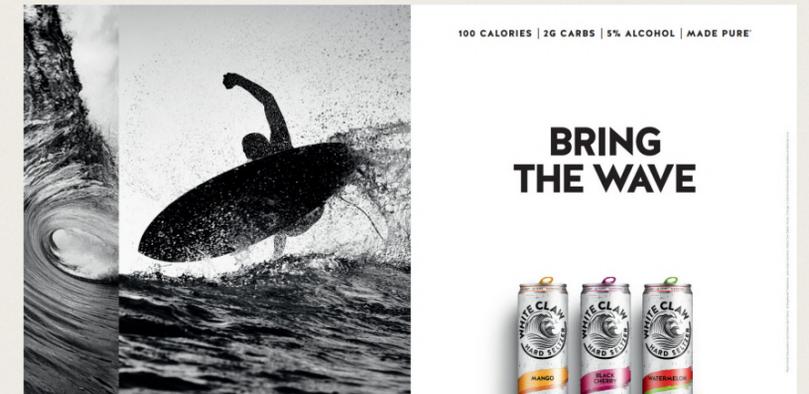
Static banner, proximity to station
Regular walking route, morning and evening

Active	Passive
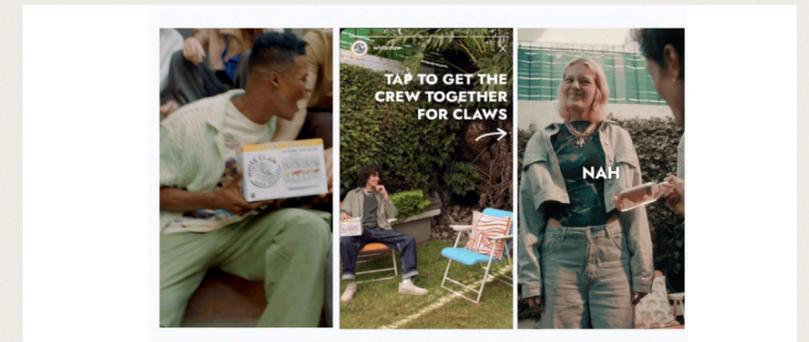
**Reels, Meta**
Doom scrollin', Friday night

Active	Passive

# ACTIVE ATTENTION IS ONE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

Only a small fraction of advertising benefits from active attention. Think of the cross-track posters as you wait for your tube. Cinema pre-roll. The static ad that takes over your TV when you hit pause mid-VOD session.

Or more unexpected examples like the Fortnite load screen, the WeTransfer home page, or the message from NYT while your Wordle of the day loads.

Non-Compliant	No Attention	Passive Attention	Active Attention

0%　　25%　　50%　　75%　　100%
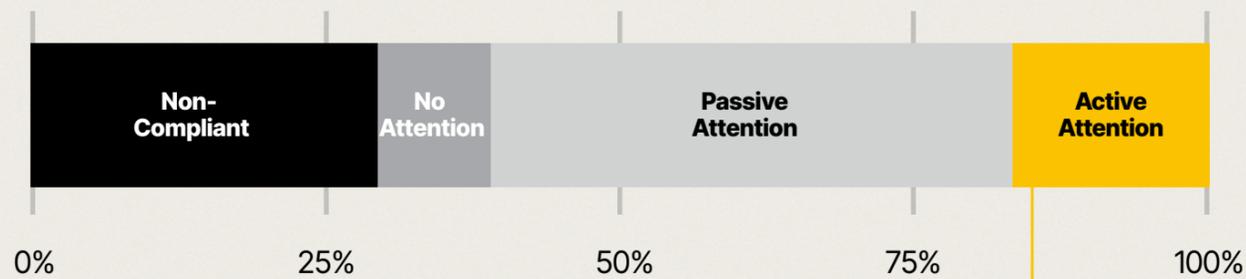
The magic of the big screen

Long-form content expectations allow for higher active attention spans. We go to the cinema expecting to watch 90 minutes or more. Our brains are more than open to giving attention to a longer form ad. After all, they're the best bit... aren't they?
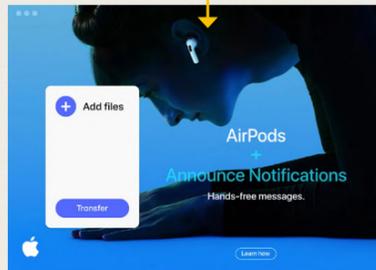
Opt-in media

Activities or content we have chosen to do are places we have opted to place our precious attention. The daily Wordle. A large file transfer. If we're actively up for it, we're actively paying attention.


'Distraction is not an option' media

Loading up a battle royale on Fortnite, there's no time to make a cup of tea. Because any second now, it's on like Donkey Kong (well, Fortnite actually).

BUT SIGNIFICANT REACH IS FOUND IN PASSIVE, LOW-ATTENTION ENVIRONMENTS

The majority hovers in passive territory - cluttered, multisensory environments where viewers are half-distracted, already eyeing the next piece of content. The Instagram stories, the TikTok ad that becomes slide

50 of your FYP, the billboard that catches your eye as you speed along the motorway, the YouTube bumper that plays as you message your friend back. Some see this as a wasted opportunity. But... is it?

Non-Compliant	No Attention	Passive Attention	Active Attention

0%　　25%　　50%　　75%　　100%
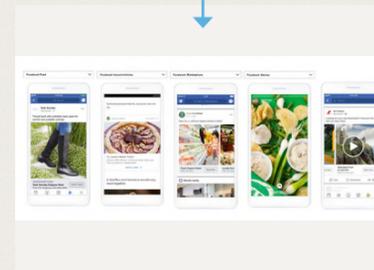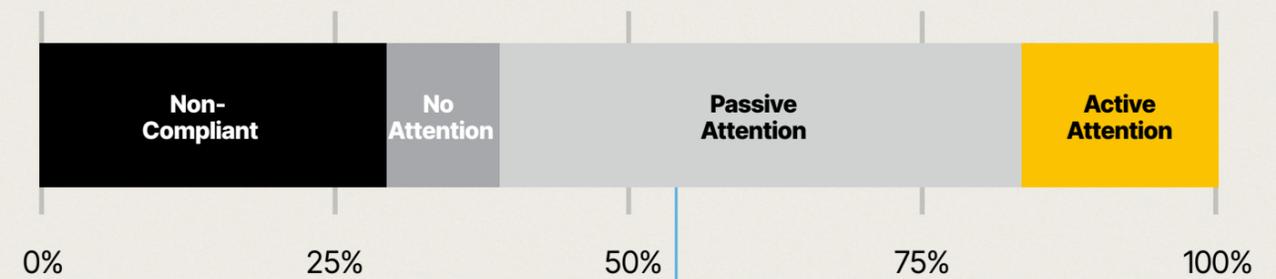
Keep scrollin'

Social algorithms are geared towards large volumes and variety of quality content. The more we scroll, the more it knows us (and the more we scroll).
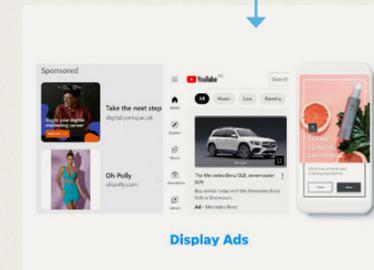
Ad skippin'

Display advertising pops up, interstitials in and in most cases doesn't add to the experience - it becomes a background presence we can't wait to skip.


Dual screenin'

Even when the big screen is on the siren call of the small screen is undeniable as the adbreak starts, turning linear moments into fragmented ones.

AND IN COMBINATION THEY REINFORCE ONE ANOTHER

THE ATTENTION FLYWHEEL

Awareness

Active Attention ignites curiosity, providing new information that encourages people to try something new.

Trial / Nudge
The consumer enters a trial phase or nudged to buy again.
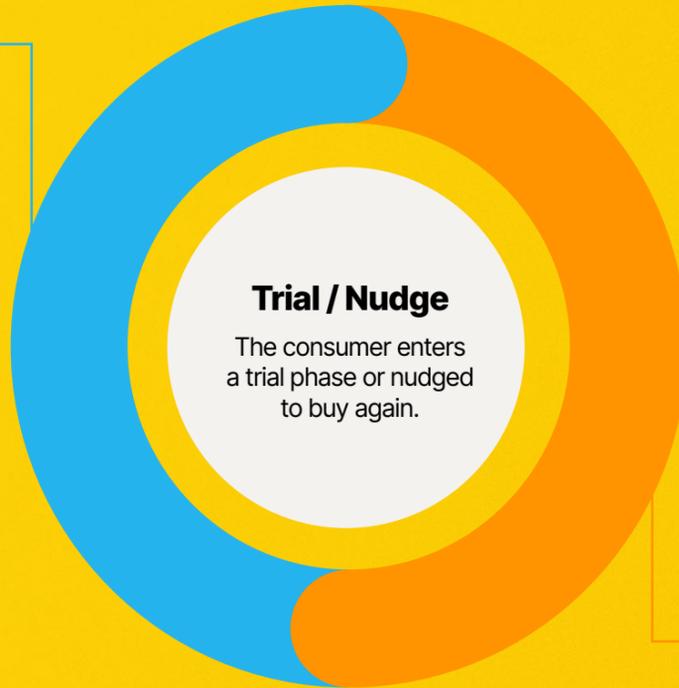
Passive Attention serves as a steady reminder to reinforce exisiting knowledge and gently nudge repeat purchases.

Reinforcement

© Amplified 2024

WHY DO WE FOCUS ON ACTIVE ATTENTION SO MUCH?

"Passive attention has value but is inconsistent. It can reinforce memory for big brands if their distinctive asset are super strong, but is far less effective for challenger brands or assets or messages that are new.
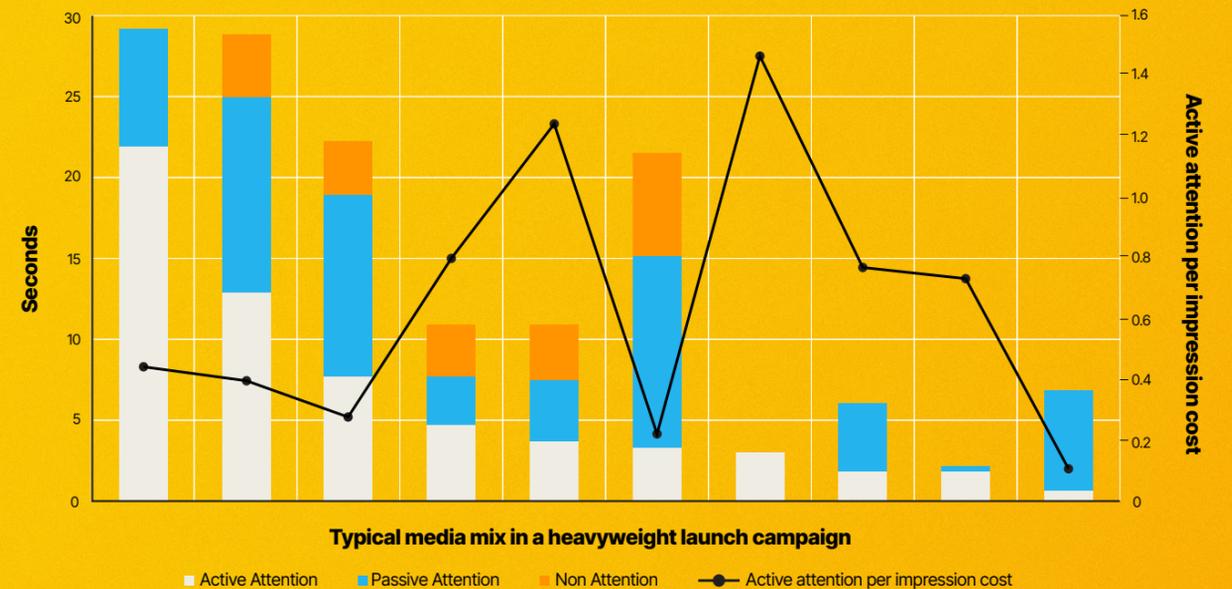
In our models, active attention is about 7x more predictive of outcomes. That's why it's the right baseline.

That said, combining active and passive attention can create a flywheel effect that benefits all brands and campaign types."

OUR NEW MEDIA REALITY REQUIRES US TO BUILD A BRAND WORLD THAT HARNESSES BOTH

The evolving media landscape demands that we blend traditional notions of channel reach with a nuanced understanding of format engagement - balancing active and passive consumption - while also weighing the cost-effectiveness of each environment.

Typical media mix in a heavyweight launch campaign

■ Active Attention   ■ Passive Attention   ■ Non Attention   ●— Active attention per impression cost

SO WE HAVE TO BALANCE FORMAT LENGTH, STORY LENGTH AND DISTINCTIVENESS ACROSS ALL TOUCHPOINTS
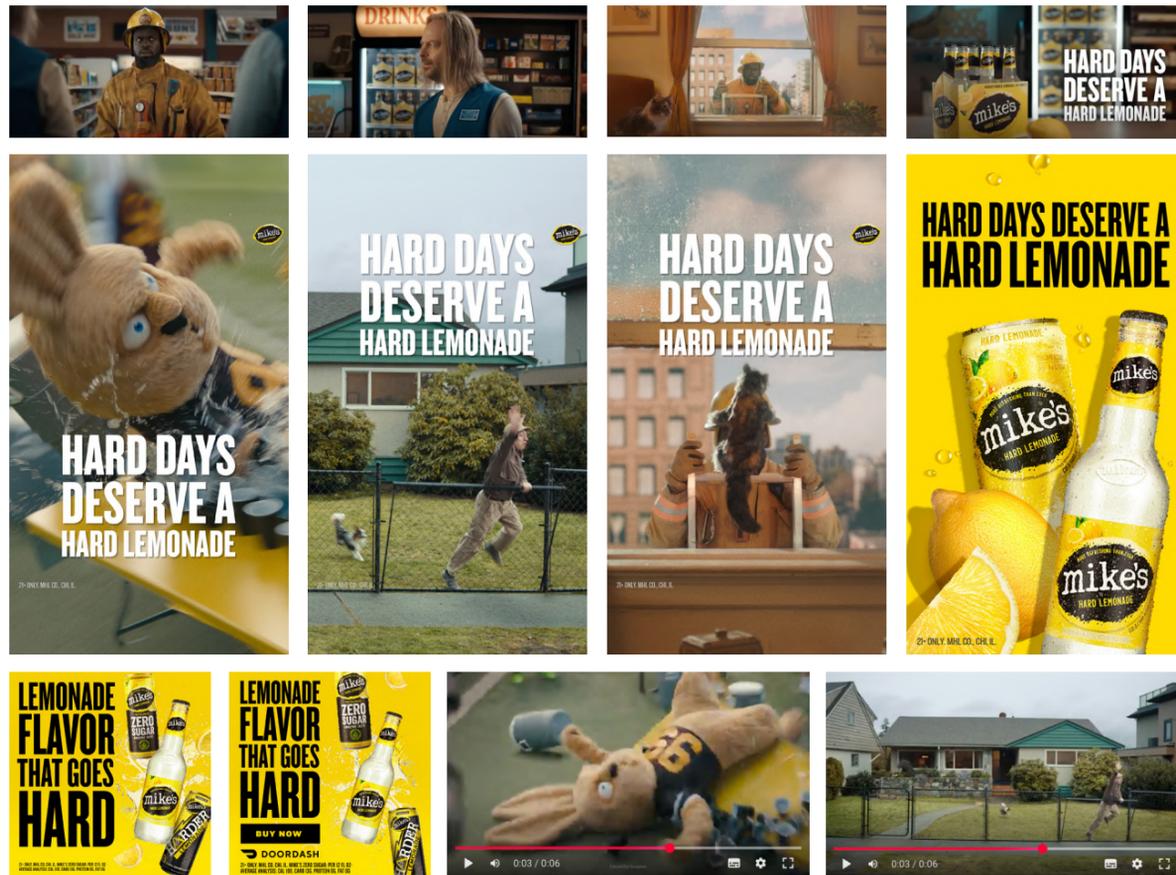
THAT CALLS FOR INTEGRATION. ESPECIALLY WHEN...

EVERY SECOND OF ATTENTION **REQUIRES SLEIGHT OF HAND**

MAXIMISE THE BRAND ELEVATING POTENTIAL OF ATTENTION-RICH SECONDS...

AND BE DISTINCT IN THE FLEETING MOMENTS OF HIGH DISTRACTION

HARNESS THE MAGIC OF DISTRACTION

03

VCCP

A CULTURE TRAINED INTO DISTRACTION

Platform user experience is training behaviours that are reinforced over the course of a million scrolls.
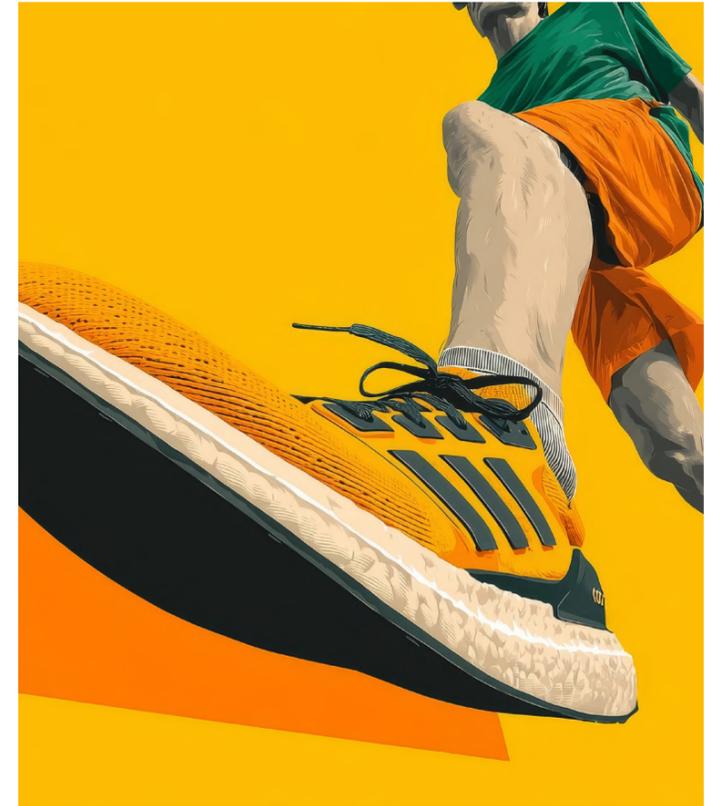
THE DAILY SCROLL

300 FEET A DAY

Or the height of the Statue of Liberty

OR...

109,500 FEET A YEAR

Also known as a marathon

A MILLION BRILLIANT LITTLE DISTRACTIONS

The quality, variety and speed of change in content consumption, content creators, platforms and formats is dizzying. We employ creators, we engage in partnerships but the bar is constantly being raised, the game constantly changed and the volume of dances, dogs and duets is only going one way.
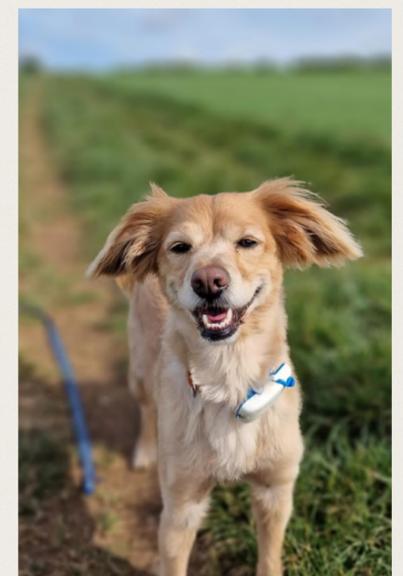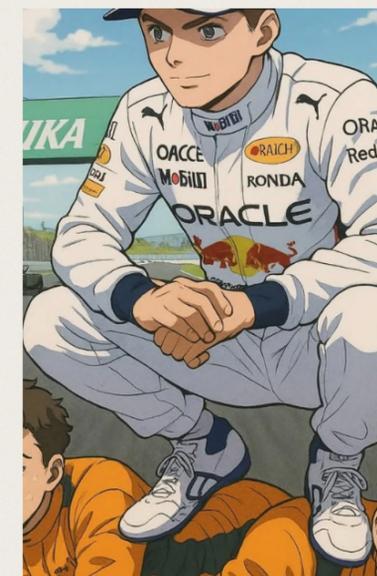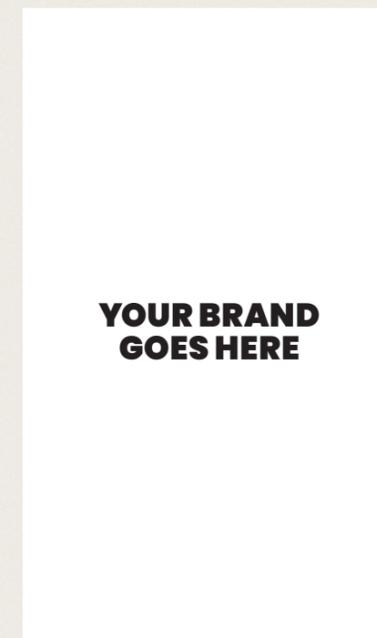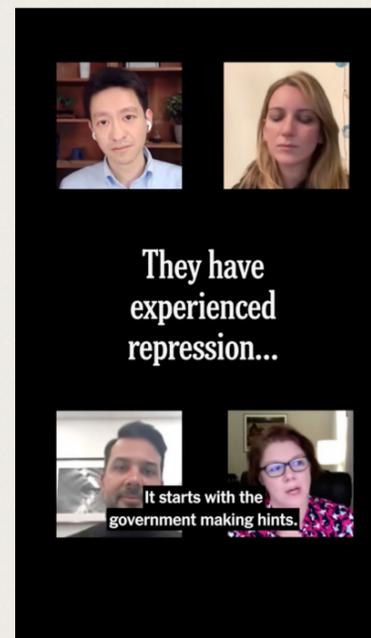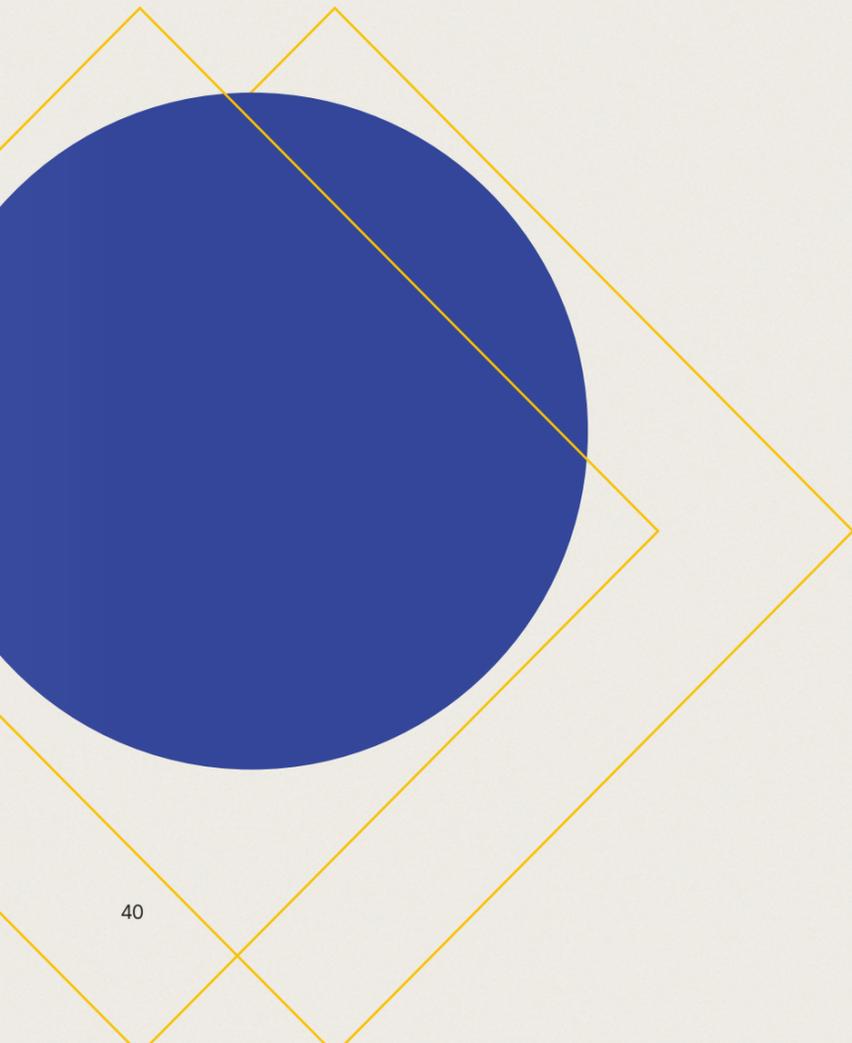
LEARNING FROM THE MASTERS OF DISTRACTION

In a 2016 study, Andreas Hergovich and Bernard Oberfichtner looked into the total amount of attention that was given to a standard cup and ball magic trick.

They tested social cues over a number of repeated tests to gauge:

1. On which part of the trick was attention spent
2. The rates of deception of each trick
3. The 'Amazement' the respondents felt

Control:

Eye Contact:

Ball:

Sideward Gaze:

Ball & Gaze:
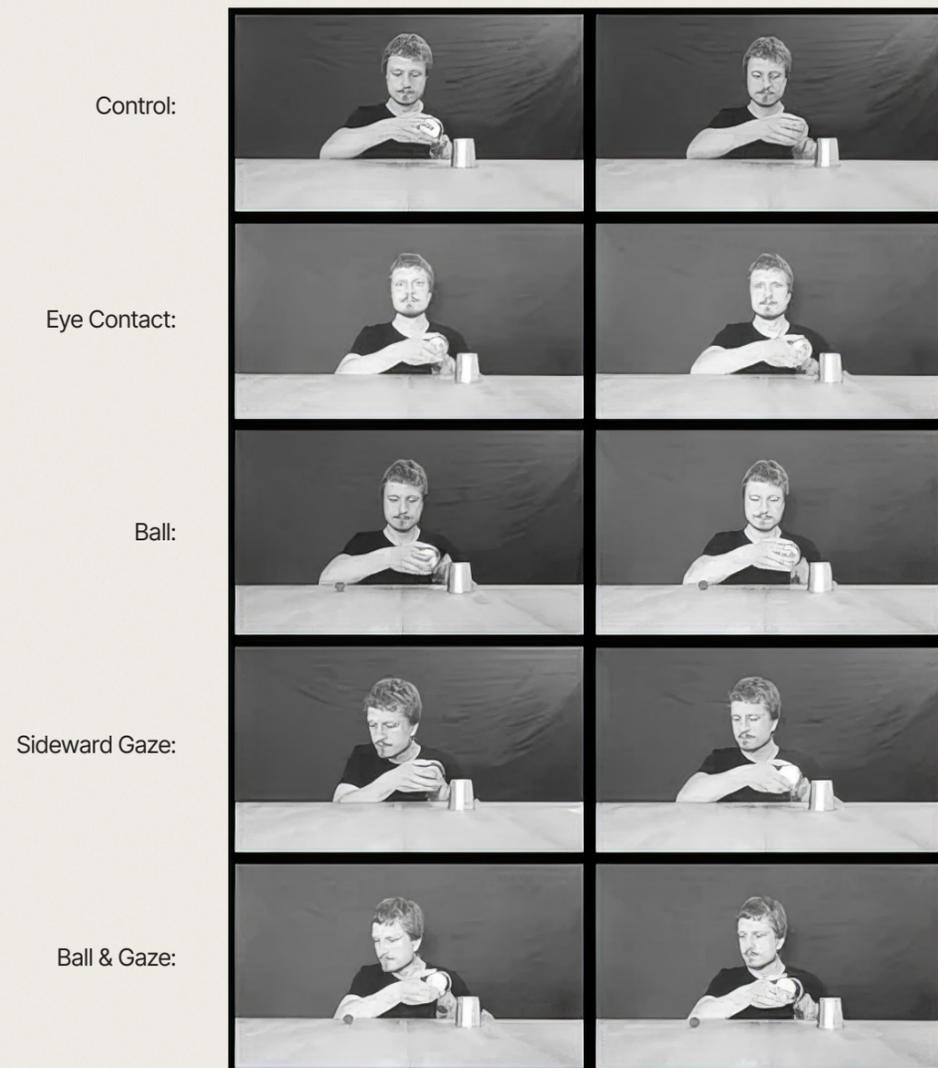
Source: Magic and Misdirection: The Influence of Social Cues on the Allocation of Visual Attention While Watching a Cups-and-Balls Routine - Andreas Hergovich, Bernard Oberfichtner, May 2016

Certain cues employed by the magician drive a higher yield of deception than others, and result in higher amazement levels.
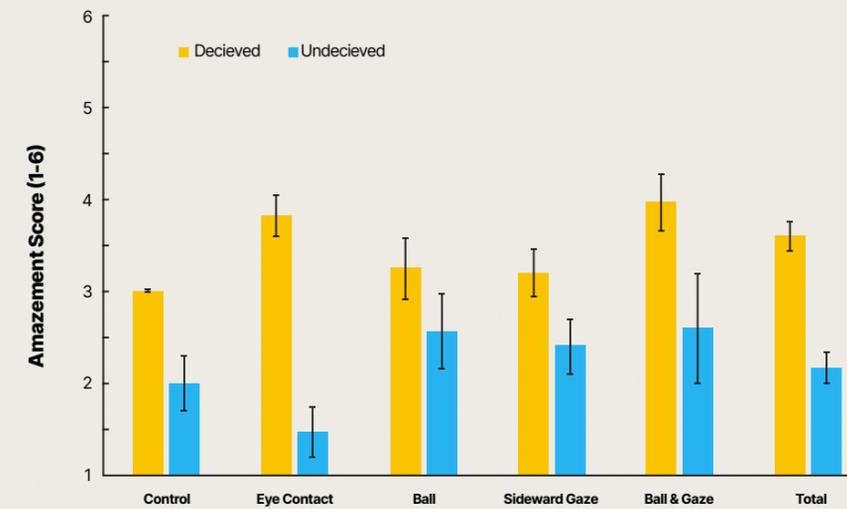
Attentive seconds towards the trick, the magician or the deception are massively influenced by the 'cue' employed by the magician during the trick.
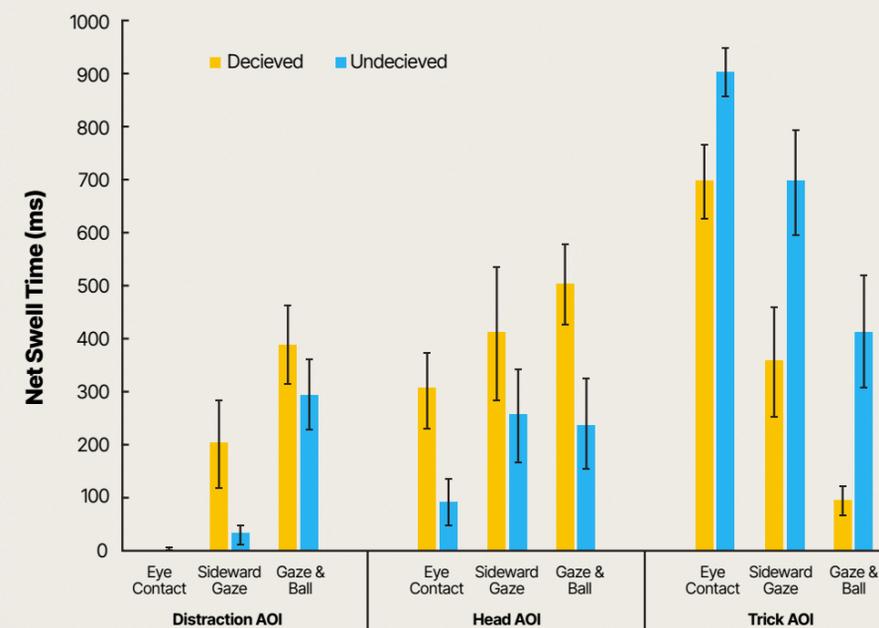
THE MAGIC OF DISTRACTION

Dr. Karen's research also dives into the "attention amplifiers" used by street magicians and pickpockets. Cues, repetition and emotion are used to distract and delight in their world. They can be used to draw attention back to us in ours.
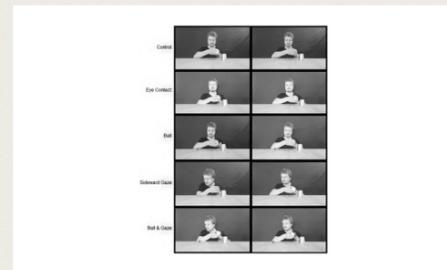

DISTRACTION   **ATTENTION**

CUES

In magic, cues and props set context to make illusions more believable. In marketing, distinctive brand assets trigger recognition, relevance and brand association.

REPETITION

In magic, repetition creates familiarity and directs the audience away from sleight of hand. In marketing, repetition reinforces comprehension of brand assets.

EMOTION

In magic, emotion such as humour creates a relaxed atmosphere making the audience less sceptical. In marketing, high arousal emotions amplify viewer attention and enhance ad memorability.

BUT THE BIG DIFFERENCE IS THE STAGE
(AKA TIME & ATTENTION)

"Magicians and marketers share a fundamental craft: they direct attention, shape perception, and influence behaviour. But here's the crucial difference…
Magicians perform on a stage, with an audience that's watching intently. Marketers, on the other hand, perform in a mobile feed - a stage where the audience often isn't looking."
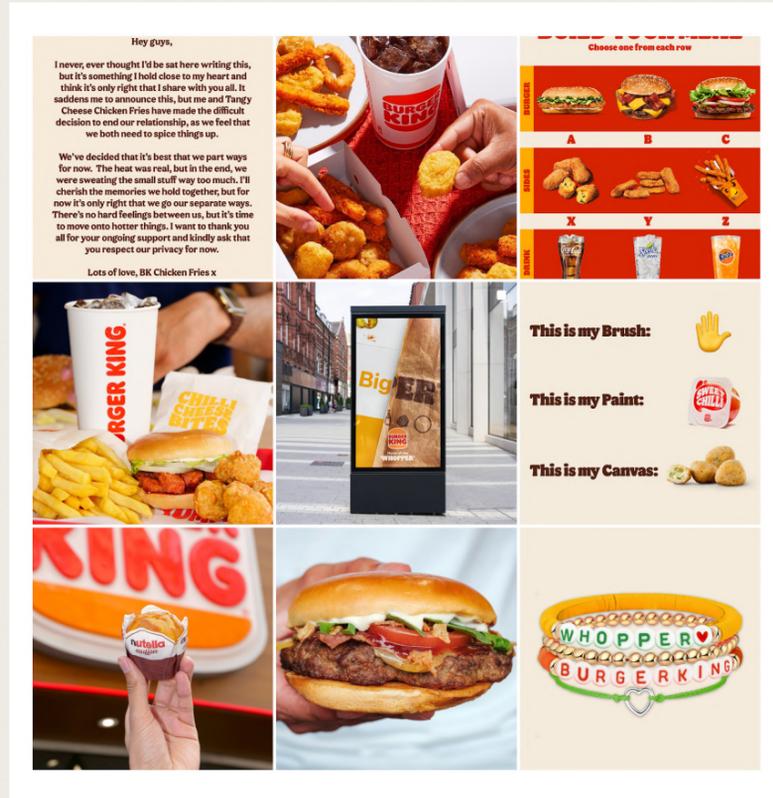

Low lights
Big stage
Paid for tickets
Ready for magic

Lights everywhere
Tiny screen
Free distractions at every turn
Ready to move on

HARNESS THE MAGIC OF DISTRACTION

GET IT RIGHT

Even with the variety of messages, imagery and stories required to maintain a social narrative, staying strict on colour combos, fonts, key words and hero products makes Burger King unmistakable (whether it's for a glance or a full mouth-watering gaze).

...you feed their memories

CUES	REPETITION	EMOTION

OR RISK MISATTRIBUTION

GET IT WRONG

Place an ad for spicy nuggets

Where the cue is overwhelmingly chicken

We think, I want some chicken

And head off to the outlet where chicken is their most distinctive asset

...you feed the competition

CUES	REPETITION	EMOTION

OUR MAGICIAN'S CUES ARE THE LIVERY OF DISTINCTIVE, INSTANTLY MEMORABLE, FLUENT BRAND ASSETS
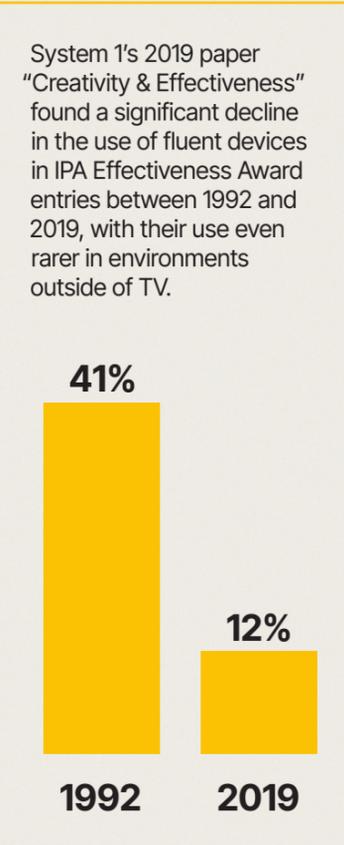
Fixed and flexible assets: The codification of fluid brand devices we have to build a brand world in an increasingly fragmented media landscape.

Is the era of distinctive brand livery due a comeback, and how do they work in a digital world?

White Claw brand world

System 1's 2019 paper "Creativity & Effectiveness" found a significant decline in the use of fluent devices in IPA Effectiveness Award entries between 1992 and 2019, with their use even rarer in environments outside of TV.

The TV era gave a false sense of security that brand building didn't need these instantly recognisable elements to hold the brand's meaning - you could tell it in long form, emotive narratives only. Now we have to balance both fixed and flexible.

41% 1992

12% 2019

THE BAD
TWIN TEST

04

THE BAD TWIN TEST

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF PROPERLY OWNING EVERY SECOND OF ATTENTION?

01

The Hypothesis:

With your distinctive brand assets on full display - think the unmistakable colour palette, iconic character, or signature jingle - fleeting attention isn't wasted and needn't lead to misattribution. In fact, when you add up all those moments - and every second counts - it leads to a significant increase in:

a) Media effectiveness
b) Brand recall
c) Business impact

The Rules:

For both the good and the bad ads - the logo must be present and the hero product (if present) and narrative cannot change.

02

The Test:

VCCP Media and Amplified conducted an industry-first experiment to explore what happens in a fleeting moment of attention - whether focused or distracted - when a brand's most distinctive assets are present, and, critically, when they are removed.

For each of the eight brands tested, we carefully selected a range of distinctive brand assets (DBAs), then systematically removed them - creating a 'bad twin': an identical version in length, narrative and message, but stripped of its key DBAs.

HOW IT WORKS

Our experiment has been conducted using Amplified's industry-leading attention research technology. It allowed us to test attention performance in real-time ad environments in the users own social and digital feeds.

With the technology we can discover if ad formats, creative executions and more importantly, branded moments, are capturing valuable attention from audiences.

Amplified passively collects users' attention (via gaze tracking), their viewing behaviour (i.e. scrolling, skipping etc.) and their brand choices via a virtual store.
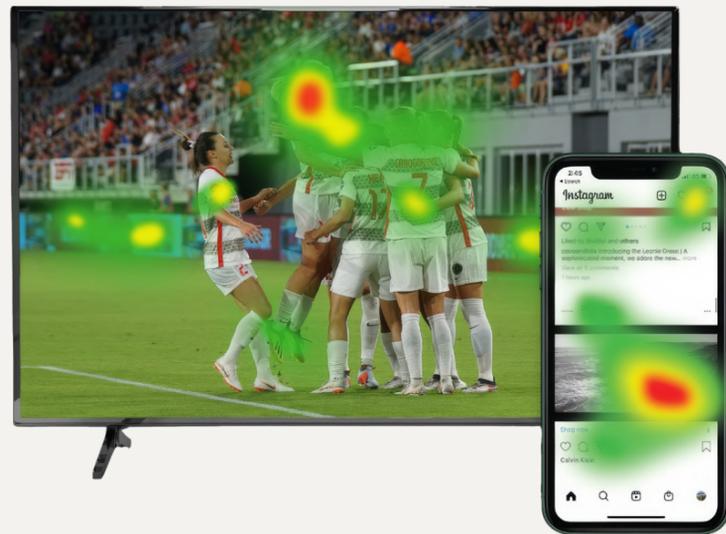
Most people use it to ask:

"Do my branded moments work?".

So we asked:

"What's the difference between a second when the branded moments we care about are there, and when they aren't?".

The world's most sophisticated gaze tracking technology

◣ Amplified

WHAT WE RAN

16 | Ads   03 | Digital Platforms   800 | Respondents

- Time in View
- Active Attention
- Passive Attention
- Emotional Response
- Platform Metrics
- Mental Availability
- Short Term Advertising Strength

NO: ONE PERSON
ATTENTION LEVEL:
PASSIVE
GENRE: MALE
AGE:ADULT
SECOND SCREENING:
CO-VIEWING: NO
TRANS: X3.37,Y13.
ROT: X-175.37,Y6.
VEC: X2.44,76.77.
INTERSECT: 125.74

WHAT WE HAVE TESTED

Leading Brands

O₂   Cadbury   OLD EL PASO   Sage

Growth Brands

BULL DOG SKINCARE FOR MEN   easyJet   WHITE CLAW HARD SELTZER

Platforms

Formats

Distinctive Brand Assets

Colour   **Typeface**   **Sonics**

Characters   **Logo Prominence**   **Visual Device**
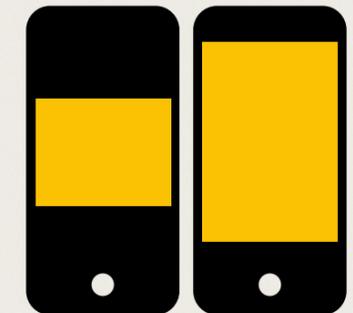
Ad Type

Emotional   **Functional**

VCCP

O2

GOOD

- Prominent O2 logo
- Frutiger font
- Colour graded to match O2 blue
- Bubl

BAD

- Logo downgraded to bottom right corner
- Comic Sans font
- Colour graded away from O2 blue
- Bubl removed

Cadbury

GOOD

- Iconic purple

BAD

- Category competitor colour

GOOD

● Prominent White Claw logo

● Products as visual device

BAD

● Logo prominence downgraded
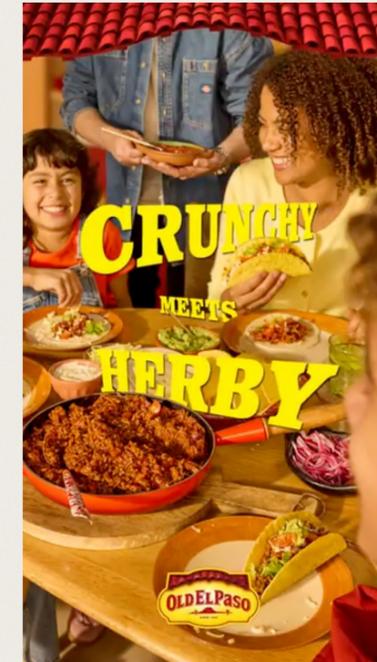
● Products prominence downgraded

GOOD

● Distinct tiled roof visual device

● Yellow & red Old El Paso colour scheme

BAD

● Distinct tiled roof visual device removed

● Yellow & red Old El Paso colour scheme replaced with non-category colours

BULLDOG
SKINCARE FOR MEN

GOOD

● The Bulldog

BAD

● Empty mirror during ad, Bulldog replaced with packshot in end frame

Domino's®

GOOD

● Domino's blue

● Domino tile delivery character

● Domino's Yodel

BAD

● Colour switched to category neutral colour

● Character detail removed

● Yodel removed

Sage

GOOD

● Sage cartoon customers

● Prominent Sage logo

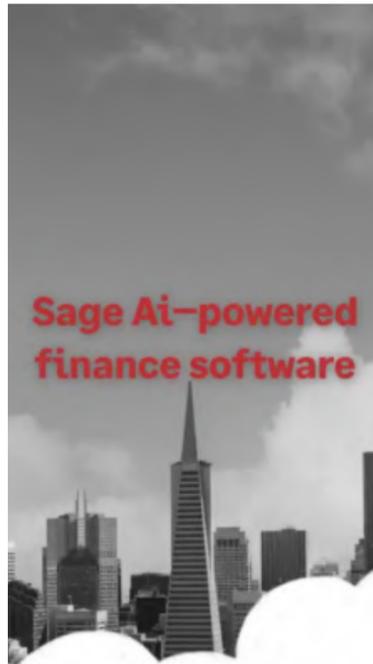● Distinct Sage rainbow coloured typeface

BAD

● Sage cartoon customers removed

● Sage logo reserved for endframe

● Typeface recoloured

easyJet

GOOD

● easyJet orange and colour graded travel scenes to complement

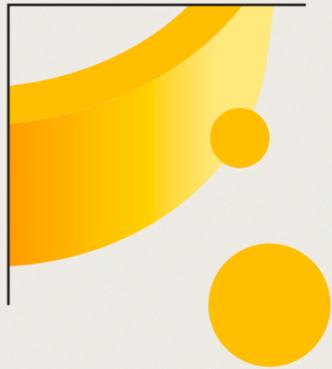● Prominent easyJet holidays logo

BAD

● Type recoloured to travel category competitor shade and resized

● Prominence of logo downgraded

AND MINE EACH FOR A WEALTH OF INSIGHT

1 STAS (SHORT TERM ADVERTISING STRENGTH)
The likelihood of your brand being spontaneously considered at a purchase occasion.

2 MA (MENTAL AVAILABILITY)
The likelihood of your brand being deliberately considered at the purchase occasion.

3 ACTIVE SECONDS
How many total seconds respondents actively attended to the creative.

4 PASSIVE SECONDS
How many total seconds respondents passively attended to the creative.

5 ACTIVE SECONDS TO TIV/AD LENGTH
How many total seconds respondents actively attended to the creative in relation to ad length.

6 ABOVE 2.5 SECONDS
Proportion scenarios achieved above the digital ad average of 2.5 seconds.

7 BELOW 2.5 SECONDS
Proportion scenarios achieved below the digital ad average of 2.5 seconds.

8 TIKTOK
Ad performance and engagement metrics from TikTok meta data.

9 INSTAGRAM
Ad performance and engagement metrics from Instagram meta data.

10 GENERAL WEB
Ad performance and engagement metrics from web browser meta data.

OUR FINDINGS

05

THE CHICKEN & EGG OF INTEGRATION

Exploring how seconds are determined primarily by the media, not the creative

Does the creative catch your eye and determine how many seconds of attention you get?

Or does the media platform define the seconds your creative content is afforded?

A question typically followed by: "Surely if we build better creative content, that will fix it?".

This study confirms what over 1,000 Amplified studies have shown: attention performance drops as platform performance drops. This underscores the significant influence of media environments on a brand's ability to earn attention. If creative were the dominant factor, each brand (using the same ad) would achieve similar attention levels across formats - but it doesn't.

25% vs. 66%

25% There is still a difference between the best and worst performing creative (avg 25%)

66% but this difference is smaller than the difference between best and worst format (avg 66%)

Total Active Attention for 'good' assets across all 8 brands

	Social Platform A Feed	Social Platform B Story	WEB MREC
Brand A	4.1	3.7	1.3
Brand B	4.1	3.5	1.6
Brand C	4.5	3.9	1.6
Brand D	4.2	5.4	1.4
Brand E	4.0	3.3	1.3
Brand F	3.9	3.6	1.2
Brand G	3.8	3.0	1.3
Brand H	3.7	3.5	1.3
Grand Total	**4.0**	**3.8**	**1.4**

ASSETS BOUND TO THE RULES OF THE FORMAT

How some media environments may not carry enough attention for assets to cut through

Distinctive assets get more seconds of attention if there is enough attention to be had in the first place.

Even when comparing Distinctive vs. Non-Distinctive creative, the format still drives attention, regardless of creative strength.

Distinctive assets do get more active attention, *but not everywhere*

Active Attention	Social Platform A Feed	Social Platform B Story	WEB MREC
Distinctive	4.3	3.8	1.3
Non-Distinctive	3.8	3.7	1.4
Grand Total	**4.0**	**3.8**	**1.4**

and only one environment is laden with passive attention distractions

Passive Attention	Social Platform A Feed	Social Platform B Story	WEB MREC
All ads	0	0	6.5 - 10+

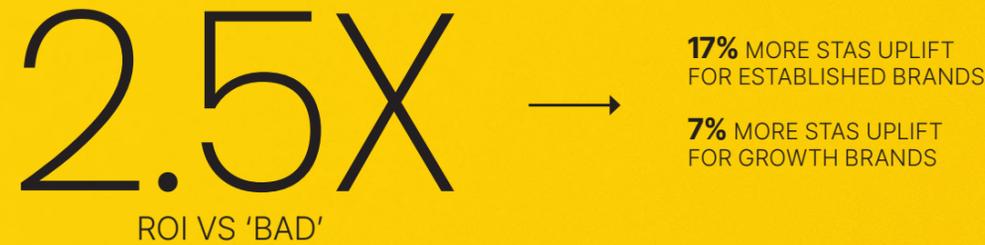# SHOULD WE POINT OUT THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM?

Even when General Web is on its best attention-earning behaviour, with distinctive assets present, it still delivers just over 1 second of active attention. Why?
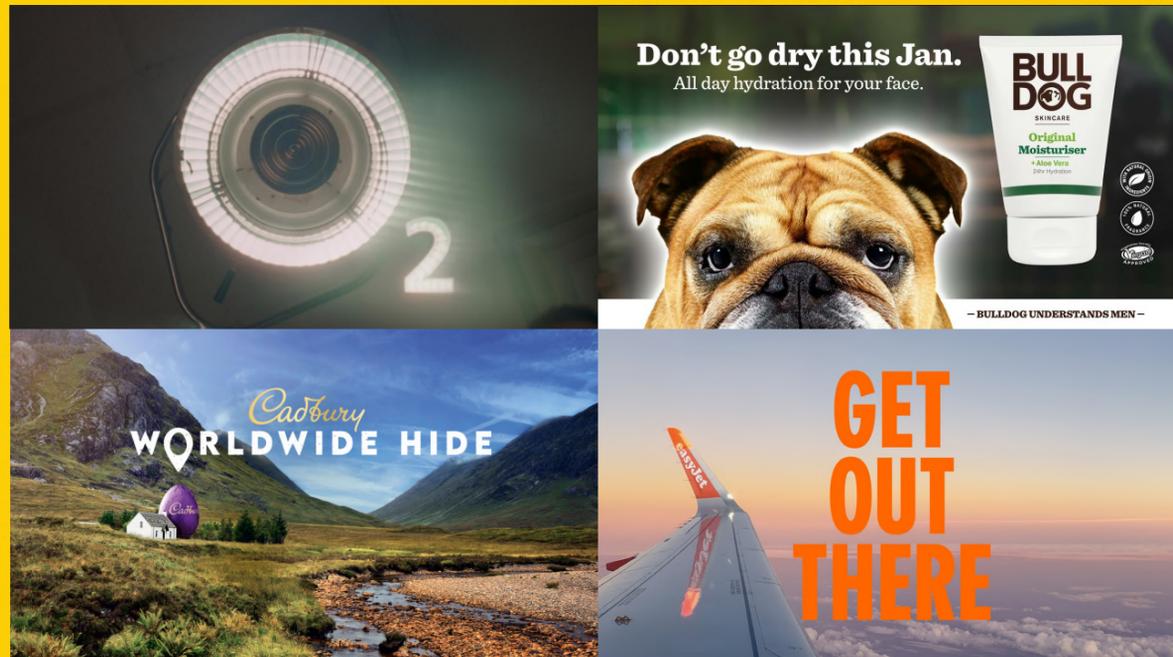
Because people scroll **1,121%** faster on General Web than on TikTok.

DISTINCTIVE CREATIVE ACTS LIKE AN ATTENTION AMPLIFIER

Every well branded second of attention gets:

2.5X

ROI VS 'BAD'

→ **17%** MORE STAS UPLIFT FOR ESTABLISHED BRANDS

7% MORE STAS UPLIFT FOR GROWTH BRANDS

EVERY SECOND COUNTS

Distinctive creative delivers nearly 3× more STAS uplift per £1 spent (9.00 vs 3.10) and 1.4× higher MA Efficiency (1.39 vs 1.01).

Distinctive assets make each second of attention more valuable – viewers recognise and consider the brand faster, so attention delivers more sales and memory outcomes.

NOT THUMB-STOPPING CREATIVE, BUT SCROLL-PROOF ASSETS

"Higher speed usually means less time to process ads - but distinctive creative still drives more uplift per £1 spent. Why? Because recognition happens faster when distinctive assets are present. People don't need as much time to connect the creative to the brand and trigger choice outcomes. What the data shows is that even when people scroll faster, distinctive ads consistently deliver more active attention – both in how long people look and how many people engage. Distinctiveness isn't about slowing users down - it's about cutting through, even in motion."

The data shows that distinctive creative delivers much higher STAS Efficiency even when scroll speeds are faster:

Distinctive scroll speed: 3.13 px/sec
Non-distinctive scroll speed: 2.16 px/sec
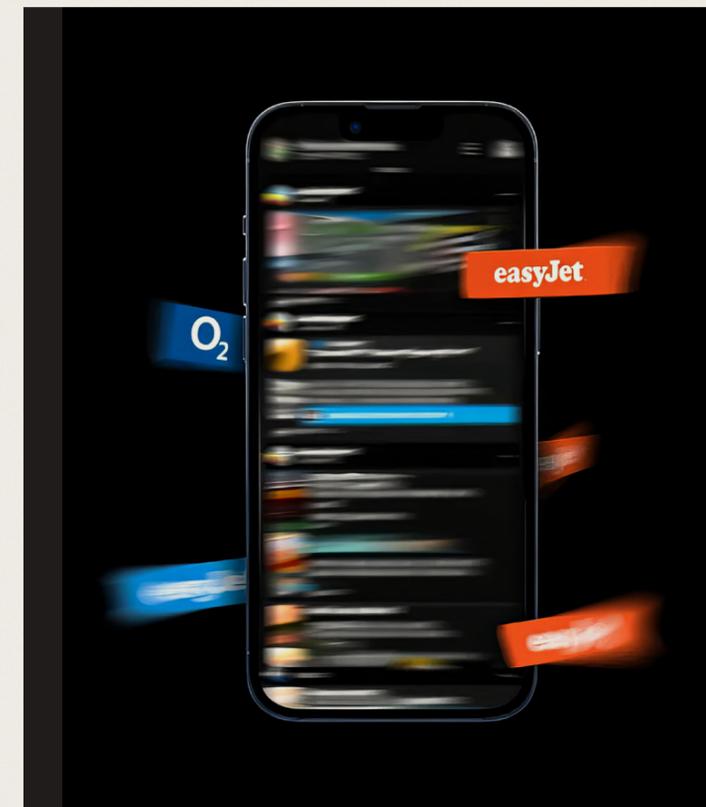
MOVING THE ATTENTION MEMORY THRESHOLD

Understanding the minimum level of attention required before outcomes like memory association reliably occur

Remember this? 85% of digital advertising gets less than 2.5 seconds of attention, which is below the threshold for creating a memorable impression (MA).

This prompted us to question, if every second is distinctively branded, can we hack attention to beat this 'new normal'?

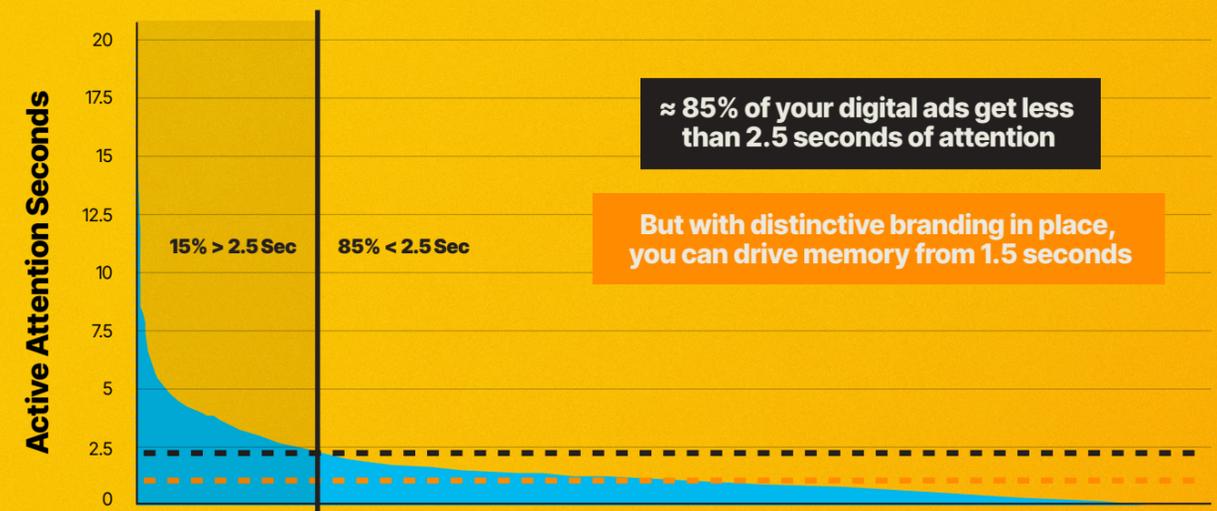**Yes! With good branding memory outcomes are multiplied by ~1.06x even under 2.5 secs.**
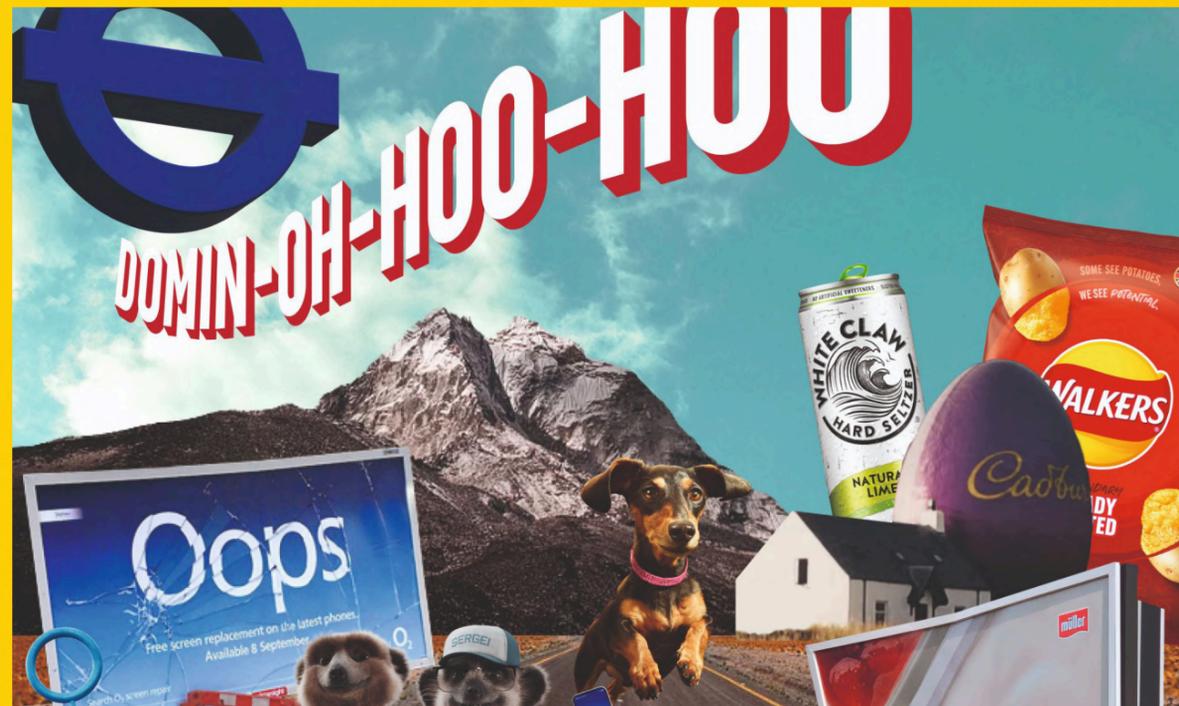
THE NEW ATTENTION MEMORY THRESHOLD

Distinctive assets effectively lower the attention-memory threshold. Even below 2.5 seconds, where typical creative struggles to generate memory outcomes, distinctive assets amplify both STAS and MA.

Non-distinctive creative only starts to show meaningful MA uplift at around 2.5-3.5 seconds (which is why the old threshold was set around 2.5s).

Distinctive creative shows detectable MA uplift even under 1.5 seconds, with a steady rise starting already in the 1.5–2.5 second bucket.

≈ 85% of your digital ads get less than 2.5 seconds of attention

But with distinctive branding in place, you can drive memory from 1.5 seconds

15% > 2.5 Sec   85% < 2.5 Sec

Active Attention Seconds

So the "new threshold" means: With typical creative, you generally need 2.5 seconds+ for memory to form. With distinctive assets, memory benefits start appearing as early as 1.5 seconds - meaning your effective threshold shifts lower by ~1 second. That's a big deal when 85% of impressions fall under 2.5s.

With distinctive assets in play...
the new attention memory threshold is

1.5
SECONDS

Using distinctive assets to own every second means turning a mountain of wasted impressions into a million little memory drivers.
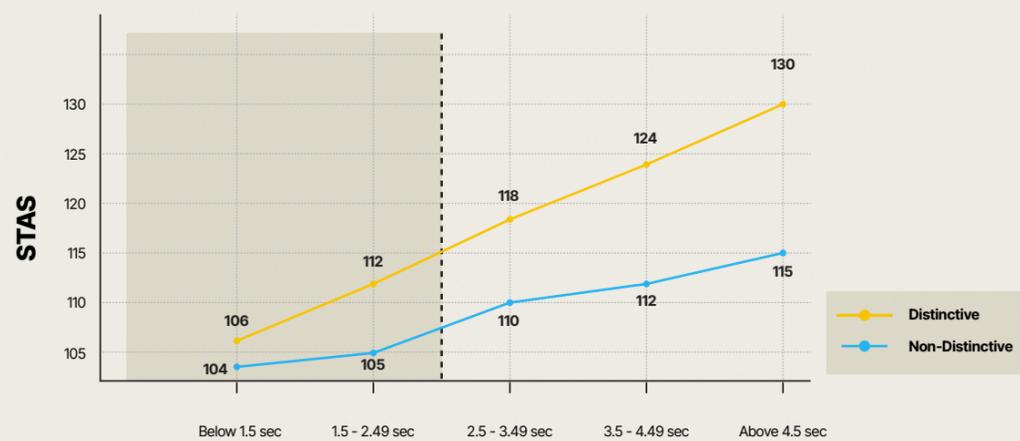
DISTINCTIVE BEATS BOTH LONG AND SHORT EFFECTS

If you don't design for distinctiveness and to capture enough attention duration, you're stuck in the 'no memory' zone.

MA by Attention Duration
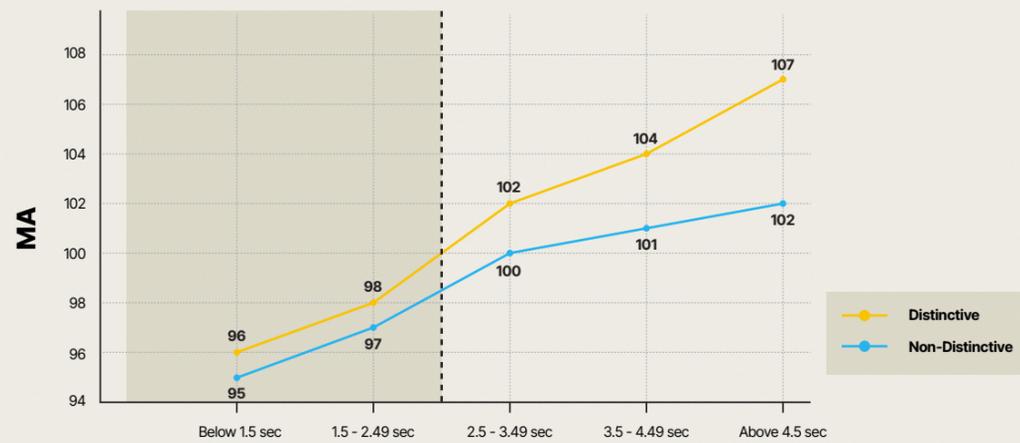
STAS by Attention Duration

WHAT THESE CHARTS TELL US

Distinctive creative works harder at every attention level but the advantage compounds once ads hold attention beyond 2.5 seconds.

Distinctive assets give you a head start: even under 2.5 seconds, distinctive creative beats non-distinctive on both STAS and MA.

The amplification gap grows with time: above 2.5 seconds, the performance gap between distinctive and non-distinctive creative widens steadily. This means as time goes on, distinctiveness gets more brand consideration and memory from each second.

My memory threshold chart shows the point where memory starts to kick in and we see it clearly here. Most ads never get more than 2.5 seconds of attention - including in this data - but that's exactly when distinctive creative starts making a difference. Even in short exposures, distinctive assets boost the chance of being remembered (MA) by 6% and considered (STAS) by 6.7% compared to non-distinctive creative. The 2.5-second mark remains a critical inflection point. As attention increases, this advantage compounds rapidly, widening the gap in both memory and brand choice outcomes.

% Active Attention Above / Below 2.5 Seconds in this Data

36% % Above 2.5 Sec

64% % Below 2.5 Sec
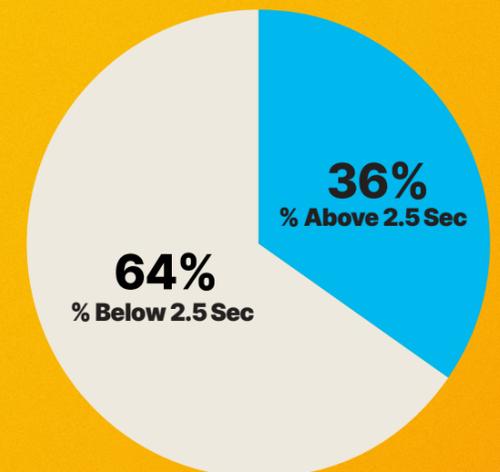
THE DISTINCTIVE ASSET TARIFF

There is an enormous 'tariff' for non-distinctive branding.

In other words, it's the extra money bad (non-distinctive) creative needs to perform as well as good (distinctive) creative.

Here's how we did it.

First, we calculated the Delivered Value - the brand choice uplift (STAS) achieved by each creative type, based on its efficiency per £1 spent. Using an average monthly UK digital ad spend, we then estimated how much would be needed to achieve the same uplift if distinctive creative had been used (Required Spend). The gap between these two amounts is the Distinctive Tariff - the extra money wasted when non-distinctive creative is used.

1

Delivered Value = Current Spend x STAS Efficiency (Non Disnctive)

Easy Explainer
"How much uplift are we getting now with non-distinctive creative?"

2

Required Value = $\dfrac{\text{Delivered Value}}{\text{STAS Efficiency (Distinctive)}}$

Easy Explainer
"How much would we need to spend if we used distinctive creative instead?"

3

Distinctive Tariff = Required Spend - Current Spend

Easy Explainer
"What's the wasted spend from using non-distinctive creative?"

Based on an average UK digital spend of £493,000 per month, the Distinctive Tariff can be converted into a Tariff per £1 spent to make it comparable across all platforms. This Tariff tells us how much advertisers lose for every £1 spent when distinctive brand assets are not used.

WHEN YOU DO NOT PROPERLY OWN EVERY SECOND OF ATTENTION AVAILABLE, YOU PAY A MASSIVE SELF-IMPOSED TAX ON YOUR MEDIA SPEND

TARIFF ON POORLY BRANDED ADS

66p
in every £1 spent in digital media

BIG BRANDS ARE HIT HARDER BY THE TARIFF

Normally smaller brands suffer more, but in fast-scroll environments, big brands are hit harder as their distinctive advantage is rarely seen.

Established brands face a bigger penalty in absolute terms because when they don't use distinctive assets, the efficiency loss is much greater.

Why? Established brands have more mental availability to lose. Distinctive assets work harder for larger brands, so failing to use them results in much bigger efficiency losses compared to growth brands.

Established brands lose 69p for every £1 spent when distinctive brand assets aren't used. Growth brands lose 59p for every £1 spent when distinctive brand assets aren't used.

TARIFF ON POORLY BRANDED ADS

+17%

It's a bigger tariff for established brands

AND THERE ARE TARIFFS BY FORMAT

By Format

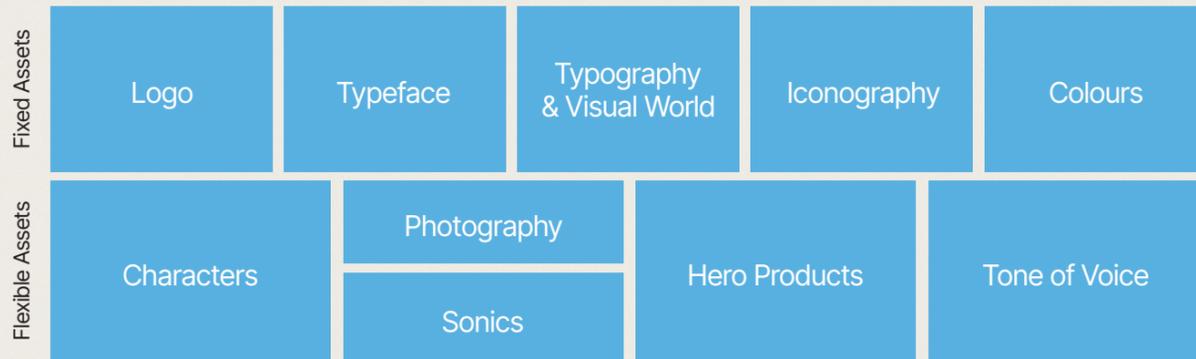| Platform	Distinctive STAS Efficiency	Non-Distinctive STAS Efficiency	Tariff per £1
Web	2.96	0.89	£0.70 lost
Social Platform A	8.96	3.14	£0.65 lost
Social Platform B	8.78	6.24	£0.29 lost

HOW TO HACK THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

06

A 5-POINT PLAN TO HACK THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

1. KNOW YOUR ASSETS

Fixed Assets: Logo | Typeface | Typography & Visual World | Iconography | Colours

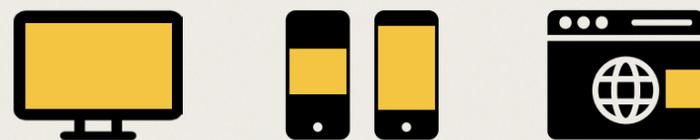**Flexible Assets:** Characters | Photography | Sonics | Hero Products | Tone of Voice

Codify and map fixed and flexible elements.

2. BALANCE MEDIA THAT IMBUES THEM WITH MEANING, AND MEDIA THAT PUTS THEM TO WORK

Plan media that combines effectiveness, audience relevance and attention realities.

3. THEN PLAN YOUR FORMATS BASED ON MEDIA AND CREATIVE STRENGTH

Select formats that deliver on brand strength, brand asset type and attention - obsess over the creative.

## 4. COUNT THE SECONDS AND REACH

CPM ⟶ Cost Per Attentive Reach

Buy seen not served. Insist on a trading and tracking currency that speaks to real media behaviour.

5. BOARDROOM PROOF YOUR BRAND IN DIGITAL, AVOID THE TARIFF

Total spend against asset x Asset Tariff = Value of brand assets in digital media

Provide clarity on the equity of your brand in even the most low attention environments by calculating its impact on spend and projected outcomes. Test your own creative to create an even more accurate read on your own assets' power in digital.
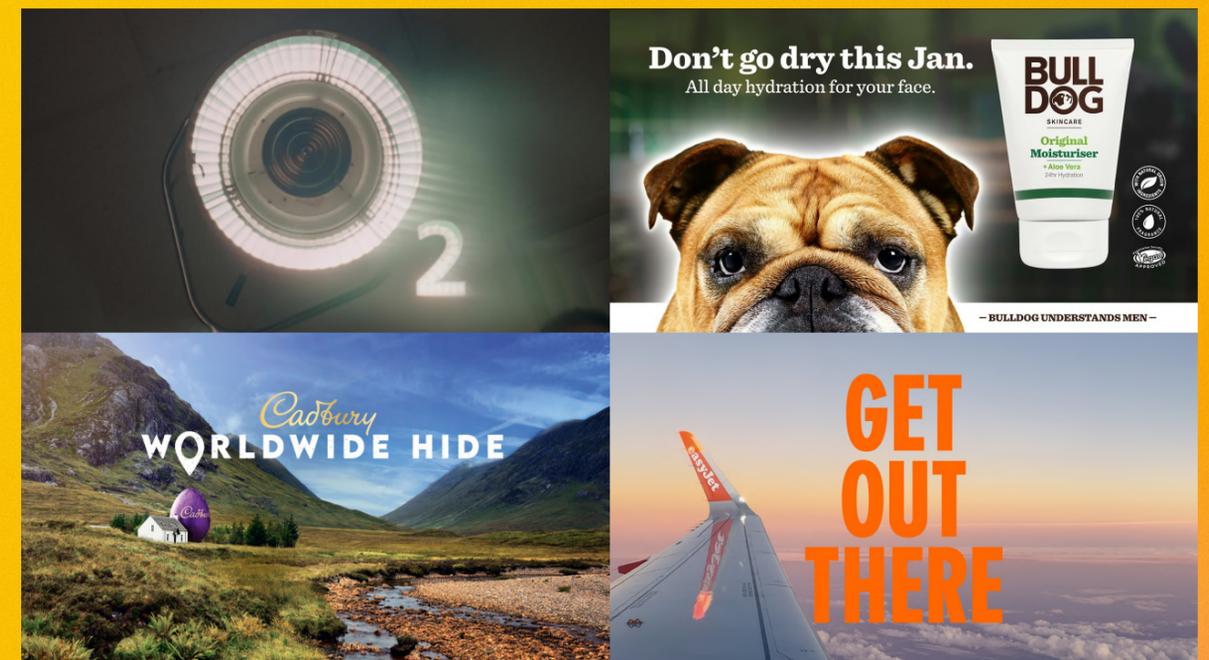
WHY IS HACKING THE ATTENTION ECONOMY SO CRUCIAL?

IF YOU'RE NOT GETTING THIS RIGHT IN TODAY'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE IT CAN COST YOU 66P IN EVERY £1 YOU SPEND.

HAVING CONTROL OF YOUR BRAND NOW MORE THAN EVER CAN PROVE TO DRIVE 2–6X HIGHER BRAND AND SALES RESULTS IN DIGITAL SPEND.

IT'S THE BEGINNING OF A WHOLE NEW MARRIAGE OF BRAND DESIGN, CREATIVE AND MEDIA.

BECAUSE IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO GAIN AND BUILD ATTENTION IN THE NEW MEDIA REALITY.

WHERE AS LITTLE AS 1.5 SECONDS OF ATTENTION IS ENOUGH TO CREATE A MEMORY WITH THE RIGHT ASSETS IN PLAY.

VCCP

FROM MEDIA PLANNING TO ASSET PLANNING

To deliver on the findings of this research, VCCP Media have developed Asset Planning.

Media doesn't work without creative. Creative doesn't work without the media. This means planning for all elements together - harnessing our collective intelligence and the smarts that brand design, behavioural science, data and technology afford us to properly walk the walk on integration. Attention data can set the agenda within our predictive models, as well as contribute to creative testing and media scenario planning, but it can also be optimised for in real time.

We can let the best consumer panel in the world - the media - tell us where the attention is being held. Which distinctive elements in which combinations are driving attention and in turn results.

Welcome to a different way of thinking about attention. Welcome to a different way of thinking about media. Welcome to a different way of thinking about creative. Where we don't plan media in a silo. Where we don't build 'the creative' separately.

Where we build a brand world second by second. Asset by asset.

HOW WE CAN HELP

Attention Modelling	Budget setting, forecasting and unlocking value with the true attention potential of your brand world in play. Our World Class econometric modelling suite, Challenger, allows us to demonstrate the projected business impact of your brand through forecasted attention yields, **with the value of your brand in the media factored in.**
Asset Planning	The next generation of integrated media and creative planning powered by 38bn biometric attention data points from Amplified and 23 years of brand building expertise at VCCP. So every £1 spent is engineered **to maximise your assets as well as the media.**
Brand World Building	The combined superpower of Girl & Bear's industry-leading production with VCCP Media's planning smarts. The marriage of brand assets with audience needs at scale - delivered through our partnerships with Smartly.io & Amplified. Launch, test and optimise **real-world ready assets at scale with VCCP's Brand World Engine.**

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HACKING THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

VCCP | Challenger Series