



Effective Advertising: Harnessing the Power of Creativity

Paul Gareau

“The real fact of the matter is that nobody reads ads. People read what interests them, and sometimes it’s an ad”

— Howard Luck Gossage, advertising innovator (1917-1969)

Making advertising interesting is the job of the creatives in the ad agencies. Creative departments hire individuals who have a special talent for seeing the world differently. They use the power of creativity to get our attention, and to make products and services interesting and relevant.

We can all easily remember our favourite ads. Mine is a Dentyne Frost Bites ad called “Frostbitten,” in which a man in the back of a cab loads a handful of small gum pellets into his mouth, and then his head freezes solid (the ad can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=regx_JrpC68).

Creativity is important to advertising for a number of reasons:

- It has stopping power. Creativity can make people stop what they are doing and pay attention to advertising – for example, Molson Canadian’s “Made from Canada” commercials.
- It fuels the memory. Creativity can leave enduring brand associations that are difficult to forget – for example, the Energizer Bunny.
- It generates interest. Creativity can make us curious about

brands in a way that gets us talking about them, searching for more information, or even wanting to try the product or service – for example, Old Spice’s “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like” commercials.

- It frames the brand experience. Creativity can enhance perceptions of the product experience – for example, Viagra commercials.

Creative and Effective Advertising

But what is creativity, and how do we measure it? These are important questions for those of us in the advertising industry.

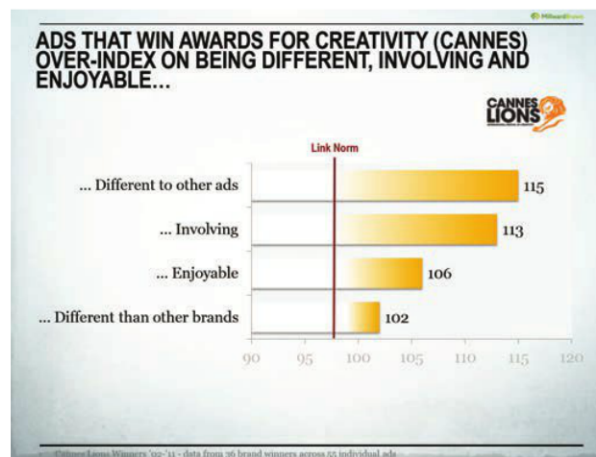
Every year, the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity recognizes the most creative advertising from around the world. What criteria do the judges use in making their decisions? There are no rules for producing highly creative advertising, so most would say that they know it when they see it. Dictionary.com defines creativity as “the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, relationships, or the like, and to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, and interpretations.”

As researchers, though, we naturally wanted to know more, so Millward Brown evaluated award-winning advertising to determine if there was a common set of traits that all or most creative advertising possesses. We used our Link™ quantitative copy-testing tool to analyse ads that won Cannes

Lions between 2002 and 2011 (55 ads across 36 brands). Quantitative pretesting is often criticized for encouraging a cookie-cutter approach to making ads, and for not fully recognizing creativity; we wanted to test this perspective.

Our Link analysis of Cannes Lions winners showed evidence that there are no patterns or rules to making highly creative advertising. However, our analysis did uncover that winning ads scored higher than average on enjoyment, involvement, positive emotions, and being different from other ads – as exhibit 1 shows. The results in this exhibit are indexed against the relevant norm: an index of 105 or more puts the ads into the top third of our database; an index of 114 or more puts the ads into the top ten per cent.

Exhibit 1: Link Analysis of Cannes Lions–Winning Ads



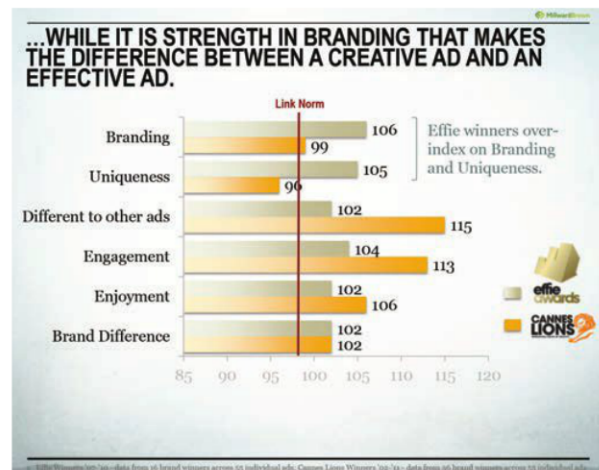
These results make perfect sense. Truly creative advertising – advertising that has stopping power, fuels the memory, generates interest, and frames the brand experience – has to be unlike any other ad, differentiating itself in a very engaging way.

But is creative advertising always effective advertising? While Cannes Lions recognizes creative advertising, Effie Awards recognize effective advertising, campaigns that generate proven business results. Millward Brown also analysed Effie Award-winning advertising from 2007 to 2010 using our Link copy-testing tool, including 55 ads across 16 brands.

Effie Award winners scored high on the same measures as the Cannes Lions creativity winners (enjoyment, involvement, positive emotions, and being different). In addition, ads that are recognized for effectiveness also scored high on branding and uniqueness of impressions, meaning that the creative was well linked to the advertised brand (see exhibit 2).

Brand linkage means more than just repeatedly showing the brand name or packaging throughout the ad. It takes a creative approach to integrating the brand into the heart of the ad's

Exhibit 2: Link Analysis of Effie Award–Winning Ads



storyline to deliver strong brand linkage. Take, for example, Guinness' "Evolution" ad, which won the Cannes Grand Prix award in 2006 (you can view it at www.youtube.com/watch?v=1t4sdgvy-pk). In the Millward Brown database, this ad scored in the top 25 per cent for branding, yet the brand is shown only once at the beginning and once at the end.

It may seem surprising that effective advertising does not necessarily have to be persuasive. Persuasion is a short-term measure of effectiveness. At the moment of seeing the ad, you are either persuaded or you are not. Persuasive advertising typically delivers new and/or relevant information that drives consumers to change their behaviour. Once their behaviour changes, the ad ceases to be persuasive.

Millward Brown has also identified ads that are not persuasive in the short term but are effective at brand building (growing the brand's equity and market share over the long term). These are the types of ads that typically get submitted for the Effies, so the findings from our analysis should not be surprising.

Advertising that is effective in long-term brand building typically generates a strong emotional response in consumers. Emotionally powerful ads are more memorable. Our work in the area of copy testing has shown that a number of different emotions are effective at generating a response from consumers, and therefore no one emotion is necessary to trigger successful advertising. Effective advertising triggers the emotion that is most relevant to the brand's positioning.

Implications for Advertisers

Creativity is very important for advertising to be successful. Creativity helps deliver stopping power, fuels the memory, generates interest, and frames the brand experience – all of which are important for advertising to work well. The analysis presented in this article adds the need for strong brand linkage and for emotional response to creativity if advertising is also to

be effective in building the brand.

Ensuring that the brand has the appropriate strategy driving its creative direction and making sure that the creative efforts are all consistent with the brand's overall strategy will increase the chances of advertising effectiveness.

While creativity is hard to define – most saying they know it when they see it – through this analysis, we now know the metrics that help us measure it.

Big Idea Research

As advertising costs increase, as competition becomes fiercer, and as brands look to globalize their marketing campaigns, many of the world's advertisers are placing greater importance on creativity to help their advertising be more disruptive, generate buzz, and transcend cultural and geographic boundaries.

This response underscores the importance of identifying big creative ideas at an early stage of creative development. "Big idea" research takes place in the often neglected space between brand strategy research and the copy-testing research that happens late in the creative development process. By knowing the metrics that help measure creativity, advertisers can greatly benefit from involving research earlier in the creative development process, generating bigger, better ideas.

Rob Hernandez, global brand director for FireFly Millward Brown, says, "There are some who argue that we can't (or

shouldn't) research our way into a big idea – that big ideas surface spontaneously or come in the form of divine inspiration to agency creatives. I disagree. There are ways to harness consumer research – both qualitative and quantitative – not only to facilitate the co-creation of big ideas, but also to make good ideas even bigger and better."

Big idea research helps advertisers determine how best to say what they want to communicate, identify the most resonant elements of potential ideas, and evaluate their fit with the brand. Millward Brown feels that putting the emphasis on development first and then evaluating quantitatively, using a proven framework for making advertising successful, is the right way to research big ideas.

Endnote: I would like to acknowledge the work of three Millward Brown colleagues in providing the research and inspiration for this article: Dominic Twose, global head of Knowledge Management; Polly Wyn Jones, in Knowledge Management; and Rob Hernandez, global brand director of FireFly.

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June 2013	SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH	May 3, 2013
July / August 2013	CANADIANA	June 3, 2013
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October 2013	QUALITATIVE	September 2, 2013
November 2013	CLIENT-SIDE RESEARCHERS	October 4, 2013
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