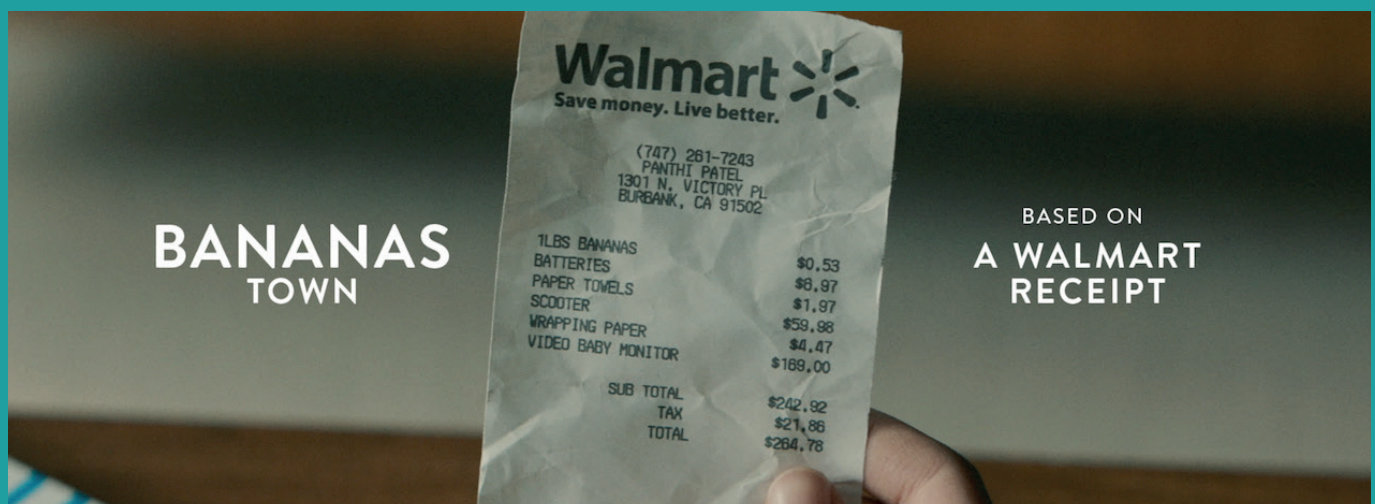


#NotaJoke. Branded Entertainment Oscar Style

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February is a prime month for American brands looking to capitalise on two of the largest television audiences of the year – the Super Bowl and the Academy Awards. Unfortunately for the teams behind Best Picture winner *Moonlight*, and the incorrectly announced Best Picture winner *La La Land*, Price Waterhouse Coopers' mishandling of the Best Picture Award winner envelope has overshadowed most all of the stories to emerge from the evening's events.

The controversy means you might have missed *The Receipt*, Wal-Mart's Oscar-style dose of 'branded entertainment'. 2016 marked the first year of Wal-Mart's multiple-year sponsorship of the Academy Awards, and to kick the partnership off in Hollywood style, the retailer sought out four well-known Hollywood directors, Marc Forster (*Monster's Ball*, *The Kite Runner*), Antoine Fuqua (*Training Day*), Evan Goldberg and Seth Rogen (*Superbad*, *Neighbors*) to create three one-minute branded entertainment films. The challenge to the filmmakers was simple: take a Wal-Mart receipt and integrate the six items into a compelling narrative. The platform guiding the film's development was "Behind every receipt, there's a great story."

Despite several impressive examples of branded entertainment, like Red Bull's events, SC Johnson's 'Glade Museum of Feelings', and even the latest installment in the Lego movie series (*Lego Batman*), it appears that many are still trying to determine what it offers that traditional media channels do not, and how it should be used to build a brand, especially as most non-marketing people will describe it as advertising. Recognising it is not, let's start with a definition. Our working definition (through Ipsos' partnership with Oxford Brookes University and The Branded Content Marketing Association) is:

“Branded Content is content fully or partly funded by a Brand which promotes the Brand’s values and provides something of value to audiences – often by entertaining, informing and/or educating.”

To provide further context to the definition, there are two inherent foundations that must be acknowledged:

1. **It’s experienced:** it need not necessarily be clicked or viewed – as evidenced by New York Times VR film *The Displaced*, Frito Lay’s fan-curated Cheetos Museum and of course the popular Red Bull events.
2. **It’s something people choose to spend time with:** it’s creativity enjoyed at an individual’s discretion. Crucially, people are in control of when it’s experienced – not the brand. Acknowledging that Wal-Mart seeded *The Receipt* during the Oscar broadcast, it is now people’s choice if and when they will watch the films (again).

Our working definition fits nicely with the decision criteria set forth by the Cannes Lions Branded Entertainment jury¹ – which awarded Lions based on quality of work, ability to hook an audience rather than interrupt, be entertainment in form not just effect, and have a strong link to the brand. Ipsos Connect would take it one step further – not only must it have a strong link to the brand, *it must support brand growth*.

What increases the chances of success?

While branded entertainment enables new opportunities for brands to creatively connect with people, many of the challenges it faces are not new. Of first importance, it must effectively compete with the real world and reach and engage audiences. We all cultivate our own media-consuming microcosms characterised by habit and autonomy. Branded Entertainment needs to interrupt to get noticed but it cannot disrupt – discovery must be as organic as discovering pure content. To achieve cut-through at scale, it needs to be found in relevant places and creatively sign posted to draw people in. In general, cutting through is getting tougher. Whether it be the impact of multi-screening or increasing use of ad-blocking software, it’s not as easy to get noticed.

Successful Branded Entertainment relies on resonance between people, content, brands and platforms. The implication is that Branded Entertainment must be planned with as much attention to detail as traditional advertising, and perhaps even more so to some extent. Part of the plan should be to determine where it fits in to your media strategy: is the aim to supplement a wider campaign by supporting the brand’s motives or to appeal to a target you struggle to communicate with through your standard channels. In short, is the content designed to inspire reaffirmation or reappraisal? So, where do you begin?



1. <http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/new-york-times-vr-film-displaced-wins-lions-entertainment-grand-prix-172225>

How to win at Branded Entertainment

1. Start with people

Our proprietary research indicates that people generally use 'just' 18 apps and 15 websites each month. Similarly, Forrester Research found that smartphone owners spent >80% of in app time on just 5 apps. For your branded entertainment to have the opportunity to be noticed, you need to know where your target audience is, how they interact with media and platforms on a day-to-day basis, and what platforms they think of when it comes to your category or brand. Furthermore, people must see something they like and then choose to spend time with it and for it to have a brand impact. Added to that, audiences are becoming increasingly impatient – the first 5 seconds determines further attention. Battling impassivity is even harder when people have the autonomy of choice.

Therefore, choosing to spend time with branded entertainment becomes critically important; the power is entirely with people. You need to understand your target's needs, values, aspirations to ensure you create content that is meaningful and resonant. The content and platform must seamlessly connect while falling within the target's preference bubble. Finally, to ensure that it is associated with your brand, you must understand what people think or feel about it, along with their associations, memories and stories. Against this backdrop you have the inspiration against which to develop content that re-affirms or re-appraises your brand.

2. Ensure attention and engagement

As with traditional advertising, attention is vital. Unlike traditional advertising, likeability is a prerequisite to engagement. People do not always have to like advertising to be influenced by it but they generally consume content because they get something in return. Branded entertainment must appeal like content but have the effect of advertising. To create genuinely engaging content that resonates with people – either through emotion, information or entertainment – it is

important to understand people's needs, aspirations, beliefs and desires.

3. Effectively leverage the power of amplification

An inherent appeal of content and entertainment marketing is the potential to have your brand's assets shared and sought out rather than filtered and blocked. The innate shareability of engaging content means ROI can extend beyond opportunity to see, clickthrough and Facebook friends. But realistically, very few pieces of online branded content go 'viral' and it's very difficult for any one item to achieve 'shareability status'. Shareability shouldn't be overestimated; Ipsos research shows that only 6% in the UK claim to have shared content in the last year and even then, the channels for sharing are tangled. Coupled with the rise of more 'paid for' content on platforms where good levels of organic reach were once possible, shareable content needs a competitive budget to be seeded appropriately. Understanding where your target habitually spends their time will enable you to seed your content where they are.

Amplification need not only be about sharing content online. It is also about creating offline discussions, word of mouth and earned media. Coming back to branded entertainment repeatedly, like Red Bull's increasing number of events, or Lego's latest movie installment, or through the creation of an online series, like [Nike's #TimelsPrecious](#), can further this amplification. Another way to achieve this is through creative seeding. When the New York Times introduced its Virtual Reality (VR) offer with [The Displaced](#) it included 1 million cardboard Google VR viewers in a print edition of its paper effectively reaching an audience it might not otherwise. This worked to create conversations, significant earned media, and a Cannes Lions Grand Prix for Branded Entertainment.



What about brand growth?

Branded entertainment has the potential to have a strong impact on brand. We found that positive response to the content has a strong influence on enhanced perceptions of the associated brand. Our proprietary research demonstrates that the *Always 'Like a Girl' video* had a profound effect on brand perceptions amongst their target group. Furthermore, positive brand impact occurred regardless of gender – proof that a universally appealing message and elegant execution can transcend any barrier. Always is a strong brand to begin with; the content acted very much as re-affirmation, strengthening brand affinity.

Lexus' hoverboard video was successfully able to provoke re-appraisal from a traditionally indifferent and unfamiliar audiences. Amongst younger participants, over half found the film unexpected for Lexus, but it was almost universally liked. It shifted their perceptions of popularity and modernity as well as personal relevance and as 'a brand to aspire to'. Maintaining engagement over time will be key so that Lexus remains top of mind when they have the disposable income to seriously consider a purchase.

Which brings us back to *The Receipt*. Wal-Mart succeeded in creating content that was aligned with the moment (the Oscars), the medium (video), and people's mindset (Hollywood films). Furthermore, it would have secured significant audience reach with the Oscar broadcast alone. The jury is still out, or the right envelope still pending, as to whether the films will be successful beyond the Academy Awards broadcast. Capitalising on core brand assets such as the receipt and the breadth of products available, Wal-Mart's CMO described the films as an "unexpected way of telling our brand story". Therefore, as a re-affirmation of already established associations, *The Receipt* pushes a bit too far. Only time will tell if they work to catalyse re-appraisal, and to secure Wal-Mart as significant a position in "pop culture" as its retail position².

In the words of Alexandra Dimiziani, Head of Marketing EMEA at Airbnb, Branded Entertainment success is about "really smart connections planning".

2. <http://adage.com/article/media/walmart-hollywood-tapping-star-directors-oscars/307710/>