

# SLOWING DOWN TO BE FASTER

Why it is paramount to invest time at the front end of the development process

Arnaud Debia and Jiongming Mu | December 2019

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**Has speed become the ultimate goal for creative agencies? Is the world set to adopt the Korean motto of ‘hurry, hurry’. Or is there an alternative to nurture effectiveness beyond just time efficiencies?**

## A ‘HURRY HURRY’ WORLD

The acceleration of web and mobile technology hasn't only impacted the digital world. It has profoundly changed people's expectations and perceptions of time. Everything now has to be fast, immediate, instantaneous, even anticipated. Waiting is over: it's so 20th century! Looking at people on public transport, in traffic jams or on the street, most people's idle time is dominated with reading screens, viewing, chatting and/or gaming.

The way we work has completely changed too: thanks to (or because of) technology, a lot of us now multi-task at the office, online meetings and instant messaging. Even email is now seen as not being fast enough.

The innovation and creative development processes have undergone a similar transformation towards fast and speed. The rise of insurgent brands, start-up companies, who can bring new products and services in markets in just a couple of months, has pushed larger companies to accelerate their innovation cycles. This is also true for communications where more and more creative advertising content is produced across more touchpoints. Traditional advertisers are pushed

**With 20 senior executives and key clients, Ipsos explores how slowing down might actually help being faster and more effective.**

to speed up by more agile digital minded agencies and are pushed to tap into crowdsourcing to develop multiple pieces of content in record timing. This impacts research too – instead of testing before launch, clients prefer to launch and learn in market, removing the products or content which don't stick.

However, should marketing, R&D and creative agencies put all their efforts on time efficiencies? Or, as Will Lion from BBH questioned, are we just looking at an efficiency bubble?<sup>1</sup> Looking at making processes faster and more efficient because *“it's cuts, it's short-term, it's rational, it's targeting, it's late funnel, it's low risk. It's 0 to 0.1. It smells like fresh laundry.”* While, *“effectiveness is relatively harder. It's investment, it's focus, it's long-term, it's emotional, it's fame, it's ideas, it's top of funnel, it's bets, guts and risk. It's 0 to 1. It has freakish breath”.*

Should we somehow take the time and make the effort to develop innovation and creativity effectiveness?





# SPEED AND EFFECTIVENESS COME FROM TAKING YOUR TIME, EXPERTS SAY

Ipsos contacted more than 20 senior creative agency, marketing and insights executives, in order to get their views on the relative value of speed and time vs. creativity and innovation.

Many of them do recognize the importance of speed in the world today:

**“New technology and limited budgets means accessibility of data and agility in service is faster today”**

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This can be very stimulating for the creative and innovation development process:

**“The reality is that today we have less time to develop ideas than we had before – sometimes that actually helps – when the pressure is on, it can be motivating”**

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They also point out that what matters most is not the amount of time, but what you do with it:

**“It’s not so much about the time you need (three weeks) than the focus, the resources and efforts you put in that matter”**

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However, there are still calls for making the time within creative and innovation processes:

**“There are two big dangers when we skip on time. Firstly, that mistakes can be made (not necessarily in the development process) but during shoots, trafficking of materials, etc. The second is that we are often juggling multiple projects at the same time – the ability to be agile decreases when too many projects are “hot” at the same time”**

**“Speed can save some time, but it is also the source of making mistakes. It might force you to decide something without thinking things to a proper end”**

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Sometimes, cutting down time is not due to business or market constraints:

**“It is very annoying when we are being given false deadlines to accommodate agendas”**

**“Too much time is dedicated to politics and processes rather than quality”**

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# WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO INVEST TIME AT THE FRONT END OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Everyone recognizes that creativity takes time:

**“While new processes and methods can help speed up processes overall, creativity still needs time to explore, think, reconsider, push further”**

**“Creativity needs time and space to flourish to avoid formulaic work”**

**“You won’t speed up a creative idea, there’s no shortcut. You don’t shorten the time needed to cook a cake or a chicken, right?”**

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Therefore, how do you marry the need for speed, dictated by today’s fast-moving world and fierce competition, and at the same time give creativity and innovation the right time to grow?

Our panel of senior experts have the answer. They highlight the importance of investing time at the front end of the development process – understanding the brief, the situation, the business question, the target and spending enough time on the strategy and big idea.

**“If you do not take time upfront in understanding the situation, the stakes, the business marketing and communication objectives, the critical things, you lose time at the end of the day”**

**“The exploratory phase required is a must - not a luxury. Once you’ve found a great, solid idea and worked out the strategic underpinnings, it actually enables you to go faster and have more fun developing the executions. Time well invested”**

**“Without taking time on the strategic frame you operate in, there is no way you can make things efficient”**

**“With more time within the creative process the probability to find a genius solution is higher; investing time in the exploration phase, to see where the raw diamond can take you is well invested as it will make the whole development smoother”**

**“Time helps to understand the question and the real challenge is to get faster to the right answer”**

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# EARLY STAGE RESEARCH HELPS INCREASE SPEED AND EFFECTIVENESS

These insights from the experts we spoke to are fully consistent with the research Ipsos has carried out recently.

- Communication campaigns which benefited from early stage exploration show an above average performance in terms of potential short-term sales lift (index 138), much higher than those which didn't use any early stage research (index 93)<sup>2</sup>.
- Likewise, innovations with early concept exploration had a trial index of 107 vs. 96 for concepts that skipped this step<sup>3</sup>.
- Looking into the drivers of stronger creative and innovations which benefited from early stage research, innovations on average show a 6% increase on differentiation and 9% increase in relevance. Meanwhile,

creative on average shows a 32% increase in stirring emotions, 36% in terms of uniqueness. Early exploration helps build an idea relevance and differentiation.

Our research shows that clients and agencies who take the time to use our front end, early stage solutions to explore their early ideas and identify how to make them best resonate with people, develop much more successful creative and higher performing innovations.

This is no surprise for us. We have seen time and again that early, front end creative and innovation research has not only a limited effect on time, but significantly impacts effectiveness, by helping teams understand the strengths of their early ideas they need to focus on executing, and opportunities to improve before spending big money on production.





Enrique Arceo de La Pena, Global Marketing Excellence Lead at Sanofi, very clearly articulates how early stage research is essential:

*"We need to start talking about content instead of advertising. We have to re-focus our consumer understanding into the earlier stages of the creative thinking. Judging the creative power of a multi-touch point campaign based on the scores of a single execution will only slow us down and limit creativity. The focus should be on the exploration (not validation) of the creative idea to make sure we are in the right creative territory, and then let the creatives go wild."*

This is exactly what ABI did. In 2016, they successfully developed the *Born the Hard Way* Superbowl campaign in just three months, by focusing early on exploration. The team started at the end of October exploring four different ideas using Ipsos Labs, which helped build conviction and confidence on the way forward and understanding how to make it more seamlessly connect with people. The agency was equipped with the right insight to finalize the creative,

tapping in qualitative discussions to confirm the direction, then went into production in December. Creative assessment results in January confirmed the above average performance of the execution, which successfully aired at the end of January. It became the most talked about and celebrated Superbowl campaign of 2017, going to win an Ogilvy Award and was a Cannes Silver Lion winner.

This demonstrates perfectly that slowing down helps you go faster. Early exploration fuelled by the right research helps you go into the later stages of development faster, aligning all stakeholders and allowing you to move with confidence. The old sayings "a stitch in time saves nine" or "the early bird catches the worm" both back this up.



# THE NEW CREATIVITY EQUATION

Another interesting finding from our exchanges with our panel of experts is related to how the equation of creativity has evolved.

Those of us working at ad agencies in the 2000s were told by their strategic planner director:

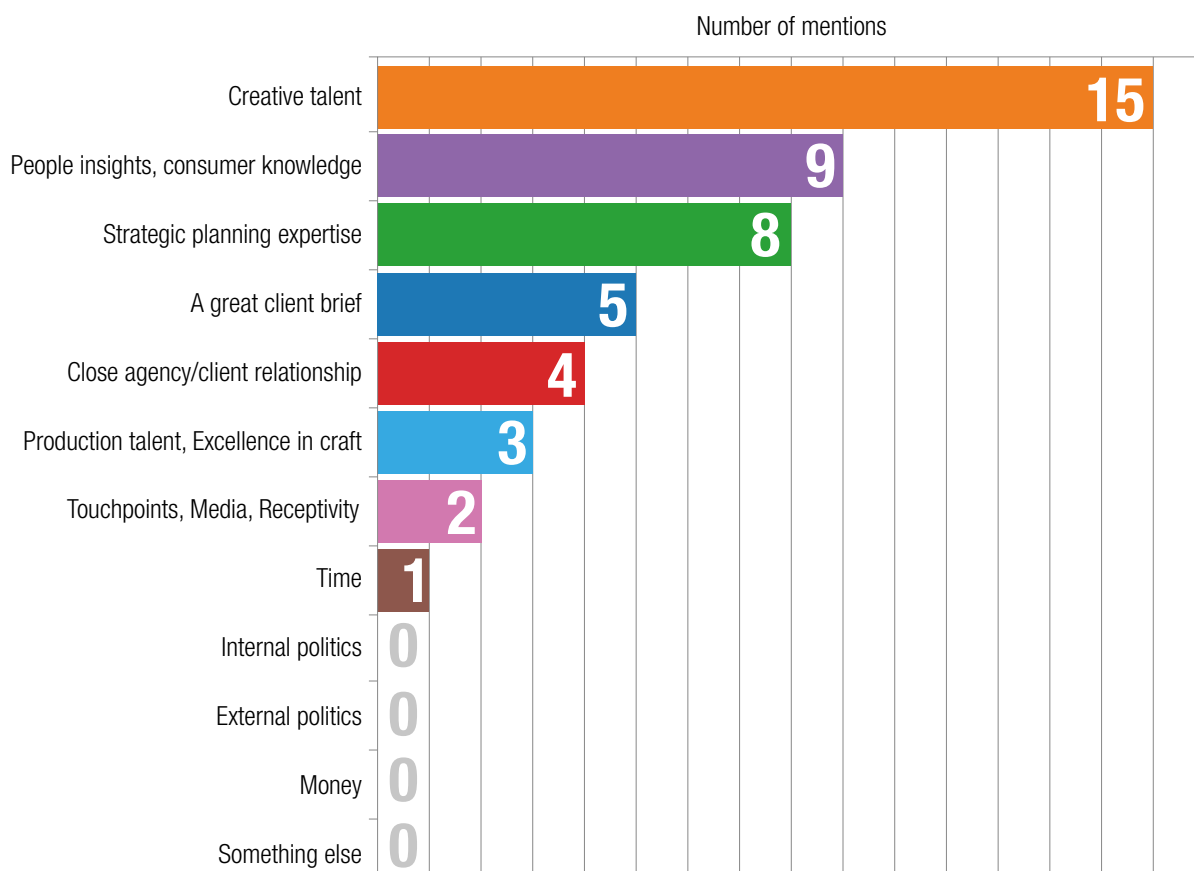
$$\text{CREATIVITY} = \text{TALENT} \times \text{MONEY} \times \text{TIME}$$

It does make intuitive sense that you need the right minds and creatives, sufficient investment and enough time to come up with ideas.

Yet to our surprise, 'time' was missing. In the context of 'hurry hurry', this isn't surprising, as marketers and communication agencies can't ask for more time to make efficient creative. Time will be scarce and cannot be a driver. It can drag down creativity if not efficiently managed, using it where it matters: early on, and speeding up in the later stages of development as much as possible.

When asked about the key ingredients to creativity, most of our experts mentioned talent – in creativity, but also in strategic thinking and production.

**Figure 1** Please select the three elements that matter most to come up with breakthrough ideas and creative



Source: Interviews with 20 senior creative agency, marketing and insights executives



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The same happens to money: many YouTubers and zero-budget campaigns have proven that strong ideas and disruptive content can make up for a lack of investment. However, Peter Field, in his last creativity report for the IPA, demonstrates that an erosion of advertising budgets is certainly correlated with the erosion in creative effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> Brands need to maintain a minimum level of investment on average, to ensure their campaigns get the chance to grab people's attention and influence brand choice.

The other surprise to us was to see that 'insights' was the second most mentioned ingredient right after 'talent'. Most professionals recognize the importance of in-depth insights about people and how they engage with ideas, to ensure their creative and innovation ideas will effectively get their attention and interest.

This is a relief for us, reinforcing our intimate belief that the right research, at the right moment, done by the right people, can be a catalyst to creative and innovation excellence if it brings the right knowledge as early as possible. This is what Ipsos strives for: supporting the creative talents and their clients in developing breakthrough creative and innovations, slowing down early on to learn, to accelerate execution and develop more effective ideas.

Not sure mathematicians will agree with our algebra, but this somehow indicates we should rewrite the creativity equation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

**CREATIVITY = EARLY EXPLORATION X TALENT X INSIGHTS  
+ THE RIGHT LEVEL OF TIME & MONEY**

**Arnaud Debia** has worked for more than 24 years as a brand, communications and research expert combining client, advertising and research agency experience. He is dedicated to driving clients, researchers and agencies to bond together earlier in the creative development process, in order to spark stronger and bolder business building campaigns.

**Jiongming Mu** has over 15 years of experience advising clients on innovation screening, optimizing, and forecasting across categories and industries. He is an avid advocator of new research approaches that better reflects the ever-changing realities of how consumers discover and adopt new innovations today.

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