



THE BALANCING ACT

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An Ipsos Point of View

GAME CHANGERS



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An Ipsos Point of View by **Lisa Zielinski**, Vice President, Creative Excellence

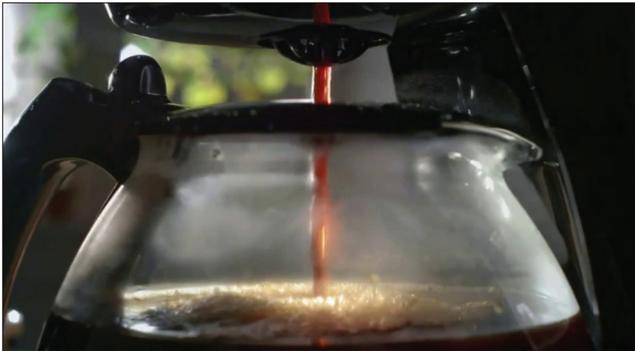
As a researcher, I love observing my one-year old son make choices. He's not biased yet by what his friends think is "cool" or what society tells him is right or wrong to enjoy. His reactions to the stimulus around him are pure and instinctual. He just had his first birthday, which of course brought an influx of new toys into our household. As I watch him interacting with his new presents, I notice he naturally gravitates toward toys that are most familiar to those he has already mastered in his first year of life. The old colorful blocks from his babyhood have been upgraded to colorful cups he can stack or nest together. He immediately engages with the cups — familiar enough to feel comfortable, but also satisfyingly fresh and interesting. Meanwhile, the toy truck, which looks nothing like anything he has seen before, is completely ignored and the toys that have been in the playroom for months are old news in the face of new items.

My son's playtime choices got me thinking about how this natural instinct plays into how we react to another form of stimuli that is near and dear to my heart: Advertising. If humans are inherently drawn to stimulus that is familiar, but also fresh and new, it seems logical that the most breakthrough creative would hit on these elements simultaneously.

It turns out that this behavior has been studied outside of the confines of my living room. It's what Behavioral Scientists refer to as *Fluency/Disfluency* and there is a whole host of research on its application to how consumers experience brands and advertising content.

WHAT IS FLUENCY?

Consumers often have existing mental networks for how a brand should look or behave. These are created through exposure to the brand's communication and product experiences. When what we see from the brand matches these mental models, we experience *fluency*, or mental ease. This ease leads to liking and positive affect.¹ Consistency in advertising creates and feeds into these feelings of fluency.² This makes ads easier to remember, more liked, and more easily processed. Think about the mental ease of watching an old Folgers "best part of waking up" commercial. The familiar tune comes on and we see the coffee drip. The character rises from her bed in a happy mood as she smells the aroma of the coffee brewing and she's ready to start her day. We hear the iconic tagline being sung, leaving us on a positive, feel good note. The comfort and familiarity of this formula is well loved.



WHAT IS DISFLUENCY?

When what we see in the world clashes with our mental models, we experience *disfluency*, or cognitive difficulty. This is what happens when we see something new or unexpected. While being fluent creates a positive effect, being disfluent does not necessarily create a negative effect. Instead, it draws attention, interest and discovery. Disfluency increases information processing, attention, and memory.³ Coca Cola replacing its logo with people's names on the side of the can or Carlsberg's departure from their traditional green bottle to market Red Barley are examples of disfluency in marketing at its best. They don't completely abandon the way the brand shows up, but instead create a small shift or departure that causes the consumer to be pulled in and take notice.



HOW DO WE CREATE BOTH FLUENCY AND DISFLUENCY SIMULTANEOUSLY IN CREATIVE?

Through Ipsos' partnership with our clients on creative development and evaluation, we see that it can be challenging for brands to strike the right balance in developing creative that is instantly familiar, but also fresh and new. Some brands struggle with consistency, with each new campaign taking a completely different direction

from the previous, while other brands with long running campaigns can suffer from yawn inducing, homogenous creative. So how do we walk the line between fluency and disfluency? Based on Ipsos' experience and knowledge base, there are five key principles to follow:

- 1 Stay true to the brand's core idea**
- 2 Be consistent**
- 3 Be consistently *fresh***
- 4 Avoid change for the sake of change**
- 5 Write (and stick to) a playbook**

Let's understand each concept in more detail.

1 Stay true to the brand's core idea

Before brands can even think about what their advertising execution should look like, they need to fully vet the core brand idea. Ipsos has found that brands that take the time to articulate their core idea, receive consumer feedback on that idea via Ipsos Early-Stage research, and stay true to it in their advertising executions see nearly a 50% increase in advertising performance on average versus those that skip this crucial step.⁴ We refer to this step in the creative development process as the “Big Idea.”

We’ve found that the process of getting your brand’s Big Idea down on paper before any ad executions are even discussed sets the foundation for long-term success.

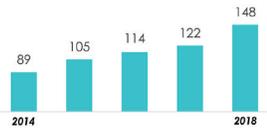
If all executions, across various touchpoints and platforms are grounded in the same core idea for the brand, you will naturally create fluency and consistency in the way that your brand shows up to consumers.

While developing and validating a Big Idea may sound like an additional step, we have found that it pays dividends down the line and actually gets to impactful creative more quickly. By ensuring that the idea resonates prior to creative development, our clients have saved on re-work time, research budgets, and production costs—in some cases to the tune of \$7 million savings on a single campaign.

Our partnerships have improved creative quality and business impact over time

COMPANY A

5 Year Client and Agency partnership to



dramatically improve creative quality over time partnering with Ipsos Creative Excellence

COMPANY B



10% increase in ROI after leveraging Ipsos Creative Excellence Techniques

COMPANY C

Improved market position with creative refinement and quality improvements via Ipsos Creative Excellence. In 2 years creative revamp moved brand from

#4

to

#2

2 Be consistent

Memories are built through repetition. In today’s fragmented media landscape, the chances of reaching someone multiple times, let alone once, are slim and what if each time they see an ad from your brand, it looks and feels completely different from the other touchpoints they saw? Consistency in the way your brand shows up is key to building mental networks so that your brand is easily retrieved in the moment of choice. Marketers should

build in some consistent elements to a brand’s advertising, through overarching campaign idea, distinctive assets, or preferably both, in order to create fluency.

The Ipsos Copy Testing database supports the power of consistent elements. We see that ads which leverage a consistent creative style are 1.67 times more likely to leave a branded impression.⁵

3 Be consistently *fresh*

Consistency is important, but we also know that seeing something new or unexpected causes disfluency, which enables the message to be consciously processed. So the question becomes: how do I create something that is consistent, but also fresh and new at the same time? The key is to realize that consistency is *not* about predictability. Consistency and creativity are not at odds with each other or at opposite ends of the spectrum. The ultimate state is when creativity becomes the predictably consistent element of a brand’s advertising.

Progressive has leveraged The Superstore campaign with insurance girl Flo for over a decade. The campaign has been a game changer for their business and continues to perform for the brand. Since Flo’s debut, Progressive’s revenue has more than doubled, with a growth rate two times that of the insurance industry as a whole.⁶ In the early days of the campaign, Flo was always in the stark white Superstore setting helping customers in the aisles of policy boxes. The situations and jokes would change,

but Flo and the setting remained as consistent assets. After a few years, Flo became established enough that she could stand on her own and be taken out of the Superstore and into the real world. This was a big turning point for the campaign and for the creative possibilities. Seeing this perpetually happy and helpful lover of insurance interact with different real-life scenarios is what continues to keep the campaign consistently *fresh*.

One of my favorite spots in the campaign is called “Peer Pressure.” It’s a perfect example of taking a consistent campaign element and doing something fresh and unexpected. Instead of the pristine white surroundings and her typical cheery attitude, we see Flo in a dark alley, peer pressuring two men to try “Snapshot”—a device that monitors your driving habits as a way to save. The pressure isn’t overly high or mean spirited—more on the level of an 8th grader urging his friend to “Do it!!.” It clashes with the way we are used to seeing Flo, but is also somehow still perfectly on point with her character.



4 Avoid change for the sake of change

We often hear brand marketers pondering if their campaign is wearing out with consumers, but it's more than likely that brand marketers get burned out on an execution or campaign long before consumers. When you've agonized over every scene cut and every display ad the brand puts out, it's easy to lose sight of reality—consumers do not remember as much about our brands as we would like. At Ipsos, we often turn to our in-market ad tracking database to level-set with our clients on how hard it is to even *breakthrough* in today's environment, let alone breakthrough to the extent that people are tired of seeing your ad or that it has reduced impact. Even with over 2,000 TRPs of spend, less than 40% of consumers will recall the storyline of a TV ad on average. It's also worth noting that this number has consistently declined over the past 10 years with the rise of multi-screening, DVR, etc.

It's important to take a step back, take off your brand marketer hat for a second, and leverage consumer data to inform if it's truly time to move away from the current campaign formula. We often see brands abandon a long-running campaign or brand character based on a marketer's gut feeling that it's played out, but just because *you're* tired of the formula doesn't mean your consumers are tired. Based on what we've already covered about the power of campaign consistency, you could be throwing out your brand's biggest asset just because you're bored. Ensure that the consumers' lens weighs into any decision to change. If the brand team is saying an ad is worn out, consider a fast, lean copy test to check if the ad still has positive brand impact despite time on air.

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5 Write (and stick to) a playbook

Brand marketers are rotating desks often and who wouldn't want to put their own stamp on the brand and its communications when they join a new team? The challenge is, this can lead to a lack of consistency, which can confuse consumers and make it harder for brands to gain mind share. The people behind the brand can change, but the brand's principles can't.

Brands should have a system in place to ensure that key assets, consistent campaign elements, and big foundational ideas live on even in the face of changing team members. This can be a playbook that is used for onboarding, agency briefings, and is systematically leveraged during creative review to ensure focus and compliance. Consider incorporating consumer feedback to inspire the playbook in the following ways:

1. Test your brand assets with consumers to understand which are the strongest, which need investment, and which should not be used in isolation. Monitor them over time to measure if they are gaining traction.
2. Work with your research partner to create a meta-analysis and key lessons learned from your creative testing over time—what has worked/not in the past.
3. Leverage Brand Health Tracking to keep brand and agency teams focused on the long-term goals, even in the face of team changes. Having consistent consumer-based feedback on how your brand is performing against its strategy provides a north star for all team members and a means to understanding the brand impact of your marketing efforts.

In closing, I can't help but wonder: If that truck my son got for his birthday had a familiar face or color as one of his tried and true toys, would he have gravitated towards it more immediately? Don't let this basic lesson on human behavior and instincts stay confined within the four walls of my living room. Consider the principle of fluency and disfluency in your next meeting or creative review! If you aren't being focused and

consistent in brand building efforts, then you are potentially hindering the power of your brand. Remember, consistency doesn't have to mean boring or lacking creativity. Strive to be consistently fresh, stay true to the brand's core idea, and help level-set by keeping the voice of the consumer front-and-center during decision making. This will ensure you strike the right balance between being consistent, but also fresh and new.

CONTACT

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ABOUT IPSOS

At Ipsos we are passionately curious about people, markets, brands and society. We deliver information and analysis that makes our complex world easier and faster to navigate and inspires our clients to make smarter decisions. With a strong presence in 90 countries, Ipsos employs more than 18,000 people and conducts research programs in more than 100 countries. Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos is controlled and managed by research professionals. www.ipsos.com/en-us

¹ Reber, Rolf, Piotr Winkielman, and Norbert Schwarz. "Effects of perceptual fluency on affective judgements." *Psychological science* 9, no.1 (1998): 45-48.

² Bornstein, Robert F., and Paul R. D'Agostino. "The attribution and discounting of perceptual fluency: Preliminary tests of a perceptual fluency/attributional model of the mere exposure effect." *Social Cognition* 12, no. 2 (1994): 103-128

³ Alter, Adam L. "The benefits of cognitive disfluency." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22, no. 6 (2013): 437-442

⁴ <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2019-12/slowing-down-to-be-faster-ipsos-views.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2020-02/power-of-you-ipsos.pdf>

⁶ Beer, Jeff. "10 Years of Flo: The Story behind Progressive's Accidental Ad Icon." Fast Company, Fast Company, 1 Nov. 2018. www.fastcompany.com/90254247/10-years-of-flo-the-story-behind-progressives-accidental-ad-icon.

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