



The Empathy Gap and How to Bridge It:

Giving creativity's other half the airtime it deserves



In the first volume of our Dynamic Effectiveness series we broached the subject of gender in advertising using Ipsos Global Trends data to show how better portrayal of women is good for both society and business. In volume 2, we were inspired by another global trend: the search for simplicity and meaning.

As we navigate the current polycrisis, 73% of us globally wish we could slow down the pace of our lives. In the UK, agreement with this statement has gone up by 48% over the last 10 years. The implication for marketers when reaching out to some very overwhelmed people is twofold:

1

Can you avoid the temptation to complicate things?

2

How can you maximise the effectiveness of your outreach while still respecting your audience?

The most effective campaigns are those which harness high quality strategic planning to identify a simple, compelling idea and express it with creative that is entertaining, different, and feels empathic or familiar for the audience. This paper explores the role of empathy in advertising as, in the search for simplicity and meaning, empathy creates the most meaningful point of connection with audiences – because there's no deeper connection than an emotional one.



Key takeaways

Some campaigns are so good, they make you wish you had made them, with plenty of Gold Effie campaigns inspiring envy. This is one of the criteria for judging a Gold Effie. With campaigns like these, there is a dance between **Creative Experiences and Ideas and something more overlooked, **Empathy and Fitting In**.**

Empathy and Fitting in as we talk about it in this paper is not a sentimental concept. It is what everyday people perceive as either 'for them' or is concurrent with the brand world as they know it. Put simply it is either your brand gets them, or they get your brand.

- Ipsos testing data and Effie case data shows that campaigns that combine fresh creative ideas with 'Empathy and Fitting In' are more likely to be effective and perform **+20% on short-term sales lift potential**.
- Want to win a Gold Effie? Understand your audience and help them understand you. Higher Award levels were more likely to get 'Empathy and Fitting In' right.
- The strategic planning process unlocks campaigns, finding 'Empathy and Fitting In' from a variety of sources (human truths, product, brand, shopper insights, etc).



Campaigns that help the audience understand the brand or take pains to truly understand the audience drive results. For example:

- Tesco and BBH's 'Together this Ramadan' campaign increased footfall amongst four million British Muslims, who felt appreciated by their commitment.
- Lucky Generals helped people truly understand Yorkshire Tea and how everything there is done 'proper', helping it grow from #3 to #1 in the UK tea category.
- Dell helped people suffering from Motor Neurone Disease keep their identity by creating an easier and more empathetic way to bank their voices.
- ITV and adam&eveDDB really understood how children think. They knew they hated vegetables and got them to eat 981 million extra portions anyway.
- The Mayor of London and Ogilvy UK's 'Have a Word' campaign modelled behaviours for men to overcome the bystander effect when witnessing misogyny.
- McDonald's and Leo Burnett drove £86m of additional profit, helping people connect with McDonald's at Christmas by re-framing the humble carrot stick.



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Knowing exactly who your brand is and arriving at a simple idea to help tell your story is one of the hardest things to crack in advertising. It takes laser focus from brands and high-quality strategic planning from their agency partners to create those anchor points for creativity to flourish. This paper demonstrates how Empathy and Fitting in puts the extra in extraordinary and provides a more nuanced view of creativity. It is also a celebration of elegant campaign ‘unlocks’ and the planners that make it happen.



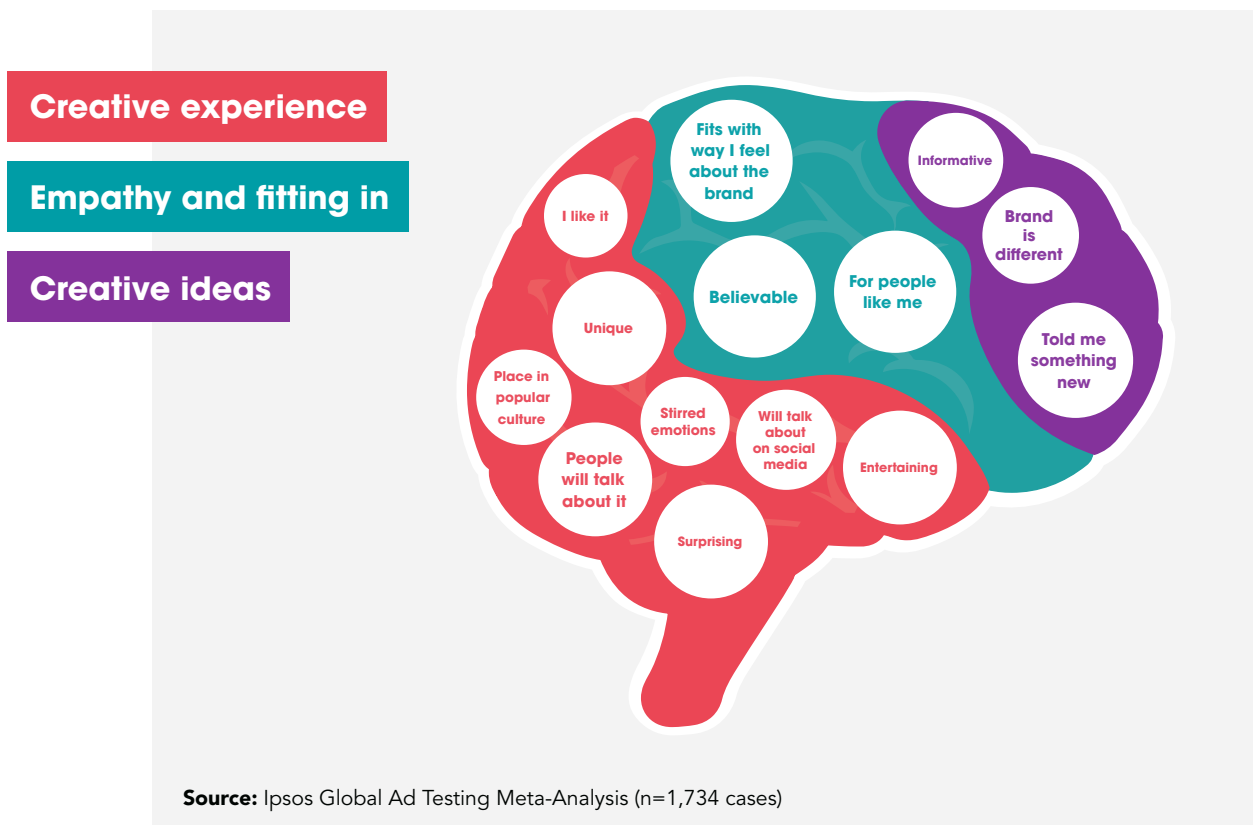
**Samira Brophy, Senior Director,
Creative Excellence, Ipsos**

Empathy and creativity as two sides of the same coin

We are at a point in the effectiveness conversation where creativity, rather than performance or efficiency, is back in the spotlight. Thank goodness. Yet this conversation can be rather one-dimensional, focusing on the need to be “brave”, to be “bold”, to be “different”.

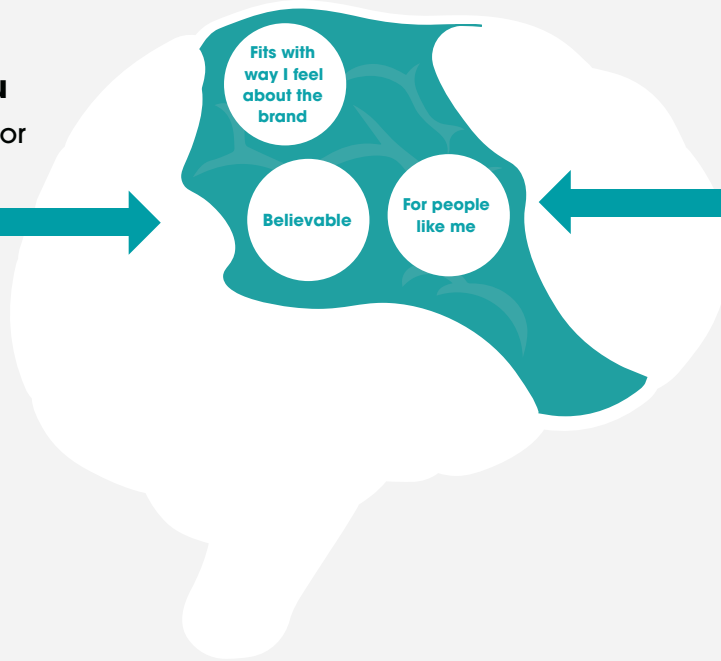
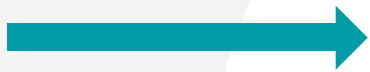
In [MISFITs](#), Ipsos explored people’s responses to advertising and identified three types of discrete experiences that emerge.

- 01** ‘Creative Experiences’ are unique, surprising, entertaining, and talkable.
- 02** ‘Creative Ideas’ teach the audience something new and cause them to see the advertiser as different to other brands.
- 03** **‘Empathy and Fitting In’ is a different experience to the ‘fresh takes’ delivered by the other two. Contrastingly, it is about delivering a familiar anchor, reaffirming something that the audience knows about the brand or an truism from their own lives.**



Empathy and fitting in

They get you
A familiar anchor
to your brand



You get them
A familiar anchor
to their lives



While divergent 'Creative Experiences and Ideas' are important, we know from assessing thousands of ads that effectiveness isn't driven by creativity alone, 'Empathy and Fitting In' is equally important.

Why empathy and strategic planning matter

Evidence from the Ipsos brand tracking database shows that 'Empathy and Fitting In' matters to market share growth. The perceptions that a brand understands and helps its customers are consistently observed as drivers of choice.



A 'Proper' campaign ticking the 'Empathy and Fitting In' box helped Yorkshire Tea grow volume share from 18% to 26% whilst retaining the brand's premium pricing.

Figure 1.

Relative importance of purchase drivers

Understands me

112

Values me

117

Helps me

114

Index

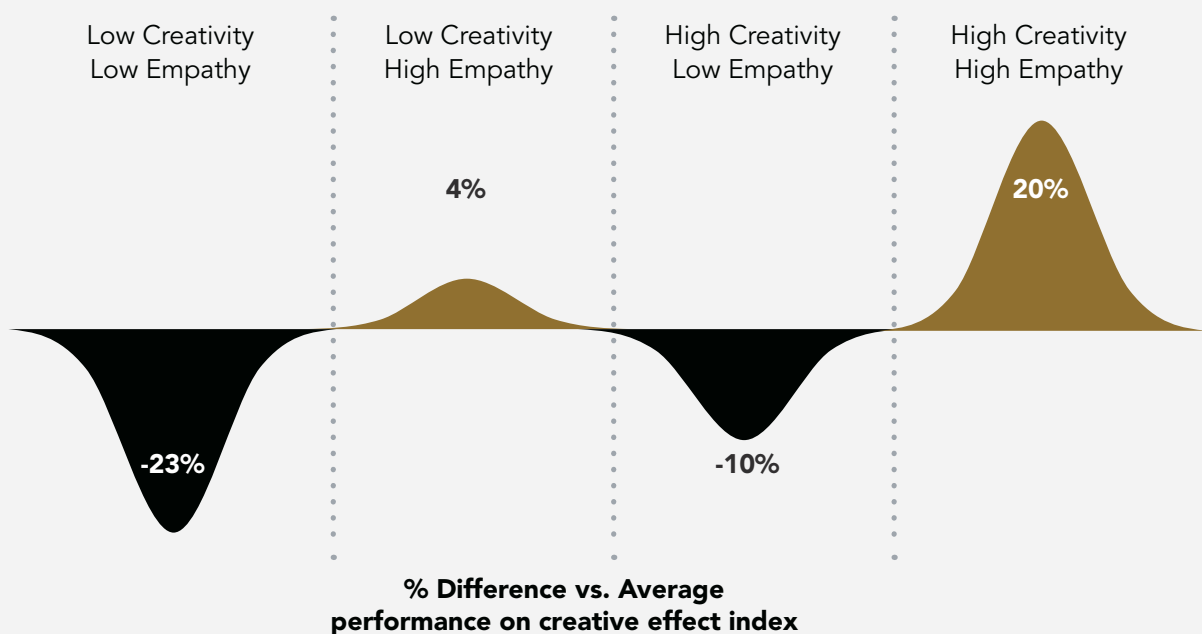
100

Source: Ipsos Brand Health Tracking Driver Analysis of Brand Desire, Consideration and Business KPIs, n=1,238 cases

In addition, advertising that demonstrates 'Creative Experiences and Ideas' in combination with 'Empathy and Fitting In' has a 20% stronger performance than average. In comparison, campaigns that do only fresh or familiar regress to the mean, to mediocrity.

Figure 2.

Combining Creativity and Empathy can help you put the "extra" in "ordinary"



Creative Experiences/Ideas is referred to as 'Creativity' and Empathy and Fitting is referred to as 'Empathy'

Source: Ipsos Global Ad Testing Meta-Analysis (n=1,734 cases)

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As marketers, we tend to think about empathy in one direction: the ability to put ourselves in our audiences' shoes and understand how they think and feel. While that's important, I like the idea that empathy can be a two-way dynamic: it's just as much about inviting your audience in to understand the brand, as it is about the brand understanding them.

For Yorkshire Tea we created a clearly defined emotional brand personality, rooted in its Yorkshire roots, that tea drinkers understood and connected with. It led to a campaign that took it from 3rd to 1st position, while maintaining its premium pricing. And it continues to deliver 5 years later.



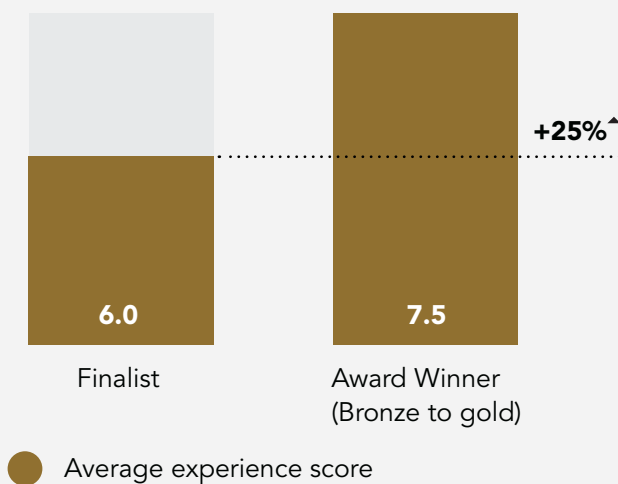
Andy Nairn,
Founding Partner at Lucky Generals

Empathy widens the gap between award winners and finalists

Ipsos reviewed two years' worth of Effie finalists in the UK and US to understand the relationships between 'Creative Experiences', 'Creative Ideas', and 'Empathy and Fitting In' amongst these 94 cases. We observed that award winners had a 25% higher score on the three MISFIT experiences compared to finalists.

Figure 3.

Award Winners are more likely to harness empathy than Finalists



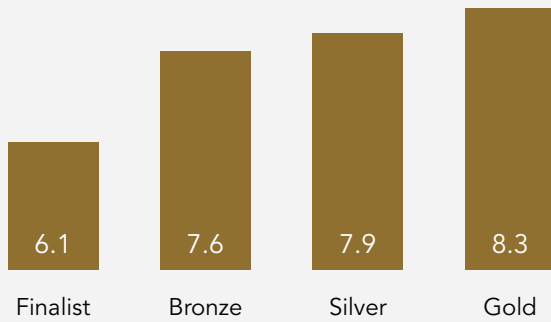
Source: Ipsos coding of US and UK Effie Awards (n=94 campaigns from Finalists to Gold between 2020 – 2021)

When looking at the impact of 'Empathy and Fitting In' vs. 'Creative Experiences and Ideas', we find that the former is a stronger discriminating factor between award categories than the latter.

Findings

Figure 4.

'Empathy and Fitting In' increases with Effie Award Levels

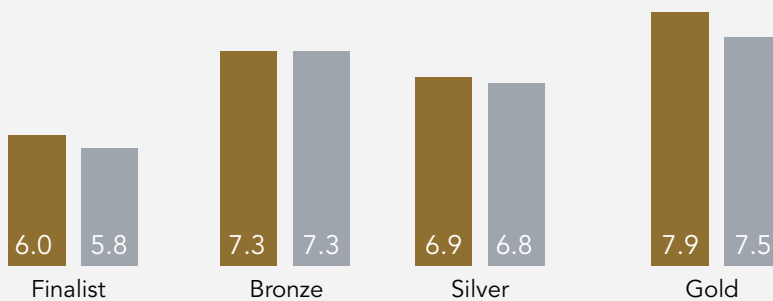


Source: Ipsos coding of US and UK Effie Awards (n=94 campaigns from Finalists to Gold between 2020 – 2021)

Findings

Figure 5.

Creative Experiences, Creative Ideas have a less consistent trend by award level



● Creative Experience ● Creative Ideas

Source: Ipsos coding of US and UK Effie Awards (n=94 campaigns from Finalists to Gold between 2020 – 2021)

When looking at the impact of 'Empathy and Fitting In' vs. 'Creative Experiences and Ideas', we find that the former is a stronger discriminating factor between award categories than the latter.

So, whilst 'Creative Experiences and Ideas' are well applied across award winning campaigns, 'Empathy and Fitting In' appears to differentiate categories more clearly.

But, why is 'Empathy and Fitting In' at least as important to winning an Effie award

as a fresh experience or idea? It comes back to the most important element of advertising, your audience. Good work can make people laugh, entertain them, or provide a new experience, but truly great and effective work goes a step further by framing the campaign message in what the audience knows or can recognise. The framing reflects their lives and habits, and where the brand fits within this, rather than promoting the brand in an abstract way. It's this dance between the fresh and the familiar that matters most.

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How strategic planning uses ‘Empathy and Fitting in’ to unlock campaign ideas

There are several learnings we can draw from Effie award winners about sources brands can mine for ‘Empathy and Fitting In’ insights, and the simplicity that can be achieved in the final campaign because of good planning.

01

Tesco: ‘Together this Ramadan’

Take a walk in the other person’s shoes. Almost four million British Muslims observe Ramadan, but it was largely absent from British supermarket advertising. Tesco and BBH were keen to show empathy to the Muslim community so they collaborated with them in the development of the campaign, bringing them into the creative process for “Together this Ramadan,” talking with them and committing fully by removing food from advertising during the month.

Digital billboards in high Muslim population areas featured 25 empty plates that filled up with vibrant and authentic Iftar dishes as the sun set. The gentle fade captured the festival’s sense of anticipation and magic. Results were a campaign that not only improved brand perceptions, but actively made British Muslims feel more included in society. The ripple effects are still being felt, changing marketing’s narrative around inclusivity, raising expectations and inspiring countless further campaigns. One campaign won’t solve discrimination, but Every Little Helps.



02

Yorkshire Tea:

'Where Everything's Done Proper'

Get a personality injection and let people enjoy getting to know you. With the help of the team at Lucky Generals, who spotted a simple sign at the factory that summed up everything, Yorkshire Tea drilled deep into the company ethos and downright Yorkshire-ness, to create a campaign that has run for 6 years and allowed consumers to really get to know them.

The unlock came when they realised how much the 'Proper' ethos genuinely permeated the company and decided to 'properly' introduce this to the UK public with the help of some Yorkshire wit and flavour.

They used Yorkshire's famous exports to do things 'properly' around Company HQ, like having the Kaiser Chiefs playing the hold music, Sir Patrick Stewart giving leaving speeches, and Sean Bean leading the team away day.

The brand has gone from #3 to #1 in the UK market, and volume share has increased from 18% to 26%, whilst maintaining the brand's premium pricing. Yorkshire Tea has achieved its long-held objective of becoming the UK's favourite brew by allowing people to really get to know the brand and value what it stands for.



The brand has gone from #3 to #1 in the UK market – all by helping people really get to know the brand and value what it stands for.

03

Dell: 'I Will Always Be Me'

Find and solve real problems.

This isn't a story about doing good for the benefit of the brand only. It's a story of getting to the heart of the audience's experience and using innovation to create hope in the face of terminal illness. It's a lesson in why creating empathetic experiences make for greater impact than telling purposeful stories alone.

Dell's 'I Will Always Be Me' was a powerful initiative executed in collaboration with Intel, Rolls-Royce, and the Motor Neurone Disease Association (MND) to find a new, genuinely valuable solution to help people with MND.

Before the disease takes a life, it takes away a person's ability to speak and their voice – a large part of their identity. Voice banking is a technology that allows people to create a digital copy of their voice, but in 2021 the technology lacked the visibility and functionality to get more people using it.

It could take months of gruelling recording sessions and was too slow to be able to help many of those who needed it. Only 12% of those diagnosed with MND in the UK were banking their voice at the time.

So, the group set out to turn this chore into a hugely valuable process through an empathetic understanding of the audience. The solution was a touching story which the person could read to their family in 30 minutes to bank their voice. Within three months of launching, they increased the rate of people banking their voice in the UK by more than 50%. One year after its launch, 'I Will Always Be Me' became the number-one voice banking service in the UK. It helped MND patients hold on to one of the most valuable parts of their identity. The campaign also changed perceptions around Dell Technologies, increasing brand relevance by 18%, brand consideration by 21%, and innovation perceptions by 28%.

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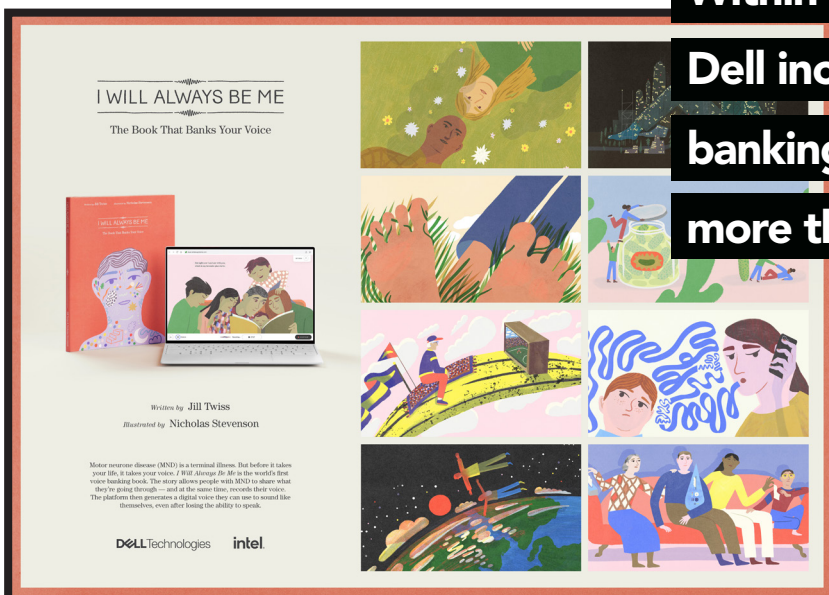


Fig. 3. Screenshot from the documentary and short online film.

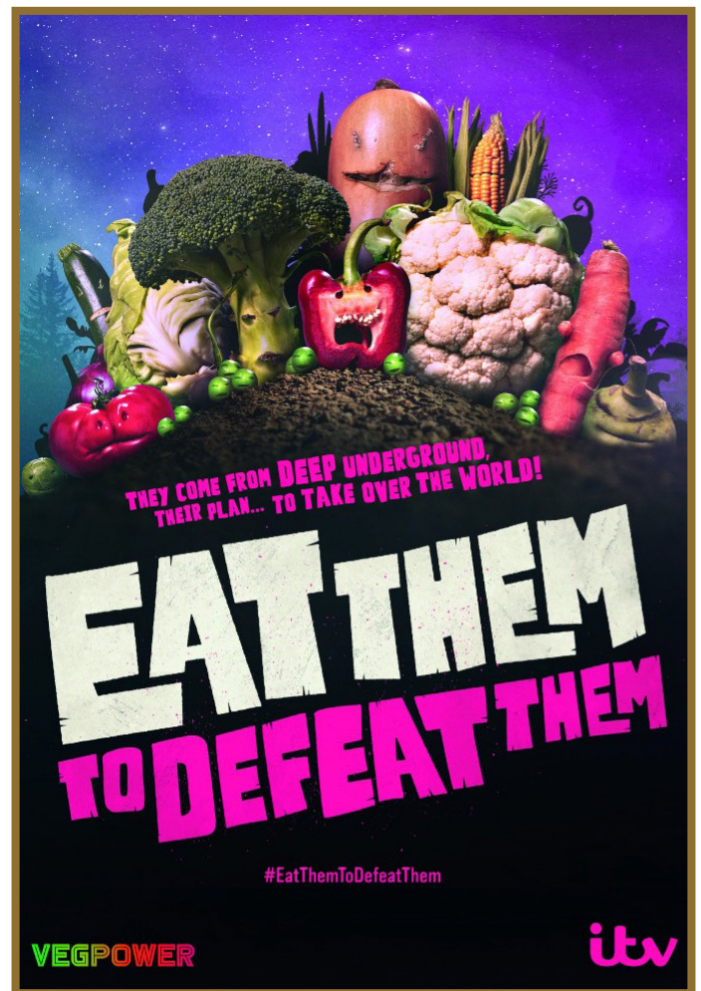
04

ITV: 'Eat Them to Defeat Them'

Don't be afraid of truism.

ITV's 'Eat Them to Defeat Them' campaign is a perfect example of taking a simple truth that kids don't like to eat vegetables and flipping it on its head to get UK children to eat 981 million extra portions.

'Eat Them to Defeat Them' was a three year-long effort to succeed where the efforts of government and parents had so often failed, to get kids eating more vegetables by choice. Adam&eveDDB and ITV flipped conventional wisdom by turning vegetables into evil villains to be eaten to death. It was a clever counter-intuitive creative idea that came from a place of deep understanding about the dynamic between kids and vegetables and which got kids doing the right thing for the wrong reasons and created positive behaviour change.



'Eat Them to Defeat Them' is based on a simple premise: instead of fighting kids' hatred for vegetables, embrace it and frame vegetables as so evil they had to be eaten.

05

The Mayor of London

'Have a Word With Yourself, Then Your Mates'

Hold up a mirror so people can see themselves.

'Have a word with yourself, then your mates' by the Mayor of London and Ogilvy UK challenged men to break their bystander inertia when witnessing misogyny. They understood that to address men without triggering a defensive "I'm not that person" response, they needed to reflect their peer groups and inter-personal dynamics.

The campaign focused on creating peer-to-peer pressure to tackle low level misogyny as a first step to preventing violence. Instead of showing extreme acts of misogyny they showed 'a friend going too far' and a scenario most men had witnessed before. By incorporating the visceral reaction and discomfort of the woman featured in the film, they showed men something they rarely see – the after-effects of their abuse and harassment.

Of the men who saw the campaign, 85% said they would now call out misogyny when they see it. London schools incorporated the campaign into their curriculum and the UN included it in their training materials. The campaign has successfully influenced new policies in England and Wales that contribute to a culture of greater protection towards women.

The campaign not only sparked a global conversation, reaching 3.1 billion earned impressions and 307 million in earned reach, but is also driving concrete social change that will infuse our culture and impact generations to come.

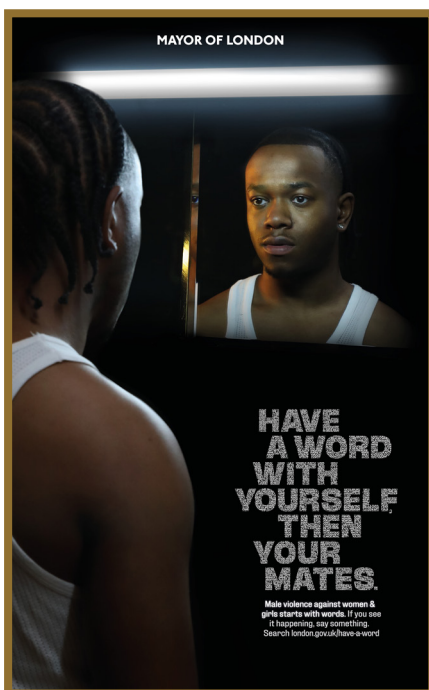
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06

McDonald's: 'Reindeer Ready'

You can find gems in the Margins. McDonald's needed a way to introduce themselves to the British public at Christmas and find relevance. Their 'Reindeer Ready' Christmas campaign success story began with a humble carrot stick, a product that had previously accounted for just 0.01% of McDonald's sales. McDonald's took the time to understand the emotional significance of modern Christmas traditions to find a relevant role for the brand within them.

Over five years, this previously overlooked vegetable has driven new brand buzz, brand love and, ultimately, £86m of additional profit. All amidst a fiercely competitive and media-crowded occasion, in which McDonald's previously had no natural role: Christmas.

Proof, if we needed it, that long-term, brand and business building success can start in the most unlikely of places.



“”

In its search to find a credible festive role, McDonald's found that for our customers the magic of Christmas lives not in the Big Day, but in the anticipation along the way. If the brand could find a way to celebrate that anticipation, we would ignite the festive feels nationwide. To do that we reframed our least sold product – carrots – and turned them into a symbol of the thing our customers love most about Christmas.



Hamish Cameron,
Planning Director at Leo Burnett



In summary

From the evidence we see that effectiveness is not solely driven by the traditional idea of creativity we are accustomed to.

Truly great work blends 'Empathy and Fitting In' with 'Creative Experiences and Ideas' to drive end business effects. We have observed this in both generalisable Ipsos data which captures responses of everyday people and as a discriminating factor between Effie award winners vs. finalists. Some simple rules to follow:

- 1 Take a walk in another person's shoes**
- 2 Let people get to know you**
- 3 Find and solve real problems**
- 4 Don't be afraid of a Truism**
- 5 Hold up a mirror – let people see themselves**
- 6 Look for the gems in the "margins"**

These findings and the Effie case database examples remind us of the value of the strategic planning process and taking time over getting the fundamental idea right.

Thank goodness we can now give some airtime to that!



Methodology

1

Misfits analysis

We took a two-step approach to understand the contribution of creativity to advertising effectiveness. The first was to run a factor analysis on our measures of the advertising experience amongst a selection of 1,700 recently evaluated ads across 18 countries. Having identified the three MISFIT experiences, we then ran a regression analysis to understand the relationship between each experience and key advertising effects measured in Creative|Spark, which are validated to in-market sales effects.

2

Misfits experience coding approach for Effie cases

The classification was on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being no attempt or achievement in delivering the experience and 10 an extremely strong experience. The exercise was blind to the level of Award given and the Ipsos researchers assigned had no affiliation or relationship with Effie as an organisation.

3

Creative Effect Index

Ipsos' sales validated measure of ad effectiveness



Get in touch



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Samira is an Ipsos expert on brand and communication work, with 20 years of experience spanning creative and research roles. She leads Ipsos' early-stage campaign development offer, is a thought leader on ad effectiveness, and works with clients to adopt a misfit mindset and make bolder, highly creative campaigns that audiences value.



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Adam Sheridan is Global Head of Products at Creative Excellence at Ipsos, and author of the book MISFITS: How creativity in advertising sparks brand growth. He has worked in research for two decades, across movies, entertainment, brands and advertising and supports the world's leading brands with the latest measurement and thinking to harness creativity in their advertising to grow sales and market share.



Juliet Haygarth

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Juliet has over 25 years' experience of working across marketing, brand and communications. Her career has spanned the Charity and Public Sector as well as the Commercial sector. She has been a Marketing Director and worked in Brand and Creative Agencies at every level. Her role at Effie allows her to bring her diverse experiences together to champion the progressive practice and practitioners of marketing effectiveness across the industry.

Dynamic Effectiveness: Ipsos & Effie UK

While the bedrock of brand building and human motivations stand firm, we turn our spyglasses onto the shifting sands to uncover current opportunities for marketers. The series combines evidence on society, trends, and advertising effectiveness from Ipsos research with Effie's marketing effectiveness database.

