

**Belief Branding:**

# Hi, performance.

*A six part, six pillar series on impactful marketing from your Friends & Neighbors.*

**By Mark Bubula and Tom Fugleberg**

## **Part 3:**

The Crucial Role of  
Creativity in Building  
Effective Brand  
Connections



# Introduction

The topic of performance in marketing has become associated with efforts that result in immediate, measurable impact. But is this truly the best way to assess success? As good Friends & Neighbors, we're committed to providing the best intelligence on effective marketing programs to our community. Our new series – Hi, Performance – will explore six pillars of impactful marketing programs to help our clients and collaborators better understand how to design, implement, and measure efforts.

## Six Pillars of Performance

Long-term commitment.

Memorable moments.

Meaningful connections.

Relevant context.

Strong coverage.

Consistent presence.

**Long-term commitment.** *There's no question short-term sales activations can be effective, but long-term branding cannot be ignored. This pillar will explore how to think about, plan, and measure long-term branding efforts.*

**Memorable moments.** *As we learn more about how advertising works, we more deeply understand that its primary role is to create future buyers by making brands and products memorable. This one is all about how a memorable message contributes to the future success of brands.*

**Meaningful connections.** *The power of creativity in branding is well understood to be a critical driver of effectiveness. This pillar will explore the latest research and insights related to creating meaningful, memorable connections with people.*

**Relevant context.** *A meaningful message is only as impactful as the space it appears. This pillar covers an essential ingredient in the marketing mix: media and activation.*

**Strong coverage.** *Growing a brand means going big, getting your message in front of an increasingly broader audience. This pillar explores the impact of reach in marketing efforts.*

**Consistent presence.** *Turbulent markets make it tempting to scale back on costs, and marketing is no exception – yet pulling back on investment comes with a cost of its own. This pillar focuses on the importance of consistent messaging over time.*

Every quarter, our team will produce a thought leadership piece that more deeply explores one of these six pillars. We're excited to share our neighborly wisdom with you.



**Pillar Three: Memorable Moments**

# **The Crucial Role of Creativity in Building Effective Brand Connections**

**In today's crowded marketing landscape, where people are bombarded with information, creativity can resonate deeply. In fact, it might just be the antidote to our industry's overwhelming overindulgence. This installment of Hi, Performance explores that essential ingredient, creativity, to see if we can quantify its pivotal function in capturing the hearts and minds of an audience. Spoiler alert: Creativity works.**

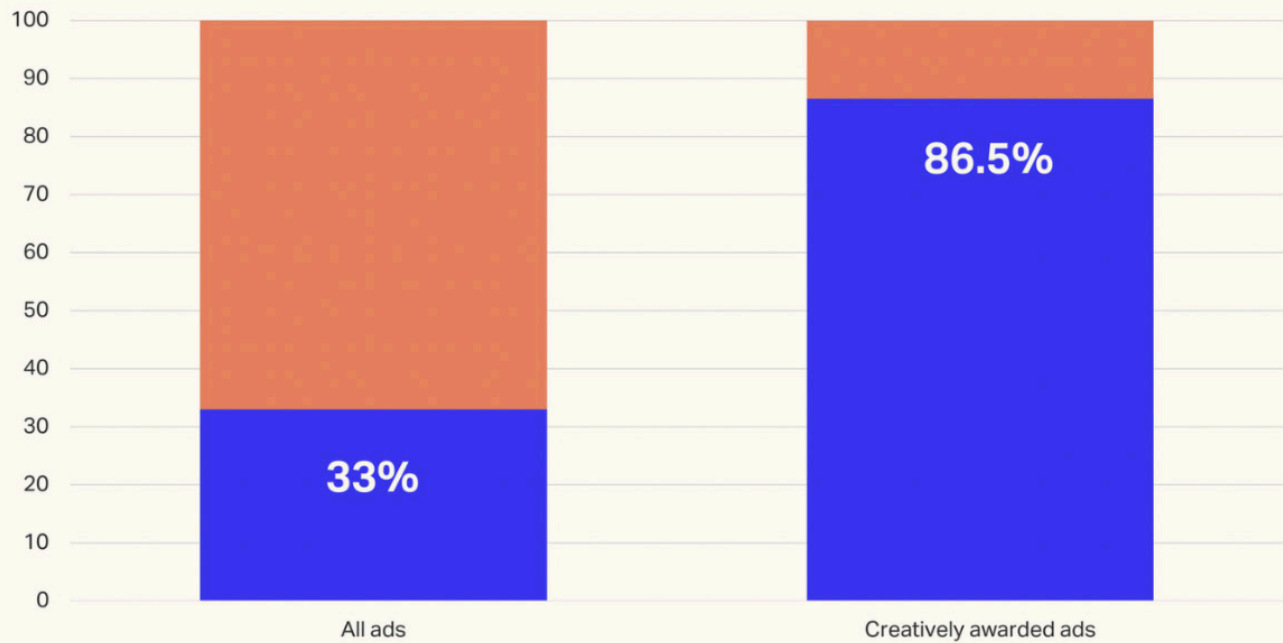
# Winning a Creative Award Does Indeed Correlate to a Successful Campaign

In an era characterized by fleeting attention spans, capturing and retaining a consumer’s focus has become more challenging than ever. Creativity plays a fundamental role in this challenge. Inventive narratives, striking visuals, and innovative concepts are proven to break through the noise and seize the audience’s attention. A creative messaging approach has the power to convey a brand’s true spirit, making it stand out in a crowded marketplace.

For decades, research has supported the importance of creativity in marketing effectiveness. Rewinding the tape to 1996, a landmark study from Donald Gunn demonstrated that creatively awarded campaigns were associated with marketplace success.

## Marketplace success of creatively awarded ads

86.5% of the most awarded ads in the world in the years 1992-1996 were associated with marketplace success



Source: [Donald Gunn, Do award winning commercials sell?, GUNN Report, 1996](#)

Source: Warc, *How do I use creativity to drive effectiveness?*

Sources: 1: WARC What We Know about Differentiation and Salience 2: WARC from Home: Distinctive brand assets – what they are and why they matter 3: What is the role of distinctive brand assets? WARC, 2022 4: Global Banking and Finance Review, 2018

## Creativity Even Correlates to, Wait for It, ROI

We can move to more recent research to tease out these findings: A 2023 update of the study of the top drivers of advertising profitability reaffirmed that brand size is still the biggest driver of incremental profit, but that creative

quality is number two, with potential to improve ROI by a factor of 12.

While advertisers have little control over brand size, what they can control is creative execution.

Top 10 Drivers of Advertising Profitability 2023		
Rank	Factor	Profitability Multiplier
1	Brand Size	20
2	Creative quality	12
3	Budget setting across geographies	5
4	Budget setting across portfolios	3
5	Multimedia	2.5
6	Brand vs Performance	2
7	Budget setting across variants	1.7
8	Cost/product seasonality	1.6
9	Laydown/Phasing	1.15
10	Target Audience	1.1

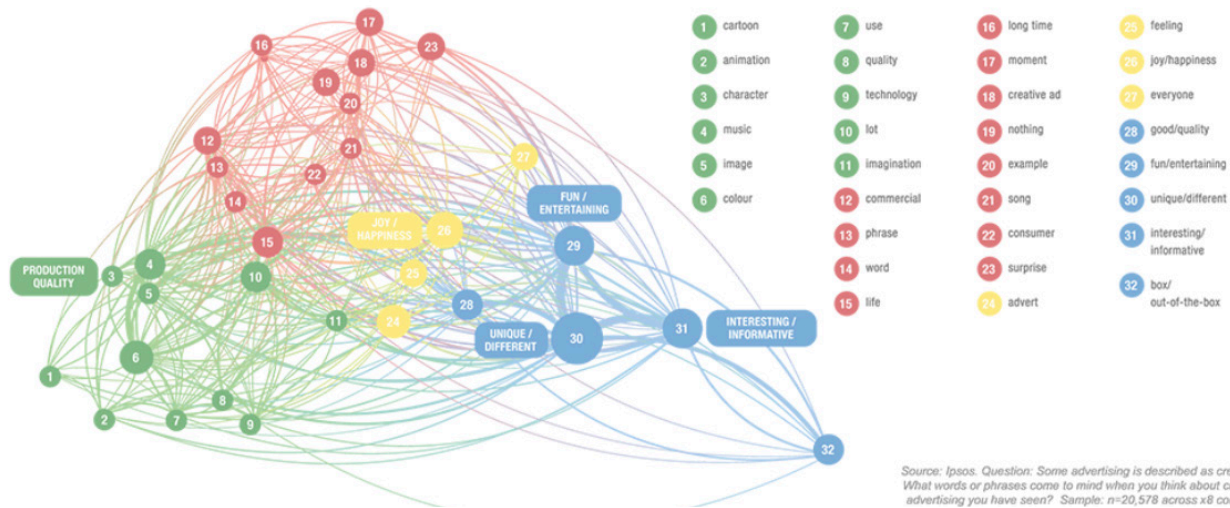
Source: What we know about creativity and effectiveness, Warc

## So Creativity Is the Biggest Actionable Driver of Effectiveness. Woot! But What Exactly Is Creativity?

Understanding the power of creativity in driving performance for brands begs the question: what qualifies as a highly creative message? Professional marketers have historically looked at industry awards to answer this question, but awards only consider the submissions they receive. A groundbreaking study from Ipsos

turned to consumers to understand creativity through the eyes of the audience by asking them to describe creative advertising they had seen. This visualization may not be the most intuitive, but it represents the broad variation of how an advertising audience describes the creative work they have seen.

Sources: 1: WARC What We Know about Differentiation and Salience 2: WARC from Home: Distinctive brand assets – what they are and why they matter 3: What is the role of distinctive brand assets? WARC, 2022 4: Global Banking and Finance Review, 2018



Source: Warc, How Creativity in Advertising Sparks Brand Growth

The visualization indicates there is quite a range of perspectives on this—however, common themes emerge. According to author Adam Sheridan:

“Although originality is central to their descriptions (represented by ‘unique/different’), we see that this is accompanied moreover by themes that represent their experience, using words such as ‘fun/entertaining,’ finding the advertising ‘interesting/informative’ and having feelings of ‘joy/happiness’... This led us to propose a definition of creativity in advertising from regular people, ‘An original or different experience that offers value to the end audience.’”

So the experience of the work clearly matters. And the study further reinforces this notion by the relative importance placed on production elements (the green descriptors in the visualization).

Production quality has been deprioritized by many marketers in recent years as more messaging shifts to short-form, nimble content—speed to market winning over craftsmanship. But perspectives from the audience suggest elements like colors, image, and characters matter in execution, resulting in a more memorable and admirable creative message.

## Creativity Is in the Eye of the Brand? Yep.

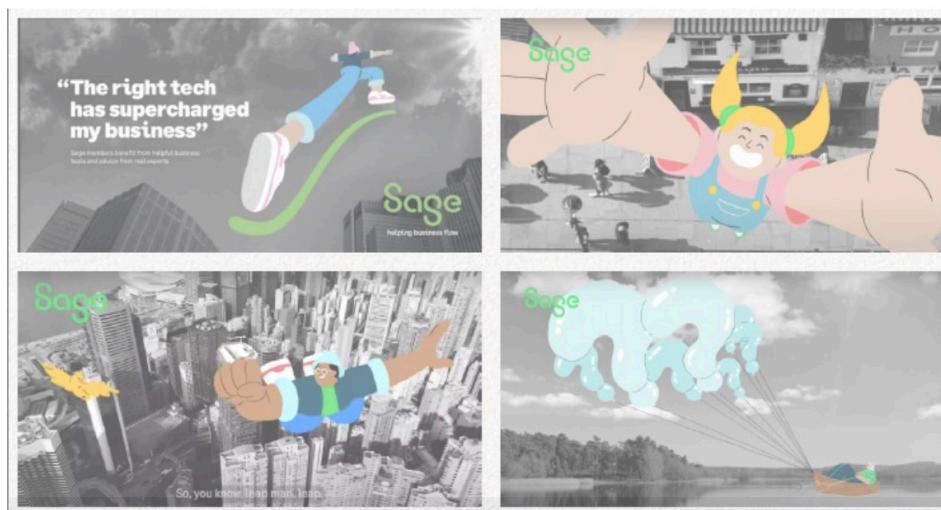
And this insight provides a range of opportunities for marketers to explore what creativity means for their brand. Many marketers are familiar with iconic advertising campaigns that drove business impact for major brands over time – think of Apple’s iconic 1984 Super

Bowl ad or the Dos Equis “Most Interesting Man in the World” campaign. Yet we continue to see creativity drive brand growth even on a smaller scale in both the business-to-consumer and business-to-business spaces.

Sources: 1: WARC What We Know about Differentiation and Salience 2: WARC from Home: Distinctive brand assets – what they are and why they matter 3: What is the role of distinctive brand assets? WARC, 2022 4: Global Banking and Finance Review, 2018

A recent example of creativity fueling impact for a business-to-business brand comes from accounting software leader, Sage. Their Voice of Business campaign was inspired by the very real, and sometimes challenging, emotions that business owners experience when navigating conversations about finances.

The campaign generated a 9% annual recurring revenue lift in the US and a 31% increase in overall ad recall, presenting a compelling case for the power of a creative messaging approach to connect with their audiences and drive business results. This same campaign also lifted Sage’s brand 6% higher on measures of empathy than their nearest competitors.



Source: Warc, How Sage Turned Accountancy Software from Business-to-Business to Human-to-Human

Another great example is from tech company MailChimp, a digital marketing platform geared toward small businesses. An underdog in the category for many years, MailChimp sought to achieve rapid growth while retaining their unique personality in the marketplace. While being an underdog is challenging enough, they found that on top of that their brand name was being mispronounced. But MailChimp understood that small business owners are creative at their core.

So, rather than fight the pronunciation problem, they embraced it with a novel, but still on-brand, invitation to small business owners and their creativity.

The results speak for themselves. MailChimp saw a 14% rise in sign-ups during the campaign period, the brand’s highest sales months in its history, outpacing their projection for growth and exceeding their sign-up goal by 10%.



Source: Warc, Did You Mean MailChimp?

Sources: 1: WARC What We Know about Differentiation and Salience 2: WARC from Home: Distinctive brand assets – what they are and why they matter 3: What is the role of distinctive brand assets? WARC, 2022 4: Global Banking and Finance Review, 2018



## Wait, Have We Learned Anything Actionable?

Yes, indeed. Understanding that creativity can come to life in many ways, marketers should keep these basic considerations in mind:

### **Stay Consistent with Brand Identity.**

While creativity allows for innovation and experimentation, it's essential to maintain consistency with your brand's identity and core values to build equity over time. A creative approach should enhance and reinforce your brand's personality. MailChimp serves as an excellent example for how to approach creativity while staying true to the essence of a brand. Ensure that your creative aligns with your brand's mission and voice, so it doesn't confuse or alienate your existing customer base.

### **Measure and Adapt.**

As we have seen from recent examples, creativity in marketing is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Marketers should continually measure the impact of their creative campaigns and be ready to adapt based on data and feedback. Establish and monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) from the beginning – this may include engagement rates, conversion rates, sales, and brand sentiment to assess the effectiveness of your creative initiatives. Be open to refining your creative strategies based on the insights gained from these metrics.

## And Then: Going Beyond Best Practices

It's clear that true creativity requires imagination pushing the boundaries of convention. So the transformative power of creativity in marketing is actually rooted in brand anthropology, a discipline the Friends & Neighbors team has pioneered and refined over many years.

Unlocking creative power in advertising and marketing often demands imagining the world through a unique lens and having the audacity to share that vision with everyone. This journey begins with an appreciation for the cultures and experiences that surround us, seeing them a bit differently, and bringing this new perspective to life creatively. A fundamental principle of brand anthropology known as 'cultural relativism' is about diving deep into unconventional perspectives without prejudice, uncovering hidden insights that often go unnoticed.

Here we can take a page from our agency playbook: We infused a narrative twist into the med-tech world of treating arterial calcium. By personifying it as a villain in the client's storytelling (with the catchy "Hey Calcium...") we showed how a creative angle can make even the most technical concepts engaging.

Another anthropological principle that inspires pushing creative boundaries is holism. This invites us to see beyond the immediate product and asks us to consider the broader ecosystem in which a brand operates. What additional value does your brand offer? How does it embed itself in the broader, more emotional narrative of customers' lives? This approach transforms your brand from a product or service into a true partnership. Again, from our agency playbook, Bulwark FR exemplifies this approach quite well — evolving from selling protective clothing to offering a comprehensive package of services, including educational thought leadership, content, training and hands-on expertise that deepens its bond with customers.

Creativity that moves the needle demands imagination in the service of crafting a narrative that resonates with your audience — something they know to be true but perhaps haven't considered before. This makes your brand an integral, memorable part of their world. Through the principles of brand anthropology, creativity in marketing isn't just about standing out; it's about connecting on a profound level with work that inspires and endures.



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**DAS Outperforms Balloon Angioplasty in BTK Lesions<sup>1</sup>**  $p = 0.006$

Freedom from Re-Intervention	Freedom from MACE <sup>2</sup>
93.3%	93.3%
80.0%	57.9%

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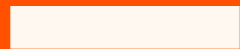
See why at [Bulwark.com/WalkFR](http://Bulwark.com/WalkFR)

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# Conclusion

As competition across the marketplace becomes more crowded and fiercer, harnessing the power of creativity is more critical than ever for brands. It enables them to cut through the noise, connect with a target audience on a deeper level, and most importantly, drive meaningful business results. Brave marketers will unlock the full potential of creativity to build meaningful brand connections and thrive in our modern business environment.

Marketers interested in achieving the greatest bang for their buck will combine Meaningful Connections with Relevant Context. In other words, pairing a powerful creative message with the most appropriate media environment ensures that communications aren't lost in the ether. In our next installment of Hi, Performance, we'll explore the importance of Relevant Context for driving brand impact.