

# The role of creativity in advertising

Creativity is the magic glitter of advertising. It's what turns a marketing message into something captivating, inspires emotions and provokes a response.

In recent years, our understanding of "content" has changed. Now, it's a buzzword in digital advertising, but its role in relation to creativity is not always well understood.

When marketing professionals are focused on the comparatively tangible metrics of performance marketing, and the hard mechanics of SEO including hits and clicks, how can we sell the value of creativity? Is creativity still relevant to brands in 2023 and if so, what role does it play?

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“Creative” is a term that typically refers to the elements of a marketing campaign that includes design, colour schemes, music and brand to create a specific aesthetic experience. The aim is to capture attention, provoke emotion and build a brand’s unique identity.

Content is the meat of the message and provides substantive information. It includes the narrative, such as product features. Its goal is to engage, educate and persuade – to drive an audience to action. It’s used to build trust with brands and establish them as valuable sources of information.

As Wellison D’Assuncao, Creative Director of advertising agency [LOUD](#), summarises it:

“Creative is generated. It’s a thought process with endless outputs. Content is a media channel that without creative would just be a whole bunch of empty boxes.”

In a traditional sense, content “pulls” the audience in with something to offer them, such as an article, a video or a recipe. There’s a natural value exchange where the viewer/reader/listener is discovering something or being entertained. Traditional advertising is the “push”, delivering the message that an advertiser wants to communicate to an audience.

## Creative’s ability to increase sales performance for brands

Lauren Gibb, Head of Content at [Resolve](#), notes that while content and creative both fulfil separate roles within the marketing funnel, the two ultimately ladder up to the same goal of driving marketing – and ultimately business – effectiveness.

“However, within the lens of today’s fast-paced media landscape, content must be creative, and creative needs to borrow the same audience-first principals that content is built upon to truly engage an audience.”

Gibb notes that when framed within the idea of the marketing funnel (traditionally based on awareness through to conversion) content fits on the lower end of the funnel, and can be most useful when the potential customer is in the consideration or education phase.

“That doesn’t mean that it sits separately from the rest of creative though. To have impact, your brand communications need to be singing from the same songbook from top to bottom to achieve true effectiveness.”

Creativity works best when advertisers know their audience. Samsung Australia was aware its target audience were fatigued by the influx of ads inundating their social media channels. In 2022, it created [Flipvertising](#), – a kind of online scavenger hunt where viewers had to actively search for a hidden ad for the change to win a Galaxy Z Flip4 phone.

The campaign resulted in an increase in consideration for Foldables among 18-45-year-olds and Gen Z, with the highest search volume of any previous Samsung Z Flip release. It achieved a [34% increase in sales](#) and 600% higher engagement than the industry standard.

When the two forces of content and creative align and collaborate, the impact is powerful. A notable example is GoPro, which encouraged customers to share their own videos captured with GoPro cameras. This user-generated content (UGC) was then used in GoPro’s own marketing, showcasing real-life customer experiences. This made the campaign more authentic and relatable, resonating with the target audience.

## How customers engage with strong creative

In 2023, the average person is exposed to [thousands of points of communication](#) every day, from ads to marketing messages and other information. This means brands have to try harder than ever before to get the cut-through required to make an impact. Creativity helps in distinguishing an advertisement from the clutter.

According to the [2023 LIONS State of Creativity survey](#), only 28% of marketers see creativity in business as critical, and only 12% feel confident that they can sell creativity into their CFO. In an industry that is being continually squeezed by falling budgets, increasing internal demands and a seemingly unlimited number of media formats to be creative within, creativity (and effectiveness) is at risk of losing out to short-termism.

“Gone are the days where you could make a kick-ass TVC and leave it at that (although that can be an extremely important layer in awareness!). To achieve true effectiveness, there needs to be layers of poignant, creative messaging throughout your business communications. This includes everything from written to audio to visual content,” Gibb says.

“All advertising, whether traditional creative or content, needs to make your audience feel, think, or do something. In this sense, content and creative have very similar objectives but are defined by somewhat different approaches to achieving that goal.”

D’Assuncao agrees that effective creative delivers a competitive edge.

“We remember creative work that entertains, captivates, or provokes us. Whether we act immediately, or store it in our subconscious, creativity can increase our disposition towards a brand. Creativity is a powerful tool that lets you distinguish your product or service from your competitors, and in a saturated sales performance environment, it gives you an edge.”

When creative “goes viral” and becomes part of the cultural fabric in both pop culture and subcultures, advertisers have really struck gold. Catchphrases like “Not happy Jan” (Yellow Pages) and “Shut up and take my money!” (KFC) endure far longer than their initial campaigns. Unique storytelling, amplified by the power of social media, can reach and influence a much larger audience than traditional advertising methods alone.

Creative can ultimately make or break business performance, not just marketing success. It’s how brands differentiate from each other and is the glue that keeps them stuck in a consumer’s mind. For example Virgin and Qantas both run [similar routes in Australia](#), but Virgin’s ethos is about “making a difference” while Qantas is the “spirit of Australia”. Both evoke very different top-line thoughts that give consumers an idea of what to expect from each brand.

## Creativity drives results

Creativity is about much more than aesthetics. Creative thinking underpins strategic problem-solving in advertising. It can inspire new ways to reach customers, deliver messages and get results. The goal may not always be sales or profits, but changing viewpoints or driving action. Creativity can play a critical role in improving people’s lives.

Cannes winner ‘The Last Photo’, created by suicide prevention charity and Cannes winner, ‘Campaign Against Living Miserably’ (Calm) and UK Broadcaster, ITV, significantly connected with audiences. It consists of a 90-second TVC featuring the final image or footage of loved ones who were lost from suicide. According to agency Adam&eveDDB, the campaign led to a 400% increase in donations, generated a 33% increase in online conversations about suicide, and prevented over 160 deaths (measured via the Calm helpline).

[Effie winners](#) (the leading industry award for marketing effectiveness) also show a direct link between creativity and performance.

“The campaigns that have done really well, that we remember, are the campaigns that are more creative than others. It’s much easier to get the message across once someone is engaged, and break away from competitors because you’ve created something memorable,” D’Assuncao says.

Helen Normoyle, an Effie UK Council Member, observes that in strained economic times, marketers are being forced to make their budgets work much harder.

“Marketers on constrained budgets have also got to be creative and think beyond traditional communications,” she says.

Normoyle cites the example of the British Beer Alliance’s Effie-winning [‘Long live the local’ campaign](#). This didn’t solely focus on the impact of tax on the price of a pint, but started a national movement to protect and support local pubs and saved the industry more than £2.5 billion. What a campaign like this does is build emotional connections with consumers and create a bond which fosters brand loyalty and advocacy, and much longer-term customer relationships.

Good creative has a powerful ability to increase sales performance for brands. Both creative and content have critical, yet distinct roles – intertwining to play significant parts in advertising strategy. However, it’s important to acknowledge creativity as the heart and soul of advertising. The best creative can not only resonate at a personal level with audiences, but it can extend campaigns beyond business interests and inspire change.



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