THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO
CREATIVE
OPTIMIZATION

rocketfuel
Artificial intelligence. Real results.
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OVERVIEW

When we started to work on this project, our goal seemed simple: Evaluate and quantify the impact that creative has on performance across different verticals. More than 30,000 ads and six months later, it’s clear that our initial project estimates were a bit naïve. Over the course of the study, we’ve frequently seen that controllable factors can have a major impact on performance in some categories, but there is no clear “silver bullet” for creative success. It appears that the most important cross-category factors tended to be background color and call to action, though there are also a particular set of variables that greatly impact each category, such as vehicle color for Automotive ads, length of trip for Travel & Lodging ads, or indoor vs. outdoor imagery for Home & Garden ads.

We also found that these factors changed further based on campaign goal: The factors that lead to higher conversion rates seldom overlapped those that led to higher click-through rates, or in the case of video, higher completion rates. As you read through this guide, note that our intent was not to create a set of rules or hard-and-fast principles for design. After all, applying the data presented here will not guarantee greater performance. Rather, the goal is to identify ways you might be able to improve performance when a campaign is struggling, or to increase the chances of launching a successful campaign by using creatives that are similar to those that have historically performed well. We often liken the application of the results here to understanding statistics behind Blackjack: knowing how to play won’t guarantee that you walk home rich, but it will increase your chances of coming out ahead.
METHODOLOGY

A team of Rocket Fuel researchers observed and categorized a sample of 38,151 distinct banner advertisements from 1,076 advertisers across 2,184 distinct marketing initiatives. These initiatives spanned 16 verticals served between November 2013 and June 2014, totaling 23,397,541,849 impressions served in the United States. Researchers categorized advertisements according to a number of criteria, including:

- Background color of the ad at load time
- Whether the ad was “static” or had animation—for example, any moving elements
- The wording of the ad’s call to action
- The presence of an advertiser’s logo
- Whether a special or limited-time offer was included in the ad’s messaging

Note that the categories varied by vertical based on advertising trends within that vertical. After these ads had been categorized, we looked at the aggregate performance of ads in each category to determine how specific categories performed relative to one another (for example, how animated ads in a vertical performed in relation to static ads in that same vertical).

To measure effectiveness, we calculated performance in terms of both click-through rate and view-through conversion rate for each vertical. Note that “conversion” actions are advertiser-defined; they vary based on advertiser goals. Because of this, care was taken to remove campaigns that either had no defined conversion actions or had abnormal conversion actions compared to their vertical prior to performance analysis. Additionally, many verticals were further subdivided in order to account for key differences in conversion type and messaging, such as OTA, Destination, and Air Travel within the Travel & Lodging vertical. Finally, some ads and attributes were excluded from the analysis if they did not meet specific sample size thresholds. For the thresholds in our study, we looked for an attribute to be present in at least 15 million impressions in ads from at least five different brands. This helped ensure that a single brand’s stylistic choices would not bias the results. As the attributes that drove click-through and conversion-rate performance were often completely different, our focus was entirely on view-through conversions.

When determining performance for a creative category or set of attributes, we looked at impression-weighted click-through and conversion rate performance. We compared performance of one attribute (for example, “blue background”) to either the performance for all ads in that vertical or ads with different attributes within the same category (for example, “how do red backgrounds perform against blue backgrounds for retail campaigns?”). The resulting lifts in performance were recorded and compared to produce the insights here.

Results from each vertical were then used in a regression tree analysis to determine the overall impact of these measurable attributes on ad performance. The resulting R² values identified the likelihood that a specific set of factors influenced ad performance for a given vertical.

While this methodology works for individual industry verticals, the significantly wider difference in conversion actions between verticals required a different approach. In these cases, lifts against the vertical performance average for a particular attribute were used and averaged across multiple verticals to ensure a fair calculation of average lift relative to that category’s performance. When we examine industry-wide best practices, these lift averages are used.
GLOSSARY

Before we dive into the findings, let’s cover some of the terms we’ll be using for our analysis, how they’re defined for use in this study, and how we categorized ads during our research for each of those attributes.

**ANIMATED/STATIC**
Ads were classified as animated if they featured moving images or text, changing images, or any other type of motion. Typically, animated ads in the sample would play their animation cycle (or “loop”) several times before settling on a final static image. Videos (or rich media ads with embedded video) were classified separately. Ads which featured a single, unmoving image were classified as “static”.

**ANIMATION LENGTH**
The length of time between an ad’s initial load and its final frame of animation, after which the ad becomes a static image (having completed its maximum number of loops). Also included in the analysis was the number of loops. Ads that infinitely looped were rare, but were classified as “infinite” for the purposes of animation length.

**BACKGROUND COLOR**
The dominant color in an ad, comprising more than 50% of the ad’s viewable background space when the ad finishes its initial load. This does not count other elements placed on top of the background color. The categorization applies to photos when a single dominant color is evident. Backgrounds with multiple colors were classified as “multiple,” whereas backgrounds that used photo images were classified as “photo.”

**BUTTON COLOR**
The primary color of any button featured in the ad (usually these executed the ad’s call to action).

**COMPANY LOGO**
Whether the primary logo of the company was featured within the ad. Logo placement was also cataloged using ordinal directions, where “west” indicated left, “east” indicated right, and so on.

**CONQUEST MESSAGING**
Ad messaging that compared the features or benefits of one company’s product as superior over a competitor’s product was considered conquest messaging. One example of an ad of this type would be a truck ad that talks about superior horsepower or safety compared to another truck brand.

**HUMAN FACE/HUMAN PRESENT**
Ads were categorized according to whether or not they featured one or more humans, specifically with a visible face in the ad. For many industry verticals, the gender of the person (male, female), number of people by gender (for example, multiple people, man and woman, family), and relative age (children, adults) were observed and cataloged. Additionally, pets and other non-human entities were also cataloged but excluded from the analysis due to a small sample size.

**MESSAGING**
Ads in the sample were classified according to their core message to the audience. This could be a product, idea, or goal. For example, a creative highlighting an auto manufacturer’s safety rating was categorized as “safety” messaging, whereas a creative highlighting fuel efficiency would be classified as such.
ONLINE/OFFLINE PUSH
Creatives in the sample for certain industry verticals were classified according to whether they pushed consumers to either an online action (such as an online purchase, donation, or download) or an offline action (such as an offline purchase). The latter was seen more often among products for which online purchases were either impossible or very unlikely.

PRICING
Ads that featured the actual price of a product or service. Ads that only cited price-reduction offers by dollar amount and/or percentage were not considered to have shown price.

PRODUCT SHOWN
Ads that prominently featured one or more images of the product within the ad were classified as having displayed the product. Ads without a product shown typically featured the use of text or company logo to deliver its message. The product's logo was not considered a valid interpretation of the "product shown" classification. Ads for some verticals were also categorized according to whether they showed the product in use, for example, being eaten, worn, or otherwise used by someone in the ad. When the product was shown, its color was also recorded for certain verticals, such as Retail.

RICH MEDIA
For the purposes of this study, rich media ads came in the form of expandable or interactive rich media ads, including ads with embedded video.

SPECIAL OFFERS
The classification of special offers covers a wide variety of offer types, including limited-time offers, price reductions, free trials, and other incentives.

TAGLINE
Classified along the following guidelines:
• Was the TM symbol present next to text?
• Was the statement located near a company logo in company-specific font?
• Was the text a well-known tagline associated with a company?

EMOTIONAL APPEAL (ADVOCACY)
Ads in the Political/Advocacy sample were classified according to the strength of their emotional appeal on a unipolar scale, ranging from neutral to moderate to extreme. Classification was left up to the analyst. A "neutral" ad was primarily informational in nature and was essentially a public service announcement. Ads of moderate emotion used polarizing imagery or wording, such as a picture of an angry politician. Extreme appeals featured very polarizing or emotional imagery such as starving children or abused animals.

INDOOR/OUTDOOR (HOME & GARDEN)
Home & Garden ads were classified according to whether they pictured a scene that was either indoors or outdoors.

VENUE (ENTERTAINMENT)
Entertainment ads for a show or concert were classified according to whether they featured an image of the venue.

LEGAL TEXT (PHARMA)
Pharma advertisers are required by law to provide extensive legal text describing the risk factors for medications. This applies specifically to medications in their creative and does not include other forms of legal text (for example, privacy policies). Legal text is not required for ads about medical procedures.
Though scant, there are some creative performance trends that were consistent over the entirety of our sample, suggesting some best practices even for those verticals that we did not extensively study during this analysis.
Overall, ads with red backgrounds had 31% higher conversion rates when compared to ads with other background colors. This was the highest lift among background colors, followed by similar hues, such as orange (+28%) and yellow (+24%). Interestingly, white (+14%) and black (-22%) backgrounds were by far the most common, despite comparatively lower performance in most verticals.

### BACKGROUND COLOR PERFORMANCE

- Red: +31%
- Orange: +28%
- Yellow: +24%
- White: +14%
- Black: -22%

### ANIMATION

Our results confirmed what existing benchmarks have long shown: animated banner ads averaged lower click-through rates than static ads. However, our research showed that while this was still the case, animated ads actually averaged higher conversion rates across most verticals, accounting for a 7% higher conversion rate on average when compared to static ads.

In addition to comparing animated and static ads, we also looked at performance based on the length of the animation cycle in those ads, counting loops. While the majority of animated ads in the sample had animation cycles between 10 and 12 seconds in length (40%), animated ads with total animation cycles of six to nine seconds in length averaged the highest conversion rates across all categories, with an average conversion rate lift of 38% against their category average.

### ANIMATION LENGTH

- 3-5 SECS: +8%
- 6-9 SECS: +138%
- 10-12 SECS: -6%
- 13+ SECS: -68%

### BEFORE WE GET STARTED...

Although what follows is an examination of macro trends, it is important to note the following:

#### THIS DATA DOESN'T GUARANTEE BETTER PERFORMANCE

The information presented here is by no means exhaustive. There are many other factors that affect creative performance that either weren’t measured or cannot yet be measured, in addition to a myriad of external factors that can affect performance. That said, we liken these insights to learning the statistics behind Blackjack—knowing how to play won’t guarantee you walk home rich, but it will increase your chances of doing so.

#### THERE’S NO “SILVER BULLET” FOR PERFORMANCE

The factors that affect creative performance vary greatly by vertical. An attribute that appears to neither improve nor decrease overall performance might actually be correlated with higher performance for one vertical and equally lower performance for another, causing the two to “cancel each other out” at the industry-wide level.

#### DIFFERENT FACTORS DRIVE CONVERSION AND CLICK-THROUGH RATES

Throughout the study, we frequently saw that ad attributes that drove click-through rate performance for a given vertical seldom drove conversion-rate performance at the same time. In fact, taking a statistical look at the two shows little correlation between click-through and conversion rates overall (r=0.029). Because of this, the information presented in this report focuses primarily on those factors that drive conversion-rate performance, and identify where this might actively be detrimental to click-through rate performance.

#### BACKGROUND COLOR

Background color has a significant impact on ad performance across every vertical examined. For our study, the background color of an ad was defined as the color representing more than 50% of the ad’s viewable area when the ad first loads into the browser (as opposed to when it completes its animated cycle).
One potential positive consequence of focusing on view-through conversion-rate performance for this study is that, on the whole, displaying a company logo in creative appears to boost performance. Ads featuring a company logo had 4% higher conversion rates than those without logos. “When” the logo was featured (for animated ads) was not considered in this analysis.

Furthermore, placement also mattered. Although the most common approach was to place the company logo in the center of the ad (22%), our analysis showed that ads with the logo in either the upper-left, upper-right, or lower-left corners had the highest conversion rates, with the lower-left corner indicated as the optimal location (+81%). This might be due to the “F-shaped” model of viewing, which implies that we can expect to see different results if we look at ads for languages that read right-to-left.

A surprising important factor across many verticals was whether the ad displayed the actual product. Ads that displayed specific products averaged 6% higher conversion rates compared to ads that did not show a product.

Perhaps just as important was how the products were shown. We also looked at whether products were shown “in-use” in the ad, where in-use was defined as a person operating, manipulating, driving, or wearing the product being advertised. Across all verticals, ads showing the product in-use had 5% higher conversion rates than those merely showing the product (this can be considered an additional improvement over just showing the product).

### COMPANY LOGO

Conventional creative wisdom suggests that ads with a human face perform better than ads without one. Overall, this appeared to be true for most verticals, with human-featured ads averaging 4% higher conversion rate lifts.

Digging deeper, we find that the type of person shown can have a significant impact on performance as well. When breaking down “type of human” (for example, man, woman, child, and combinations of these) we found that ads featuring men—the most common person type featured—averaged 102% higher conversion rates on average than those featuring women (+25%), while ads featuring both a man and a woman tended to underperform (-15%).

### SHOWING THE PRODUCT

A surprisingly important factor across many verticals was whether the ad displayed the actual product. Ads that displayed specific products averaged 6% higher conversion rates compared to ads that did not show a product.

Perhaps just as important was how the products were shown. We also looked at whether products were shown “in-use” in the ad, where in-use was defined as a person operating, manipulating, driving, or wearing the product being advertised. Across all verticals, ads showing the product in-use had 5% higher conversion rates than those merely showing the product (this can be considered an additional improvement over just showing the product).
While we are presenting results that imply performance gains for a particular category as a result of creative changes, it is important to note that not all verticals are affected by the same attributes, nor are they equally affected by the attributes presented here. Two questions we often hear are 1. how much of performance is due to the creative (vs. say, the targeting), and 2. is this data causal or just a coincidence? Both of these are legitimate questions, and we sought to answer them by using statistical analysis of our creative attributes.
THE R² VALUE
When building our regression-tree model, the R² value of the model is a measure of how well the model accurately predicts observed data points. In this case, you can think of it as a measure of how much of the variation in an ad’s performance is explained by variation in the attributes of the model. If R² = 1.00, then almost all of a vertical’s ad performance was due to changes in the creative.

WHICH ATTRIBUTES MATTER THE MOST?
Building a regression tree model for each vertical, we can identify:

Which attributes play a significant role in ad performance for that vertical, and

1. How much of the variation in ad performance in that vertical is explained by changes in the creative attributes we tracked, represented by the R² value (a value of “100%” indicates that creative changes correlate almost perfectly with performance changes).

For those verticals where our R² value was low, it’s likely that other factors (such as targeting, time of year, or ad attributes we didn’t examine) have a larger impact on ad performance.

OTHER VERTICALS
Our models did not indicate a strong relationship for every category, particularly those that were splintered among a wider variety of products, such as Consumer Electronics, Business Services (B2B), or Travel & Lodging. Similarly, our models did not hint at strong causal relationships for Auto or Insurance advertising.

For these verticals, there are three likely explanations for why our models do not show stronger relationships:

1. We might need to further segment these verticals into more relevant subcategories (which would necessitate a larger sample of ads).

2. The data set is not large enough to adequately express these relationships (for example, smaller sample sizes for some attributes in specific verticals might be to blame).

3. Other factors, such as targeting effectiveness, time of day, the product, or the brand play a significantly larger role in the conversion process for ads in those verticals.
In addition to ad-performance aggregates, we also observed common trends related to the design of display ads. This section provides a breakdown of the frequency of some design choices by industry vertical.
BACKGROUND COLOR

Although white ads tended to perform only slightly above the category average for most of the verticals examined in our study, white backgrounds were far and away the most common color used for display ads in our sample, representing nearly half (40.6%) of the ads. Comparatively, red backgrounds, which averaged the highest overall performance across all verticals, were the fifth most commonly seen, with 5.7% of the ads in the sample. Ads with black backgrounds were more common (10.5%), despite averaging lower conversion rates across most industry verticals.

Insurance ads were the most likely to make use of animation in the creative, with four out of five ads in the sample including with some kind of animation or motion. On the opposing end of the spectrum, Fashion creatives were the least likely to employ animation (17.8%).

By vertical, the majority of ads did not feature pricing information. This is probably for the best, as ads with pricing tended to average lower conversion rates across most categories unless they were accompanied by a special or limited-time offer.
ANIMATION

Just under half (46.6%) of the ads in our sample featured any type of motion or animation in the creative. Use of animation was most common among insurance ads, where more than four out of five (80.7%) of the ads in our sample featured some kind of animation. While on the whole, animated ads averaged slightly higher conversion rates (+7%) than static ads, the value of animation varied significantly by vertical.

Animation made the biggest impact for creatives in the Home & Garden, Fashion & Retail, Entertainment, and Education categories, where it was a significant factor in the models we created for the performance of each category. Depending on the category, animated ads could average conversion rates as much as 98% higher than their static counterparts.

By length, most ads in our sample averaged cycles between 10 and 12 seconds in length, including loops. However, animated ads with an animation length between 6 and 9 seconds averaged the highest conversion rates (+138%).

PERCENTAGE OF ADS WITH ANIMATION BY Vertical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home &amp; Garden</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel &amp; Lodging</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPG / FMCG</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Services</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Technology</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAND TOTAL</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceuticals</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Beauty</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**PRICING AND OFFERS**

The inclusion of pricing or special offers (such as sales, rebates, or limited-time offers) in our sample varied by vertical, with Telecom ads being the most likely to contain either. Comparatively, pharmaceutical ads were the least likely to contain pricing information, likely as a consequence of how prescription drugs are purchased. Only Travel ads were anywhere near as likely as Telecom ads to contain pricing or offer information.

Insurance ads in our sample were the least likely to include a special offer, though more than 25% included pricing.

**HUMAN FACES**

As we saw earlier, human faces had a positive impact on conversion rate performance (+4%), though this was particularly true for Entertainment and Telecom ads, with the former featuring an image of one or more people (typically a performer or celebrity) in more than two thirds of the creatives in our sample.

Auto ads in our sample were the least likely to include a person or human face. They were more likely to include an image of a vehicle instead, though auto ads did benefit from including an image with both a person and a vehicle.
CALL TO ACTION
Throughout our analysis, the “Learn More” call-to-action was by far the most common across all verticals, representing nearly one third of creatives in our sample with a clear call-to-action. Ads with the “Learn More” call-to-action averaged among the highest conversion rates among ads in our sample.

The percentage of ads in the sample with the “Learn More” call-to-action varied by vertical, but it was most common among Retail creatives. The chart below shows the frequency of phrases and words used as calls-to-action across all verticals.

PROPORTION OF ADS WITH “LEARN MORE” CALL TO ACTION, BY VERTICAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel/Lodging</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Beauty</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Services</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPG</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home &amp; Garden</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Technology</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharma</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecom</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL ADS IN SAMPLE

GOOD PERFORMANCE

POOR PERFORMANCE
Our Automotive sample consisted of three billion impressions from 367 campaigns for domestic and foreign brands. In addition to the standard characteristics examined, we also looked at car type and color, engine size, the type of messaging used to sell the vehicle (for example: safety, awards, high MPG, and so on), the presence of humans in the ad, and whether or not they were driving the vehicle.
SPECIAL OFFERS AND PRICING
Auto ads tended to perform better when they mentioned pricing in the creative messaging, while special offers such as sales and promotions did not appear to improve performance.

The exception to this are limited-time offers. Ads that included messaging around limited-time offers averaged +25% higher conversion rates than those with no offers or other offers, regardless of whether they included pricing information.

Limited-time offers accounted for approximately one-third of all ads and required us to create a separate category district from traditional “special offers.”

PEOPLE AND CARS
The overwhelming majority of auto ads featured a vehicle (90%), though auto ads often performed better when they also had one or more people in them (just 4% of ads) in addition to the car, averaging +42% higher conversion rates.

Although ads without cars were rare, those that relied on other imagery also often performed higher than the Auto category average, with conversion rates +35% higher.

LOGO PLACEMENT
Logo placement matters. Auto ads that placed the logo in the upper left or lower left averaged higher conversion rates than those that placed their logo elsewhere.

Interestingly, advertisers frequently placed logos in the lower right corner. However, this area was associated with lower performance, indicating an area for creative optimization.
MESSAGING
Our data set also provided some evidence to suggest that ads containing MPG data followed by safety information experienced a conversion rate lift of +246%.

There was evidence to suggesting that ads containing award messaging followed by safety messaging experienced a conversion lift by +104% above the vertical average.
Rocket Fuel served 1.2 billion impressions for 183 campaigns in the Entertainment vertical, including ads for concerts, shows, sporting events, and music services, and music streaming. As the majority of these initiatives focused on generating ticket sales for an upcoming event, we have split out the performance results for initiatives that did not focus on an event.
ARTIST/STAR SHOWN

Showing the artist or star of the featured attraction improves performance. Ads that featured an artist or celebrity have average conversion rates +56% higher than those without one, regardless of the gender of the artist.
**Photography vs. Illustration**

![Photo Icon]

\[+16\%\] ![Pen Icon]
\[-13\%\]

When it comes to graphics and imagery, photos appear to be more effective than illustrations, especially if the photo features a celebrity. Generally, ads with photos averaged conversion rates 33% higher than those with illustrations or other graphics.

**Gender of Celebrity Shown**

![Male Celebrity]

\[+131\%\]

![Female Celebrity]

\[-65\%\]

Looking at the gender of the featured celebrity shows that while showing the celebrity tends to improve performance, the gender of the celebrity might matter. Ads featuring male celebrities averaged conversion rates 6.7x higher than ads featuring female celebrities, though this did not affect click-through rates (ads with female celebrities averaged similar click-through rates to ads with male celebrities). This seems to be emphasized by the trends we saw—while 52% of ads featured a celebrity of either gender, the breakdowns were heavily skewed: 41% of ads featured male celebrities, and only 8% featured female celebrities (3% featured celebrities of both genders).

**Animation, Call to Action**

![Animation Icon]

\[+98\%\]

![Static Icon]

\[-48\%\]

**Price and Offers Shown**

![Pricing Icon]

\[+204\%\]

![Offer Icon]

\[+70\%\]

Although the practice of including price is less common (8% of ads), entertainment ads performed better when they included that information in the creative messaging. Ads that included pricing averaged conversion rates +213% higher than those that did not include price. Including special offers such as sales or promotions did not appear to improve ad performance unless they also included pricing.

**Logo Placement**

![Logo Placement Chart]

**Performace vs. Frequency**

**The Venue**

Creatives that didn’t show the venue—such as a stadium or concert hall—tended to perform better than those that did, averaging conversion rates 75% higher overall.
Although the Travel vertical encompasses a wide variety of campaign types—Hotels, Lodging, Tourism, Air Travel, Cruises, Destinations, and so on—the disparate nature of these marketing initiatives and the large difference in conversion types necessitates splitting these up and considering them separately. As such, the results here refer primarily to general Travel campaigns such as those for Online Travel Agencies (OTA). The results here come from a sample of two billion impressions across 266 campaigns.

Interesting results and differences for Air Travel creatives are noted in this section.
While Travel ads with people in them were less common (fewer than 50% of ads), creatives featuring humans tended to average significantly higher conversion rates (+152%). Showing humans in an ad might add a level of vicariousness to the imagery, enticing consumers with beautiful adventures and locales in which they can picture themselves.

The exception to this were creatives for Air Travel, which rarely showed people and tended to average conversion rates +166% higher when no people were shown in the ad.

Ads with length of trip in their messaging averaged conversion rates a whopping +227% higher than those without that information. Although not a feature of most Travel creatives (only 11%), ads that showed or suggested a length of stay—typically in the form of a number of days—tended to perform significantly better.

This could be a concreteness issue. In other words, vacation packages with a designated number of days might reduce the abstraction of a far-away vacation and make the trip quantifiable.
Travel ads were better off if they mentioned either a price and special offer (+71% higher conversion rate) or neither (+28%), with the former category being the better performer of the two. Ads with neither pricing nor special offer information were about twice as common in the sample used.

HOTEL & LODGING

In contrast with general Travel creatives, Hotel & Lodging creative messaging tended to benefit more from displaying special offers, and performed worse when pricing was included, even alongside a special offer. Otherwise, there weren’t many significant differences for Hotel, Resort, or other Lodging creatives.

Hotel & Lodging ads tended to perform best when they did not mention pricing (+59%), and generally performed best when they included some kind of special or limited-time offer (+25%). Hotel & Lodging ads featuring special offers tended to be far more common, accounting for 74% of ads in the sample. Of these, only 12% also included pricing information.
Including marketing initiatives for newspapers, websites, and broadcast networks, the Media sample looked at over 680 million impressions served across 68 different marketing initiatives. The majority of these initiatives revolved around driving subscriptions as a success metric. Surprisingly, special subscription offers were often not as effective as more concrete benefits, such as stock quotes or marketing services.
SUBSCRIPTION OFFERS

Media ads with special or discounted subscription offers averaged lower conversion rates than those without offers. Instead, Media ads tended to average higher conversion rates when featuring other benefits beyond a subscription, such as stock quotes, marketing services, or other products.

ANIMATION, CALL TO ACTION

Regardless of the type of offer (remember, ads with subscription offers tended to average lower conversion rates), Media ads with pricing information in the creative averaged significantly lower conversion rates, regardless of any offers. In these cases it might be better to extol the benefits of a subscription or service and let consumers discover the price of the product on their own, when they might be more receptive.
The Consumer Technology vertical contained 1.2 billion impressions, including computers, smartphones, and software. Ads promoting online action with the product shown had the highest conversion rates in the vertical. Shorter animated advertisements also tended have higher conversion rates.
Shorter animations tended to have higher conversion rates when compared to longer animations. The ads we observed appeared to flash or flicker in order to grab your attention and then followed up with the call to action and an image of the product. There was less of a sense of narration or feature lists with these creatives and more of a focus on “getting to the point.” Longer animations (which had fewer conversions) appeared to address a problem point and highlight special features.

Featuring the product is effective in this vertical, as it can provide an opportunity for the convert to actually see the product they might be preparing to purchase. That said, featuring the product not in use resulted in higher conversions. Products not in use received 75% greater conversions than when the product was seen in use. This might be because when products are being used, it provides the viewer less opportunity to observe and compare the product against similar products.
The Telecom sample primarily consisted of marketing initiatives around two distinct types of service: Cable/Internet providers and wireless phone service providers.

Our sample looked at 4.6 billion impressions served for 111 marketing initiatives. While the actual conversion action—typically involving a subscription to a service—did not end up being incredibly different for the two initiative types, the messaging between the two varied substantially. As such, we'll note key differences between the two below.
REGIONAL MESSAGING

Ads with a clear regional focus (and corresponding targeting) in their messaging saw clear benefits, averaging conversion rates 2x higher than those with no regionally focused messaging.

CONQUEST MESSAGING

Although only 5% of ads employed conquest-focused messaging outside of the call to action (the aforementioned “Switch Now”), ads with this messaging tended to have lower conversion rates (-12%). This might be caused by the ad messaging being perceived as defensive.

PHONES & TABLET OFFERS

Although only seen on 10% of Telecom creatives, ads with an offer that included a free or discounted phone or tablet had significantly higher conversion rates.

TAGLINE

38% of the Telecom ads in our sample included a tagline, and ads that did so had conversion rates +45% higher than those that did not include a tagline. In this case, we defined a tagline as any phrase likely to be directly attributed to a single brand or that is trademarked.
Telecom ads that featured special offers tended to have significantly higher conversion rates than those without, though telecom ads also performed better when there was no pricing involved. When considering offer type, limited-time offers had lower conversion rates (-68%), whereas offers promising savings, either as a percentage or dollar amount, had higher conversion rates (+150%).

**LOGO PLACEMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NW</td>
<td>140%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTH</td>
<td>-52%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>-48%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEST</td>
<td>-57%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENTER</td>
<td>-15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAST</td>
<td>-93%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH</td>
<td>119%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the most common logo placement for Telecom ads was the upper right corner (33%), the logo placements with the highest observed conversion rates were the upper left, bottom center, and bottom left. Of these, ads with the upper left logo placement had the highest conversion rates, scoring +140% above the vertical average.
The Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) vertical sample consisted of 184 marketing initiatives with 1.6 billion delivered impressions. This vertical encompasses a wide variety of products including groceries, packaged food, contact lenses, beverages, and household goods. Due to the wide variety of products in this category, our research focused primarily on universal factors—such as whether the product was shown in use and by whom.
PRICING AND OFFERS SHOWN
Unless showcasing a sale or special offer, CPG creatives showing pricing information tended to average -60% lower conversion rates than ads that did not include pricing information. CPG ads that included special offers without pricing information had the highest performance at +9% above the vertical average and were the most common execution, accounting for 41% of all ads in the sample. This might be the result of the products being perceived as commodities: Special offers may be more effective in cases where the average price of the product is well known.

PEOPLE AND PRODUCT SHOWN
CPG ads averaged the highest conversion rates when they either showed a person with a product or showed neither: Ads which had only a person averaged -82% lower conversion rates than the vertical average, while ads with only a product tended to perform just below the average.
In our sample, approximately half of the CPG ads included taglines and half of the CPG ads did not include taglines. CPG ads that did not include taglines had conversion rates +53% higher than ads that did include a tagline.

### Animation, Call to Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call to Action</th>
<th>Animated</th>
<th>Static</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Order Now</td>
<td>+420%</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get &lt;Item&gt;</td>
<td>+419%</td>
<td>+6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter Now</td>
<td>+240%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Now</td>
<td>+35%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign Up Now</td>
<td>+10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save Now</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Coupon</td>
<td>-80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CPG ads with the “Order Now” call to action produced conversion rates +420% above the vertical average and appeared in 7% of ads that had a call to action. CPG ads with variations on the “Get <Something>” call to action averaged a higher conversion rates than the very similar “Get Coupon” call to action. Coupon-centric CPG ads accounted for 29% of ads in the sample and averaged conversion rates 80% lower than the vertical average, showcasing the difficulty in driving offline activity through coupons (as opposed to online purchases).

### Animation Length

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-5 SECS</td>
<td>-9%</td>
<td>-63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 SECS</td>
<td>-63%</td>
<td>-63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 SECS</td>
<td>+85%</td>
<td>-63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13+ SECS</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Animated CPG ads with longer animation times (including loops) tended to have higher conversion rates than shorter ads. Animated ads with animation times between 10 and 12 seconds had the highest conversion rates while accounting for 18% of ads in our CPG sample. This makes practical sense, as it might take time for the viewer’s eye to locate the ad on the screen while reading other material on the website. Longer ads allow for viewers to comfortably scan the page before taking notice of the ads.
The Retail sample consisted of 273 marketing initiatives for which 2.9 billion impressions were delivered, covering items such as toys, furniture, clothing, electronics, and other supplies. Conversions for campaigns in the Retail sample were recorded as online product purchases of varying sizes.
Just under half (43%) of Retail ads showcased special offers without including pricing information and averaged the highest conversion rates when compared to the vertical average. Comparatively, Retail ads that included only pricing information averaged significantly lower conversion rates.

Retail ads with the “Click Here” call to action, present on 6% of ads in the sample, averaged conversion rates 169% higher than the vertical average and click-through rates similarly high (+161%). This is an interesting exception to our findings across most verticals.

Within retail, conquest ads preformed noticeably worse than non-conquest ads with respect to conversion rates by a wide margin (conquest -85% below the mean versus non-conquest +1%). While only 3% of our data contained conquest messaging, the sample featured a variety of brands, suggesting that similar results will hold for larger samples.
The Dining vertical sample consisted of 57 marketing initiatives with 697 million impressions served, covering quick-serve restaurants (QSR), casual-dining restaurants, and food-ordering websites. The data set represents several of the largest QSR brands in the United States. During the analysis, special attention was paid to the types of food offers provided on orders and how these might have affected performance.
19% of the restaurant ads in our sample included volume-based offers, e.g., messaging that offered more food at the same price (such as a free side or a buy-one-get-one-free offer). Comparatively, ads with these offers averaged the highest conversion rates in our sample, +284% higher than the vertical average. Offers that promised a discount or lower price were more common (23% of ads in our sample) and performed only slightly better than the vertical average (+17%). This finding suggests that people respond more to tangible comparisons that can be visualized easily—10% more food may be more compelling than a 10% price reduction (especially when you are hungry!)

Although ads with volume-based offers had higher conversion rates, ads with “add-ons” (for example, those offering additional items at a discounted rate, such as “order now and add a side at half off”) had conversion rates 21% lower than advertisements without add-on offers.
PRODUCT SHOWN

We'd like to think this one is a no-brainer. As you might expect, 78% of ads in our dining sample featured food of some sort. The remainder (22%) averaged conversion rates significantly lower. Showing the food likely whets the appetite of the viewer and may reduce anxiety in purchasing an item online.

PERSON SHOWN

Only 2% of the dining ads in our sample featured a human face, and those than did tended to average lower conversion rates (-82%). The moral of the story: When it comes to display ads, consumers would much rather see the food that the person consuming it.

COUPON

LOGO SHOWN

ANIMATION, CALL TO ACTION

Dining ads with the “Order Now” call to action averaged the highest conversion rates, as we might expect given the inherent advantage that they have over restaurants that don’t deliver. Ads with variations on the “Find a location near you” call to action performed nearly as well, averaging conversion rates +55% higher than the category average. The “Click Here” call to action, while driving higher click-through rates, appears to be significantly less effective at driving conversions, either for online orders or more offline-centric conversions.
The Advocacy sample consisted of 118 marketing initiatives with 1.8 billion total impressions served, covering charitable and non-profit organizations, political campaigns, and issue-based initiatives. Specific to advocacy, we looked at differences between emotional appeals and attack ads and focused on which ad attributes led to higher or lower performance in terms of driving donations for a particular campaign or cause.
Advocacy ads in the sample were classified based on the relative strength of their emotional appeal, typically as a result of an attempt to solicit sympathy or anger over a particular issue. Emotional appeals were classified as “Neutral,” “Moderate,” or “Extreme” based on their content (a black-and-white ad showing an abused puppy would be considered “Extreme,” for example). Overall, “Extreme” ads in the sample were relatively rare, accounting for 4% of ads, compared to those with “Moderate” (25%) or “Neutral” (65%) messaging. Ads performed better when they had stronger emotional appeals. Ads with “Extreme” emotional appeals averaged conversion rates 94% higher than ads with “Moderate” or “Neutral” appeals.

Political ads that focused on attacking a specific candidate accounted for 7% of ads in the sample and averaged conversion (e.g. donation) 59% higher than political ads with no attack messaging. These tended to be fairly evenly distributed across the spectrum of emotional appeal strength (neutral, moderate, and extreme) and included a mix of ads designed to appeal to a particular base and others designed to dissuade those in an opposing political party.
Advocacy ads can be categorically divided according to their campaign goal and whether they are asking for donations. The good news for fundraisers is that ads featuring the “Give Now” call to action had among the highest performance, averaging conversion rates +110% higher than the vertical average. This held true across ads asking for a financial contribution, whereas ads asking for a time contribution, such as “Sign a Petition” (+5), “Sign Up” (-35%), “Learn More” (-52%), and “Schedule Pick Up” (-64%) performed significantly worse.

Looking at the “ask” of each Advocacy ad regardless of the call to action supports our previous finding, showing that ads asking for donations in the form of goods and money averaged the highest conversion rates, whereas requests that were more time-intensive tended to perform significantly worse. The key lesson here: People value time over money.
The Education sample covered 119 marketing initiatives for which 1.3 billion impressions were served for non-profit and for-profit institutions. Conversions were typically measured as signing up to receive additional information about a school or program. The majority of campaigns in the sample promoted either graduate (55%) or undergraduate programs (37%).
men averaged significantly higher conversion rates (+137%) than those featuring women (-48%) or a man and a woman (-16%).

LOGO SHOWN

Creative featuring the institution’s logo tended to average lower conversion rates than advertisements without one. Twenty-five percent of ads did not feature a logo and tended to feature the institution’s name spelled out in simple type. Design-wise, they tended to have bolder designs with more empty space.

ANIMATION, CALL TO ACTION

Many of the calls to action in the sample focused on requests for more information about the institution and its services. Education ads with calls to action that suggested higher levels of commitment (e.g. Register Today, Start Now, Enroll Now) averaged lower conversion rates. The “Click Here” call to action showed up in 24% of the ads in our sample and often led to expectedly higher click-through rates (+103%) but significantly lower conversion rates (-20%).

RANKING INFO

Creatives which featured college/university rankings (e.g. U.S. News and World Report) experienced conversion rates approximately 2.2x greater than ads that did not feature ranking information. Approximately 4% of our sample contained ranking information.

Ads that featured an image of a campus, present in 64% of ads in the sample, performed significantly better than those that did not, averaging conversion rates 33% higher. This may reflect consumer preference for in-class learning, which they may view as more valuable than a purely online education. Education creative that did not feature a campus typically showed solid backgrounds with school logos.

35% of the ads in our sample showed one or more people (typically a student), and those that did averaged 64% higher conversion rates. Not all human faces performed equally well, however, as ads showing

PEOPLE SHOWN

+137%  -48%  -16%

SHOWING THE CAMPUS

+29%  -4%

BACKGROUND COLOR

BLACK  MULTICOLOR
BLUE  PURPLE
BROWN  RED
GREEN  WHITE
GREY

REQUEST MORE INFO  +70%
LEARN MORE  +53%
CLICK HERE  -20%
VISIT US  -39%
The Home & Garden sample consisted of 65 marketing initiatives for which 861 million impressions were served. Ads in this vertical focused primarily on the sale of appliances, mattresses, storage, tools, lawn and garden supplies, services, and other goods for inside and outside the home.
While we’ve seen that animated Home & Garden ads perform better than static ads, animation length is also an important factor. Ads 6-9 seconds in length (including loops) averaged the highest conversion rate (+312%) and represented 6% of the Home & Garden sample.

Ads depicting the outdoors (lawns, forest, etc.) had a CTR 2.3x greater than indoor ads, but they significantly under-performed in terms of conversion rates, at -84% below average. Ads with an indoor environment had a conversion rate 11x higher than outdoor ads. This speaks to the importance of optimizing toward conversions rather than clicks in programmatic media buying.
Many ads in our sample featured a brand name/logo with no reference to a single product. We believe this may arise from many advertisers opting to feature their brand as an introduction to a wider suite of products.

Not featuring special offers had a statistically significant effect on conversion rates. In particular, ads without special offers had conversion rates 7.4x greater than ads with special offers.

Advertisements promoting online action were associated with higher conversion rates in the Home & Garden vertical—with an online pushes skyrocketing toward 13.7x higher conversion rates over ads promoting offline action. This could be a result of the vertical’s propensity for branding where the ads appeared to have less of an emphasis on direct action.
The B2B sample consisted of 128 marketing initiatives for which 1.4 billion impressions were served, typically covering software or tech products. Most of the items advertised in this sample were big-ticket items, though several campaigns focused on smaller items and services such as server space and shipping. Where necessary, differences between service and product types have been noted.
PRICE AND OFFERS SHOWN
Advertisements with a price listed and no offer had the highest average conversion rate of all and appeared in 2.3% of campaigns. Ads of this sort tended to be related to software or a smaller service, such as server space, shipping, software, etc., and did not include bigger-ticket items. Only five percent of campaigns in the B2B sample featured any price at all, likely because prices for many B2B products are negotiated. Ads with a price tended to drive higher online conversion rates.

Ads with no price and no offer listed were the most common, appearing in 65% of campaigns and experiencing a 12% increase in conversions.
Creatives with humans present averaged higher conversions than ads without humans shown. We believe this might stem from business products being primarily service related, and establishing the “human” connection early on might help to drive positive brand interaction.

Taglines, used in 56% of campaigns, might help to establish product features and positioning early on with user engagement. This ability to define the message in terms of features might help users figure out whether they want to seek potential relationships and thereby improve conversions.

Conquest messaging accounted for 5% of B2B ads, and ads with that messaging averaged 21% lower conversion rates than the vertical mean. Conquest messaging might only serve to inform potential customers of rival products. Further, by having to draw a comparison to a competitor’s product, the ad might in fact be conceding that the vendor offers the same product as the current industry leader.

The “Learn More” call to action was the most frequent in the B2B sample (30% of ads in our sample), though ads with that call to action performed in-line with the vertical average. B2B ads with the “Shop Here,” “Free Trial,” and “Click Here” calls to action averaged the highest conversion rates among ads in the sample.
The Financial Services sample consisted of 130 marketing initiatives for which 1.4 billion impressions were served.

Our data set consisted of various financial products, including loans, credit cards, ID theft protection, wire transfers, investment services, and insurance products.

The largest segment was insurance, which comprised 35% of the data set, and was separated from the others when analyzing performance.
Ads with humans present averaged higher conversion rates than ads without humans. One or more people appeared in 30% of Financial Services creatives. Insurance ads in the sample were more likely to show humans, particularly if they featured a local agent.

The complexity of financial products might motivate individuals to first research which options are available and any details of particular interest. This might explain why ads with the “Learn More” call to action averaged higher conversion rates.

Financial Services ads with special offers (comprising 12% of ads in our sample) averaged lower conversion rates than ads without special offers. In our credit card subset, discounted percentage-point offers tended to average conversion rates -14% lower than the category average, and cash back offers did even worse (-40%).

Among credit cards ads, those that featured an image of the card averaged higher conversion-rate performance than those that do not. Just over 80% of the credit card ads in our sample included an image of the card.

Ads not featuring pricing information were associated with an average conversion rate +110% higher than the vertical average. Ads featuring pricing information averaged a conversion rate -34% less than the vertical average.
The Health & Beauty sample consisted of 92 marketing initiatives served across 1.3 billion impressions. Our data set included ads with beauty products, hospitals, gyms, and health supplements. These were distinct from pharmaceutical ads in that they could be marketed commercially and were not prescription drugs or hospital-based surgical procedures.
Purple stood out as the dominant color in this vertical, which is interesting if only because one might expect more traditional colors like white or black. That said, the sufficiently large sample size encompassed multiple brands and accounted for 2% of impressions, leading us to support this color as the champion for the vertical.
Only 8% of the ads in our Health & Beauty sample included pricing information. If a price was listed, it generally appeared alongside a special offer (occurring in 6% of ads). Ads with no price and offer listed averaged the highest conversion rates (with 48% of ads falling into this category). Given the price of some products, product offers might help potential converters overcome their trepidation about investing in some of the higher-priced products and procedures.

Health & Beauty ads with the “Learn More” call to action could perhaps benefit from the more direct approach of pushing the consumer toward a direct action, as ads featuring the “Find a Doctor/Care” calls to action averaged higher conversion rates.
Our Pharma sample consisted of 1.7 billion impressions across 77 marketing initiatives in the Pharma vertical. In our sample, we included prescription drugs, hospital-based procedures, and lab-testing services. We paid special attention to rich media and legal subtext, as current drug advertising laws limit the types of advertising possible.
Rich media ads had a conversion rate half that of standard display ads, and were used for 6% of ads. This is likely a result of the style of rich media ads that take time to expand and sometimes lack clear click points.

Expandable rich media ads accounted for 82% of the ads in our sample, a legal necessity for conveying important drug information. Overall, these ads averaged lower conversion rates. Comparatively, “Reminder” and “Help-seeking” ads appear to be more effective than those making a product claim.

73% of the ads in our sample did not include any pricing or offer information, likely because the price of prescription drugs varies between insurers. Among those that did, including the price appeared to have a negative impact on performance. There were not enough observations for two of the quadrants.

Animated ads accounted for 63% of the ads within our sample. Static ads accounted for 37% of the ads.
DYNAMIC CREATIVE

No examination of creative performance would be complete without a look at the effects of Dynamic Creative on performance. Although our sample size for Dynamic Creative was significantly smaller, the effect of putting the right product in front of the right person when serving an ad can have a significant impact on performance. While our prior work in this report was about how the message and product are presented, this Dynamic Creative research looks instead at the impact of determining which product should be presented to the consumer.
SCROLL BUTTONS
Consumers were 3.5x more likely to click on the right scroll button than the left scroll button. In fact, the right scroll button was the most commonly interacted-with button in dynamic creatives.

PRODUCT THUMBNAILS
Consumers were equally as likely to click on product thumbnails as the left scroll button.

CALL-TO-ACTION BUTTON
Just under 1 in 10 (7%) of Dynamic Creative interactions involved the call-to-action button.

RETAIL AND TRAVEL
To date, the majority of Dynamic Creative impressions served by Rocket Fuel have been for marketing initiatives in the Retail and Travel & Lodging verticals, which provide a wide range of products to dynamically insert into ads. As such, only those verticals had adequately large datasets to be included in our analysis at this time.

DYNAMIC DISPLAY
On average, when compared to creatives in the same verticals with similar conversion actions (in this case purchase-based, non-luxury-item conversions), Dynamic Creatives averaged conversion rates 21% higher than their fixed-product counterparts, though to date we’ve seen a more pronounced effect for dynamic Travel & Lodging ads.

Overall, Dynamic Creative retail ads averaged conversion rates 8.6% higher than standard ads, while Travel & Lodging Dynamic Creative ads averaged conversion rates more than twice as high (2x) as their standard counterparts.

DYNAMIC PERFORMANCE VS. STANDARD CREATIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vertical</th>
<th>CTR</th>
<th>CVR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>+24%</td>
<td>+9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>+19%</td>
<td>+160%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our Video sample consisted of 471 million impressions delivered for 286 marketing initiatives across every vertical, and focused on elements that would improve or affect completion rates. For much of our analysis, we used the timing of events within Video ads as our primary measurement tool. Due to the variable nature of Video advertising, we concentrated our analysis on ads that were 15 seconds in length or shorter.
VIDEO PLOTS
To understand the differences in completion rates between plot types, we first had to come to a consensus about how to classify plots. Using Chris Booker’s review of classic plot types in his book “Seven Basic Plots,” we segregated plots into manageable narrative categories. While combinations of plot types are possible, we cataloged only the dominant narrative element in each ad. We included an additional category called “informational,” designed to capture product showcases and event descriptions.

COMEDY
Comedic plots set a humorous tone and offered the highest completion rates of all plot types, with a completion rate +3% above average and accounting for 16% of the videos in our sample.

TRAGEDY
Tragedy features a particularly sad or unfortunate event. This was the least-used plot type (used in only 1% of the videos in our sample), likely because associating tragedy with your brand is typically seen as undesirable.

REBIRTH
Rebirth plots highlight a former villain (or unlikable character) who redeems him/herself during the course of the narrative, and was used in 8% of video creatives in our sample. A common example would be pharma ads showing a character going from sick to healthy.

RAGS-TO-RICHES
Rags-to-Riches involves a character starting out poor and finding great riches through a series of trials. An example would be a creative where a hero opens a second store after finding success in the first branch. Only 1% of the ads in our sample used this plot.

QUEST
Quest plots imply a scenario where one or more characters embark on a journey to arrive at a destination. This was the most common plot seen in the ads in our sample, accounting for 27% of the videos.

DEFEATING A MONSTER
Defeating a Monster ads entail a hero beating all odds to overcome a seemingly impossible task. This could range from an actual monster to completing tax forms on time. This plot type was seen in 1% of the videos.

INFORMATIONAL
Informational ads are not based on the “Seven Basic Plots” paradigm and typically feature information being shared about a product or event without a narrative. They accounted for 9% of the videos in our sample. An example would be a video about an upcoming wrestling event showcasing the date, time, and location of the event.

RETURN
Return plots imply situations where a character is returning back to a previous state of comfort, as a student coming home from college or a soldier returning from war. This plot type was observed in 7% of the ads.
**WHEN TO SHOW PRODUCT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Mean Completion Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-5 SECS</td>
<td>-6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 SECS</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 SECS</td>
<td>+12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13+ SECS</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Completion rates were highest for videos that show a product 10 to 12 seconds into the ad. We assume this typically occurs after exposition but before the product’s features are shown.

**WHEN TO SHOW COMPANY LOGO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Mean Completion Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-5 SECS</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 SECS</td>
<td>+/-0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 SECS</td>
<td>+8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13+ SECS</td>
<td>+14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Placing the company logo toward the end of the video (and after the product unveiling) can lead to higher completion rates. This might be because it allows other content to take center stage, leading to higher levels of engagement.

**WHEN TO SHOW PRODUCT FEATURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Mean Completion Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-5 SECS</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 SECS</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 SECS</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13+ SECS</td>
<td>+7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, showing the feature list toward the end of the video might lead to higher completion rates, as it allows the viewer to engage with more entertaining content at the beginning of the video.

**PRODUCT IN USE**

Whether the product was shown in-use or not seemed to have little effect on overall completion rate. This points to video’s ability to offer higher levels of engagement with a brand without a total focus on the product. Half of the ads in our sample showed a product in use.

**FEMALE OR MALE VOICE**

Videos with female voiceover slightly outperformed ads with male voiceover. For ads with no narrator, the dominant speaking voice was classified as male or female. Female voices were featured in 27% of the ads.
ABOUT ROCKET FUEL

Rocket Fuel delivers a leading programmatic media-buying platform at Big Data scale that harnesses the power of artificial intelligence to improve marketing ROI in digital media across web, mobile, video, and social channels. Rocket Fuel powers digital advertising and marketing programs globally for customers in North America, Latin America, Europe, and APAC. Customers trust Rocket Fuel's Advertising That Learns® platform to achieve brand and direct-response objectives in diverse industries from luxury cars to financial services to retail. Rocket Fuel currently operates in more than 20 offices worldwide and trades on the NASDAQ Global Select Market under the ticker symbol “FUEL.” For more information, please visit http://www.rocketfuel.com or call 1-888-717-8873.