

Why the Need for Pre-Testing has Never Been Greater

Today a smart media strategy is a necessity—but without effective creative it doesn't matter how well the ad is delivered. Today's on-demand pre-testing solutions provide a fast and cost-effective means to ensure that the creative deployed is as effective as possible, helping to improve return on investment when time and budget are tight.



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In 2000, I led a team of people from Millward Brown seeking to develop one of the first on-demand research solutions to test online advertising. Our objective was to minimize the cost and time required to research online display ads with an automated, self-serve solution. The need for faster, cheaper pre-testing solutions is far more important today than it was then—across all media types. The cost of developing and deploying advertising is rising, and the demand for strong return on investment grows ever greater. Advertisers need to know that investment in new creative will pay off with increased sales. Pre-testing addresses that need, and automation makes pre-testing faster and more affordable.

PRE-TESTING IMPROVES ROI

In an interview in *AdAge*, Keith Weed, Unilever's Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, states, "I've certainly got enough evidence, real hard evidence, showing that ads we've pretested perform better in the marketplace than ads we don't. It's inarguable proof."

Russell Weiner, CMO of Domino's Pizza, suggests that short of buying more media, pre-testing is the best way to make advertising work harder. The evidence backs Weiner's assertion. Clancy and Dyson reported in *Admap* in 2014 that creative has over four times more influence than media efficiency on profit impact. Great media placement can never make good on poor creative—money spent on media is wasted if the ad fails to deliver a memorable impression

that will influence purchase behavior. Millward Brown's analysis finds that consistent pre-testing improves a brand's ad effectiveness by at least 20 percent compared to brands that do not test.

AUTOMATION MEETS A GROWING NEED

One of the biggest challenges facing advertisers today is the need to develop creative to run across a diverse set of media channels. Increasing fragmentation of traditional media and the rise of complex digital and social ecosystems means that creative must be optimized for environments where ad format, consumer mindset, and expected response differ dramatically. At the same time, budgets and timelines are being squeezed.

Faced with these challenges, it can be tempting to simply hope for the best, but hope is not a strategy—or at least, not a reliable one. Pre-testing works because consistent application across campaigns helps optimize effective creative, weed out the least effective, and provide learning for the future. So how do you test more creative and stay within budget?

The answer is to leverage the power of automation and allow a wider range of creative formats to be tested quickly and affordably.

WHEN AN AUTOMATED SOLUTION IS THE BEST CHOICE

Fortunately, today's technology makes research automation far easier than it was in 2000, providing advertisers with on-demand access to predictive pre-tests. Automation,

however, requires more standardization and offers less scope for diagnosis than has been standard. While some might criticize the use of “canned” research solutions, sometimes all you need is a red or green light.

When working on a successful, established campaign, perhaps all that is required is to check that new iterations of an execution do represent an improvement. Maybe you need to test the same creative across different cultures. Or maybe you want to decide which executions should be up-weighted within a rotation. When it comes to creative destined for outdoor, digital, or mobile, then maybe the media budget does not justify more than a disaster check. Last, but not least, maybe you want to check out that new competitive campaign to figure out how much of a threat it poses to your brand.

In cases like these, an automated solution, which gives you access to a limited set of key metrics within hours, is going to give you all the information you need.

WHEN TO DO A MORE IN-DEPTH ASSESSMENT

A more in-depth assessment is worth the investment of extra time and budget when risky decisions need to be made.

Maybe you are faced with developing a completely new campaign, and pre-testing can help justify a bold new approach. Maybe production budget constrains the number of ads you can make, and you need to make sure a single execution works effectively. Or maybe the media budget needs all the help it can get. In cases like these, the focus needs to shift from go/no go to one of diagnosis and ensuring the copy used is as effective as possible. The question becomes how can we make what we have better?

With in-depth diagnostics feedback from the target audience, pre-testing can be used to improve and refine executions, particularly if tested in a rough form before final development. Add in non-verbal, neuroscience-based methods to assess instinctive reactions, and this is when interpretation and presentation of results is needed most. Taken at face value, key metrics might suggest failure when fine-tuning may help to realize the campaign’s full potential. A face-to-face presentation of results can prove immensely valuable by providing a forum for discussion, facilitating understanding of the results and actions necessary to optimize the creative.

WHY WOULD YOU NOT TEST?

Pre-testing pays its way by making sure the media budget is leveraged effectively. In the past, applying a pre-testing system consistently was a challenge, but now turnkey, low-cost solutions mean that any advertiser will find it worthwhile to pre-test their advertising on a regular basis. The only question is whether your research needs are best met with an automated solution or an in-depth test. Either way, there is no good reason not to test when the potential upside is measured in millions.

Key Takeaways

- Without effective creative buying media in any channel is wasted.
- New automated pre-testing solutions make it easier and cheaper to test any creative.
- Choose the right tool for the job: on-demand pre-tests for simple decisions, in-depth pre-tests for complex and risky decisions.