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# Driving Attention: Good Creative is Not Enough

A blueprint to catching your consumer's eye



## ATTENTION, DO WE HAVE YOURS?

As advertisers, you know that the next generation of consumers are growing up quickly, and you have adapted just as quickly. You've taken the time to understand what makes everyone from Generation Z to Baby Boomers tick, and continue to create amazing creative and campaigns based on those insights.

Both publishers and advertisers have seen the consumer landscape change dramatically in the past decade. We've seen attention spans get shorter and shorter, the adoption of endless scrolling, demand for fresh content, and time spent across multiple channels including TV, print, mobile and digital.

With that in mind, you know first hand that it's getting increasingly difficult to reach consumers on the right platform, at the right time, with the right context and message. With so much competition for consumer attention, many advertisers are left asking themselves: Is anyone actually paying attention to my ads?

As industry-old partners, publishers and advertisers can continue to work closely to share consumer insights and together, provide a better experience for those consumers while helping to future-proof the industry for a long time to come.

Tried and true metrics like clicks, impressions and views have worked in the past but we've always known that they aren't perfect. Perhaps there is something else to consider adding to your measurement arsenal. In this paper, we're discussing a powerful new tool for you to consider: attention.

## Great Creative is Just the Beginning.

Distracted viewing while watching video content is a real challenge for advertisers. When ads begin playing, it can sometimes act as a cue for viewers to start diverting their attention elsewhere, whether it's to start a conversation with a housemate, browse online, or simply get up and leave the room (while ads continue playing in the background). Knowing this, it makes us stop and think. Can you truly measure the quality of the time spent with an ad?

Up to now, advertisers have been laser-focused on those quantifiable metrics like clicks and impressions, as well as bigger picture objectives like creative and context.

You know it's incredibly important to deliver the strongest creative possible. Plus, you know that context is critical in order to identify the audiences that are most receptive to your message. These are the essentials when it comes to developing impact-driving advertising campaigns.

Since we all want to stay top of mind for the new generation of consumers, and beyond, we need to find and invest in new, strategic ways to understand consumers and incite action.



## ATTENTION, DO WE HAVE YOURS?

So, let's look beyond creative and context. What if, as an industry, we think bigger? What if we look at consumer attention as a new tool to help us understand and reach consumers?

We're digging deep into consumer attention and its potential to be a valuable metric when tied to an outcome, like purchases or app installs. We've

collected valuable research conducted by various publishers and industry experts that looks at how attention can help us understand ad consumption in order to deliver more effective ads.

We'll also explore why advertisers should consider investing in and testing the relationship between consumer attention and campaign outcomes.

Armed with these insights, we believe advertisers can use attention descriptively to learn more about consumer behavior across:



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# Digging Deeper: What is Ad Attention?


Now that we have *your* attention, we think it's time to define exactly what attention means in terms of advertising. First off, let's set the table stakes of what attention in advertising means: "Attention is the qualitative measure of an advertisement's effectiveness in arousing interest in a viewer<sup>1</sup>."

We all agree with this, right? If only it were that simple.

As advertisers, you know that agreeing on advertising metrics is an

age-old issue in the industry. Views and clicks mean one thing to one advertiser, and something completely different to another.

We've tried to establish a better understanding of what attention means by gathering feedback from different publishers and industry experts. Knowing that attention can mean something different depending on an advertiser's goals and vertical, let's see what the experts had to say:



**Disney:** "We define ad attention as memory recall. Memory recall, whether you judge that by survey responses in terms of self-stated recall, or by measuring some kind of customer engagement or action. These things are indicative of people that have not only been exposed to an ad, but obviously paid attention to an ad. Ultimately, it's about behavior, whether it's self-stated or observed behaviors."

Christopher Barton  
Director, Emerging Platforms,  
Research & Analytics at Disney

**Buzzfeed:** "We take a holistic approach and interpret ad attention to mean noticing advertising in a meaningful way. This means that we don't rely just on engagements or recall, but consider the contribution of both attitudinal and behavioral data to understand the true impact on a consumer."

Randi Vaughn  
Senior Director, Ad Effectiveness at BuzzFeed



**true [X]:** “We define ad attention in economic terms, quantifying it as a “cost” in relation to its “value”. Consumers are more aware than ever before that their time is scarce and highly valued. The true[X] business is based on asking and answering the economic question of how much it actually costs to guarantee a brand real human attention without distraction. More specifically, we see the value of attention composed of four connected pieces: consumer opt-in, acquiring full gaze, engagement or interactivity, and time or duration.”

Jamie Auslander  
SVP, Research & Analytics at true[X]

**Xandr:** “Ad attention and relevance are very much intertwined. In order to capture attention, an ad must elicit interest from the viewer. It really comes down to serving the right message to the right audience at the right time. But it’s also about evoking an emotion. If you just have the right audience, and just have the right media, but you don’t have the right creative, it doesn’t work. All of those pieces combined are what make the relevance equation.”

Ariella Astion  
VP, Commercial Enablement at Xandr

It’s clear that we don’t have a consensus on the definition of attention yet. But, these definitions can give us some insight into how to approach attention metrics in your business.

The key is to focus on real behavior change. It’s important to make sure that the attention metric you’re looking at is linked to the bottom-line business outcome you want to drive. This relationship between attention and your specific KPIs may vary across different placements and formats, so make sure to take a test and learn approach to validate your strategy.

To get a full picture of consumer behavior, combine multiple dimensions. Attention is complex, so consider layering different elements to capture nuances. For example, eye tracking metrics can shed light on what elements of a creative were noticed by an audience, while ad recall measures how much the audience remembered the ad. Looking at both consumption and effectiveness measures together can help us understand how consumption patterns drive impact.





# Drive Attention with the Right: Ad Unit

Driving consumer attention is tough, especially when advertisers need to find a way through the constant stream of content battling for a consumer's attention. In this section, BuzzFeed and true[x] break down how advertisers can draw consumer attention using the right ad unit.

## BuzzFeed research: The power of pre- and mid-roll ads

BuzzFeed partnered with an auto brand to test the effectiveness of 30 second pre- and mid-roll ads during one of their popular online show programs. The partnership was an opportunity to test and measure how well the ads could capture attention to drive awareness, consideration and messaging for the auto brand.

### The key takeaway: Leverage audience preferences

Because BuzzFeed focuses on understanding their audience inside and out, they knew that aligning ads within authentic show content would lead to big impact. The key was ensuring that the branded show integrations reached a balance between driving brand messaging and creating a seamless and organic feeling with viewers. The success of the auto ads can be attributed to achieving breakthrough for the brand in a way that felt native within the show content.

### INSIGHTS

The auto brand sponsorship worked well, with similar positive responses from participants across all episodes. Eye tracking and survey data collected through a MetrixLab study revealed that the integration was clearly noticed by people surveyed, fit seamlessly within the episodes, and generated interest and favorability towards the brand.

“Our audience’s deep connection with our content comes from its authenticity, leading to a powerful halo effect on our advertisers’ brand health.”

Randi Vaughn

Senior Director, Ad Effectiveness at BuzzFeed

BuzzFeed’s audience research<sup>2</sup> revealed that 7 in 10 people in the survey report that ads in content help them to make purchase decisions. This rang true in this ad test, with more than half of exposed respondents indicating buying intent towards the auto brand. Over two-thirds of respondents exposed to the show and ads displayed unaided brand recall of the auto brand, increased favorability, and likelihood to share the content.

Eye tracking results showcased that the final frame of the ads helped to drive home the auto company’s branding and tagline as a result of uncluttered, prominent brand logo and on-screen text.

Impressively, nearly every ad reaction metric surpassed 2018 performance for the same auto brand as a result of BuzzFeed’s test and learn approach that built upon the prior year’s campaign.



## true[X] research<sup>3</sup>: Give consumers the opportunity to opt-In

true[X] examined viewer responses to its value exchange offer in streaming commercial breaks and measured the impact of over 1,000 standard and interactive video campaigns using their UP//LIFT brand lift measurement technology. The findings show how intricately viewer attention is tied to positive advertising experiences. true[X] evaluated the opt-in rates for interactive ads and how brand lift from advertising differs by ad length, exposure frequency and interactivity. The results showcase the relationship between viewer experience and ad attention.

### The key takeaway: Respect the viewer experience

Participating viewers choose where, when and how they spend their time, especially when it comes to their attention to advertising. Put the power back into the hands of consumers. Give viewers the option to opt-in with brands. Doing so significantly increases attention and impact. If controls are in place to reduce excessive frequency and ad overload, 30 vs. 15 second spots, double vs. single exposures, and interactive vs. passive ads can all deliver much higher lifts in brand awareness.

### INSIGHTS

When millions of streaming TV viewers were offered the choice during commercial breaks to interact with one engagement ad versus watching multiple standard video ads in a pod, true[X] found that 45% of research participants chose to opt-in to engagement experiences, and only 14% selected the standard ad break. A remaining 41% of participants made no choice at all and automatically rolled into the standard ad break group after 10 seconds of inactivity.

These behaviors suggest that while some streaming viewers in the study were not actively paying attention once the content breaks, 3/4 of participants who made a choice chose to lean forward and interact with a brand in exchange for a better ad experience. With this behavior, viewers are signaling that they will provide active attention if publishers are willing to properly value and respect it.

“We’ve always measured the high-quality viewer attention available across our publisher network as well as the impact of opting into interactive experiences with brands.”

Jamie Auslander

SVP, Research & Analytics at true[X]

Evaluating 371 video campaigns during full episode streaming content on several premium full-episode publishers, true[X] found doubling the length of an ad, from 15 to 30 seconds, more than doubles the attention in participants, generating 2.7 times more lift in brand awareness.

Increasing frequency of exposure to brand ads had nearly the same effect. Two exposures to a video spot more than doubled the awareness gains achieved versus just one exposure; equivalent to the 2.7 times achieved from increasing ad duration from 15 to 30 seconds.

However, true[X] found that gains in brand awareness from increased frequency are not sustained forever, with diminished returns kicking in at frequencies of three or greater. This underlines the importance of respecting the viewer and reducing frequency overload.

Not surprisingly, when participating viewers chose to opt-in and interact, attention was noticeably greater than when viewers were passively served video spots. Comparing brand lift from 371 video campaigns to those generated from 684 interactive campaigns, true[X] found the engagement ad format delivers 2.6 times more brand awareness even after accounting for 30 second spots and optimal video frequency.





# Drive Attention with the Right: Ad Length

We know that consumer attention spans are getting shorter and shorter. How does this impact advertising and attention? In this section, Disney (ESPN) breaks down how advertisers can draw consumer attention using the right ad length.

## Disney (ESPN) research<sup>4</sup>: Short and small can be mighty

Disney (ESPN) put time to the test to see its impact on ad attention. Their research tested the viewer impact of three ad lengths on ESPN TV and digital platforms, including 6 seconds, 15 seconds, and 30 seconds on various platforms.

### The key takeaway:

#### Tailor creative to work for shorter spots

Small ads can be mighty! Shorter length ads can be very effective with the right hook that captures and keeps viewer attention. By tailoring creative to the shorter format, advertisers can drive better attention and ad engagement.

### INSIGHTS

The findings below are based on numerous experiments conducted in the ESPN Ad Lab, digital analytics and other relevant fieldwork conducted by ESPN over the past few years. The research found that 6 second ads can be as effective or, in some cases, more effective than longer formats on both TV and digital.

Eye gaze technology results from participants found that, across platforms, only 69% of participants actually viewed an ad within half a second. But, that number jumps to 97% after 3 seconds of watching an ad.

“Short ads have a bad rap. But our short-form video is an important way that we engage consumers, and if you’re not taking advantage of that, you’re not taking advantage of the potential reach.”

Christopher Barton

Director, Emerging Platforms,  
Research & Analytics at Disney

On digital platforms, 6 second ads had higher completion and viewability rates and delivered comparable lifts in brand health metrics. Whereas on TV, shorter ads alone tended to be slightly less effective, but perform relatively well. The study demonstrates the importance of looking at effectiveness metrics; even though participants didn’t watch short ads for very long, those ads still created impact, for example, 1 second of view duration doesn’t have the same impact across formats.

More importantly, the results showed that these shorter ads can provide a significant incremental lift when used in combination with 15 second and 30 second ads on TV.







# Drive Attention with the Right: Audience Segment

There are key differences when it comes to messaging and targeting for different demographics. You know that the approach for targeting Gen Z should be very different from the approach for targeting Millennials or Baby Boomers.

The consumer landscape is changing rapidly, with Millennials and Gen Z representing nearly \$3 trillion in spending power<sup>5</sup> in today's marketplace. How does attention impact different audience segments?

Below, we've drawn insights from research that you can use to further understand the nuances of attention across audience segments:



## Attention across generations

### Time is of the essence

Research from Disney<sup>6</sup> looked at how the length of an ad impacted engagement and brand intention in viewers across different online platforms. The research found that shorter ads can be mighty, especially amongst younger viewers in the survey group. In fact, respondents aged 18-24 favored quick 6 second spots. In comparison, older participants aged 55+ were more strongly impacted by lengthier 15 second spots.

Ad length did not significantly impact consideration across gender demographics in the study, however results showed that men were impacted more strongly than women by shorter ads.

The test used skippable ads, and measured engagement by the number of seconds spent viewing the ad. Interestingly, the length of an ad may not tell the whole story. Disney's research found that the longer a participant watched an ad, the more likely they were to take the intended action. So, the true results were in the amount of time that someone watched past the 5 second skip threshold, which was the strongest indication of engagement.

### For Gen Z, empathy, truth and creation reign supreme

Research from BuzzFeed<sup>7</sup> found that Generation Zs are "commonly uncommon," representing all different identities and sub-identities. Tired of being grouped together with their predecessor Millennials, BuzzFeed's research found that Gen Zs prioritize emotional connections and their mental and emotional wellbeing over the flashy pictures of influencer ideals they've endured for the past decade.

"Given their individual dissimilarity, it was important to us to identify and tap into the three defining traits that connect and bring all Gen Zs together," said Shari Cleary, BuzzFeed's SVP of Research and Insights. "By leaning into empathy, truth, and creation, brands can reach a generation that is niche by nature." Gen Zs use empathy in order to let down their guards and prioritize emotional connections; they turn to truth in times of "fake news," seeking out only what is "really real" in culture and in themselves; and they value creation not just because they're creative, but because they're creators—rebuilding culture from the ground up. BuzzFeed uses the results from this research to continue to understand this target audience, and work with advertisers to create campaigns that leverage their deep understanding of the Gen Z audience.



## Drive Attention with the Right: Audience Segment



### Pair audience demographics with intent for ultimate attention

Personalized ad experiences have the power to truly resonate based on audience intent signals, like search behavior, store visits and app activity. According to research from RevJet<sup>8</sup>, generational differences are critical to consider when building out digital ad experiences, especially when it comes to video ads.

The research showed that there are key differences between older viewers (people 45+) and younger viewers (people under 45). Younger viewers are three times more likely to pay attention to digital ads, reflecting their familiarity with online advertising. Furthermore, this younger cohort is 80% more likely to purchase items on their smartphones, something advertisers should keep top of mind when considering the online path to purchase.

As an advertiser, these insights are significant, and can help get your campaign planning ideas flowing for the next section in this paper.





# Drive Attention with the Right: Overall Campaign Planning

You're already aware that reaching your target audience is all about using the right message, the right creative and the right medium. Without this combination, your ad may simply lack relevance for its intended audience. In this section, Xandr shares their insights on tapping into relevance as the key to planning a campaign that demands attention.

## Xandr research<sup>9</sup>: It's all about relevance

Xandr conducted a survey with over 2,000 general population participants and over 500 senior marketers who are responsible for over \$1MM in both digital and advertising spend. Xandr's research aimed to look beyond reach, frequency and target, instead focusing on evoking emotion and action in viewers, and what factors will improve their experience with ads.

### The key takeaway:

#### Think about campaigns holistically

Only 19% of marketers surveyed are satisfied with their ability to deliver the right message at the right time to the right target. Advertisers need to think about their ad campaigns beyond just the individual aspects of targeting, creative and ad units. Ads must go beyond conveying a message to conveying a meaning, and the roadmap for that is relevance.

### INSIGHTS

In today's world of high-quality content, consumers have the freedom of choice, they watch, read and listen to what they want, where and when they want it. They recognize that both their attention and information are commodities, and they are willing to dedicate some of their time to ads in order to get access to content. Brands and advertisers need to follow this consumer behavior and can't look at campaign planning in silos anymore.

“We look at every single metric. At the end of the day, we want to make sure that the advertiser is getting their KPI that they want, and that we're serving our customers the best way that we can, with the right message.”

Ariella Astion

VP, Commercial Enablement at Xander

Xandr's research found that participants genuinely enjoy ads that are for something they're interested in (74%), make them laugh (72%), and provide some sort of new information (70%).

Their results also showed that ads must go beyond simply conveying a message, but should also evoke emotion or influence the audience to take action. In fact, the most relevant campaign creatives effectively evoked an emotion, and resulted in 169% higher ad appeal than ads that only shared information about the product or service.

Xandr's research showed that relevant campaigns were more memorable, exceeding norms for ad recall, and are 130% more believable among research participants. Plus, campaigns with 1-2 creative executions drove greater relevance and stronger reactions to the creative.



# Advertising in Action: Top 5 Tips for Advertisers to Consider

Here are the top 5 things you as an advertiser should consider in driving attention:



Tailor messaging to the editorial environment and audience because context matters.



Use a variety of creative executions and ad lengths. This way, you can adopt a “test and learn” approach to create benchmarks.



Understand your audience and what really inspires them. Then, you can deliver inspiring creative that speaks to them in their own language.



One size does not fit all, there is no magic roadmap for all platforms or audiences. Be sure to think about each campaign individually, and establish specific KPIs at the start of your campaign to set yourself up for success.



The consumer has an important position in the market, and their attention is a scarce resource. The more we embrace different ways to measure their attention, the more we will be able to future-proof our industry and our businesses.



# Use Attention Metrics to Improve User Experience and Campaign Goals

Consumers know that their attention is valuable. Delivering advertising to these consumers is especially unique because they are open to receiving advertisements, but they want more than great creative. They want ads that are hyper-personalized to their needs and interests.

But push them too far, with too much or irrelevant ad content, and they may lose trust in both the advertiser's and publisher's ability to understand them.

Thankfully, the advertising ecosystem is finally getting wise to the value of consumer attention. Advertisers see the opportunity that ad attention metrics hold to create effective campaigns that deliver real results and return on ad dollars.

In fact, results from a recent study showed that nearly 80% of marketers who participated in the survey were very or extremely interested in the insights that customer attention can deliver, and 63% plan to invest in customer attention metrics for their brands<sup>8</sup>.

With this consumer knowledge, advertisers should advocate for industry-wide infrastructure that supports linking consumer attention and outcomes, at scale. The more we embrace the different facets of measuring attention, whether it's with the right ad unit, length, audience or campaign plan, the more ability we will have to future proof our businesses for the long-term.



80%

of marketers are very or extremely interested in the insights that customer attention can deliver<sup>8</sup>.



63%

of marketers who participated in the survey plan to invest in customer attention metrics for their brands<sup>8</sup>.



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