

More than 'art for art's sake': the world's most admired ads bring payback for the brand

By [Sue Elms](#), issued by [Kantar](#)

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On the Cannes Lions website is an archive, which it calls "the digital home of the world's greatest branded communications". The business world's definition of what makes a creative campaign "great" has evolved since the festival began in 1954, however, and is now firmly rooted in how effectively an ad sells the brand.

The Lions Festival of Creativity, as it's now known, was originally designed to honour the world's very best filmed advertisements, which the organisers felt deserved just as much attention as the movies fêted at the Cannes International Film Festival.

Can the kind of creativity the Lions was conceived to celebrate - the execution of ads as miniature works of art - exist alongside today's ruthless focus on business outcomes?



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For the last four years, the Lions has included a 'Creative Effectiveness' category for campaigns that make "a measurable and proven impact on a client's business" - rewarding a direct correlation between creativity and results.

The winners clearly demonstrate that creativity and effectiveness do go hand-in-hand, and a look at the 2014 winners reveals a number of aspects of creativity that are crucial to bottom-line success and brand building.

Creativity in idea

In Australia, Virgin Mobile is a relatively small player. It exploited the reality that it wasn't getting its fair share of attention, by having Doug Pitt step out of the shadow of his famous brother Brad to front its 'Fair Go Bro' campaign.

Dove's long-term mission to show women that they're beautiful was reinvigorated by the 'Real Beauty Sketches' campaign (below), which featured an FBI sketch artist drawing women the way they pictured themselves, and then the way their friends saw them, highlighting the difference.

In its 'Travel Yourself Interesting' campaign, Expedia focused not on travel destinations, like most of its competitors, but on the effects of travel.

Creativity in targeting

V/Line trains in Australia targeted parents of children who had left home, with the 'Guilt Trip' - a pre-paid ticket back home that parents could send to their kids. This idea exploited the fact that parents wish they saw more of their grown-up children; and that they can better afford the fare.

Creativity in execution: The Lurpak 'Weave your Magic' campaign involved a set of beautiful films depicting sumptuous meal preparation using butter. Jury President David Sable, Global CEO of Y&R, called it "truly inspiring".

The UK charity for homeless people, Depaul, recognised that people in the process of moving home held a latent empathy with homeless people. A great insight, but how to exploit it? It founded the Depaul Box Company to sell cardboard boxes to people moving home, with the proceeds helping the homeless.

Creativity in media choice

To celebrate Australia Day, McDonald's ran a month-long integrated campaign (below) that acknowledged and celebrated its Australian nickname, 'Macca's' - even changing the sign above the arches of its stores. The store logo is, in a sense, an obvious point of communication, but is rarely considered a medium in its own right.

These campaigns are certainly creative. Based on highly original ideas, the ads are clever, beautifully designed and shot, and inspiring. They also generated business results. V/Line's ticket sales rose 15% without discounting, while McDonald's experienced a 6.7% increase in sales during the month its campaign ran. Dove's biggest categories grew in all four markets as a result of its campaign, while Expedia enjoyed an 8% growth in bookings value in the UK, and 33% in France.

So how did they do it? Here's what all the winning campaigns have in common.

They travel well across both traditional and digital formats and they don't depend on outdated expectations around media consumption. Broadcast TV is no longer king, and people no longer consume media (and therefore messages) in a predictable way. People's lives are busy and varied and they're exposed to media in all sorts of orders. They interact with different screens throughout the day, sometimes at the same time, as they consume all sorts of content.

The winning campaigns recognise this, using different elements and media to construct a cohesive brand experience in consumers' minds. McDonald's, for instance, executed its idea across all possible touchpoints, including TV, digital, print, outdoor - and its own signs.

The ads also work well as 'bite-sized' content. Micro-video is now the world's most popular marketing format, with consumers noticing and being more receptive to it than any other, according to Millward Brown's 2014 AdReaction report. This also makes an ad highly shareable.

The campaigns each use emotion to connect with consumers, tapping into a deep-rooted feeling or desire.

Ads that generate a positive emotional response are much more likely to be effective, according to Millward Brown's Link copy-testing research, and the most likeable online ads have a major impact on brand favourability and purchase intent (Millward Brown's Marketnorms survey).

Virgin Mobile's 'Fair Go Bro' campaign plays on the need to feel significant in an age when celebrity seems to be everything, while Expedia's idea pivots on the desire to stand out from the crowd. V/Line recognises how much parents miss their grown-up children, and their offspring's guilt at not getting home as often as they should.

Dove's campaign demonstrates an understanding of the negative perception women can have about their looks, and the need to be valued for who they are: as a result 'Real Beauty Sketches' became the most viral ad of all time, with over 135 million views.

These creatives all helped build the brands they promoted. They made the brand more meaningfully different than the competition - a key ingredient of a strong, sustainable brand - whether that was Lurpak turning a simple ingredient into something to be celebrated, Expedia changing travel from a cost to be minimised into a worthwhile investment, or Depaul transforming cardboard boxes into a means of helping people.

They also generated salience for the brand - for example, Virgin Mobile enjoyed a 21% increase in unaided awareness.

Cannes is, then, right to celebrate creativity. While creative ads in themselves can be a joy to see, and truly 'art', when properly harnessed to the brand - and based on profound consumer insights - they are also 'commercial art', a powerful business tool.

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