

THE STATE OF
CREATIVITY
STUDY
2023

STRONGER TOGETHER

What's powering creative impact?



“Creativity is at a crossroads. With the rise of technology and data, marketers are expected to be more tactical and exact in every brand action, however bold. And bold creativity requires guts. In the coming years, we’ll see how data, technology, and guts fall into balance.”

BRAND MANAGER | FOOD & DRINK SECTOR (US)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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What a difference a year makes.

Our 2022 State of Creativity report found creativity in flux; pressure to produce great creativity at speed was made worse by a talent war and the challenge of convincing stakeholders of the need to invest in creativity.

This year sees much higher confidence in creativity.

There is a real desire to deploy great creativity for growth, but a sense that uncertainty is holding us back.

The pressing issues this year are macro - global uncertainty has put downward pressure on budgets. Creatives and marketers are having to work harder than ever to prove the value of creativity. Most important is demonstrating a clear link between creativity and commercial outcomes.

On the plus side, creativity has the interest of the C-suite. There is a call to bring the CEO and CFO in on the conversation and prove to them the value of investment in creativity and how it can power growth.

In this third edition of the state of creativity study you'll find:

1. Insights from our survey of over 2,400 creatives and marketers

What's on their minds, what's influencing the state of creativity in their worlds and what they are doing to use creativity to best effect.

2. Key trends on how to lead with creativity.

Learning from those doing well, such as how to:

- Build a happy relationship with AI to amplify human capabilities;
- Balance the long and the short by building brand-building devices into short-term activations;
- Forge deeper collaborations with the creator community
- Instill best practice approaches across the marketing organisation which set firm foundations for great creativity to flourish.

This report is brought to you by **LIONS Advisory**, a team within the LIONS business dedicated to supporting brands with creative transformation. We help companies build the foundations for creative excellence and effectiveness, and set the conditions for creativity that wins awards and fuels growth. **LIONS Advisory** has worked with a broad range of renowned global brands across different categories.

We hope you enjoy this report, it's filled with examples taken from The Work, a platform with every Cannes Lions entry since 2001. We'd love to hear from you if you have any ideas or would like to discuss the findings further.



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LIONS Methodology

- In December 2022, we conducted a global survey where we asked more than 2400 marketers, creatives, media owners, tech specialists and creative education bodies from 102 different countries their biggest challenges, opportunities and priorities for 2023.
- Supported throughout by insight from creative leaders and Lion-winning brands



The state of creativity today in numbers...

What the collective responses tell us on your challenges, opportunities and priorities for creativity

Biggest external challenges

54% Rising inflation and cost of living

47% Media and audience fragmentation

45% Understanding changing consumer habits

And internal challenges

50% Downward pressures on budgets

47% Demonstrating the link between creativity and business growth

45% Convincing stakeholders to invest in creativity

At a **global level**, macro economic pressures and the impact on budgets, along with a heightened focus to demonstrate the link between creativity and business growth, are the biggest challenges facing the creative community today.

On a **regional level**, the view is slightly different. In **North and Central America**, the recession is slightly less keenly felt - **changing consumer habits** are the biggest concern.

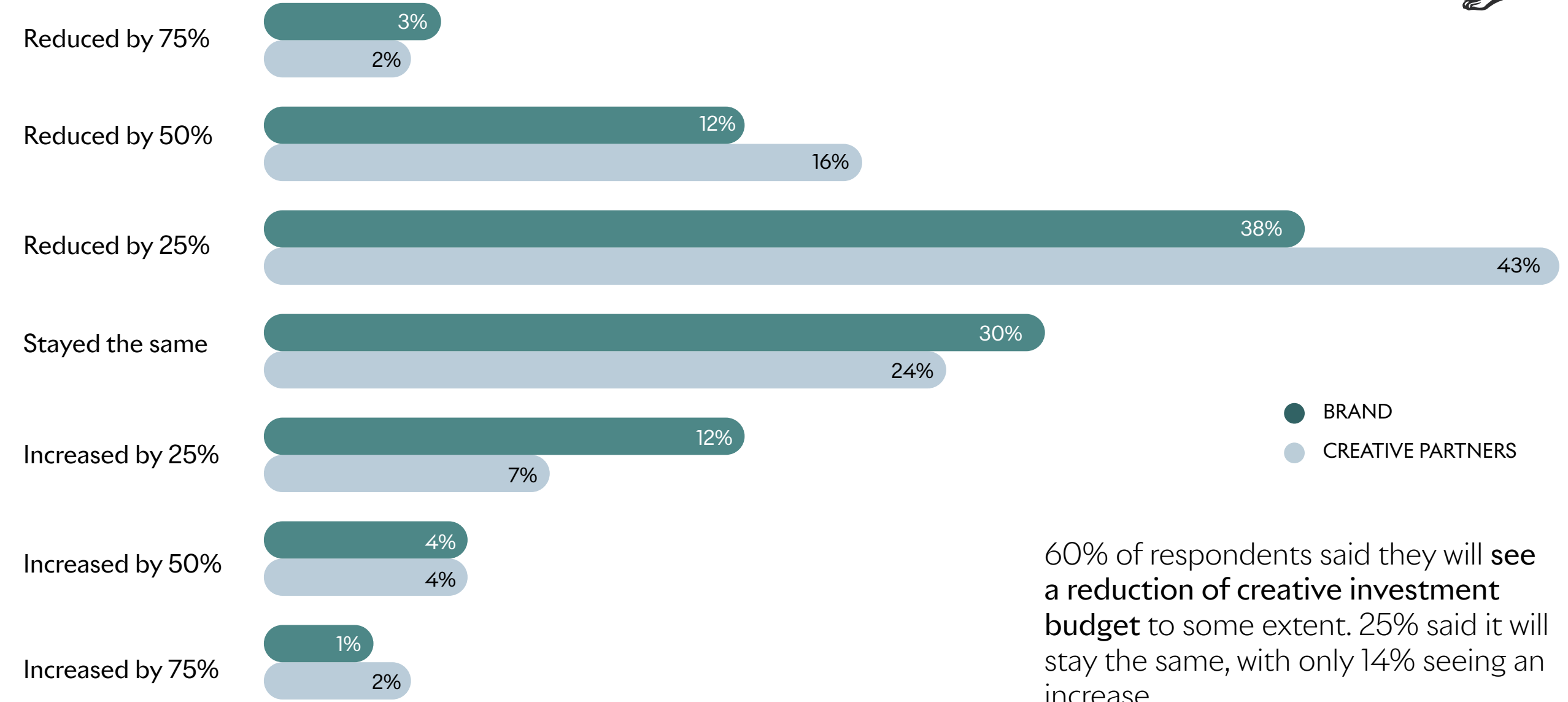
In **Asia**, the biggest external challenge is **media and audience fragmentation**. Europe sees the highest proportion of people citing **inflation and the cost of living crisis** as the biggest external challenge (56%).

The state of creativity today in numbers...



Impact to creative investment budget

To what extent has the prospect of recession impacted your budget for creative investment

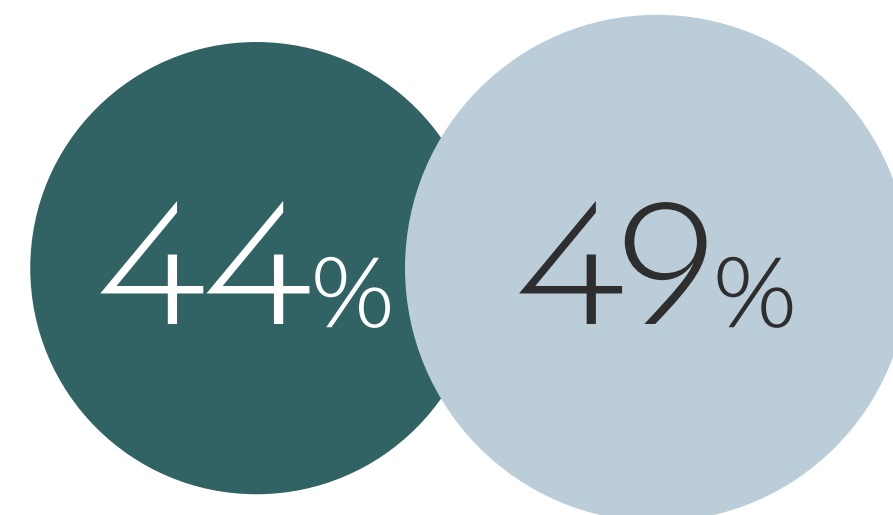


60% of respondents said they will see a reduction of creative investment budget to some extent. 25% said it will stay the same, with only 14% seeing an increase.

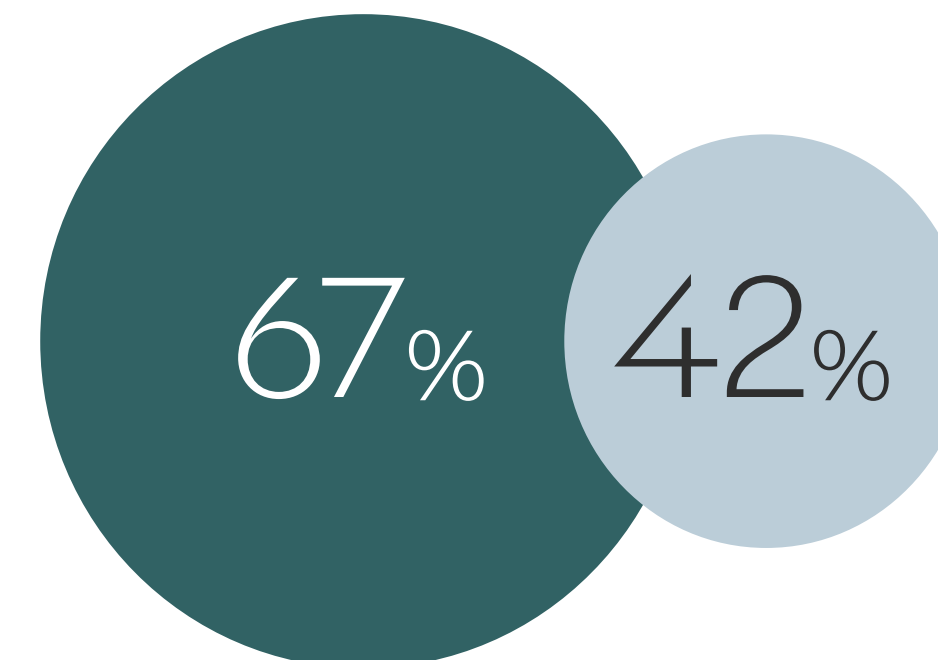
Priority for creative investments

Whilst brand leaders state they are prioritising investment in the customer journey, creative partners believe brand leaders are prioritising investment in targeted promotions and activations to drive sales uplift.

Targeted promotions / activations to drive sales uplift



Enhancing the customer journey and brand experience



● BRAND
● CREATIVE PARTNERS



“Wanting to grow, but limited by budget”

The huge potential of the creative industry took centre stage in responses this year, but optimism was often offset by doubt.

Respondents questioned whether the industry could reach its full potential, saying it’s “limitless, but limited”. But to foster creativity, we must see these constraints as opportunities, not limitations.

We need to use small budgets as a catalyst for creativity, a way to look at challenges in different ways to find new solutions. 70 years of award winning work has taught us that creativity is found at the edges, and constraints are what push us there.

As one respondent put it, the industry may be **“challenged by declining budgets, but it is more important than ever because of declining budgets”**.

The state of creativity today in words...

“Too focused on tech, not enough on art”

The next decade will be about balancing tech with art. There is a lot of hype around technology and its impact on creativity, but rather than see one as more critical than the other, there is more value in seeing the power of the two together.

“It’s no longer technology vs. creativity...technology and creativity must be linked for true creativity and impact.”

SENIOR EXECUTIVE | AGENCY (CANADA)

You told us “when hiring people who code, we must not forget to also hire creatives”. Keep the balance between mind and machine.

“New technology has given new boost/ inspiration to creativity. It extends the boundary and imagination for creativity. The new challenge is on having the right talents and teams who can master the new skill and blend with the traditional craft of storytelling and brand experience building.”

SENIOR EXECUTIVE | AGENCY (ASIA)

Benefiting from more “cross-functional collaborative teams”

The survey revealed a positive shift toward “greater collaboration outside the creative domain”, with many praising its impact on innovation and problem solving.

“We are encouraging collaboration and open mindedness to work with groups and people outside of the creative team”

MIDDLE MANAGER | AGENCY (IRELAND)

This is an effective route to more diverse ideas. Joint [research from Deloitte Digital and LIONS](#) revealed that one of the key elements of successful creative business transformation is finding “hidden” creatives from unlikely sources –not just every employee across the business, but also external partners, suppliers, and customers.



Top Trends

Results of our research find that synergism will be the driving force behind groundbreaking creativity over the next few years. Here we uncover four of the most powerful alliances that emerged from the survey.

TREND

1 Mind meets Machine

DETAIL

“As AI surges, creativity is needed more than ever”. 65% of respondents cited AI as the most important tech trend in 2023, and more than a third of respondents plan to experiment with signal based marketing through AI. Lion winners show AI enabling hyper-personalisation, and creativity at scale. The big question on everyone’s mind is “How can we harness its power rather than be threatened by it?”

ACTION

Amplify human creativity by co-creating with AI

TREND

2 Elevate Short-term Tactics

DETAIL

“[Clients] are betting on short-term strategies whilst maintaining brand essence”. As rising inflation and the cost of living bite, almost half of respondents (48%) are prioritising investment in targeted promotions to drive sales uplift above brand-building and customer experience. As short term demands grow, you’re asking: what short-term creative approaches will also benefit brands in the long-run?

ACTION

Inject more brand-building devices into your short-term activations

TREND

3 Community Collaboration

DETAIL

Downward pressures on budget (cited by 50% as the biggest internal challenge) are leading to resourceful creativity. Added to this “paid media on social” gleaned the highest rating for “best value for money”. It’s no surprise then that 74% of brands and 64% of creative partners are choosing to “work with content creators” in 2023. Popularity for the big social platforms is in the mix; so how should you engage in community building via the creator economy this year?

ACTION

Collaborate more with the creator economy

TREND

4 Process for Progress

DETAIL

For creativity to flourish, leaders and employees need tools, methods and training. From collaboration across teams to making time to celebrate success and learn from failures, the biggest Lion winners show us that every creative journey requires commitment to a creative structure and process. In this section, you will learn how to turn specific structures and processes into creative effectiveness and growth.

ACTION

Enhance creativity with structure



YOUR NEXT STEPS

How to leverage the synergies powering
creative impact

Amplify human creativity by co-creating with AI



AI dominated responses in the survey this year, with 65% of brands and agencies citing it the most important emerging tech for 2023. According to Gartner, by 2025, 10% of all data produced, and 30% of all outbound marketing messages from large brands, will be from Generative AI.

Many welcome its efficiencies;

“AI is playing a much bigger role in the field of creativity. It is used more and more to enhance creativity as it provides new tools and platforms that make it easier for people to be creative”.

Others worry it will damage creativity;

“Will AI generation kill the creative industry through ChatGPT, Dalle-E and all the other daily appearing AI tools?”.

Our recommendation is to cautiously embrace AI. Mind and machine shouldn't be an “either-or” in the context of creativity. The best ideas come from the crossroads of creativity, technology and humanity.

As the late Author Ken Robinson said, imagination and creativity are what fundamentally set us apart from anything else on earth. For now, that still includes AI. Success will come from combining the attributes that set us apart from technology, with those that set technology apart from us.



“Creativity is at risk of competing with AI, so creatives should define what makes them as creative human beings different from AI, what unique skills they have that cannot be replaced with AI.”

MARKETING MANAGER | BRAND



Enhance creative agility

“AI is playing a much bigger role in the field of creativity. It is used more and more to enhance creativity as it provides new tools and platforms that make it easier for people to be creative. It dramatically reduced the time and effort needed to generate new ideas or concepts.”

DIRECTOR | AGENCY

AI offers the creative industry more agility, a ‘luxury’ you have been asking for. Last year, you told us that mundane tasks are eating into your opportunities to get creative. It is now an option to use the tools we have been anticipating to free up more time.

Take the Creative B2B Lions Grand Prix winner by paint company Sherwin-Williams. [Speaking in Color](#) is an AI-powered paint tool for architects so they can create custom colours through voice.

Speaking the words “drinking champagne on the French Riviera at sunset” triggers the technology to search millions of images to find the exact colour in your head.

This tool can turn hours of manual work into seconds. But it’s still reliant on human ideas and imagination to work. It presents a balanced way to bring AI and humans together - using tech to enhance productivity, not remove creativity.

SPEAKING IN COLOR | SHERWIN WILLIAMS

2022

SHERWIN-WILLIAMS. COLOR OBSESSION SERIES
Redefining how human and intuitive color experiences can be.

THINKING IN COLOR
Creating color using *your mind*
TECH USED: EEG HEADSETS

COLOR MIXOLOGY
Creating color using *your hands*
TECH USED: LiDAR TECHNOLOGY

SPEAKING IN COLOR
Creating color using *your words*
TECH USED: VOICE-ACTIVATED AI

CHALLENGE
Sherwin-Williams has partnered with architects and like-minded visionaries for years, yet many in that professional world only view of them as an interior paint company. We needed to shift their perception of Sherwin-Williams to an innovative, modern partner — one that matches their vision, whatever that vision may be.

INSPIRATION
Sherwin-Williams was on a mission to demonstrate all the facets and possibilities of color. Why? For Sherwin-Williams, color is personal, human. And for architects and design professionals it can change the feel of a city, evoke emotion and create a building's character. As a global leader in color coatings, Sherwin-Williams set out to find the intersection between color experiences, innovation and humanity to create a previously unimagined world of color.

IDEA
The Sherwin-Williams Color Obsession Series used, in some cases, previously untapped technology to immerse architects in multiple color sensory experiences. Each experience worked to connect these professionals with their own sense of inspiration while solidifying Sherwin-Williams as their lifelong creative partner for any project.

GROWTH/IMPACT
Our Color Obsession Series has changed the way architects view and interact with Sherwin-Williams. No longer do they see them as a paint company. They see Sherwin-Williams as innovative color experts. From replacing never-before-catalogued colors to creating one of the world's largest color distribution data sets in the world, we showed our audience that they can create any color imaginable. As long as architects, visionaries and innovators share an obsession for color, Sherwin-Williams will continue to pursue their obsession for uniting humanity, innovation and the entire color experience.

WUNDERMAN THOMPSON MINNEAPOLIS

GRAND PRIX CREATIVE B2B LIONS



ii. Scale through hyper-personalisation

Deepfakes are shaping creative experiences.

Although synthetic media can spark ethical concern, Lion-winning work has shown promising applications that deliver cost-effective, high-quality, highly personalised and scalable creative.

Cadbury Celebrations took hyper-personalisation to a new level by allowing small local businesses to make India's biggest celebrity – Shah Rukh Khan – its own brand ambassador. Anyone could recreate his face and voice to promote their business.

It demonstrates how **AI can be applied as a tool to power a human idea**. And how brands can now venture into new spaces that allow for personalisation at scale.

Consider a working environment that encourages the sharing of unimaginable creativity. And collaborate with experts across the business and externally to see how AI can help to make them happen.

SHAH RUKH KHAN-MY-AD | CADBURY'S

2022

Shah Rukh Khan-My-Ad
The World's Biggest Star Becomes The Brand Ambassador For Thousands Of Small Local Stores

Cadbury Celebrations

Shah Rukh Khan's latest Cadbury ad wins internet, Huma Qureshi calls it 'beautiful!'

Shah Rukh Khan shares powerful message in Cadbury's viral Diwali ad. Internet reacts

ZEE NEWS INDIA TODAY

Hyper-personalized to match viewers as per their geo-location

Royal fashion Choice of fashion MK cloths Laxmi collection

#NotJustACadburyAd

130000 Total Ads Created ₹6 Million of free PR 30+ Million Ad Views 35% Growth in Business

OGILVY MUMBAI

TITANIUM LIONS



iii. Share your solutions

“In their applications of AI, brands were trying to stretch beyond driving their own business impact: they were actually investing in new approaches that other brands could also replicate. There was a real generosity emerging in the work.”

ROSIE COLLINS
HEAD OF STRATEGY | BBH LONDON
CREATIVE EFFECTIVENESS JUROR 2022

Generosity was an emerging theme in jury rooms last year. Jurors across the board particularly praised the sharing of solutions that repair fractures in society.

Project Understood empowered people with Down syndrome to teach Google Assistant to recognise their voice more accurately. The partners then presented their findings at the UN, to help other tech companies make their voice technology more accessible.

Consider how you can work alongside or collaborate with other organisations or competitors for mutual benefit, growth and to help solve an environmental, societal or cultural concern together.

PROJECT UNDERSTOOD | CANADIAN DOWN SYNDROME SOCIETY

2022



FCB TORONTO

GOLD CREATIVE EFFECTIVENESS LIONS



IV. Bring people and tech together for more equitable solutions

AI-powered tools can help to democratise experiences.

Project Convey uses AI to help people on the autism spectrum better identify non-verbal social cues. It translates emotion into an emoji, allowing someone with autism to better understand the conversation. This solution was the result of a powerful collaboration between creatives, people on the autism spectrum and technology.

“The community often uses the phrase “nothing about us without us”. We teamed up with a specialist autism doctor and a media arts school for people on the spectrum. They helped us design everything from the colours to the movement of the emojis.”

MIKE BOKMAN
EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR | 180LA

Think about how co-creating with underrepresented communities can strengthen the impact of your AI-driven solutions.

PROJECT CONVEY | COX COMMUNICATIONS

2022



180LA, LOS ANGELES

TITANIUM LIONS

One thing to do today:

View AI as your creativity co-pilot. Embrace the productivity tools that free up time for creative problem-solving, then use AI to scale up those solutions.



Lion-winning techniques

1

Choose your partners wisely.

Talking about creating [McEnroe vs McEnroe](#), Alex Abrantes, Group Creative Director at FCB New York, said this:

“Choose your partners carefully. There will be moments when things won't go well. You'll be faced with situations where you'll either point fingers or hold hands. Luckily, we had the right partners and everybody was working towards the same goal”.

MCENROE VS MCENROE | AB INBEV

2022



FCB NEW YORK

GOLD DIGITAL CRAFT LIONS

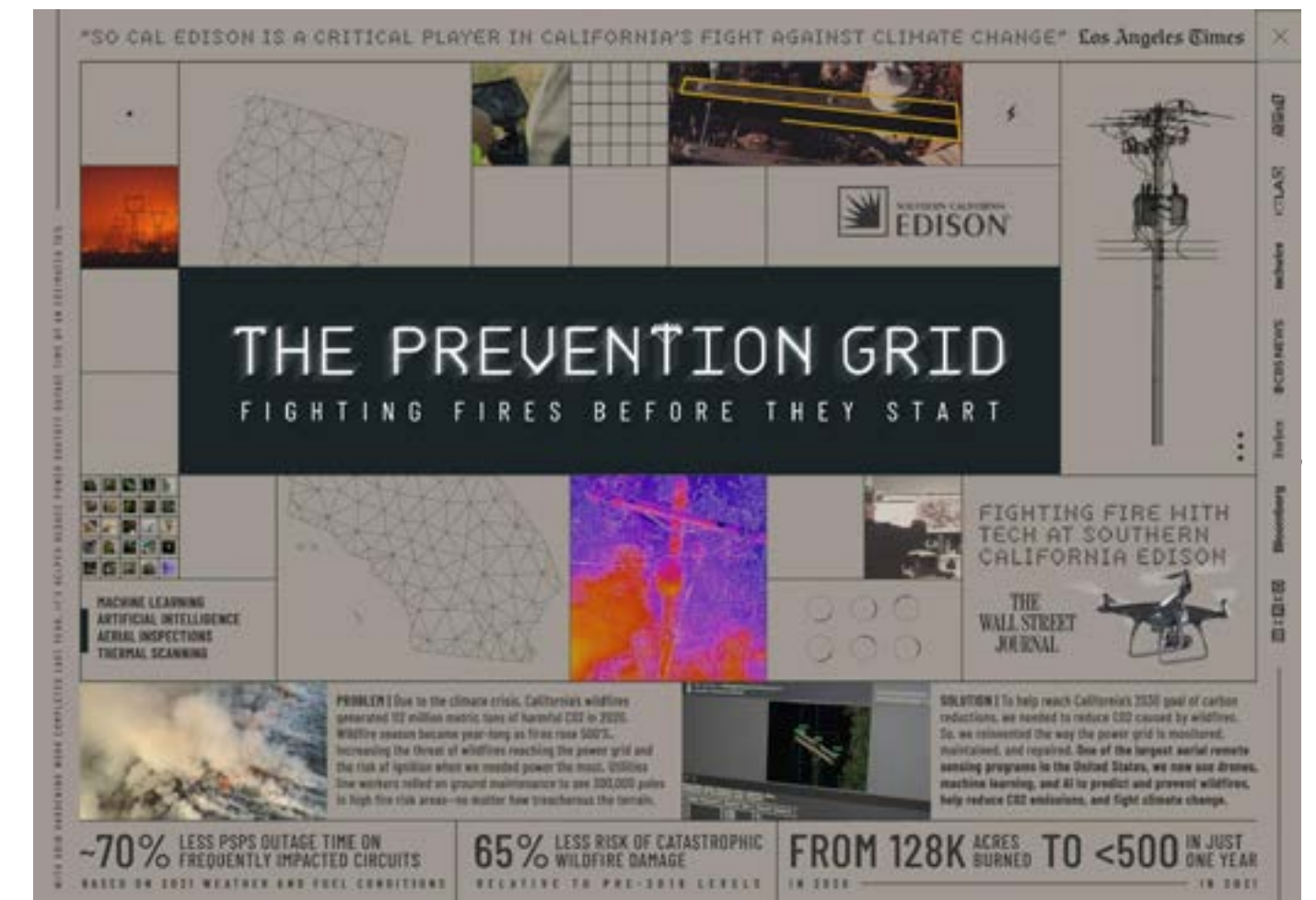
2

Use AI to help to solve business problems.

[The Prevention Grid](#) implemented machine learning and AI to see the grid in real time and anticipate wildfire risks. This operational innovation has changed the way we monitor, maintain, and repair the power grid.

THE PREVENTION GRID | SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON

2022



DELOITTE DIGITAL NEW YORK

GOLD CREATIVE BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION



Inject more brand- building devices into your short-term activations

2

The rising cost of living and inflation is the most significant challenge for brands and creative partners (54%). And the knock-on impact on budgets is keenly felt. 60% of respondents expect a reduction of 25% or more to marketing budgets.

The pressure is on to be resourceful with that budget and prove its value in the short-term. 60% of respondents in this survey will primarily focus on short-term activations this year.

It goes against the optimum split for UK-based marketing effectiveness that Peter Field and Les Binet advocate (on average 60% into brand-building, 40% into short-term tactics). However, it's a reality most marketers are facing.

New research shows that brands benefit from including features of longer-term brand-building in all their advertising. So how can the industry be more creative with its approach to short-term marketing?

"In 2023, creativity will once again be challenged by those who demand more short-term, sales-oriented work. And the brands who come out on top will once again be those who dare to focus on audacious, long-term brand-building creative."

MIDDLE MANAGER | BRAND (SWEDEN)

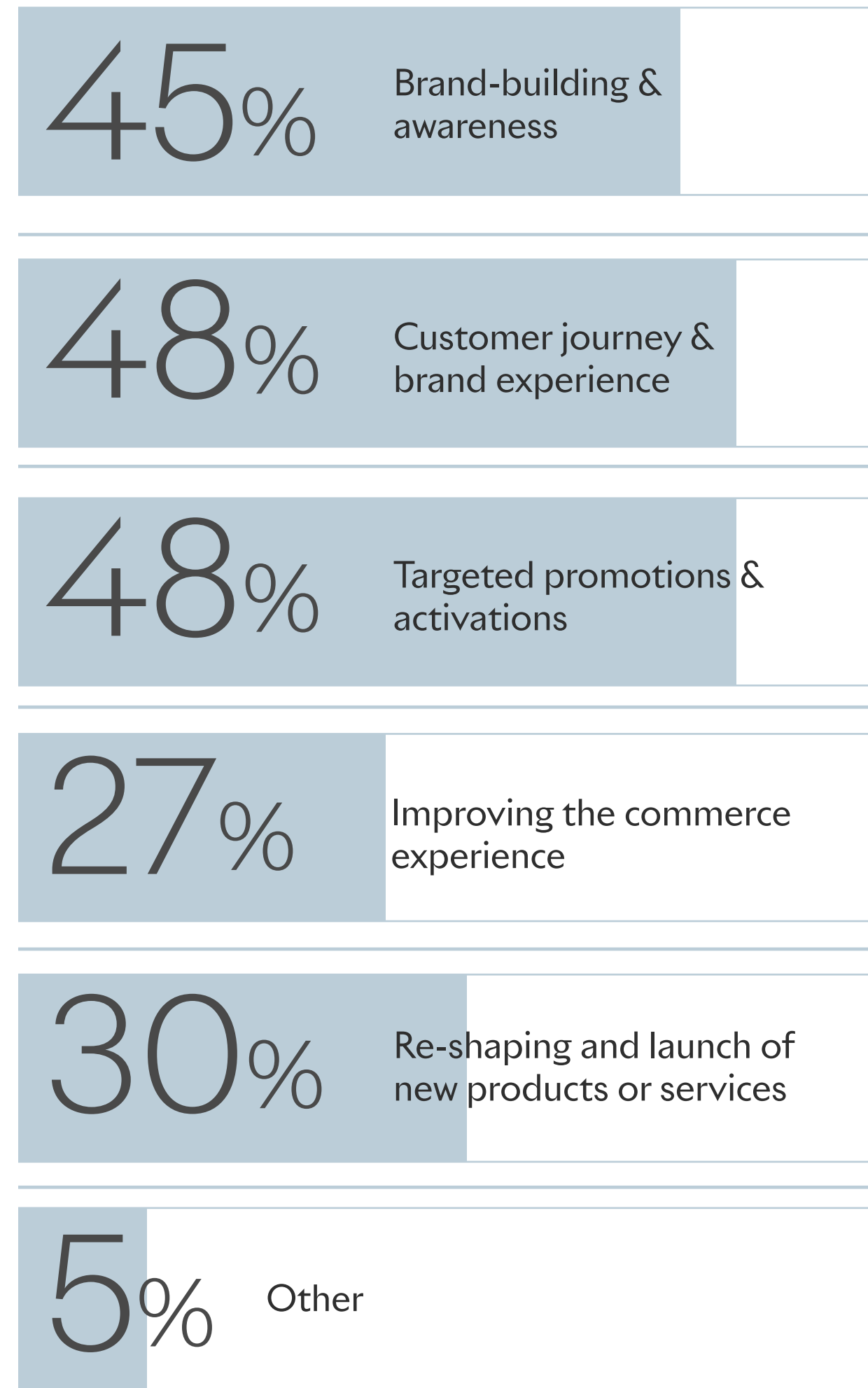
You told us...



We asked where you will be prioritising your creative investments in 2023, and you told us this...

1. Targeted promotions
2. Enhancing the customer journey
3. Brand-building

Brand-building was knocked out of first place this year as more people focus their investment on targeted promotions. Targeting is effective in the short term, but it needs to be balanced with brand-building to generate future demand.



Fortunately, brand-building is still a top priority for many. But the fall from first to third - although no surprise - is significant. WARC and Kantar's recent [Creative Quality Report](#) advised brands to 'build components into all of your advertising that can work to benefit building future brand demand, regardless of singular objectives'.

Recent findings reinforce the need to avoid overinvestment in short-term activations. Instead, we should be looking at how to strengthen short-term activations with brand-building devices.

Action points:

- 1 Synchronize your short and long-term marketing
- 2 Inject more brand-building devices into short-term activations



Without the option to shift investment, the need for synergy grows stronger. Brands like Dove demonstrate the power of a two-pronged approach. It synergises its strategy; for every brand-building creative that provokes an emotional response around self-esteem, it releases a product-based and benefit-driven ad.

“One of Dove’s success factors across the years has been its ability to orchestrate a **comprehensive communication architecture** – a term that has somehow been lost in today’s marketers’ glossary.

It’s **balancing highly persuasive product focused communications** with **powerful emotional content**, both able to build the brand equity and business results in the short and in the long term.

The first by driving functional superiority credentials and the second one by building a unique emotional connection with the viewers.

It’s the synergy between the two that makes the magic.”



ALESSANDRO MANFREDI
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT | DOVE

Synchronize your short and long-term marketing activity



Powerful emotional content

Dove launched its Real Beauty campaign

Persuasive product focused communications

Dove created a film that exposed the manipulation of the female image in the media. The objective was to encourage discussion around the subject of real beauty.



Dove launched 'The Ad Makeover', empowering women to displace negative ads on Facebook with positive messages.

DOVE MASTERBRAND | UNILEVER



'Real Beauty Sketches' took the Titanium Grand Prix for interrogating women's perceptions of their own beauty versus those of strangers.

Dove repeated messaging on Instagram to young girls encouraging them to see that the only likes that matter are for themselves.

Dove launched 'Change the Rhyme'. The campaign challenged audiences to re-write definitions of beauty by penning alternative versions of a famous rhyme.

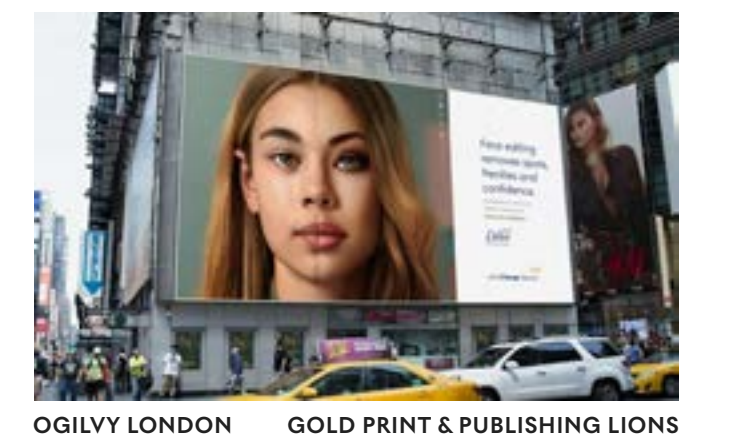
Dove juxtaposed the beauty of front-line healthcare workers' courageous acts against images of them at the end of their shifts, which would not traditionally be considered beautiful. In doing so, it redefined beauty as something you do and not how you look.

2021 COURAGE IS BEAUTIFUL | DOVE



'Reverse Selfie' highlighted the damage of retouching apps. It showed the reversal of the toxic practices retouching apps use to manipulate the images of young people.

REVERSE SELFIE | DOVE 2022



2004

2006

2008

2012

2013

2015

2016

2020

2021

2022

At the same time, Dove was driving its functional superiority across markets, including promoting its deodorants main benefit: not leaving any white residues on black clothes.

Dove pulled back on brand-building.

Dove was promoting its invisible deodorant, curly hair products and more.

Dove was promoting specific product features across markets - like products for hair loss to women in Malaysia.

Dove launched 'Love Your Curls' as well as benefit messaging around many other product features.

LOVE YOUR CURLS | DOVE 2015



Dove installed a weather-sensitive digital billboard in Times Square, New York, in April to promote its body wash.

Product campaigns running across the world, including powerful communications around Afro hair care.

Unilever, the global FMCG company, with brands including Dove, is leaning on strong brand equity as prices rise.



Take a bite out of Snickers' playbook

Snickers' 'You're Not You When You're Hungry' has been effective as a brand-building message in mass-reach media, but also as a way to trigger short-term sales campaigns specific to local markets.

As part of this long-standing campaign, Snickers released 'Hungerithm' in Australia to elicit a more immediate purchasing response from consumers. This was a bespoke algorithm that dropped the price of bars as the internet got 'hangrier', triggering a 67% year-on-year increase during the promotional period.

This shows how a creative approach to promotions that aligns with brand-building can inspire sales spikes and benefit your business in the long-run.

HUNGERITHM | SNICKERS 2016

[HUNGERITHM]
ANGRY INTERNET = CHEAPER SNICKERS

HOW ONLINE MOOD DETERMINED REAL WORLD SNICKERS PRICES

154 PRICE CHANGES PER DAY

30 MILLION+ MEDIA IMPRESSIONS

UNDERSTOOD SLANG AND SARCASM

5,040+ PRICE CHANGES

BUILT ON A 3,000+ WORD LEXICON FROM TWEET

OVER 836,000 SOCIAL POSTS ANALYSED

+67% SALES INCREASE

+120% TWITTER MENTIONS

NO DOWNLOADING APPS REQUIRED

Multi-Media Price Updates, Reactive Social, Launch Film, Posters, In-Store Digital Displays, Notify

CLEMENGER BBDO MELBOURNE

BRONZE CREATIVE EFFECTIVENESS LIONS



ii. Build a brand community

As budgets tighten, building connections in online communities will become an important tool for brands. They offer an opportunity to both build your brand and to create a home for short-term promotional activations

Under Armour teased the launch of its digital sneaker with a community of basketball fans on Twitter and Discord to build anticipation and exclusivity. When it did launch, 4.5 million people tried to buy the sneaker and they sold out in a few minutes.

This activity builds both brand consideration and a place to launch sales spikes campaigns. The stronger your presence in a community, the more effective these activations will be.

“Brands are developing creative and innovative ways to engage these diverse and passionate communities to drive growth.”

FRANCINE LI
GLOBAL HEAD OF MARKETING | RIOT GAMES
JURY PRESIDENT,
ENTERTAINMENT LIONS FOR GAMING 2023

Lessons from the Lions:

- Identify the communities your brand wants to earn the right to participate in. Spend time understanding who engages with them, their boundaries and where your brand can add value.
- Gather insights around what motivates that community and use them to incentivise people to engage with your brand.
- Bring the community into the ideation phase so they feel valued by the brand. Communities are not a place simply to promote products.

If you're in a lower interest category, consider collaborating with existing communities rather than building your own.



iii. Don't pigeonhole social media as a sales activation channel

Social media has traditionally been viewed as an avenue for delivering short-term activations. You told us you're focusing on "more targeted social promotion" and "social media short-term campaigns".

But social offers an opportunity for brands to combine both long-term brand-building with short-term promotional mechanics. A recent Kantar study revealed that social media can deliver long-term brand impact, especially on brand awareness and associations.

Seek out opportunities for storytelling in your short-term tactics. It is a top creative strategy for effective communication, especially brand-building.

Social & Influencer Lions Grand Prix winner by VICE is a new tour that allows users to use Instagram filters to scan objects and uncover stories about their true history.

Telling stories in an immersive environment can create multi-sensory, hands-on interaction which can be more memorable and more effective for brand-building.

THE UNFILTERED HISTORY TOUR | VICE

2022

VICE World News the unfiltered history tour

We can't change the past, but we can change how we engage with it in the present

A secret Augmented Reality tour of the British Museum's stolen artefacts

35,300 podcast downloads

18M social impressions

100,000+ tours unfiltered

The Guardian BBC iPhalloric

DENTSU CREATIVE, BANGALORE

GRAND PRIX BRAND EXPERIENCE & ACTIVATION



iv. Bring entertainment back

Use entertainment to make your creative more memorable.

Burger King purposely added glitches into its app to disrupt consumers' experience in a negative way, but then promised rewards for every glitch they found. This compelled people to download the app, but also attracted them to explore and familiarise themselves with its loyalty features.

Counterbalancing negative feelings with the offer of something positive like discounts can be an effective technique for brand-building and immediate ROI. Burger King saw an 11% growth in consideration among young adults and sold 60,000 glitched coupons.

One thing to do today:

Pinpoint the devices that have made your brand-building a success and inject those same techniques into your short-term activations.

BURGER GLITCH | BURGER KING

2022



DAVID SÃO PAULO

GOLD BRAND EXPERIENCE & ACTIVATION LIONS

Lion-winning techniques



1

Position your brand as good value rather than a budget option. It will resonate more deeply with audiences.

'It's That Affordable', for IKEA in Saudi Arabia, showed off the retailer's low prices in a fun way: by comparing them to everyday items such as a take-away coffees and tubes of toothpaste. Sales soared 21.4% vs the same period the previous year.

2

Promotions don't have to be dull. With the right injection of creativity they can be highly engaging and effective.

Electronics manufacturer Noblex increased sales of TVs in Argentina with a World Cup promotion offering refunds if the national team didn't qualify.

3

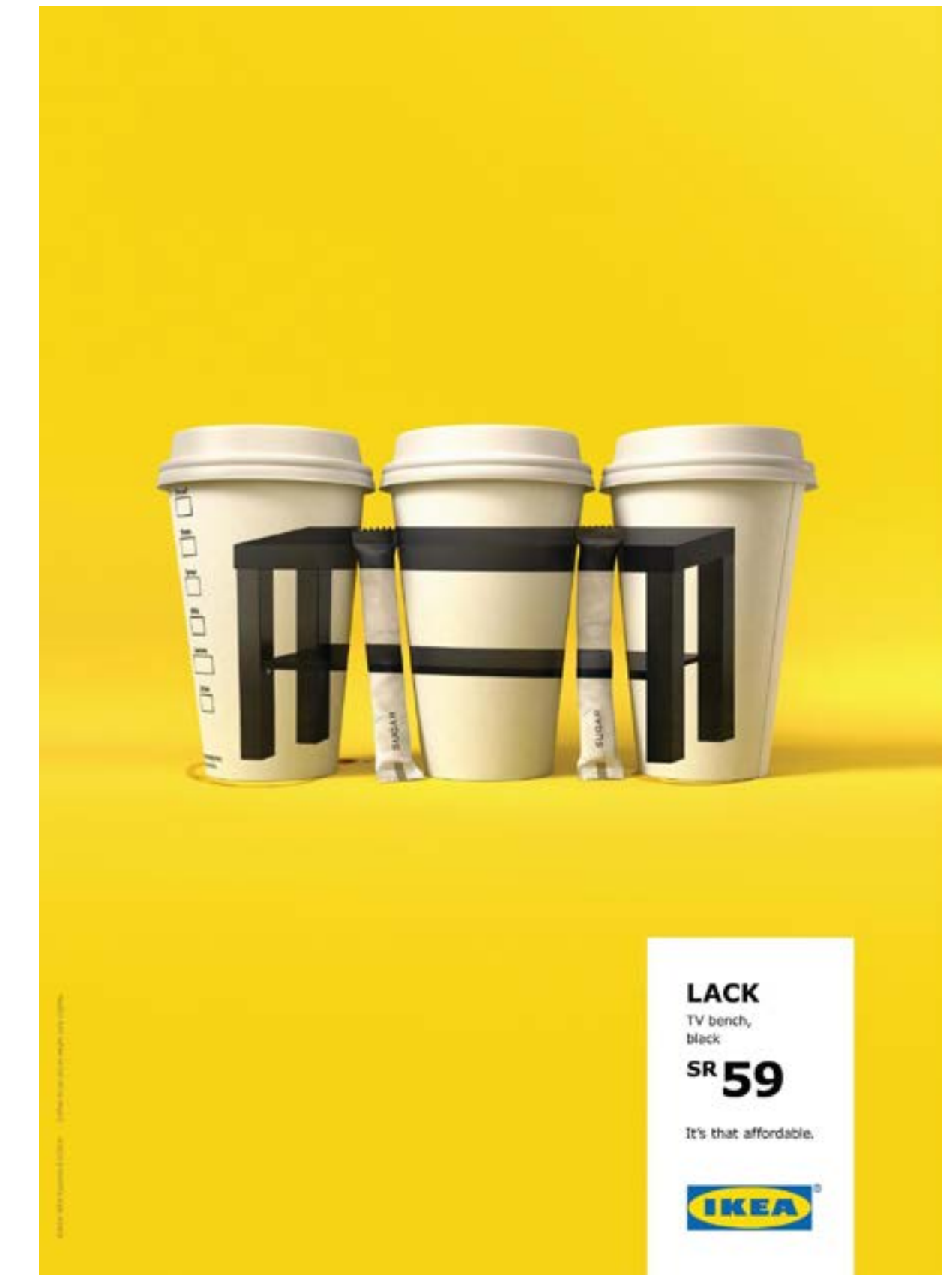
Kick against convention in your category by looking to other sectors for creative inspiration on how to communicate value and be helpful.

Volkswagen promoted its electric ID.3 vehicle using air-purifying murals that soaked up pollution, helping the vehicle beat its 2020 sales targets by 9%. It demonstrates how to use media to double down on a message.

Source: LIONS Intelligence On...[Creativity in the Cost of Living Crisis](#)

IT'S THAT AFFORDABLE | IKEA

2016



MEMAC OGILVY DUBAI

GOLD OUTDOOR LIONS



Collaborate more with the creator economy

3

Economic concerns force brands and agencies to be more savvy with their strategy. Marketing investments have to work harder than ever. So with an economy of over 303 million people globally with the ability to reach billions, the creator economy will prove invaluable as budgets get squeezed.

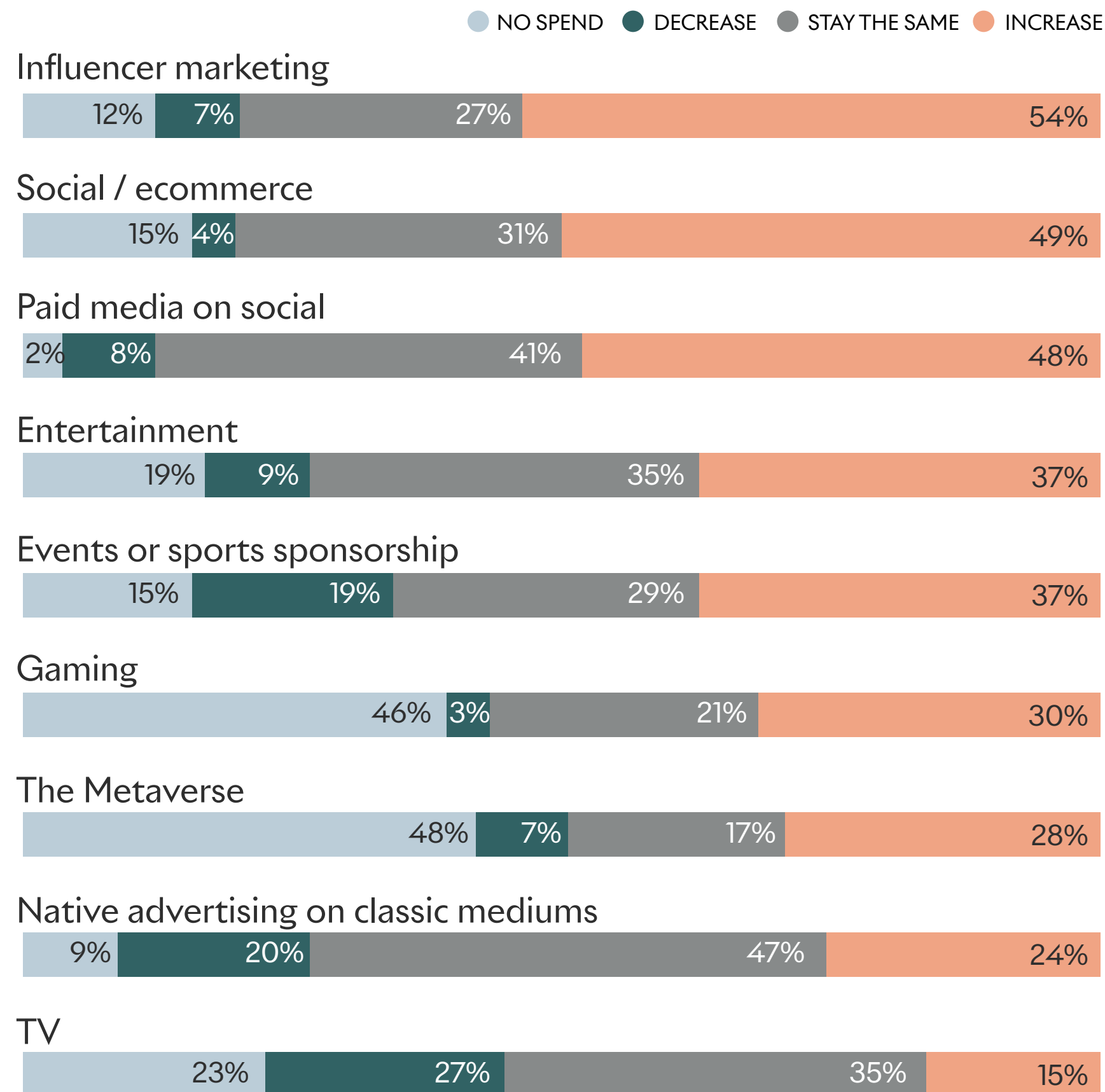
66% of brands and agencies are upping the ante with their investment into the creator economy this year. And 65% into building communities. Both offer authenticity, individuality and scalability - a winning combination with today's switched on and increasingly critical consumers.

In the Lions, the most effective work comes from those who can clearly define the connection between the brand and the creator.

As the market starts to crowd, how can your brand collaborate with the creator economy in a way that stands out?

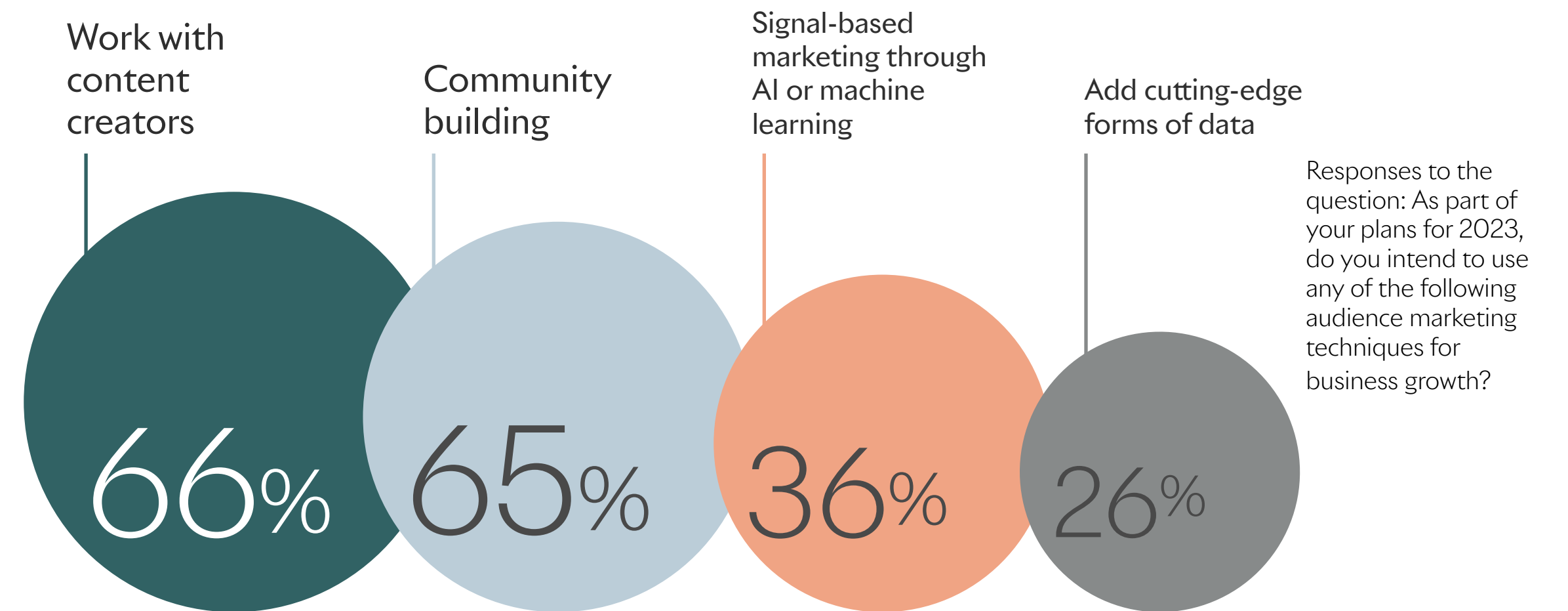


We asked how you expect investments in different media types to change in 2023. Influencer marketing came out on top as the activity where most brand respondents expect to increase investment (almost 54% indicated an increase).



Results from brand-side respondents

We also asked whether you intend to use any of the following audience marketing techniques for business growth. Over two thirds of respondents cited their intention to use community building and work with content creators as new marketing techniques to build business growth.



The Lion winners provide an array of examples of how brands have successfully engaged with influencers to build a relationship with new and existing communities. From the traits common to this work, two core actions stand out:

- 1 Take the time to get to know how online communities interact
- 2 Be prepared to respond at speed



Think beyond the traditional

Virtual influencers

WARC reports that **58%** of consumers are now following at least one virtual influencer on social media. By definition a virtual influencer is someone who is computer-generated and is either fictional or a digital twin of someone who already exists.

Computer-generated, [Lu from Magalu](#) is both a creator and a creation. Her transformation from virtual assistant to brand icon has turned her into the biggest virtual influencer in the world. By turning Lu into a pop culture celebrity, she has helped strengthen the connection between consumers and the brand.

Lu has 31 million followers and yearly earnings of \$17 million, firmly establishing her as the most powerful and profitable asset to the Magalu brand.

LU FROM MAGALU | MAGAZINE LUIZA

2022



OGILVY SÃO PAULO

GOLD SOCIAL & INFLUENCER LIONS



Unlikely influencers

SOS Children’s Villages created a new kind of influencer to convince corporations to transform marketing dollars into donations.

Ten year old Chatpat, a boy from the streets, recreated India’s most iconic commercials from the most recognisable brands, and then publicly offered those recreations to the brands on social media in exchange for donations to SOS.

Chatpat became a celebrity overnight. His recreated ads increased brand impressions by 1506% and raised over \$300,000 in donations.

This unique approach demonstrates that the best creators can be found in even the most unlikely places and provides insight into the future of the creator economy.

“The task was to create a campaign that gives visibility and makes corporations donate. With no budget and a task like this, we knew we needed an influencer and we couldn’t afford an influencer. So, that’s how the sparkly idea of ‘let’s create an influencer’ was born.”

SWATI BHATTACHARYA
CREATIVE CHAIRPERSON | FCB INDIA

CHATPAT | SOS CHILDREN’S VILLAGE INDIA

2022



FBC INDIA DELHI

GOLD MEDIA LIONS



ii. Lean on communities

TikTok Teachers used millions of creators to encourage more people in Mexico to learn sign language.

Teaching sign language to the Mexican population is the best way to integrate the more than 2 million deaf people into society, but with only 10 teachers in the entire country, it's an almost impossible task. FMS launched TikTok Teachers, harnessing the online community to find 3.4 million teachers to join it on its mission. It turned a social network into the most entertaining sign language school ever.

Empower different communities to come together to participate in supportive initiatives.

TIKTOK TEACHERS | FMS

2022

PROBLEM
In Mexico, there are over 2 million people with hearing disabilities, but only 40 non-deaf Mexicans speak sign language, which forces them to live isolated in small deaf communities.
Teaching their language to the Mexican population is the best way to include them in society, but with only 10 teachers in the entire country, it is an almost impossible task.

IDEA
On National Day of the Deaf in Mexico, we launched TikTok Teachers, an organic challenge that turned millions of TikTokers into Mexican sign language teachers.

HOW DOES IT WORK?
To join, they just had to google any sign and turn it into a TikTok dance for someone else to learn.

RESULTS
In this way, we went from 10 teachers to 3.4 million of teachers live.
We became a trend on TikTok for 4 days.
We reached 27 million fans who replicated the action for months.
We created the first sign language dictionary on TikTok that brings together in a single hashtag the 1,300 words that make up the original sign dictionary.

With TikTok done, they teach sign language. *Forbes*
TikTok teaches Mexican Sign Language with a challenge. *Forbes*
TikTok becomes a sign language dictionary. *Forbes*
Millions of TikTokers teach Sign Language. *La prensa*
TikTok is already a sign language school. *Forbes*
Challenge on TikTok seeks to promote the Mexican Sign Language. *El Sol de Mexico*

Logos: FEMESOR, IncluSor, HACKER_TV, ARTILLEROS, msn, las estrellas, YouTube, EXCELSIOR, LA PRENSA, odn4, roost brief, El Sol de Mexico, Expok, accesos, EXPANSION, POP, EXPANSION, OpenAI, El Albanaque, publimetro, la Opción, Crónica.

DDB MEXICO CITY

BRONZE SOCIAL & INFLUENCER LIONS



iii. Support a more inclusive creator economy

Brands should look at how they can contribute to a more equitable creator economy by shining a light on the communities under credited.

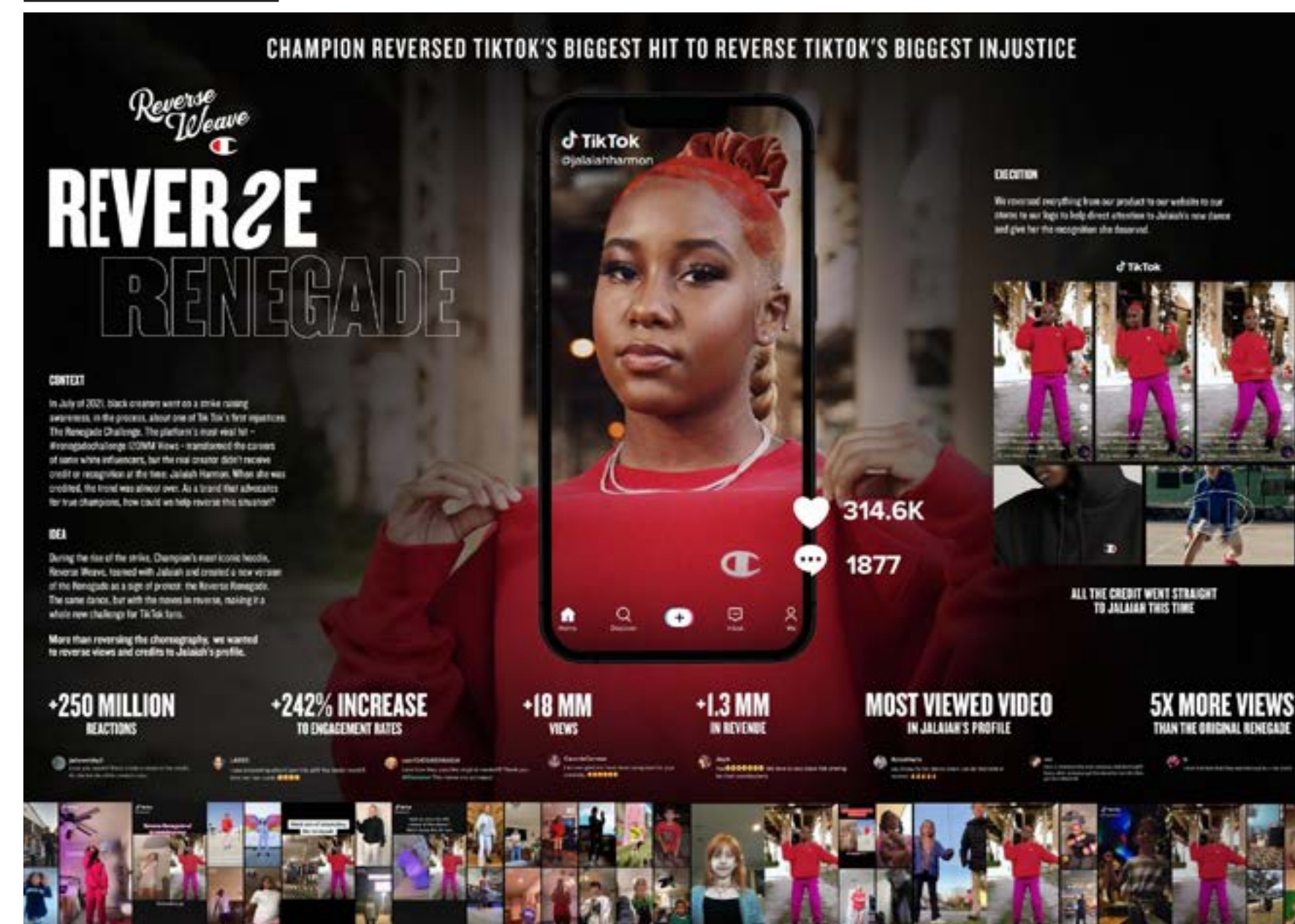
In 2021, Black content creators went on a strike. They wanted to raise awareness about cultural appropriation. Black content creators were not being credited for their creations. Instead, white creators were profiting off copying them.

Champion decided to act by starting [The Reverse Renegade](#). It teamed up with Jalaiah, the TikToker who started the viral Renegade dance, to reverse the challenge as a sign of protest.

As the Reverse Renegade gained popularity online, supporters and other influencers rallied behind it. All the credit went to Jalaiah this time, and it ended up being her most watched video, surpassing her original Renegade video.

REVERSE RENEGADE | UNDER ARMOUR

2022



ENERGY BBDO CHICAGO

SILVER PR LIONS

This was the first time a brand gave visibility to the lack of recognition Black Creators have on TikTok and helped change the narrative by putting the true creator in the spotlight.



IV. | Jump into creator conversations

Shaving cream brand EOS stumbled upon a customer raving about one of its products, TikToker, Carly Joy. Carly had posted an entertaining TikTok review of her positive experience of the product, saying 'bless your f*ing cooch', and EOS jumped straight on it in turbo mode.

Within days of Carly Joy posting her original video, EOS produced a limited-edition batch of 'Cooch Blessing' Cream. To catch her attention it used one of TikTok's native features and dueted her original video to show her the product it had made for her.

EOS went on to sell 150,000 bottles - a new record for the brand that beat previous sales.

This demonstrates the power of responding to a cultural moment at speed and emphasises the need to have all your internal and external processes set up for agility too.

One thing to do today:

Be ready for agility. Ensure your internal and external processes are set up to react at the speed of content creators or influencers.

BLESS YOUR F*NG COOCH | EOS

2022

BLESS YOUR F*NG COOCH

BACKGROUND
TikToker Carly Joy blessed the internet with a tutorial on how to "bless your f*cking cooch" with eos shave cream. Her organic viral video got 19.6M views, opening up a raw, unfiltered conversation about the stigmatized subject of shaving your nudes. And since no one ever talks about that subject matter, vulva-shavers were hungry for practical tips and tricks. So instead of shying away from her spicy candidness, we chose to celebrate it and keep the conversation going.

IDEA
We teamed up with Carly Joy to launch a limited-edition line of Cooch Blessing Cream, complete with her verbatim instructions on how to achieve a "smooth-as-hooah". Released through a series of influencer videos normalizing public shaving, the product line sold out immediately.

700M+ EARNED IMPRESSIONS **450x INCREASE IN WEBSITE VISITS** **2X GROWTH OF EOS' ENTIRE SHAVE CATEGORY** **150,000 SHAVE CREAM BOTTLES SOLD IN ONE WEEK** **#1 SHAVE BRAND AT TARGET UNTIL SELLING OUT** **#300,000 → #15,000 IN AMAZON PRODUCT RANKINGS**

MISCHIEF @NO FIXED ADDRESS BROOKLYN

SILVER SOCIAL & INFLUENCER LIONS



Lion-winning techniques

1

Work with creators who have a genuine interest in your brand

To get consumers excited about Applebee's again the brand turned unknown country singer, Walker Hayes, into a national icon overnight following his love song to the restaurant chain, '[Fancy like Applebee's](#)'.

2

Explore new avenues

When Brahma Beer could no longer sponsor football jerseys in Brazil, it decided to sponsor the place footballers love to experiment with the most - their hair. Using players as influencers for the beer, [The Foamy Haircut](#) recreated the golden liquid colour of Brahma Beer and the iconic foam on top before the games.

3

Shared values make for stronger partnerships

[Thighstop](#) built on its relationship with cultural icon and franchise owner, Rick Ross, to spread the news of its solution to the chicken wing shortage (thighs) to people far and wide. 60% of purchases came from new visitors.

FANCY LIKE | APPLEBEE'S

2022



GREY NEW YORK GOLD ENTERTAINMENT LIONS FOR MUSIC LIONS

THIGHSTOP | WINGSTOP

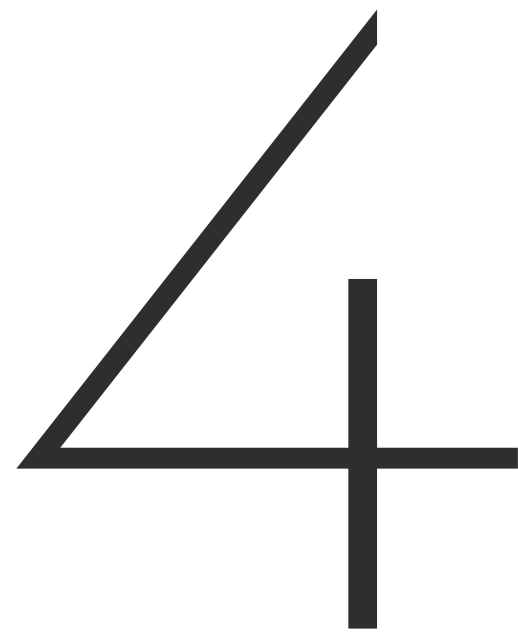
2022



LEO BURNETT CHICAGO GRAND PRIX CREATIVE COMMERCE LIONS



Enhance creativity with structure



Structure and creativity. Friends or foes?

Some argue that structure and systems stifle creativity, saying it takes away the freedom to be innovative. But this study has shown that as creative budgets and delivery timeframes get squeezed, people need a bit of order to let creative excellence thrive. Out of a long list of key leadership attributes, the ability to “have a clear vision and strategy for how creativity can be harnessed by the company” was deemed the most important, chosen by more than a third of respondents.

Look at creativity and structure as two parts that can make each other stronger. Creativity requires “inspiration time, free from daily tasks” - a sparsity many cited as their biggest challenge in last year’s survey. When outward pressures impede on these aspects, a structured approach will guard these crucial rituals from being abandoned.

“Sometimes people believe that their creativity is the result of ingenuity and inspiration – and sometimes it is – but a lot of this can come through processes and discipline.”

PEDRO EARP
FORMER CMO | AB INBEV

Like any other aspect of business, for creativity to flourish leaders and employees need tools, methods and training. From collaboration across teams to making time to celebrate success and learn from failures, the biggest Lion winners show us that every creative journey requires commitment to a creative structure and process.

You told us...



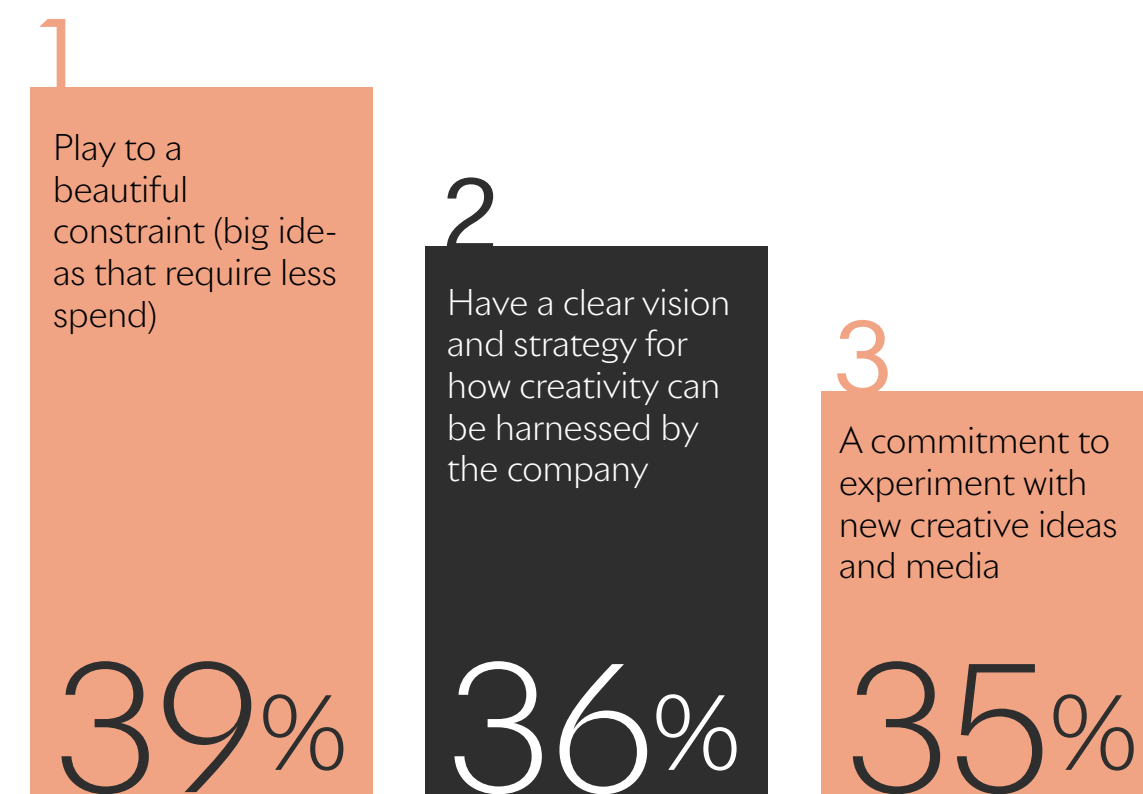
We asked brands to rank the three most important attributes for creative success in 2023, choosing from a long list of attributes.

Brands Respondents : Top three most important attributes for creative success



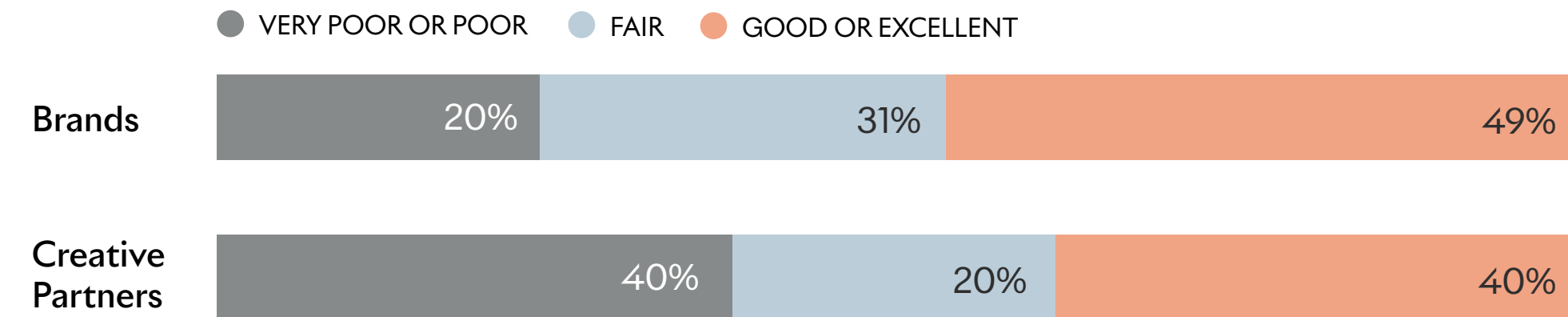
We asked creative partners to rank the three most important attributes to creative leadership and management, using the same list.

Creative Partners Respondents : Top three most important attributes for creative leadership



The answers above differ, as the data above shows. However, in each case brand and creative partner respondents deemed having a clear vision and strategy for how creativity can be harnessed by a company as a key attribute to creative success and leadership.

While this is deemed one of the most important attributes, less than half of brand respondents, and even fewer creative partners ranked their leadership as good or excellent in this area.



Creativity is likely to fall at the first hurdle if brands and creative partners do not have a clear vision and strategy for how it can be harnessed in a company. These two elements set the stage for the right structure, processes and culture for creative excellence to thrive. Discussions with the Lion winners provide multiple examples on how leaders can set and execute their creative strategies - including programmes that educate employees on creativity, and systems to bring structure to the creative development process.

The key actions:

- 1 Upskill leaders on how to build the right structure for creativity
- 2 Embed processes and programmes that strengthen creativity



Creative leaders are the link between creativity and structure. It is their responsibility to ensure teams are working in an efficient way that benefits creative output.

Never stop learning (or teaching)

“This is the time when everyone in marketing has to learn. If you don’t update yourself and become contemporary, you will get obsolete very soon. You cannot let that happen. So please invest in yourself, learn, learn, learn that’s what my advice would be.”

RAJA RAJAMANNAR
GLOBAL CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER | MASTERCARD

Leaders need to build creative structures around learning, actively teaching and inspiring young creatives around what drives excellence.

Practices working for your peers:

“Weekly team lunch & learns with outside experts; weekly trend report produced internally; culture of sharing industry ideas we find exciting and discussing why; peer review sessions.”

“Training each other on emerging creative tools, collaborating with partners and guest mentors”.

“Giving opportunities to young creatives to make final decisions, and support in case of fail.”

Make space for new ideas

As leaders start “focusing on processes to keep control of the workflow” they open up more opportunities for sharing.

Carrefour continuously improves its ‘[Act for Food](#)’ work - the Creative Business Transformation Lions Grand Prix winner. It does this by incentivising all employees to come up with new ideas (i.e., “Acts”). It has created a platform, “Act for Change”, to gather employee ideas. This has generated a range of new initiatives, from new product developments to innovation on production lines.

During the pandemic, AB InBev set up a smart process to distill insights quickly at a global level and used those to develop relevant ideas. Marketers globally across the organisation would meet twice a week to pitch their ideas and the ideas coming from their agencies.

McDonald’s opened up work to all markets through an internal creative hub, where employees and agency partners can view and share briefs and campaign content from all around the world, catalogued based on common business challenges. This direct access, leveraged during the early stages of campaign development, has helped the brand create a culture of sharing and scaling, building on insights and ideas that are working well for the company across different markets.

Lead by example

Putting a structure in place makes time for something you want to do. And it is a leader’s duty to show its ok to use that time to flex creative muscles.

Patagonia’s founder Yvon Chouinard used to eat lunch with his staff every day; this helped build a strong community and encouraged employees to take time away from the screen. This informal daily structure shaped the creative culture immensely.

Many of you pointed toward the need to “flatten the company structure” and “reduce the top down traditional leadership style”. As Patagonia demonstrates, this means participating in the elements that drive creativity alongside all of the other employees.



Structure for effectiveness:

You told us the industry needs to find and use “common methods and processes to be able to build creative ideas faster”. We have pulled together some of the processes Lion winners employ to get to highly effective solutions at speed. Putting these steps in place will not only bolster creative output but heighten the chances of getting it right the first time.

1 Always start with the problem to be solved

Start by identifying the single most important problem that needs to be solved. Too often, creatives and marketers can jump to big ideas and try to work backwards.

“Fall in love with the problem, not the idea. Remember, most ideas that fail do so because they aim to solve a problem which no-one really has.”

ALINE SANTOS
CHIEF BRAND OFFICER AND CHIEF EQUITY
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OFFICER
UNILEVER

2 Map impact goals

Creative Marketer of the Year, AB InBev, marks all its work against a creative spectrum - a scale from one to ten that helps it set the creative ambition for a campaign. Dimitri Michailidis, Global Director for Brand & Creative Effectiveness, AB InBev told us that this allows teams to talk in the same language on a global level. It also helps teams build acumen and intuition on what great creativity looks like.

3 Use setbacks as a springboard for solutions

Ideas need to be viewed from many different angles, this may mean watching them get torn apart to be reassembled. This is an essential process when creating permanent solutions.

Doconomy faced countless setbacks when creating a method for small and mid-sized companies to measure the carbon footprint of their products. As it overcame each challenge, it discovered new solutions that would become essential to the final product.

4 Monitor and celebrate creative impact

Evidently it’s important to put systems in place to monitor the impact of creative work on business results. It strengthens the case for further investment in creativity.

It’s as important to celebrate successes along the way. For creativity to thrive, you have to constantly feed it and enrich it. Celebration is an integral way to boost confidence in creative endeavours. Can you bring teams together to celebrate successes and also discuss some of the opportunities where work can improve?

Don’t forget:

Clearly communicating the positive financial impact of your creative activity is important to get executive buy-in. Consider how you can bring a finance lead into your team structure to help communicate effectiveness to the board. For Mastercard, that meant hiring a Finance Director to report into the Chief Marketing Officer so they could communicate with the CEO and CFO in terms they can relate to.



McDonald's Creative Effectiveness Programme

The Creative Effectiveness Program launched by McDonald's marked an important marketing shift for the brand. It provided it with a structured approach to creativity, which includes the following:

Establish a common ground. McDonald's feeds a 'feel-good' approach into its marketing. This ensures the marketing leans into the emotional connection of the iconic brand around the world, using McDonald's Creative Scale to set a common framework.

Be a strong advocate for capability building. McDonald's does this by leading workshops, webinars and masterclasses for over 2,000 marketers worldwide.

Celebrate to motivate. To celebrate best-in-class work, McDonald's hosts its annual Feel-Good Marketing Awards. It took the fourth annual show to the metaverse. It created a virtual "10th floor at MHQ" where it connected its marketers and agency partners in a space with unlimited potential.

Build a connected global marketing community. McDonald's has achieved this by bringing its employees together, across markets, to join forces and create campaigns. It refers to this as 'the power of one.'

Lean on your 'council'. McDonald's has a global Creative Council with top marketers from around the world. The council helps set and embed the agenda each year for continually elevating creative excellence and effectiveness.

Share to scale. Through its online portal, The Creative Hub, employees and agency partners can view and share best-in-class McDonald's briefs and work. This helps the brand to spotlight the best ideas and scale them quickly.



Learn more about how McDonald's built a culture of effectiveness in ['What Does It Take to Build a Culture of Creative Effectiveness?'](#)



MORGAN FLATLEY
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT,
GLOBAL CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER AND
NEW BUSINESS VENTURES
MCDONALD'S

“At McDonald’s, we’re committed to driving a culture of creative excellence and effectiveness across our team of marketers and agencies all over the world – one that inspires and celebrates creative risk-taking every day in pursuit of building more meaningful connections with our fans. We can confidently say that brave, culturally relevant creativity builds both our iconic brand and our business.”



JOAN COLLETTA
SENIOR DIRECTOR, GLOBAL BRAND MARKETING
MCDONALD'S

“Behind our culture shift is a multiyear journey of re-committing to creative excellence and effectiveness. To do this we:

- Develop and embed our Feel-Good marketing foundation and tools
- Elevate capabilities to enable world-class work
- Democratise access to the best work and briefs
- (Perhaps most significantly) recognise and celebrate the client and agency teams that dare to say yes in pursuit of brand relevance.”



Synergise to
strengthen
creativity

HUMANS & AI

Amplify human creativity by co-creating with AI

Leverage AI to enhance productivity and scalability, but always use it as a tool to improve an idea, not construct one.

LONG & SHORT

Inject more brand-building devices into your short-term activations

Consider how to make your short-term tactics work harder by bringing in elements of brand-building into them.

CREATORS & BRANDS

Collaborate more with the creator economy

Experiment in the creator economy with influencers and creators that share your values. And ensure your internal and external processes are set up for agility in the same way they are.

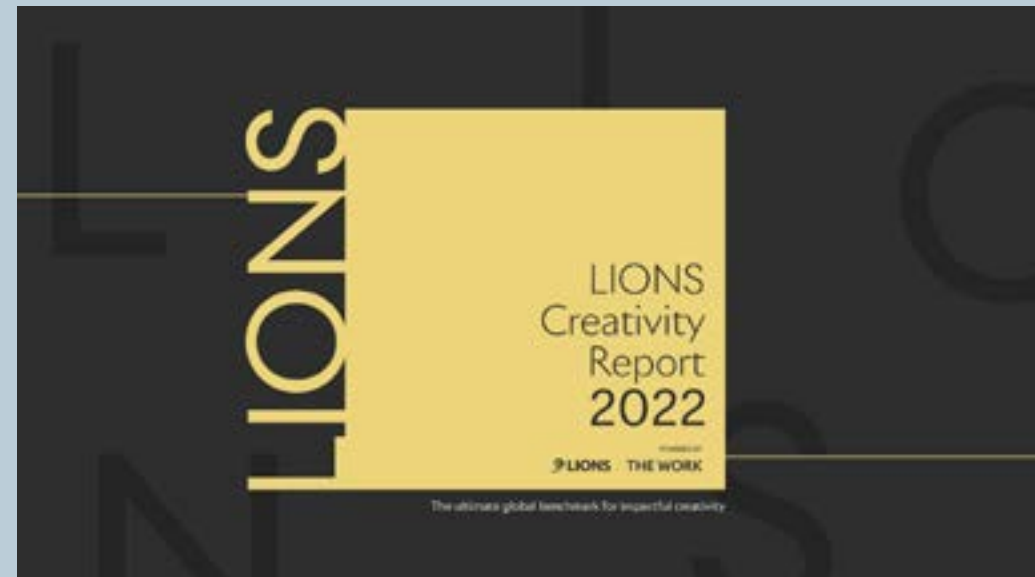
STRUCTURE & CREATIVITY

Enhance creativity with structure

Embed structure and processes into your creative journey to free up time for innovation and ensure you are improving output every time.



Further Reading:



Find out what it takes to produce Lion-winning work in the [LIONS Creativity Report](#).

Using insights from the definitive global creativity rankings, the LIONS creativity report explores the work from brands and agencies across the globe that are at the very top of their game. This must-read guide acts as a benchmark for creativity, helping you to get inside the minds of the jurors and winners who are raising the bar.



Learn how to navigate your team through a recession using the LIONS Intelligence [‘Creativity in the Cost of Living Crisis’](#) report.

Be inspired by beautiful constraints. Explore the brands who have steered their way out of the cost of living crisis by championing creative thinking. This report provides guidance on how to position your brand and marketing communications to connect with consumers in times of crisis.



Discover the drivers behind Lion-winning work in [LIONS How it Got Made](#).

This report brings together the behind-the-scenes stories of the Lion-winning work from the people who made it. Get inspired with a collection of 26 exclusive interviews that teach your team how to overcome obstacles and maintain momentum on a creative idea.



Learn how to harness gaming communities in [LIONS Intelligence on Gaming](#).

Bring creative effectiveness into virtual worlds by connecting with consumers through gameplay. This report explores the successful brands who have broken the paradigm of what it means to market through gaming.



ADVISORY

Our LIONS Advisory team supports brands in creative transformation. We build the foundations for creative excellence and effectiveness; setting the conditions for creativity that wins awards and fuels growth.

We partner with the world's best in their field to help companies committed to creativity embed it into their businesses, from culture to processes.

LIONS Advisory has worked with a broad range of renowned global brands across different categories

LIONS Advisory builds and guides brands through end-to-end creative transformation programmes.

If you are interested in learning more please get in touch with SpencerF@Canneslions.com

