

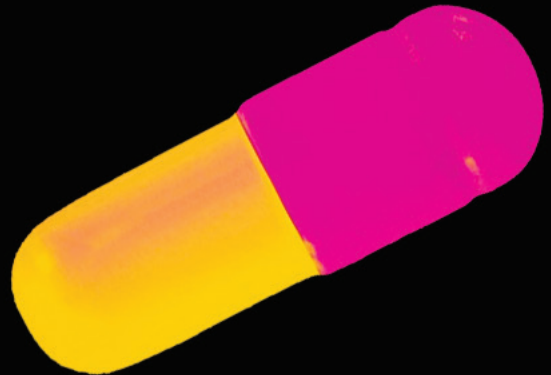


THE
CURE
FOR DULL



THE
PRACTICAL
PRESCRIPTION
FOR
DULL
ADVERTISING

System1
Create with Confidence



FROM DIAGNOSIS TO DECISIVE ACTION

The industry knows the problem. Now it's time to solve it.

In 2023, Adam Morgan, founder of **eatbigfish**, noticed something troubling in modern marketing. Creativity was becoming short-term, safe and increasingly beige.

The evidence was building across the industry. Peter Field's IPA analysis showed a decline in creative effectiveness. Karen Nelson-Field's attention research revealed how little advertising is truly seen. And System1's emotional testing, led by Jon Evans, host of **Uncensored CMO**, showed a plague of neutral responses to advertising.

As a collective we set out to quantify the problem.

After analyzing more than 80,000 ads, the scale of the issue became clear. Brands were being forced to spend an additional **\$189 billion in media** just to match the effectiveness of emotionally engaging creative. A sum roughly equivalent to the GDP of Greece.

We called it **The Extraordinary Cost of Dull.**

[Read it here](#)

Launched at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, the report sparked a global conversation about the commercial consequences of neutrality.

But diagnosing the problem was only the beginning.

The next step is the treatment.

That next chapter is The Cure for Dull.



CHALLENGER STRATEGY



Adam Morgan

eatbigfish

EFFECTIVENESS



Peter Field

Peter Field
Marketing & Communications Strategy
IPA

MEDIA



Karen Nelson-field

Amplified

CREATIVITY



Orlando Wood

System1

MARKETING COMMUNITY



Jon Evans

JON EVANS
UNCENSORED CMO

THE CURE FOR DULL COMMUNICATION

From strategic solutions to executional best practice.

The premise is simple.

The most effective strategies don't fit the category, they challenge it. They question assumptions, disrupt norms, and create space for brands to stand out.

To make that practical, Adam and team introduced the Anti-Dull Dial. Five straightforward questions to test whether a strategy is genuinely distinctive, or just following the expected path.

Because interest doesn't happen by accident. It comes from challenge, surprise, and emotional tension.

The tool is deliberately simple.

A way to push teams out of safe, well-worn thinking and towards strategies that are built to stand out.

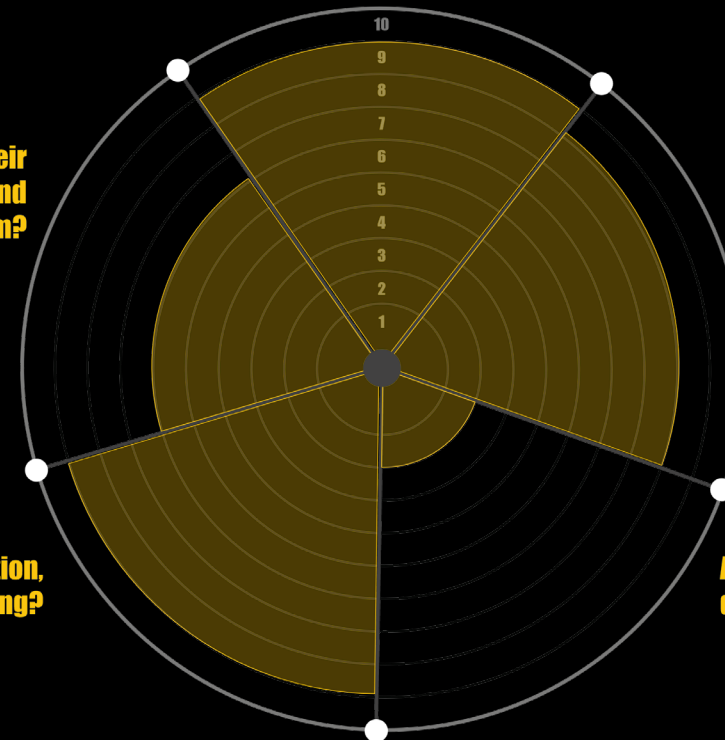
This edition takes the next step. Moving from strategy into execution, and how to translate that intent into creative, effective communications that people actually feel.

THE ANTI DULL DIAL

Are we meeting them where they care, and speaking to them in their language?

Are we denying one of their key assumptions, and surprising them?

Are we using the real bar to judge what's interesting, or some invented one of our own?



DULL-DEFYING DATA

Uncovering the creative features that defeat neutrality.

For 25 years, System1 has shown that emotional advertising drives growth. It builds market share, improves profit and reduces price sensitivity. Combine ESOV (Excess Share of Voice) with Star Rating, our long-term measure of emotional response, and you get one of the strongest predictors of market share growth.

In *The Extraordinary Cost of Dull*, we defined dull clearly.

Dull is neutrality.

But diagnosing dull was only the first step.

Orlando Wood's work in *Lemon* and *Look out* identifies the creative features most closely linked to emotional advertising, and the creative habits that have gradually stripped feeling out of modern work.

This report builds on that framework.

Lemon

[Click to read more](#)

Look out

[Click to read more](#)

It takes the creative features we know drive emotion and applies them directly to the problem of dull. Breaking neutrality down into its underlying creative patterns and identifying the features most likely to restore feeling.

Not theory, but practical guidance. A creative effectiveness playbook for escaping the sea of sameness and using emotion deliberately.

Backed by data from **120,832 ads across the UK, US, France and Germany**, this is the prescription for tackling neutrality.

QUALITY X QUANTITY OF TV ADVERTISING MATTERS

Combining ESOV with ad Star ratings (emotional response) is powerfully predictive of subsequent market share growth



Annual market share predictions for US and UK brands spanning 264 brands. The analysis is based on over 4,000 ads in the US and the UK, representing over \$10 billion in media spend. Emotional testing source: System1's Test Your Ad database of over 50,000 TV ads, with spend data provided by Nielsen and Numerator.

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**THE
CURE
FOR DULL**

THE CURE FOR DULL



THE ROLE OF EMOTION IN BRAND GROWTH

Understanding how positive and negative emotions shape brand effects and how dull spreads through the funnel.



CREATIVE MEASUREMENT IS PART OF THE DIAGNOSIS

The way you measure creativity shapes the creativity you get.
Quantifying emotion reveals dull, enables meaningful benchmarking, and gives creativity permission to work.



A PRESCRIPTION FOR DULL MEDIA

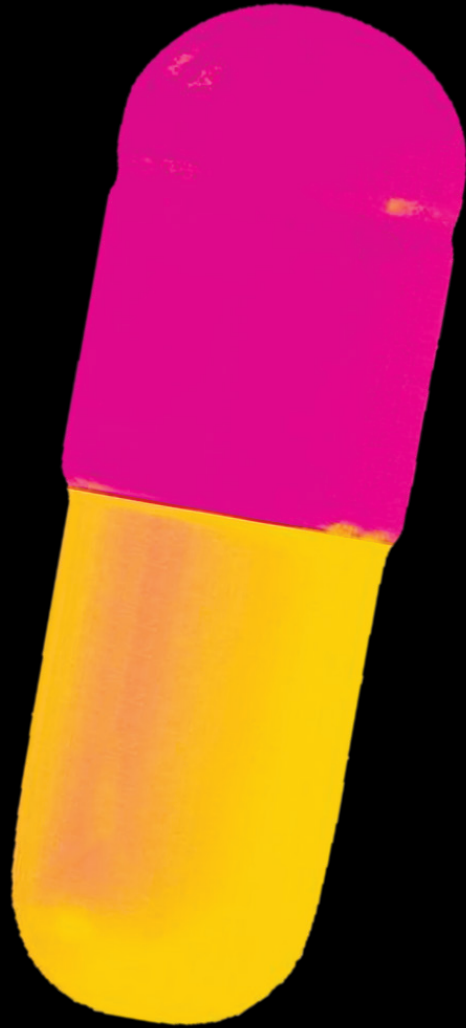
Advertising can't work if it isn't seen, and attention collapses in dull environments, meaning many ads never get the time needed to build memory or impact.



THE CREATIVE CURE FOR DULL

Storytelling, humor, drama and melody are the hallmarks of showmanship, and the most reliable remedy for dull.

**THE
CURE
FOR DULL**



1

**THE ROLE OF EMOTION
IN BUILDING BRANDS**

ADVERTISERS ARE DULL BY DEFAULT

Neutrality is still the dominant response to advertising.

In *The Extraordinary Cost of Dull*, we found that around **half of consumers feel nothing when they watch advertising.**

Two years on, the picture looks much the same.

Despite knowing the cost, much of the industry continues to drift toward neutrality, pushed by efficiency tools, fast social formats and safer creative choices.

The frustrating part is that dull is not a mystery illness.

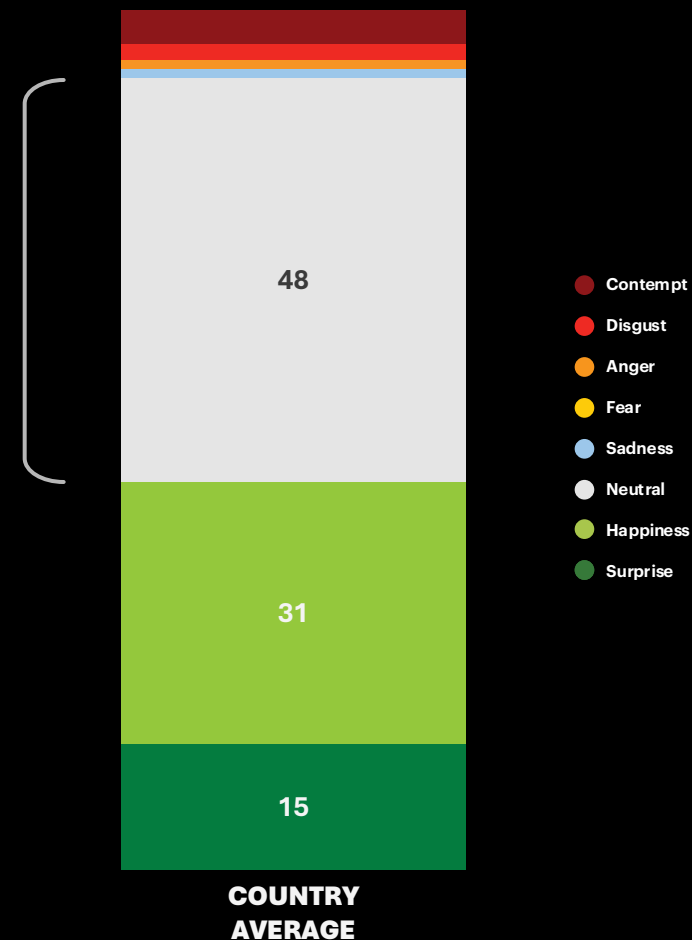
We already understand what drives emotional response and the creative features that bring advertising to life.

Allowing neutrality to persist when the evidence is clear is a little like ignoring a diagnosis when the treatment is already known.

The cure exists.

The opportunity now is to apply it.

NEUTRALITY
The absence of emotion



THE VITAL ROLE OF EMOTION IN BRAND BUILDING

Feeling drives fame, memory and brand growth. Neutrality drives nothing.

In *The Creative Dividend*, System1 and Effie explored the commercial impact of different emotions on brand effects. The conclusion is simple. Emotion builds brands. Neutrality does not.

Positive emotion creates and reinforces memory. Through the Affect Heuristic, it shapes decisions quickly and instinctively. The result is stronger brand effects, from brand image and equity to trust, distinctiveness and differentiation.

Emotion also drives fame. The more emotionally positive the campaign, the more likely people are to talk about it and share it.

Yes, negative emotions can generate spikes of attention.

Campaigns that provoke anger, disgust or sadness can outperform the dullest work when it comes to fame. But they are less consistent. Work built on happiness and surprise delivers more reliable commercial returns.

The pattern is clear.

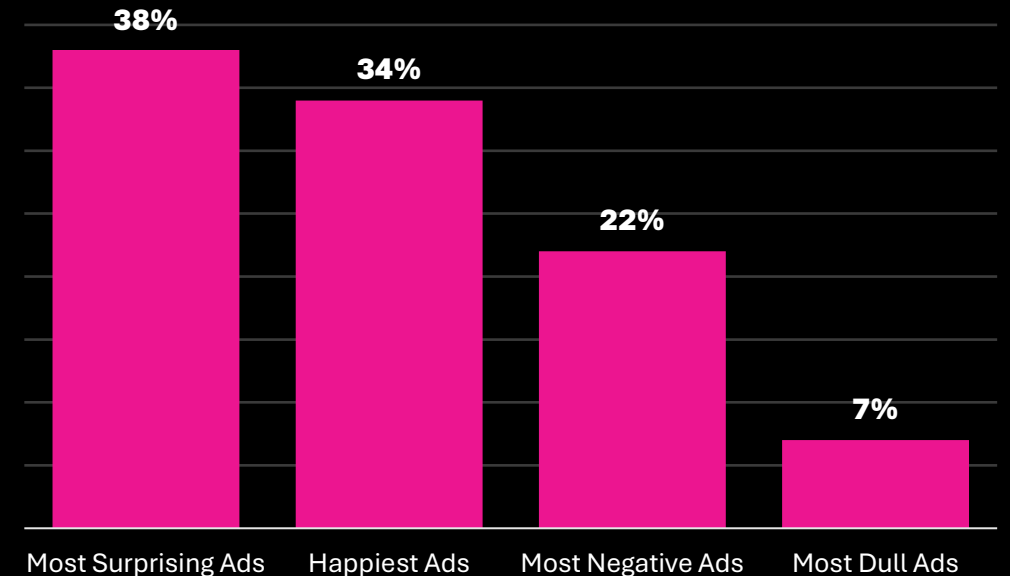
If you want brand growth, you need feeling.

If you want to be forgotten, stay neutral.

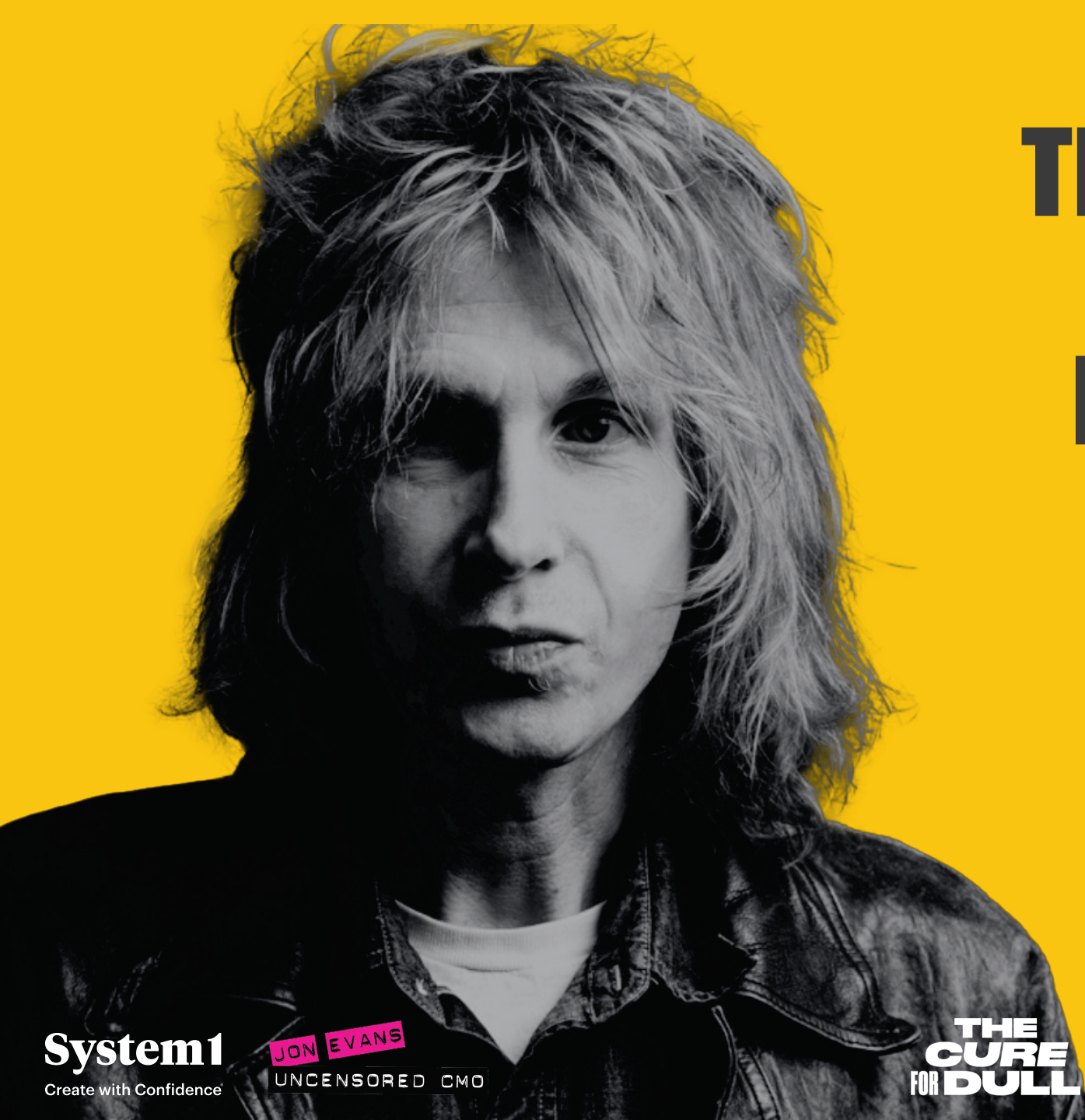
An emotionally positive creative strategy pays dividends.

SURPRISING ADVERTISING SUPPORTS GREATER FAME EFFECTS.

% reporting fame



The Creative Dividend
Click to read more



THE RISKIEST THING YOU CAN DO IS BEING IGNORABLE

Greg Hahn

Mischief @ no fixed address founder



Listen to **Adam Morgan & Peter Field** on
Uncensored CMO reveal what being
ignored is costing brands

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JON EVANS
UNCENSORED CMO

**THE
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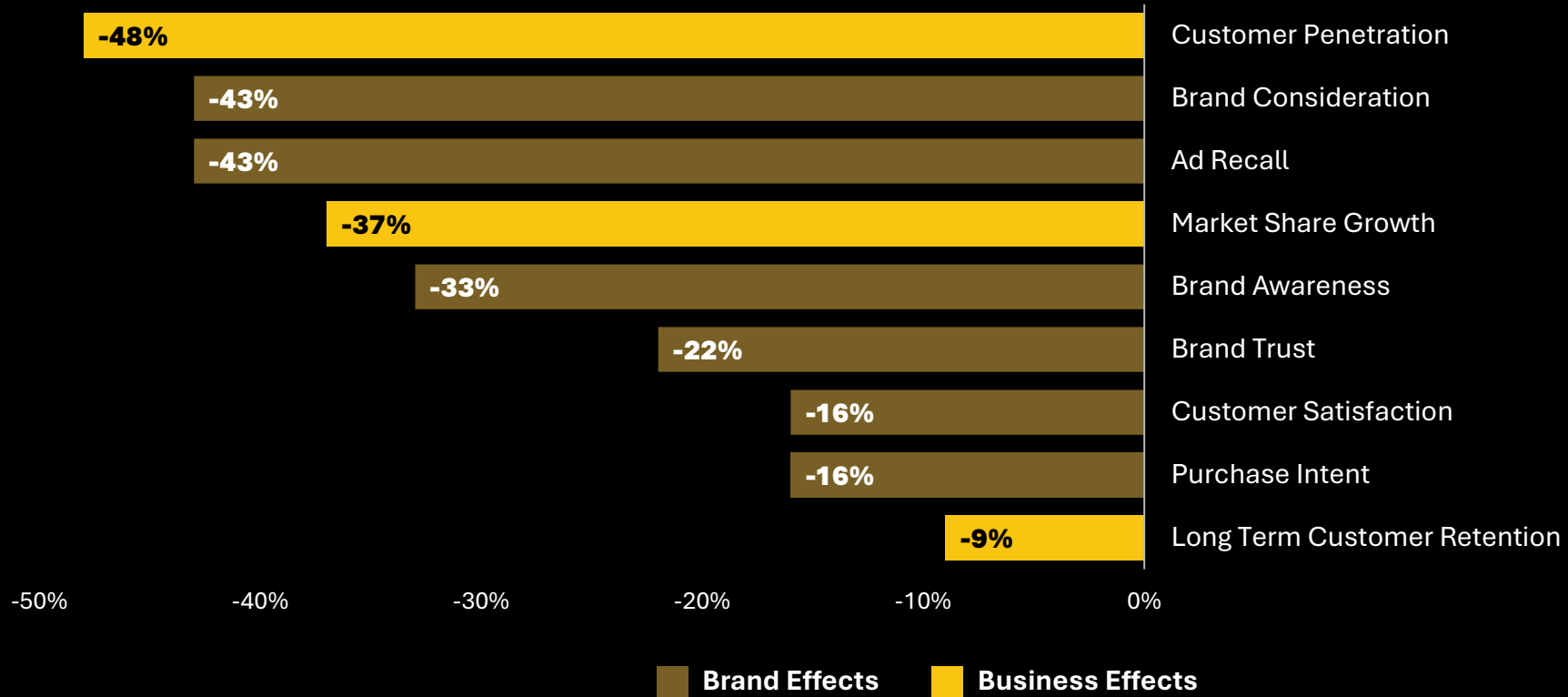
DULL CONTAMINATES EVERY STAGE OF THE FUNNEL

Low emotion creativity doesn't just limit brand building.

It reduces effectiveness across consideration, recall, penetration and customer retention.

THE IMPACT OF LOW CREATIVITY

(Likelihood of below average creativity campaigns to record effect vs average)



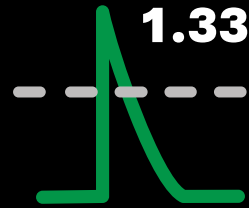
DULL IS NOT GUESSWORK, IT'S MEASURABLE

Feeling drives fame, memory and brand growth. Neutrality drives nothing.



Star Rating:
Exceptional

System1's **Star Rating** measures emotional response to advertising, weighting positive feeling because it is the emotion most strongly linked to memory, brand building and growth.



Spike Rating:
Exceptional

System1's **Spike Rating** predicts short-term impact, from sales and clicks to talkability and traffic. It measures the intensity of emotional response, whether positive or negative.

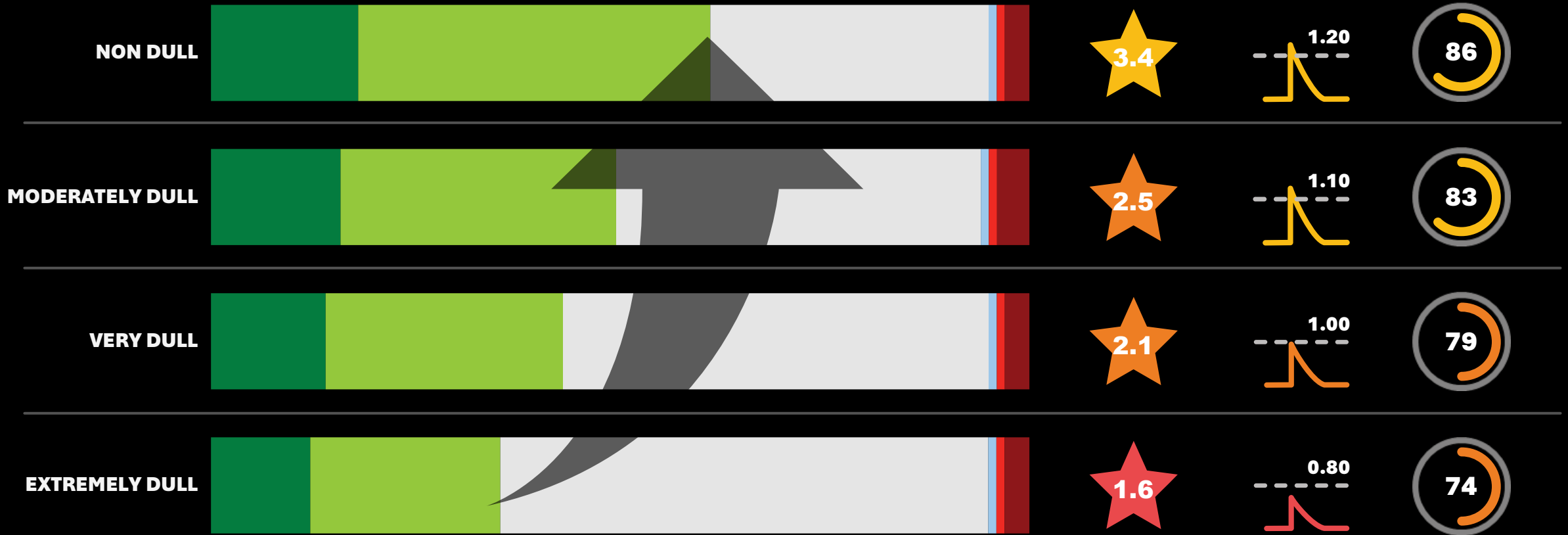


Fluency Rating:
Exceptional

System1's **Fluency Rating** measures memorability: the percentage of viewers who correctly recall the ad after viewing.

POSITIVE EMOTION IS THE MOST RELIABLE CURE

As positive emotion increases, so do Star, Spike and Fluency, strengthening both brand building and activation.



1 DOCTOR'S NOTES

The diagnosis hasn't changed.
Half of advertising still leaves people feeling nothing, even though the industry already knows the cure.

If you want brand growth, create positive feeling.

Neutral advertising leaves no memory and no momentum.

Dull weakens every stage of the funnel.

Dull reduces effectiveness across recall, consideration, penetration and retention.

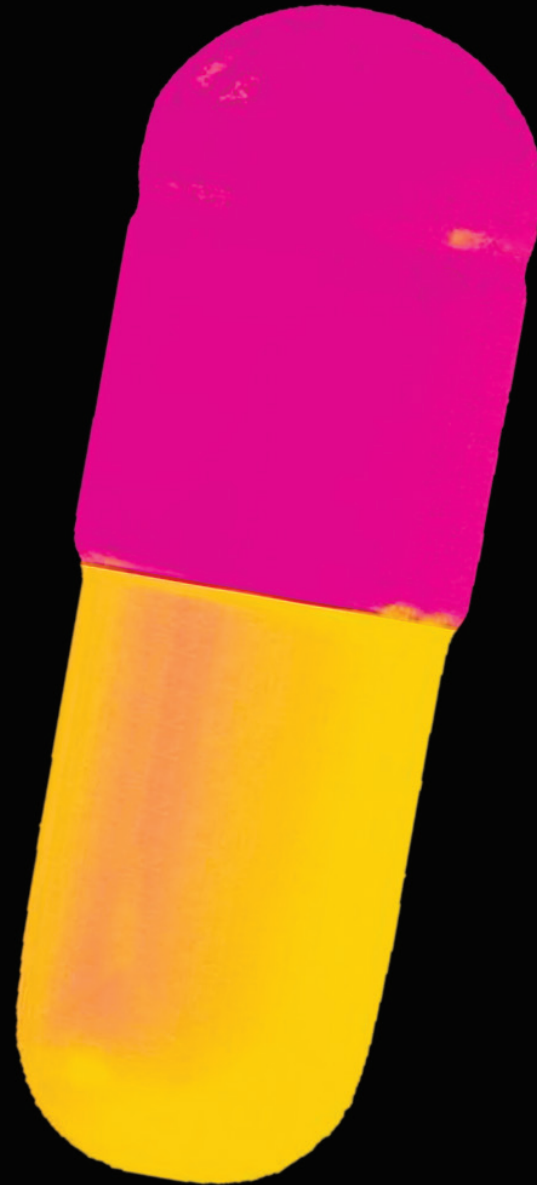
Positive emotion is the most reliable cure.
It lifts both long-term brand building and short-term impact.

**THE
CURE
FOR DULL**



2

**CREATIVE
MEASUREMENT
IS
PART OF
THE DIAGNOSIS**



**THE
CURE
FOR DULL**

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ONLY QUANT CAN TRULY MEASURE DULL

Qual research supports diagnosis and understanding through exploration.

In *The Creative Dividend*, our analysis of the Effie Insights' database revealed something important.

The way you research creativity shapes the creativity you get.

Two research approaches stand out: focus groups and modern quantitative creative measurement.

The difference is clear.

Modern quantitative creative measurement is strongly associated with more emotionally positive campaigns and fewer low-response ads. When emotion is measured properly, brands create work that generates stronger feeling.

And stronger feeling builds brands.

Focus groups also correlate with more emotionally positive work. But they are less strongly linked to distinctiveness.

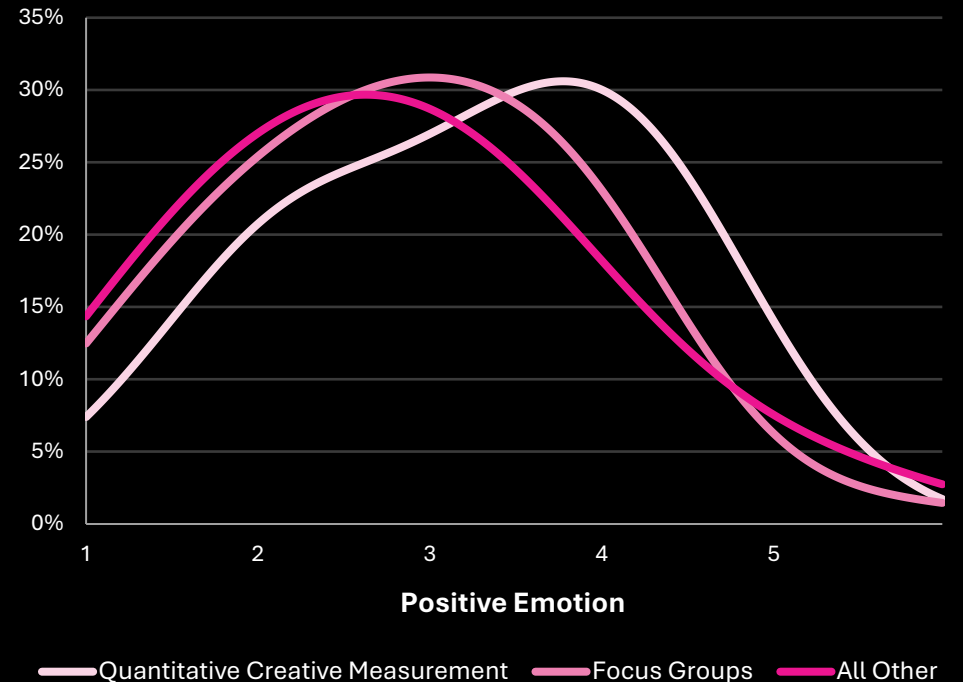
The lesson is simple.

The cure for dull is not just what you make. It's how you measure it.

Measure emotion properly, and you give creativity permission to work.

THE USE OF QUANTITATIVE CREATIVE MEASUREMENT AND FOCUS GROUPS IS ASSOCIATED WITH MORE POSITIVE EMOTIONAL ADVERTISING.

Campaigns achieving positive emotion per research use:



WHEN PEOPLE FEEL NOTHING, THEY SAY NOTHING

Only one in five viewers can explain why an ad leaves them feeling neutral.

20%

“Too long”

“Confusing”

“Generic”

What Customers Can Explain

80%

Unaccounted
Neutrality

“Fine, I guess”

“It was OK”

“No feeling”

“Don’t care”

“Average”

Why Creative Measurement Needs to Go Deeper

Neutrality rarely comes with an explanation.

When we coded neutral verbatims to identify a clear cause, only **1 in 5** contained an identifiable reason.

The remaining **80%** sank below the surface.

Most people cannot articulate why an ad leaves them feeling nothing. They simply do.

Which means if you rely only on what people can easily put into words, you will miss dull entirely.

Diagnosing dull requires more than surface-level opinion.

It requires measuring what people feel, not just what they say.

**PEOPLE DON'T
THINK WHAT THEY FEEL,
SAY WHAT THEY THINK
OR DO WHAT THEY SAY**

David Ogilvy | 1911-1999



System1

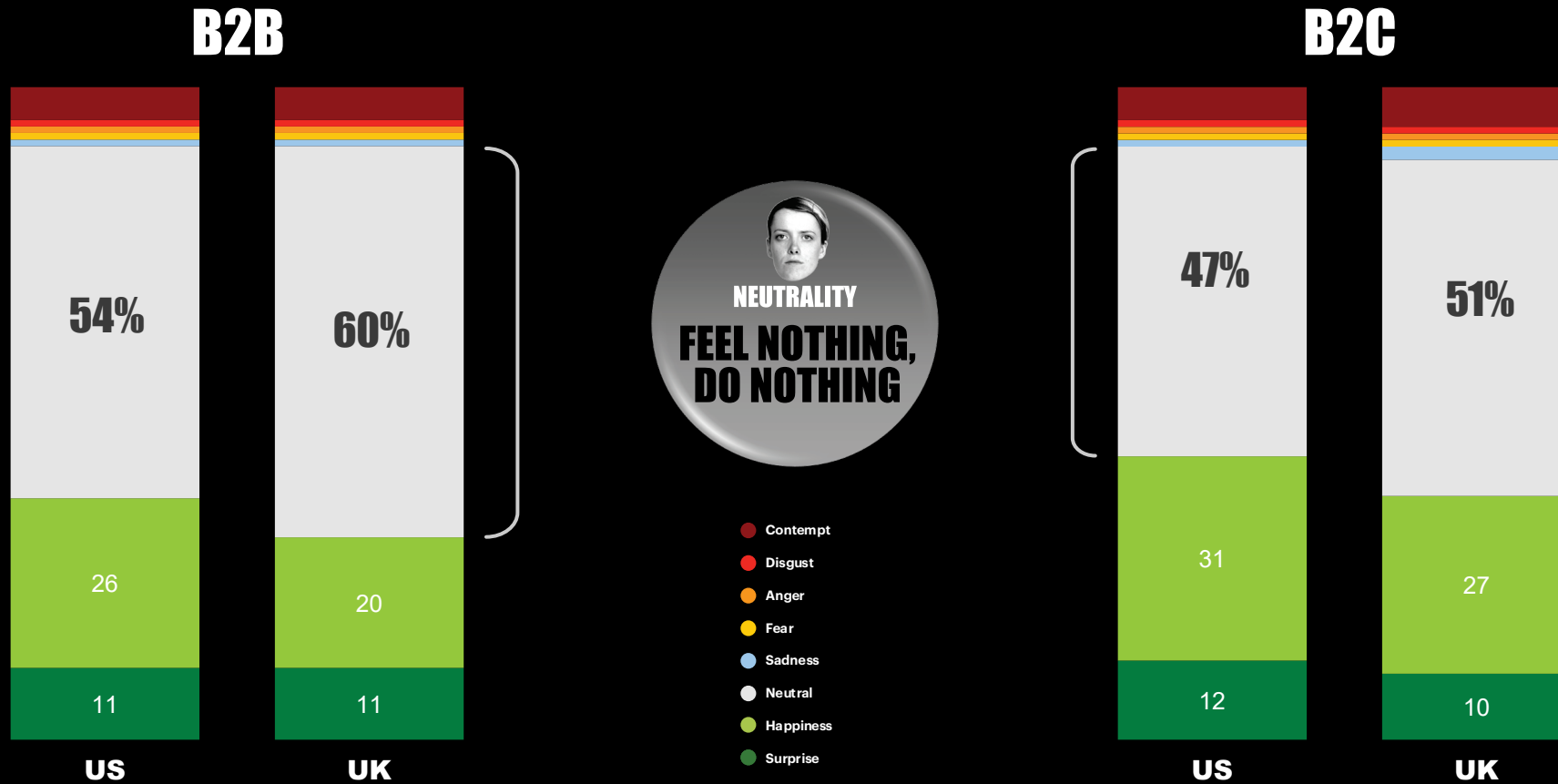
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**THE
CURE
FOR DULL**

THE FIRST DIAGNOSIS | B2B VS B2C

Emotional response varies significantly between B2B and B2C, making category benchmarking essential when diagnosing dull.

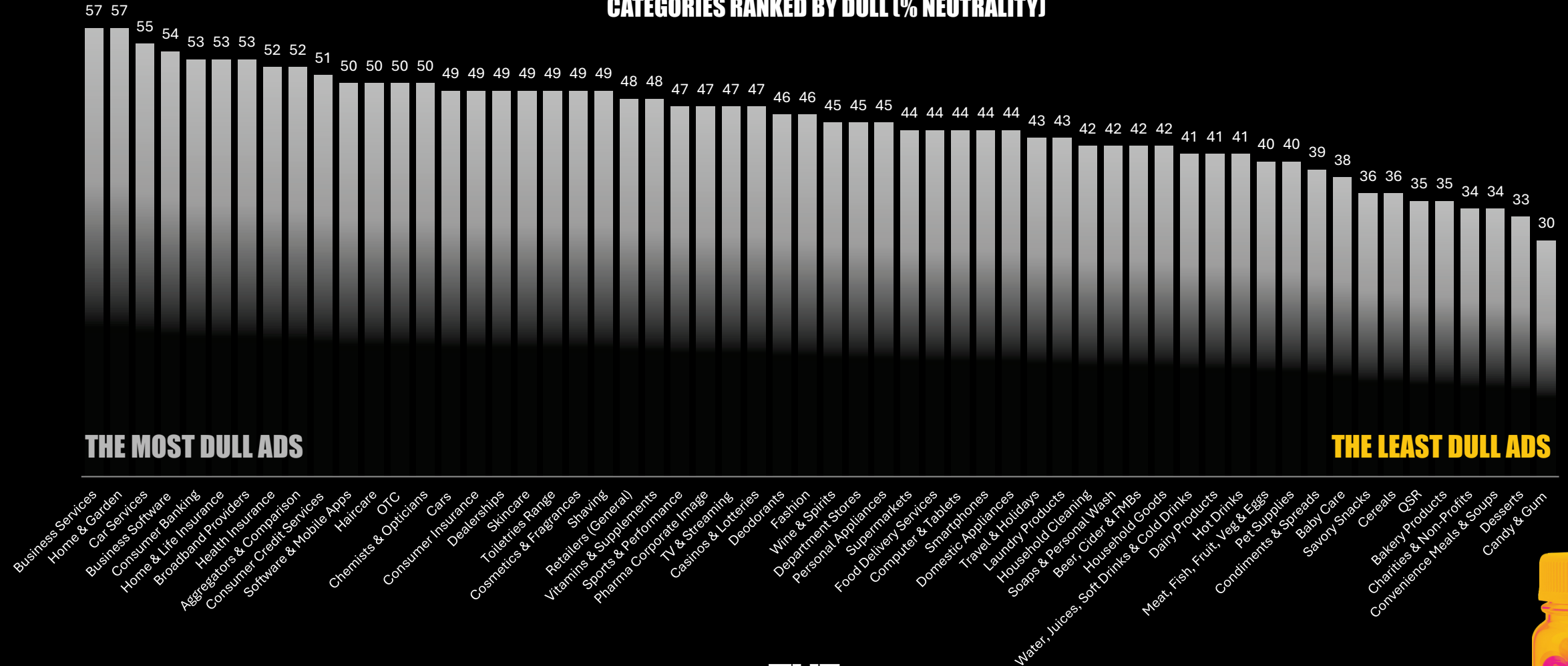
EMOTION BUILDS BRANDS BUT NEUTRALITY – FEELING NOTHING – IS THE MAIN RESPONSE TO ADVERTISING



WHERE DULL HIDES | BY CATEGORY

Quantifying emotional response reveals wide variation across categories, showing why brands must benchmark against their competitive set, not just the market average.

CATEGORIES RANKED BY DULL (% NEUTRALITY)



THE MOST DULL ADS

THE LEAST DULL ADS



2 CLINICAL FINDINGS

The way you measure creativity shapes the creativity you get.

Quantitative emotional measurement tends to produce stronger feeling, while over-reliance on focus groups can push work toward consensus and safety.

Neutrality is hard to explain.

In System1's qualitative database, only 1 in 5 consumers can articulate why an ad leaves them feeling neutral.

Measuring dull starts with context.

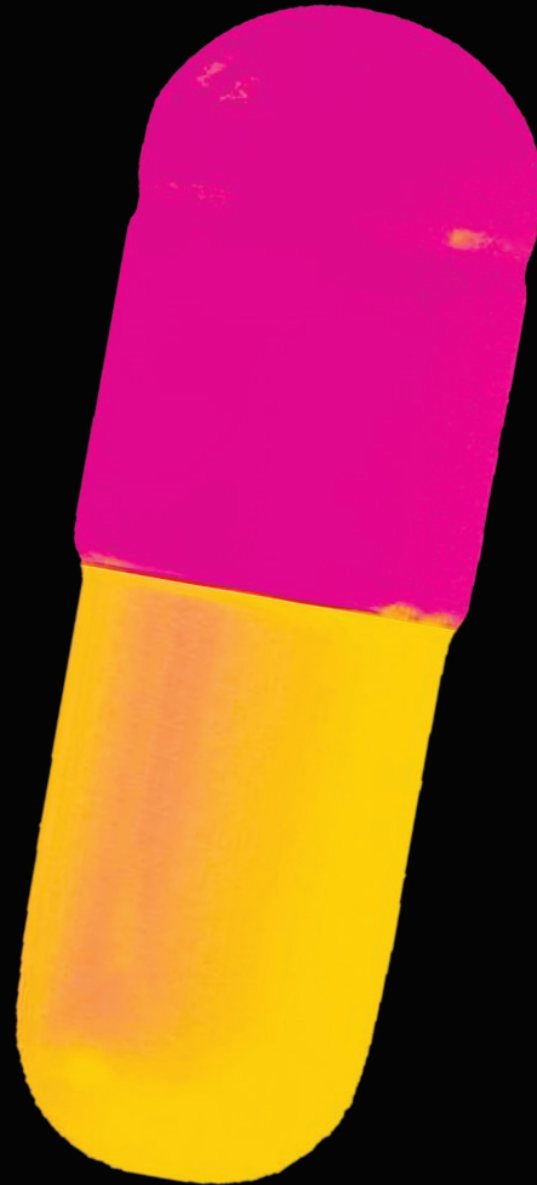
Emotional response varies across categories, and benchmarking shows some sectors begin with a natural advantage over others.

**THE
CURE
FOR DULL**



3

A
PRESCRIPTION
FOR
DULL MEDIA



THE
CURE
FOR **DULL**

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THE EYE-WATERING COST OF DULL MEDIA

Around 80% of ad impressions receive no active attention, leaving billions in media spend unable to do its job.

After *The Extraordinary Cost of Dull* revealed the commercial impact of emotionally neutral advertising, **Dr Karen Nelson-Field** explored another dimension of the problem:

Dull media.

Using biometric attention data from 115,000 real ad views across TV, social, web and gaming environments, her research shows that many ads are delivered but rarely truly seen. Around 80% of impressions receive no active attention, meaning most advertising fails to hold people's gaze long enough to have any meaningful impact.

This matters because attention is the gateway to effectiveness. Advertising typically needs around 2.5 seconds of active attention before memory can begin to form. Yet in fast-scroll environments, very few impressions reach that threshold.

The result is a major efficiency problem.

The research estimates a \$198 billion annual Cost of Dull Media, with advertisers losing roughly 43 cents of value for every dollar spent in low-attention environments.

Put simply, even the best creative cannot work if the media environment never gives it the chance to be seen.

Dr Karen Nelson-Field

The Eye-Watering Cost of Dull Media

In collaboration with industry heavyweights
Adam Morgan
Peter Field

[Read it here](#)



DULL ADS VANISH WITHOUT A TRACE

In low-attention environments, dull campaigns don't just underperform, they are barely seen.

As attention environments worsen, advertising doesn't just lose a little attention. It loses the time needed to work.

In the highest-attention campaigns, around 59% of available attention is captured.

In the dulllest environments, that falls to just 6%.

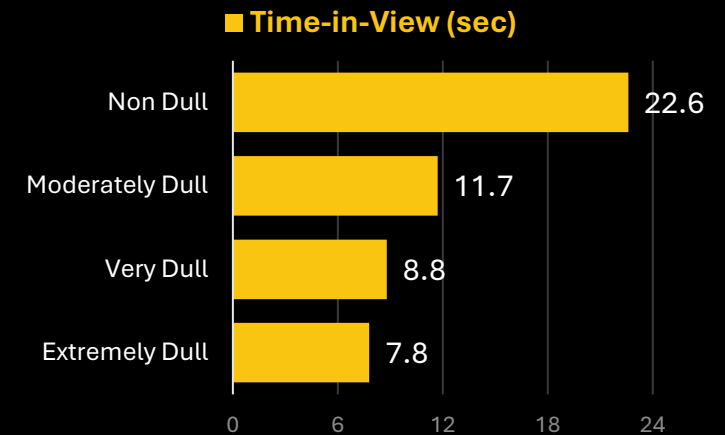
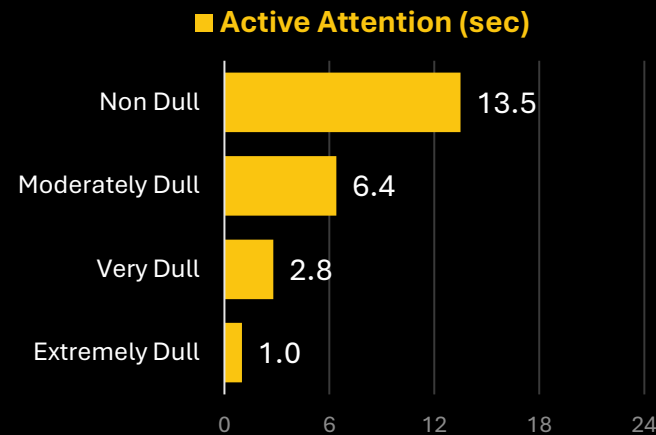
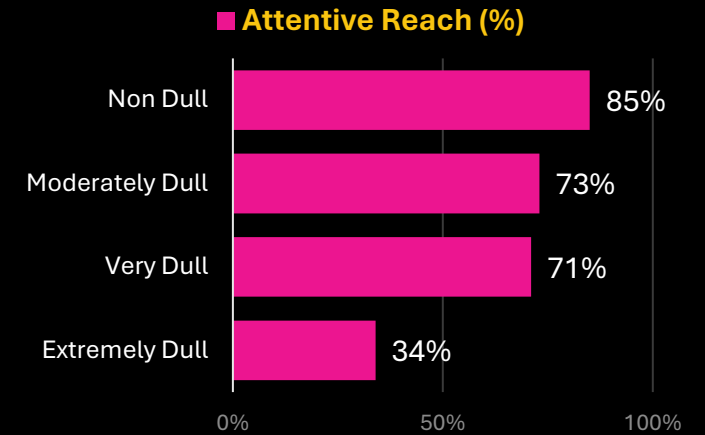
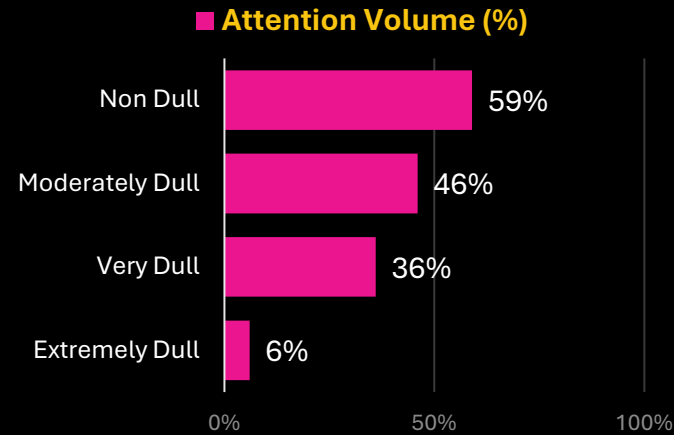
The time people actively look at ads collapses from 13.5 seconds to about 1 second.

Fewer people look at all. Attentive reach drops from 85% of viewers to just 34%.

At that point, most ads never cross the ~2.5-second threshold needed to begin forming memory.

So when dull creative runs in low-attention environments, the result is simple:

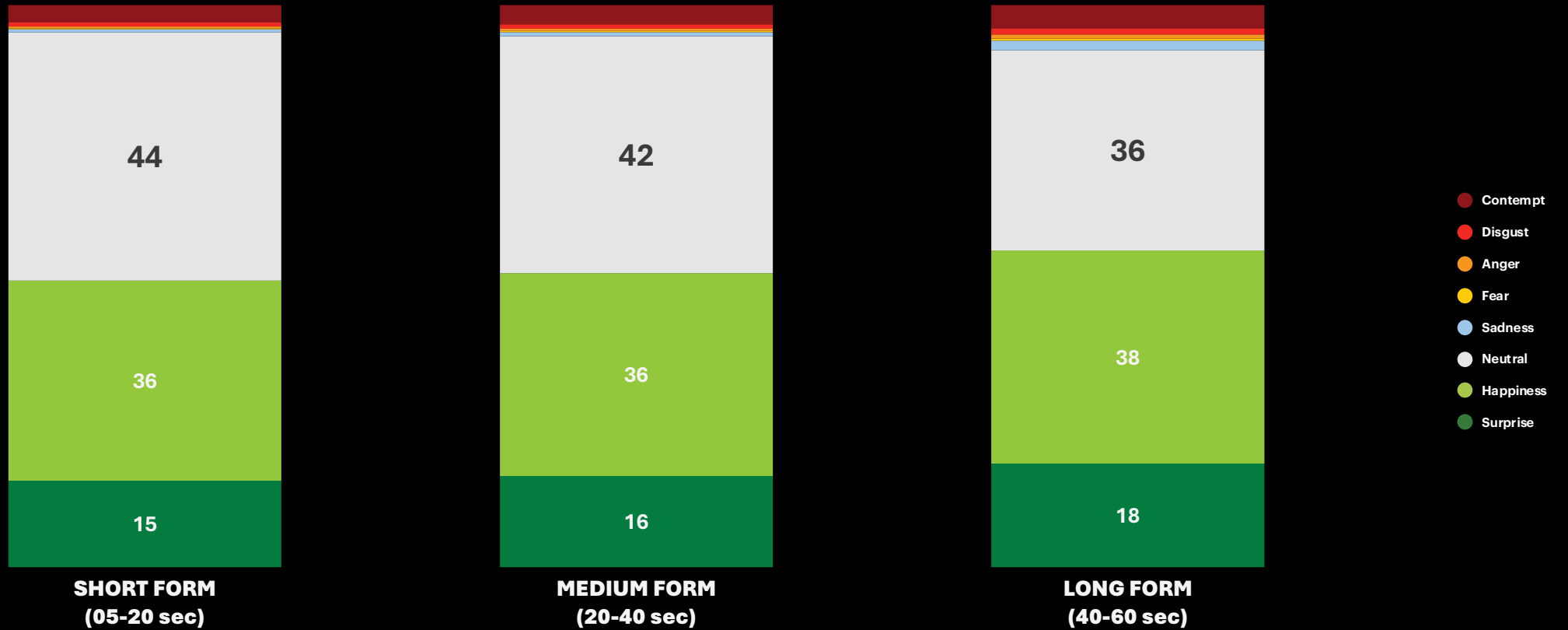
**People scroll past. The ad is served.
But it leaves no trace.**



EMOTION NEEDS TIME

System1's Test Your Ad data shows longer ads tend to be less dull.

Emotion builds over time, something high-attention environments are far better at supporting.



BIG IDEAS NEED BIG MEDIA

Stephen King (JWT) | 1931-2006



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JWT Planning Guide, 1974, Stephen King - "On the other hand, the indirect objectives of modifying or intensifying people's total impression of a brand tend to require reasonably long commercials/large spaces; as does the need for advertising to stand out from its surrounding material"

**THE
CURE
FOR DULL**

LOW ATTENTION MEDIA ISN'T THE PROBLEM. SHORT-FORM CREATIVE IS.

Dull media needs even less dull advertising to hook audience attention and hold engagement long enough to build memory.

Level of Dull	Connected TV (%)	Social Premium (%)	Linear TV (%)	Social Non Premium (%)	General Web (%)	Streaming Web (%)
Non-Dull	30.9	23.7	17.5	14.4	9.9	3.6
Moderately Dull	26.6	18.9	12.1	38.2	1.8	2.3
Very Dull	4.3	9.9	15.3	64.6	1.9	4.0
Extremely Dull	1.3	1.6	13.6	72.8	8.4	2.4

3 THE MEDIA TREATMENT PLAN

Dull media has a real cost.

Around 80% of impressions receive no active attention, meaning many ads never reach the ~2.5 seconds needed to form memory, contributing to an estimated \$198B Cost of Dull Media.

Emotion takes time.

System1's Test Your Ad data shows longer ads are less dull because environments that hold attention give emotion the chance to build.

The problem is over-allocation.

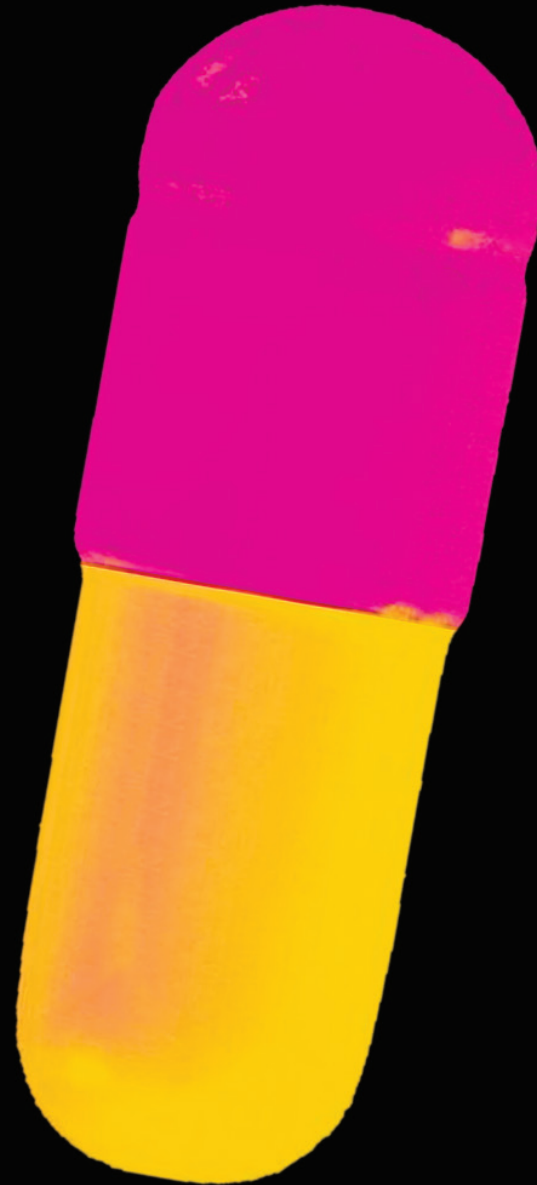
Low-attention media has a role, but when it dominates budgets, ads lose the time needed to build brands while higher-attention formats remain under-used.

**THE
CURE
FOR DULL**



4

THE
CREATIVE CURE
FOR
DULL



THE
CURE
FOR **DULL**

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THE CURE STARTS WITH CREATIVITY

Showmanship generates the feeling and attention that make advertising work.

Dull rarely starts with media allocation. And it doesn't start with measurement either.

It starts with a lack of showmanship.

In *Lemon* and *Look out*, Orlando Wood identified a set of creative features consistently linked to stronger emotional response: human stories, humor, music, cultural reference points and distinctive brand devices. These are the hallmarks of advertising that feels alive.

They reflect a more right-brained style of creativity. One that focuses on people, relationships and shared moments. When these features are present, advertising is more likely to generate feeling and capture attention.

Feeling drives fame, and it's feeling that creates memory.

The evidence is clear.

In *The Creative Dividend*, System1 and Effie showed that creative quality, expressed through emotion, distinctiveness and showmanship, explains the majority of campaign business effects alongside media support.

Creativity is not decoration. It is a multiplier.

Strong ideas make media more productive. Fame travels further. Memories form faster. Brand effects compound.

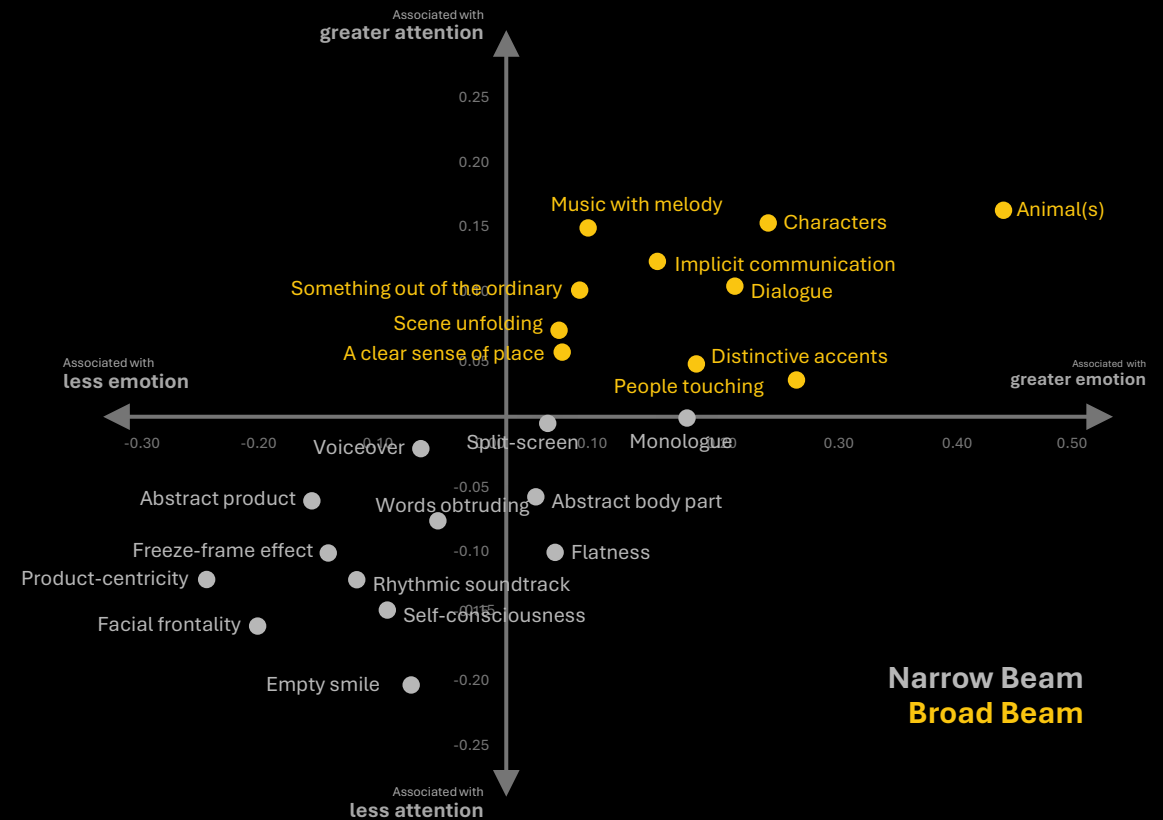
Treating dull advertising with more media is like prescribing painkillers for a broken bone.

You might dull the symptoms. But you haven't fixed the problem.

The cure starts with stronger creative foundations.

SHOWMANSHIP CAPTURES ATTENTION & DRIVES EMOTION

Feeling drives Fame



Narrow Beam
Broad Beam

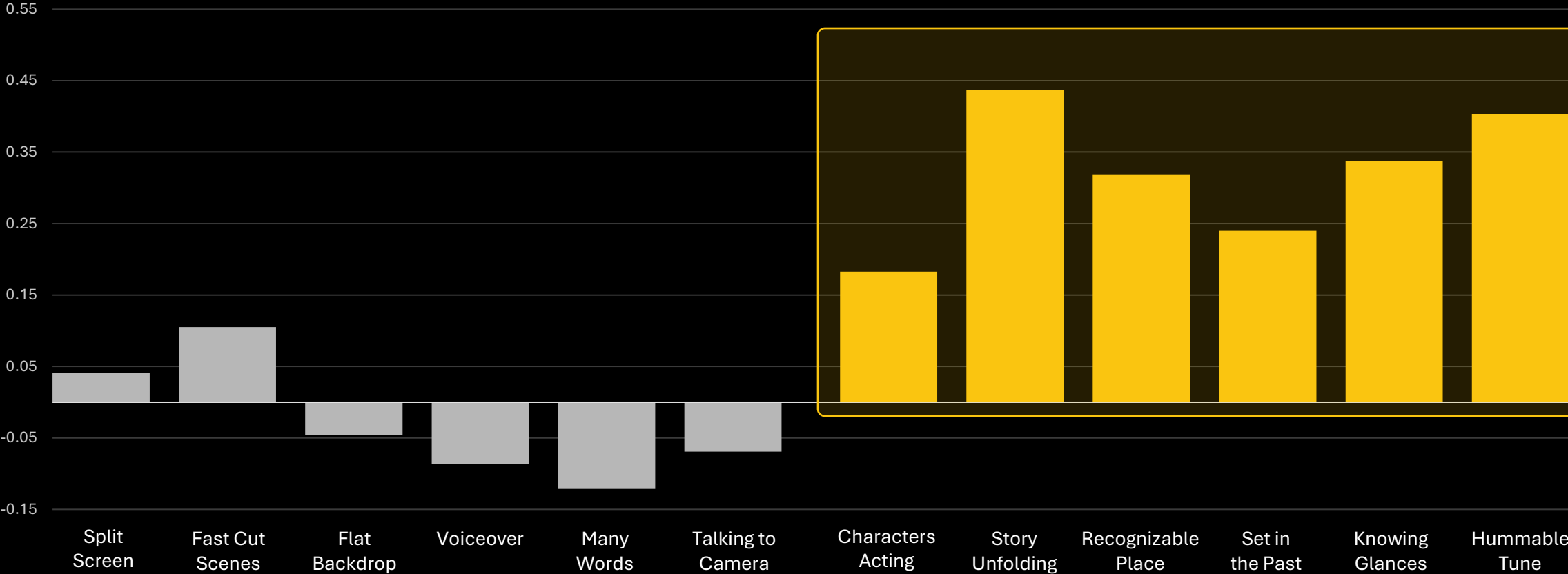
Source: *Look Out* by Orlando Wood. Fig. 36. This graph shows the Correlation between presence of feature and emotional response (System1 Star rating) horizontal axis and between presence of feature and Creative Attention Score (TVision) vertical axis.

Base: 195 US TV ads airing Spring/Summer 2020 monitored / tested by TVision and System1.

SHOWMANSHIP CURES DULL. SALESMANSHIP FEEDS IT

Storytelling, music with melody and drama and human connection generate feeling, while voiceovers, words on screen and flat testimonials often drain it away.

CREATIVE FEATURES | CORRELATIONS WITH CURING DULL



SHOWMANSHIP NEEDS TIME TO WORK

Longer formats encourage showmanship. Short formats often default to salesmanship.



THE FIVE PILLARS FOR TREATING DULL

Creative features that work, as evidenced by real-world examples.



STORYTELLING



DRAMA



MELODY



HUMOR



**FLUENT
DEVICES**

STORYTELLING IS THE STRONGEST CURE FOR DULL

Emotion rarely appears on its own. It emerges when something happens to someone.

Emotion rarely appears in a vacuum. It emerges when something happens to someone.

In **Lemon**, Orlando Wood shows that the most effective advertising presents a scene unfolding with people inside it.

A beginning, a development and a resolution.

This structure engages the brain's broad, right-hemisphere attention, which is tuned to context, relationships and change over time.

When an ad tells a story rather than making a claim, viewers start to anticipate what happens next. Curiosity forms. Emotional stakes appear. And when the story resolves positively, that feeling transfers to the brand.

Storytelling gives emotion time and structure to build. Even difficult emotions can work if the narrative resolves with happiness.

Without story, advertising often collapses into explanation.

Product shots, claims and demonstrations may inform.

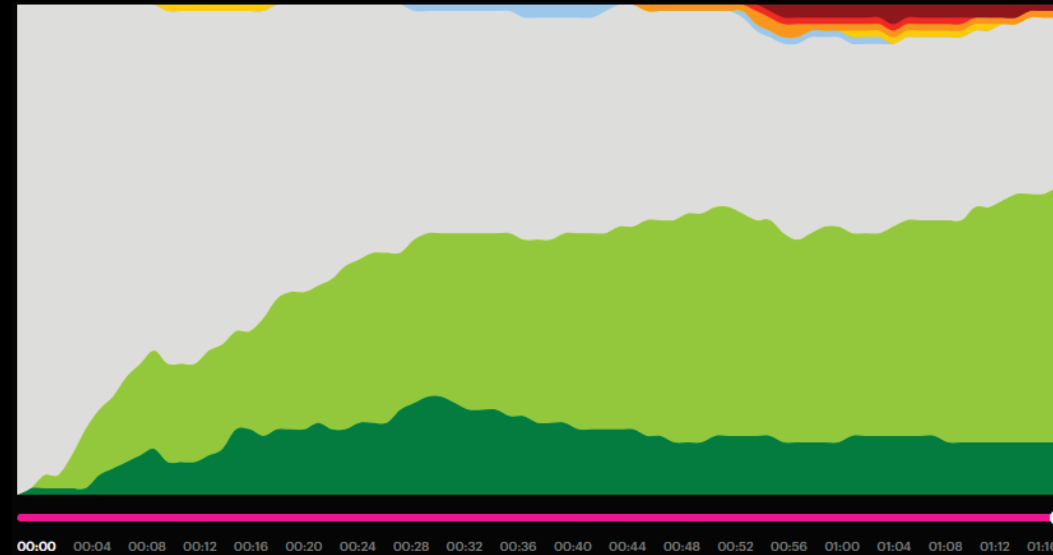
But they rarely move people.





KFC TURNS THE COLONEL'S ORIGIN INTO ENTERTAINMENT, USING EXAGGERATION AND STORYTELLING TO DEFEAT DULL.

FaceTrace Emotional Response



Obsession

76 secs



23% Dull Rating

35% Dull Rating
Fast Food

4.7 Star Rating
Strong

1.41 Spike Rating
Exceptional

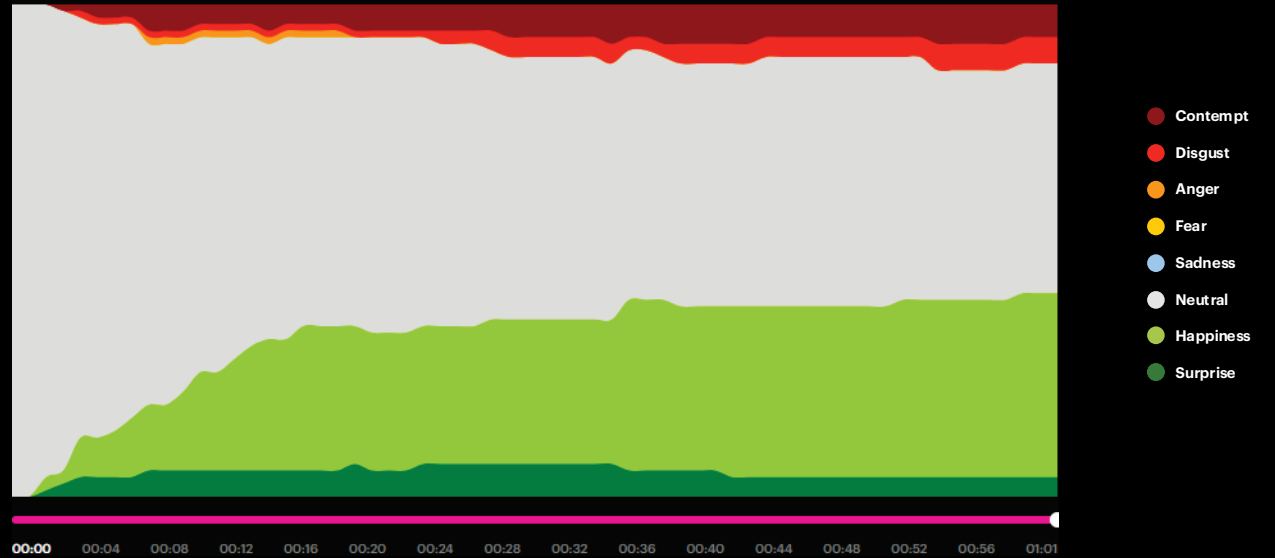
[Click for Report](#)



STORY, CHARACTER AND COMEDY COLLIDE IN IRN-BRU'S 'MADE FOR GIRDERS'



FaceTrace Emotional Response



Made for Girders

61 secs



16% Dull Rating

41% Dull Rating
Soft Drinks

56% Amusement

5.9 Star Rating
Exceptional

1.78 Spike Rating
Exceptional

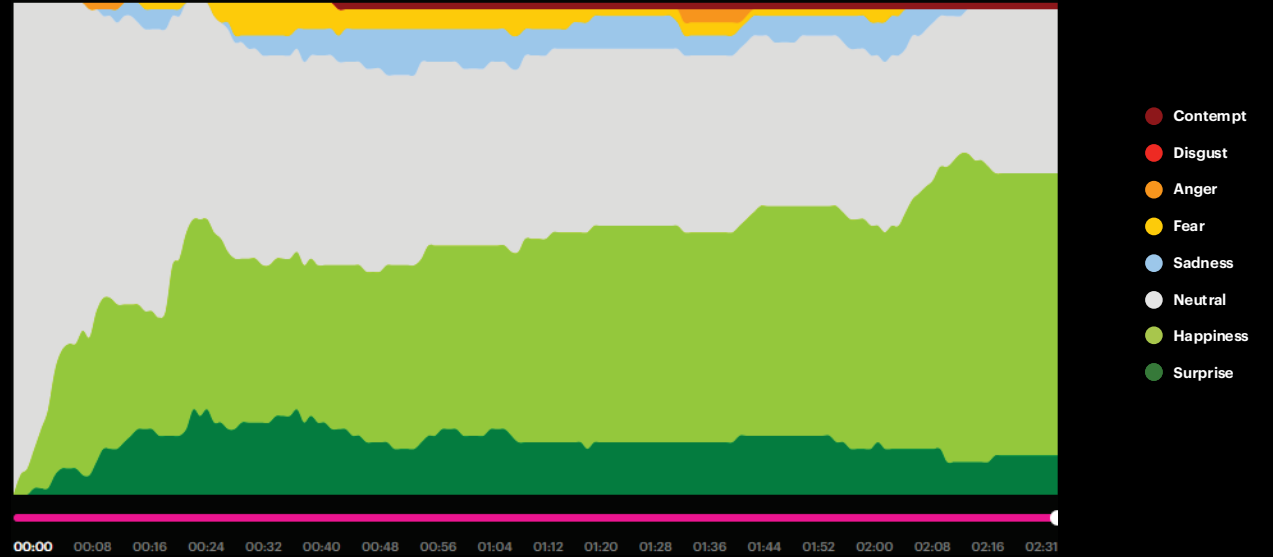
[Click for Report](#)



INTERMARCHÉ LETS THE AUDIENCE SEE THE TRUTH FIRST, TURNING THE DELAYED REVEAL INTO EMPATHY THROUGH STORYTELLING.



FaceTrace Emotional Response



Intermarché

Unloved
153 secs



19% Dull Rating

44% Dull Rating
Supermarkets

5.0 Star Rating
Exceptional

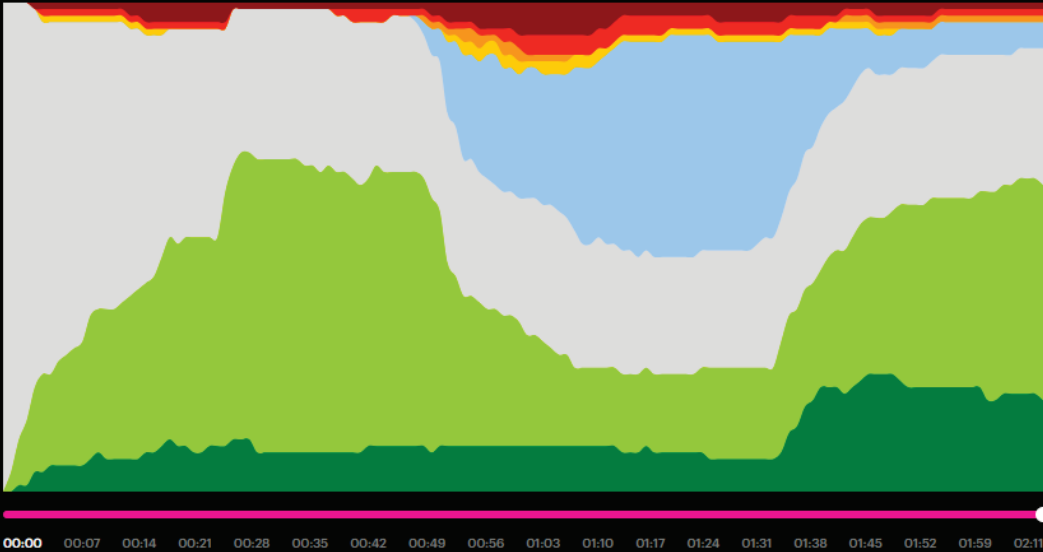
[Click for Report](#)



UBER REJECTS CATEGORY FUNCTION, TURNING THE PRODUCT INTO THE CATALYST FOR ROMANCE.



FaceTrace Emotional Response



- Contempt
- Disgust
- Anger
- Fear
- Sadness
- Neutral
- Happiness
- Surprise

Uber

There are Drivers in Your Area

131 secs



28% Dull Rating

50% Dull Rating
Mobile Apps

1.37 Spike Rating
Exceptional

[Click for Report](#)

DRAMA LIVES BETWEEN PEOPLE

The most powerful signals in advertising are often the ones that are never spoken.

Some of the most powerful moments in advertising are never said out loud.

Orlando Wood calls this **betweenness**. The subtle signals exchanged between people. A glance. A smile. A shared moment that reveals the relationship between characters and creates drama.

Humans are wired to read these cues. We instinctively interpret facial expressions, gestures and social dynamics. When advertising captures these moments, viewers don't just watch the ad.

They participate in it, filling in the meaning themselves.

This kind of communication is emotionally rich because it invites interpretation rather than instruction. It shows connection instead of explaining it.

Modern advertising has gradually replaced these signals with voiceovers and monologues that speak directly at the viewer. But one-way communication rarely creates emotional involvement.

Drama restores the social dimension of advertising. It reminds us that brands live in human contexts, not product demonstrations.

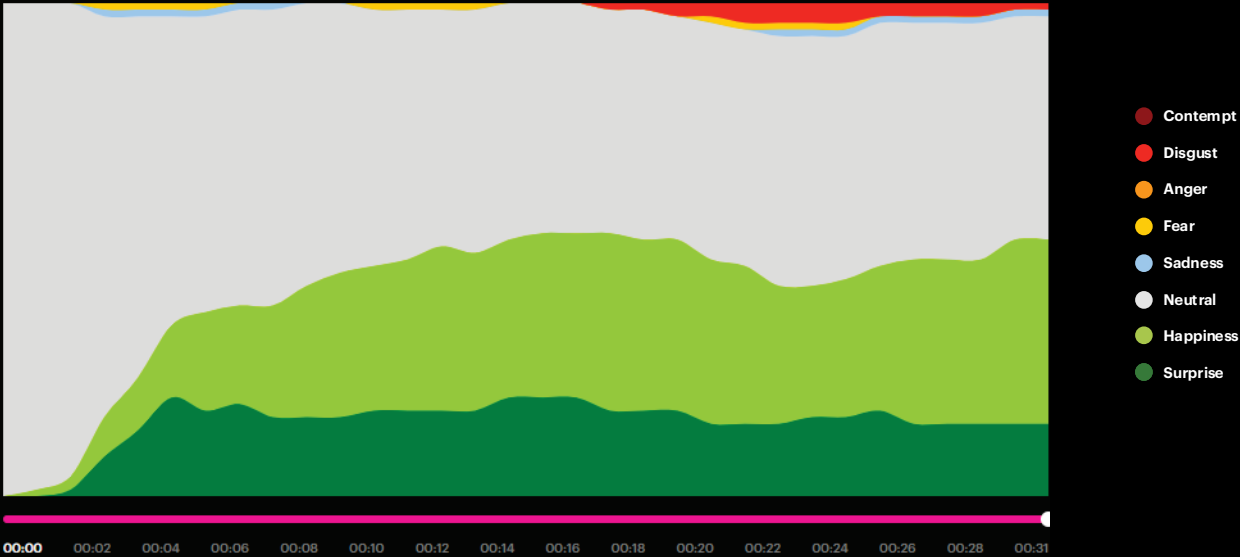




AMAZON'S 'MEET CUTE CHAOS' PROVES MEANING DOESN'T NEED DIALOGUE. FAMILIAR HIGH-SCHOOL TROPES AND TEEN MOVIE CUES DO THE WORK.



FaceTrace Emotional Response



Meet Cute Chaos

31 secs



36% Dull Rating

48% Dull Rating
Retail

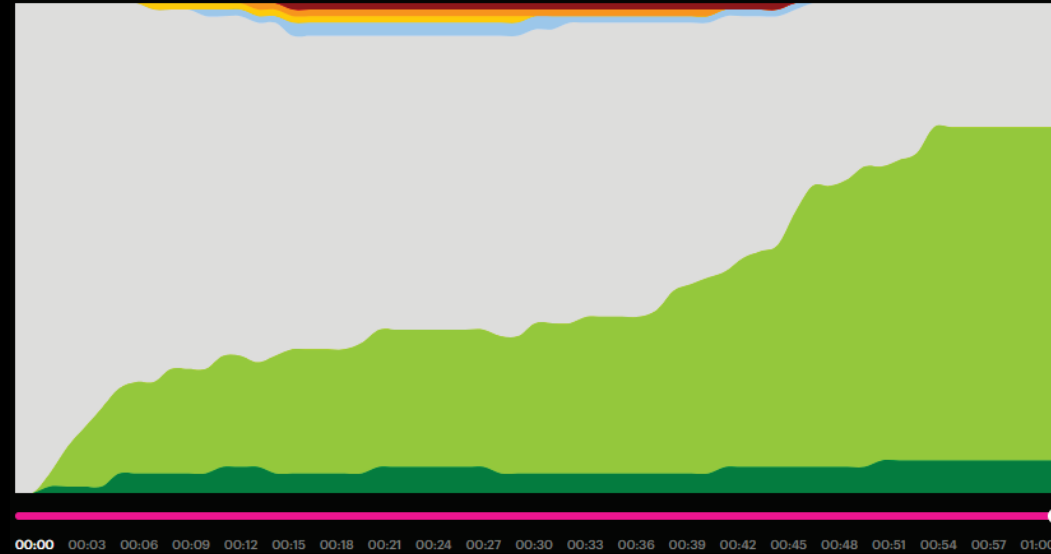
3.1 Star Rating
Good

[Click for Report](#)



CADBURY'S 'GARAGE' USES EXPLANATION WITH RESTRAINT, LETTING BETWEENNESS MISLEAD THE AUDIENCE BEFORE THE REVEAL.

FaceTrace Emotional Response



- Contempt
- Disgust
- Anger
- Fear
- Sadness
- Neutral
- Happiness
- Surprise



Garage
60 secs



22% Dull Rating

30% Dull Rating
Candy

5.9 Star Rating
Exceptional

1.20 Spike Rating
Strong

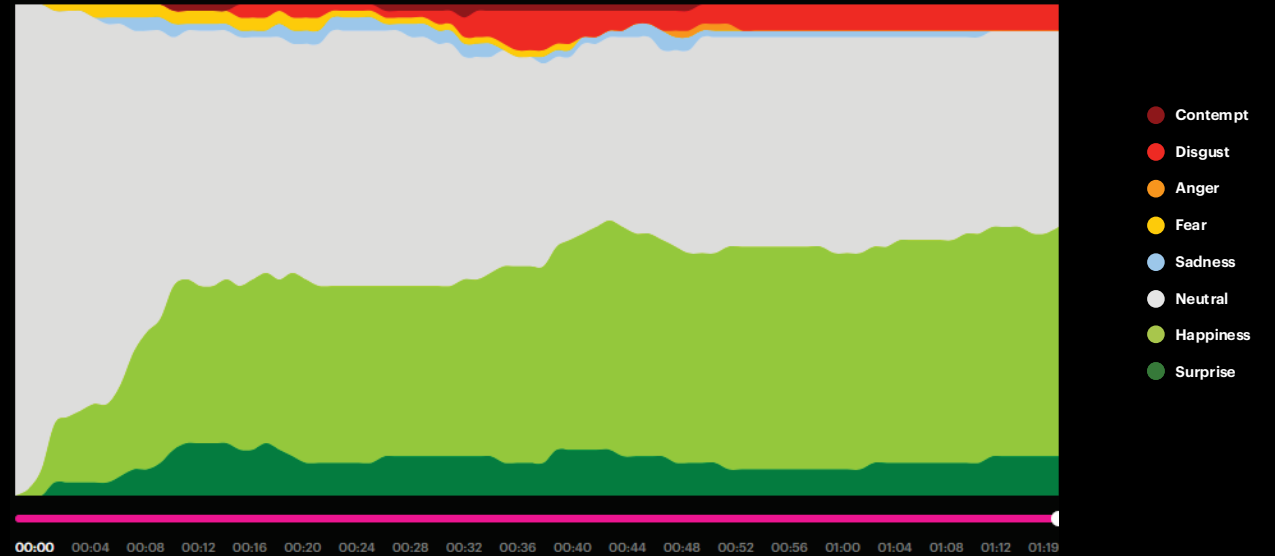
[Click for Report](#)



ARDENNES-ETAPE LETS US EXPERIENCE THE TRIP ALONGSIDE FRIENDS, TURNING MOMENTS INTO EMOTION.



FaceTrace Emotional Response



Vriendenweekend

79 secs

24% Dull Rating

43% Dull Rating
Retail

4.0 Star Rating
Strong

[Click for Report](#)



MELODY IS THE TONIC TO CREATE FEELING

Melody is one of the fastest ways to generate feeling, especially when time is short.

Music with melody is one of advertising's most efficient emotional tools.

In *Lemon*, Orlando Wood identifies melody as a key right-brain creative feature. A tune signals mood instantly, giving viewers emotional cues that help them interpret a scene and feel its meaning.

Unlike words, music doesn't persuade. It moves.

A melody can turn an ordinary moment into something joyful, nostalgic or uplifting within seconds.

That speed matters. In shorter formats where storytelling time is limited, music becomes even more valuable. It can establish emotional tone immediately and carry feeling across even brief executions.

Music also strengthens memory. Distinctive melodies and sonic cues can become long-term brand assets, reconnecting emotion to the brand whenever they are heard again.

Yet modern advertising often replaces melody with rhythm or background noise. Energy replaces emotion.

Melody brings the feeling back fast.

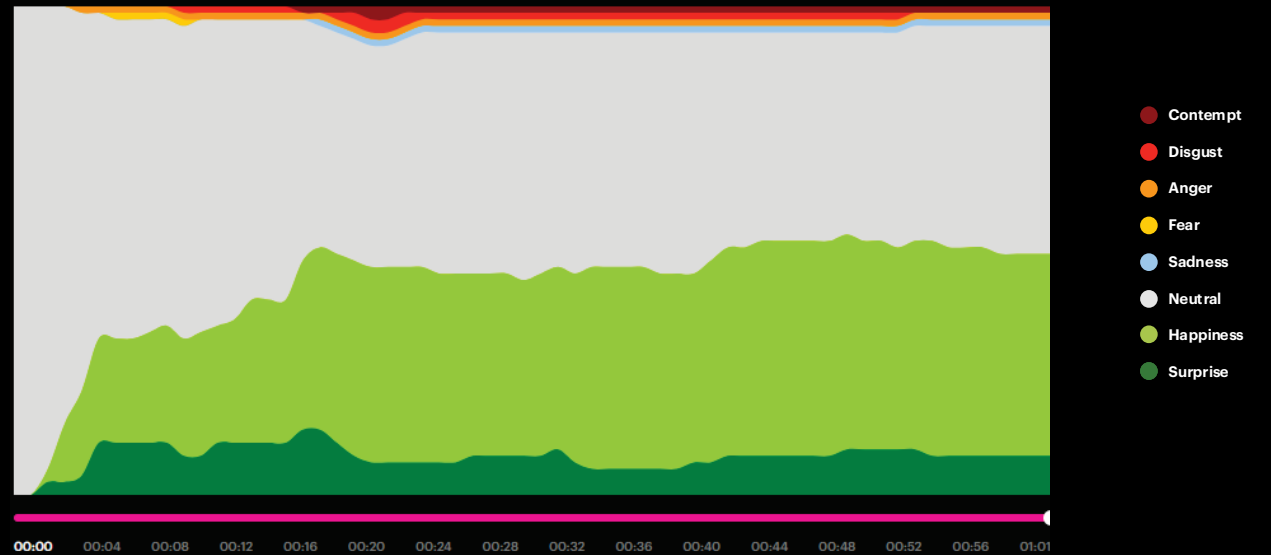




PAYPAL TWISTS A FLEETWOOD MAC CLASSIC, USING A FAMILIAR MELODY TO CREATE INSTANT MEMORABILITY.



FaceTrace Emotional Response



Pay Your Own Way 61 secs



29% Dull Rating

51% Dull Rating
Consumer Credit

3.3 Star Rating
Good

1.34 Spike Rating
Exceptional

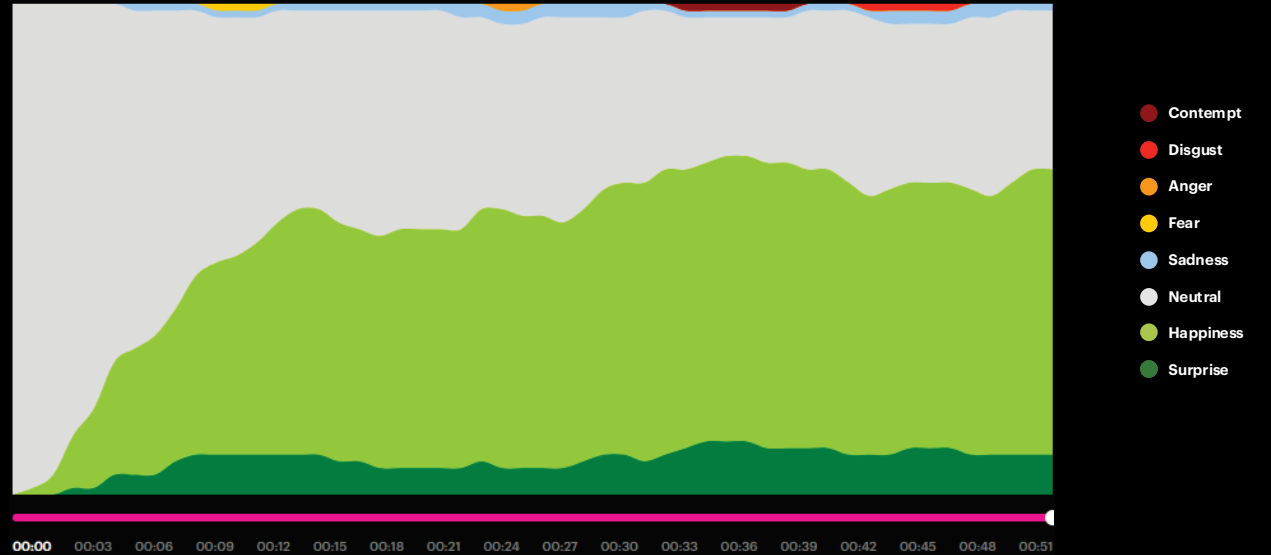
[Click for Report](#)



CALVÉ PINDAKAAS USES MUSIC TO TRIGGER NOSTALGIA, CREATING EMOTION IN SECONDS.



FaceTrace Emotional Response



Calvé Pindakaas
51 secs



20% Dull Rating

39% Dull Rating
Condiments & Spreads

5.9 Star Rating
Exceptional

1.53 Spike Rating
Exceptional

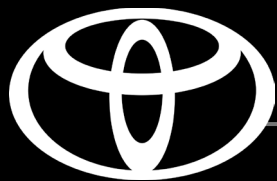
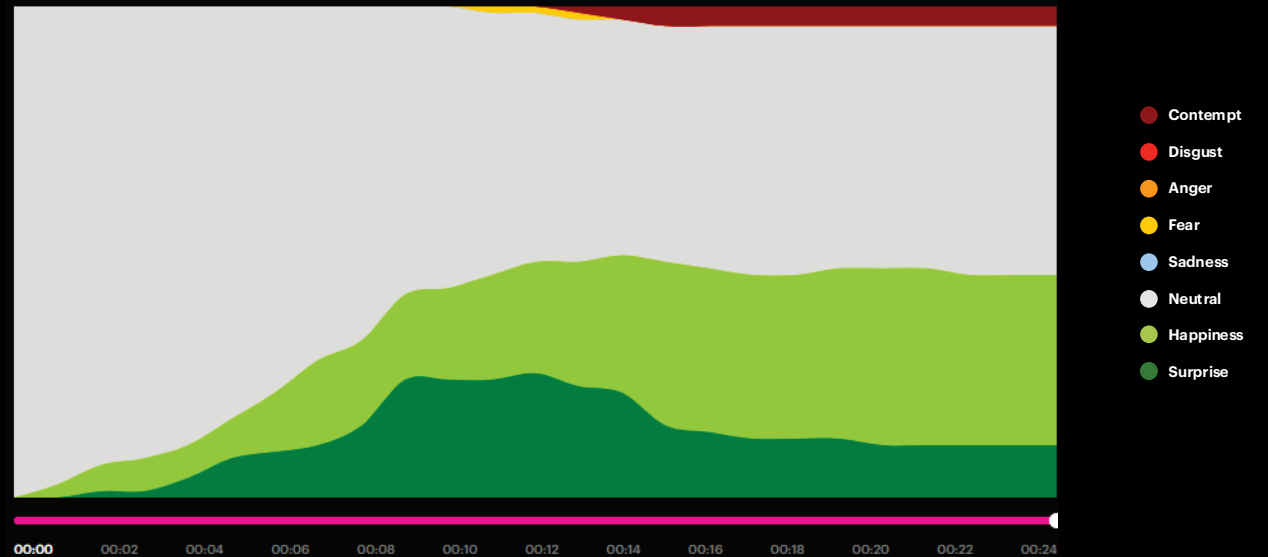
[Click for Report](#)



TOYOTA TURNS DRIVING INTO A FEELING, USING MUSIC TO CREATE A PEAK-END IN WHAT HAS BECOME A DULL CATEGORY.



FaceTrace Emotional Response



My Toyota is Fantastic

24 secs

35% Dull Rating

49% Dull Rating
Cars

3.8 Star Rating
Good

1.23 Spike Rating
Strong

[Click for Report](#)



HUMOR HOOKS ATTENTION ON SHORT FORM AND HOLDS IT ON LONG FORM

Humor creates feeling and sticks, working effectively across formats.

Humor is a powerful creative device because it thrives on tension, surprise and contradiction. It invites people in, rewards attention and makes the experience enjoyable.

When used well, humor does more than land a joke in the moment. It creates positive emotional associations that stay with people, making the brand easier to remember and more likely to be chosen in the future.

Without it, work risks becoming flat, literal and easy to ignore.



AMUSEMENT IS THE ANTIDOTE

Amusement is showmanship in action and one of the most potent ways to create feeling.

Humor is showmanship at its best.

Orlando Wood describes amusement as one of advertising's most powerful emotional triggers. And it works for a simple reason: humor involves the audience.

A joke lands when people recognize the situation, read the characters and spot the twist. The viewer completes the moment themselves. That participation creates feeling.

Great advertising humor rarely comes from lines alone. It emerges from the very features that define showmanship: story and human connection. A scene unfolds. Characters interact. A glance, a reaction, a misunderstanding.

The audience sees the moment before the character does.

Often the humor comes from exaggeration, a familiar situation pushed slightly too far.

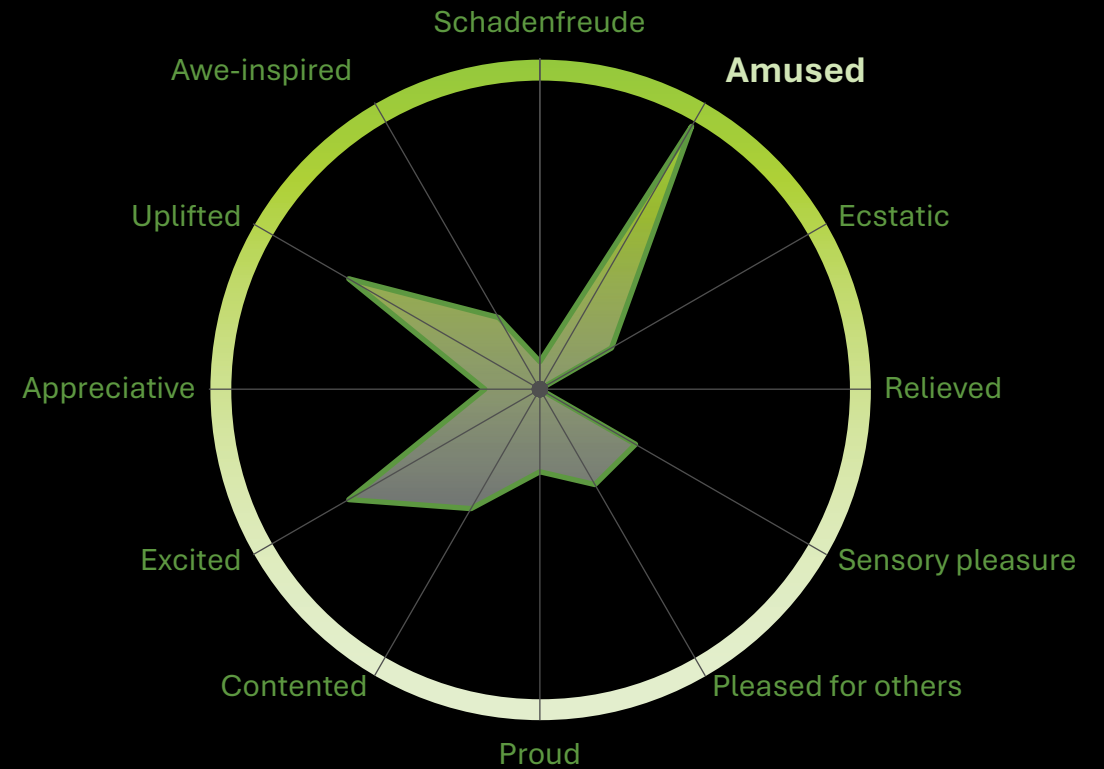
Music can amplify the moment too, adding timing, surprise or emotional lift.

Together these elements turn advertising into entertainment.

And when advertising entertains, dull disappears.

TYPES OF HAPPINESS

Average Percentage Difference Between Dull Quartile 1 & 4



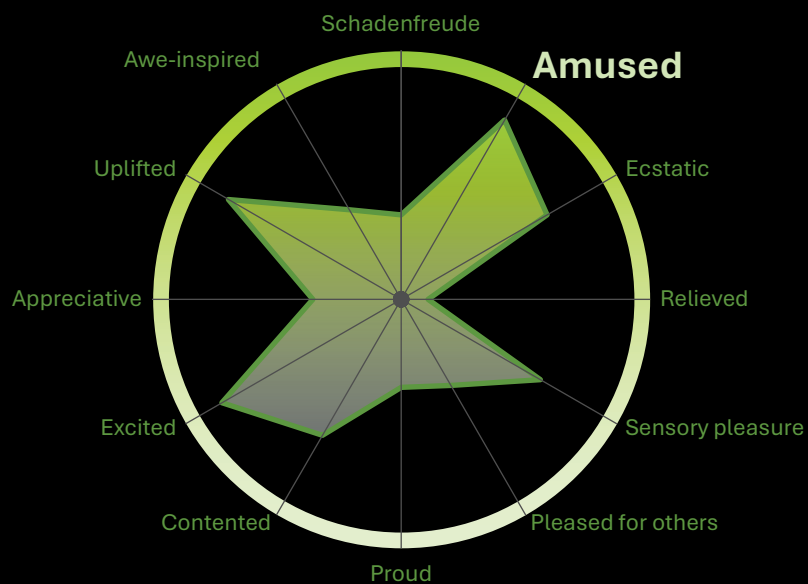
AMUSEMENT IS A MULTI-CHANNEL ANTIDOTE FOR DULL

Across long-form and short-form content, amusement defeats dull.

CORRELATIONS FOR ANTI-DULL

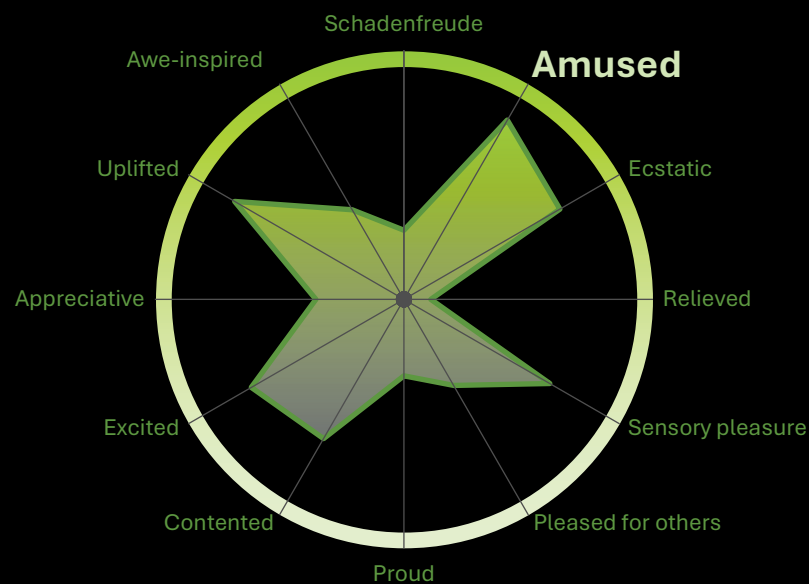
SHORT FORM

(05-20 sec)



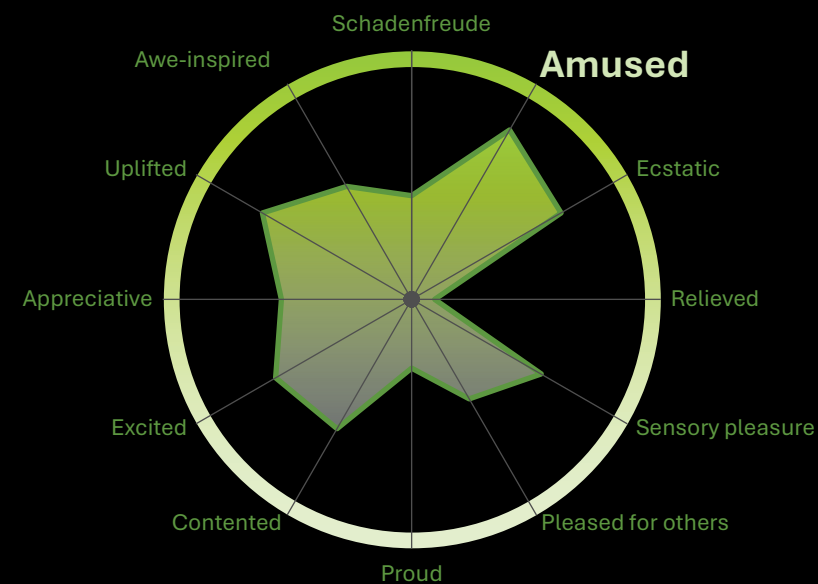
MEDIUM FORM

(20-40 sec)



LONG FORM

(40-60 sec)



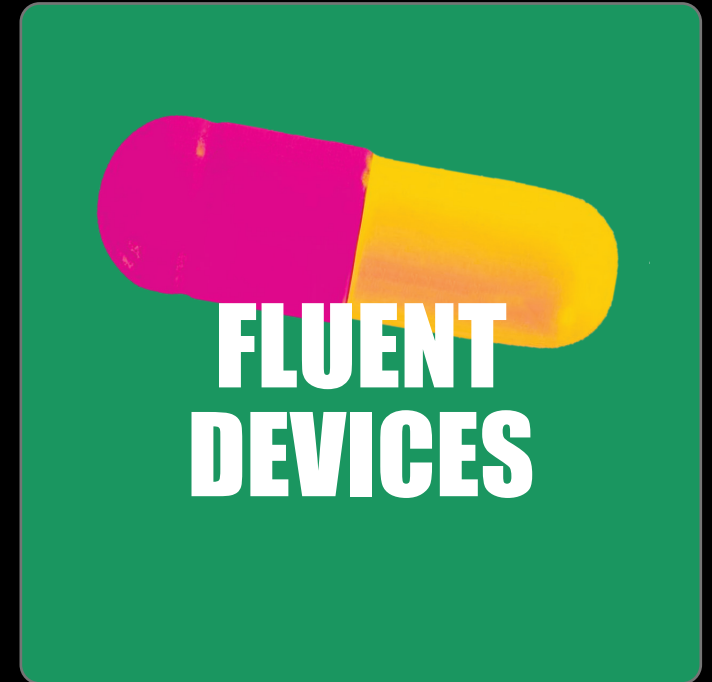
FLUENT DEVICES MAKE BRANDS IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE

Familiarity makes fluent devices emotionally powerful.

People naturally favor things that are easy to recognize and process. Fluent devices such as characters, symbols, sounds or styles act as mental shortcuts, helping brands come to mind quickly and effortlessly. They can work in five seconds, and they can sustain impact over 60 seconds or more.

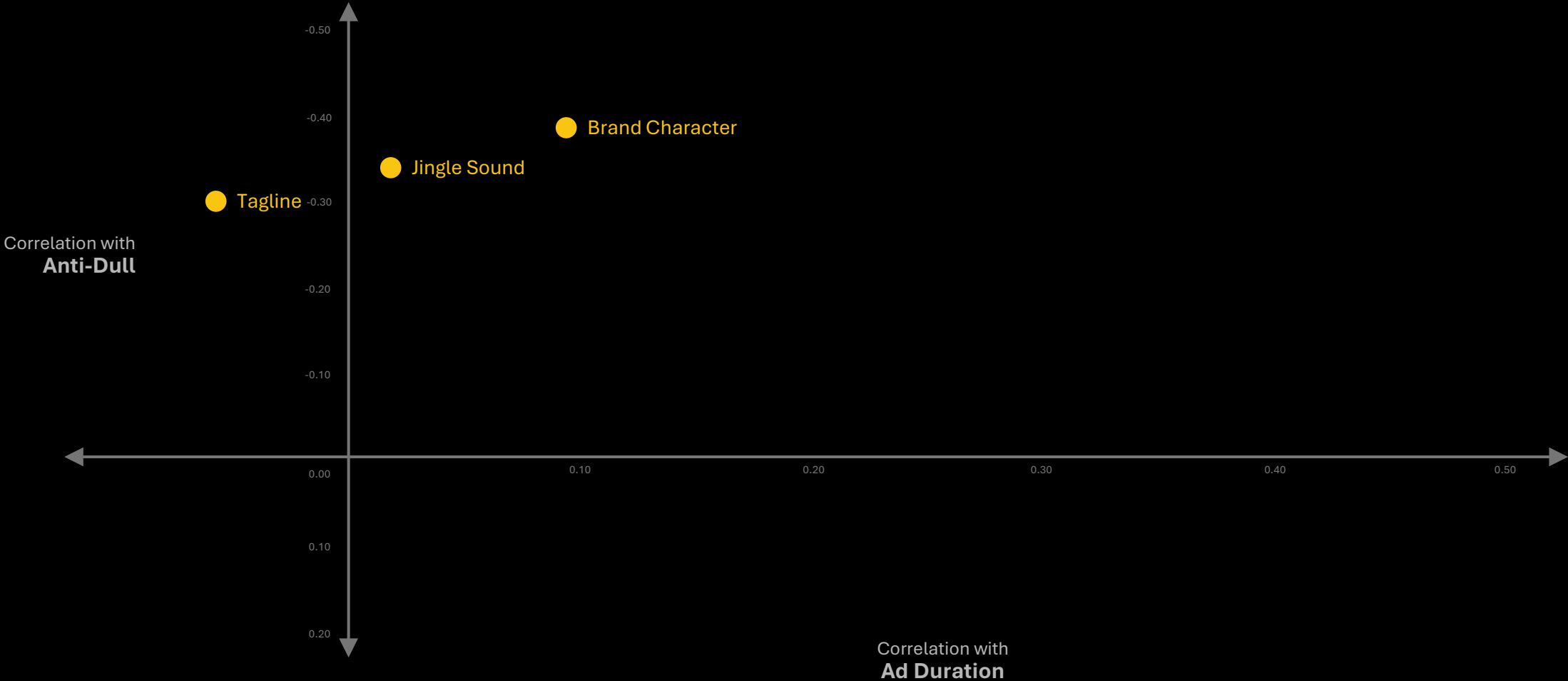
Used consistently, these devices build familiarity and emotional connection over time, making decision-making faster and more intuitive.

Without them, brands rely too heavily on explanation and persuasion, and struggle to stay memorable.



SHORT ADS NEED FLUENT DEVICES

Characters, jingles and taglines help shorter formats generate feeling and avoid drifting into dull.



CURING DULL ON SHORT FORM REQUIRES INSTANT GRATIFICATION

Familiar brand assets & music provide this.

m&m's



amazon



Lay's



Star Rating
Strong

[Click for Report](#)



Spike Rating
Exceptional



Fast Fluency Rating
Exceptional



Neutrality Rating



Star Rating
Good

[Click for Report](#)



Spike Rating
Strong



Fast Fluency Rating
Exceptional

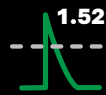


Neutrality Rating



Star Rating
Strong

[Click for Report](#)



Spike Rating
Exceptional



Fast Fluency Rating
Exceptional



Neutrality Rating

4 THE ANTIDOTE

More media won't fix dull ideas.

Showmanship creates the emotion that makes advertising noticed, remembered and effective.

If you compress the format, you compress the feeling.

Short ads push creativity toward salesmanship instead of showmanship.

When nothing happens, nothing is felt.

Storytelling gives emotion the structure it needs to build and stick to the brand.

The strongest signals are often silent.

Human interaction and shared moments generate emotion that monologues and voiceovers rarely achieve.

Melody is the shortcut to emotion.

A distinctive melody can establish feeling in seconds and anchor it to the brand.

**THE
CURE
FOR DULL**





YOUR ANTI-DULL PRESCRIPTION

2 x Positivity Pills

Prioritize positive emotions like Happiness and Surprise. They are the most reliable drivers of memory, momentum and brand growth.

2 x Creative Measurement Methods

Measure emotion properly. Quantitative emotional measurement reveals dull, while focus groups add context. Use both together to strengthen creative decisions.

A Balanced Media Diet

Low-attention formats have a role, but over-allocation starves brand building. Rebalance toward environments where attention lasts.

5 x Showmanship Pills

You can't media-buy your way out of dull. Showmanship creates feeling. Lean on storytelling, drama, melody and humor when time allows, and melody and fluent devices when it doesn't.

**THE
CURE
FOR DULL**

**WHY SPEND BIG ON A DULL IDEA?
TAKE THE ANTIDOTE TO DULL.
CHOOSE SHOWMANSHIP.**

Orlando Wood



APPLY THE CURE

Benchmark Your Creative with **Test Your Ad Pro**.

Knowing the cure for dull is one thing...

...applying it consistently is another.

Test Your Ad Pro shows how your advertising performs emotionally compared to thousands of campaigns across your category.

See where your work sits on the scale of dull.

Understand the emotional benchmark you need to beat.

And learn from the campaigns already cutting through.

The cure for dull already exists.

Test Your Ad Pro helps you apply it.

