

How Nestlé drove creative effectiveness through analyzing platform best practice

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Details the results of a revamping of Nestlé's global marketing best practices in partnership with CreativeX, Google and Meta.

- Nestlé, which operates in 196 markets globally and manages more than 2,000 brands and many external partners, decided to completely revamp its 50-year-old marketing practices in 2020.
- With its partners, the company embarked on a multi-year, multi-step program called "Brand Building the Nestlé Way" to achieve 100% integrated communication by 2023.
- One example of the work was a Marketing Mix Modelling (MMM) project involving Meta, MMM partner Ebiquity, and Nestlé, which broke campaigns down into different executional variables, measuring the impact on sales, return on ad spend (ROAS), the effectiveness of creative best practices, and how creative performed against three media levers.

Why it matters

There are multiple levers of creative effectiveness for brands, but they haven't often been specifically identified, especially on a global scale. Understanding these levers, especially on the two biggest digital advertising platforms, is essential to discerning what makes creative effective.

Takeaways

- Targeting tends to be emphasized when it comes to campaign optimization, despite being 1/12 as effective as creative optimization, according to research. However, advances in computer vision and machine learning make it possible to analyze creatives at scale and map creative elements to business outcomes.

- To increase creative effectiveness on Meta technologies and YouTube, Nestlé identified nine creative best practices of its own, called “Creative Hygiene principles”, which were proven to deliver impact for its brands. Nestlé developed the principles by first tapping into the best practice insights in Meta’s Brilliant Basics and YouTube’s ABCDs.
- Creative effectiveness can be maximized by leveraging insights from larger campaign databases against upcoming campaigns; in Nestlé’s case, it leveraged CreativeX’s technology to automate and measure adherence to its creative best practices.
- Test-and-learn is key to success: Nestlé confirmed that adherence to the Creative Hygiene principles delivered significant performance gains, finding, for instance, that its Meta campaigns with high creative best practice adherence, or high Creative Quality Score (CQS), had +66% higher ROAS vs. low adherence, or low CQS.
- CreativeX’s data shows that, on average, only 20% of brands’ creatives meet its standards of excellence, so just two in every ten creatives are running at maximum efficiency.

Mapping Nestlé’s creative effectiveness journey

With over 150 years of experience building billion-dollar brands, creativity and storytelling are key ingredients in Nestlé’s position as the world’s largest food and beverage company. Active in 196 markets around the world, with more than 2,000 brands and a multitude of external partners, the company took on a monumental challenge in 2020 when it decided to completely revamp its 50-year old marketing practices.

With more than 50% of its media investment now on digital – and accelerating – Nestlé needed a way to empower its global brands and agency partners to produce creative that worked in a way that was digital- and audience-first. In 2020, the company launched “Brand Building the Nestlé Way”: a multi-year, multi-step program that would transform its creative process and upskill its global organization and agency partners to produce more effective creative. The goal? Achieve 100% integrated communication by 2023.

Partnering with both Google and Meta to understand what creative choices would have the largest impact on brands and businesses and also to examine the efficacy of its media and media investments, Nestlé identified a set of creative elements that should be present in its digital content across Facebook and Instagram. Nestlé called them “Creative Hygiene principles”, and they included advice such as “brand early” (brand or logo present from first second), because it delivers better ad and brand recall.

Nestlé needed a single solution to centralize and scale how it tracks and measures adherence to its Creative Hygiene principles and rally its marketers around a single point of truth that measured the impact of these changes.

Nestlé leveraged CreativeX’s technology to achieve this objective. CreativeX’s pre-flight creative measurement tool allowed Nestlé’s global team of brand builders to immediately validate upcoming campaigns against Nestlé’s Creative Hygiene principles and its in-flight creative measurement tool measured their adoption in real-time and historically, looking at how adherence impacts media efficiency and content effectiveness. Today, around 70% of Nestlé’s ad spend with Meta technologies is measured through CreativeX’s platform.¹ The company is on track to achieve its 100% integrated communication goal by 2023.

The study: “Brand-Building the Nestlé Way” is an early success

The advertising industry has reams of data that connect high-quality creative with commercial impact. Research demonstrates that creative is the largest contributor to sales uplift at 56%² and a 12x advertising profitability multiplier³ – yet it's the least understood part of the marketing mix. Despite having almost 1/12th the impact of creative quality, targeting has been the most popular way to optimize campaigns. But thanks to significant advances in computer vision and machine learning, marketers can now analyze their creatives at scale – mapping creative elements to business outcomes rather than relying just on targeting optimizations.

This technology identifies, tags, and creates structured data for elements present in a creative – e.g. human present, product present, brand mentioned in audio, and so forth. Leveraging this tech, CreativeX enables brands like Nestlé to measure adherence to its Creative Hygiene principles across its organization and all of its agency partners. In this instance, through marrying performance data (available on each platform) and creative data (extracted using CreativeX's technology), CreativeX was able to validate the impact of Nestlé's Creative Hygiene principles – at an aggregate, cross-platform level.

CreativeX ran a regression analysis on one million ads exploring the impact of the Creative Quality Score on performance metrics, such as ad recall. Calculating the Creative Quality Score is simple: [CQS %] equals the number of best practices applied / total number of best practices tracked. This analysis was redone using Nestlé's data only. CreativeX found two statistically significant findings that further demonstrate the impact of Nestlé's Creative hygiene measures. All findings were to a 99% confidence level.

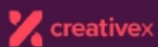
1. Consumers watched ads for longer:

Every 10% increase in Nestlé's Creative Quality Score is associated with a 10.9% decline in Cost Per Completed View (CPCV), meaning more people watched Nestlé's ads to completion, and Nestlé paid less for them, since platforms charge ad views through completed views.

How improving creative quality impacted Nestlé's video spend



● AGGREGATED CPCV ● NESTLE'S CPCV



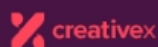
2. More consumers remembered Nestlé's ads:

Every 10% increase in Nestlé's Creative Quality Score was associated with a 2.1% increase in Ad Recall, meaning more people remembered and recalled Nestlé's ads, which is essential for growing mental availability.

How improving creative quality impacted Nestlé's Ad Recall



● AGGREGATED AD RECALL ● NESTLÉ'S AD RECALL



Meta then commissioned a Marketing Mix Modelling (MMM) project with Nestlé and MMM partner Ebiquity to break Nestlé's campaigns down into different execution variables. The impact on sales ROAS and effectiveness of the creative best practices and three media levers (reach, duration, and optimization goal) were measured. The Creative Hygiene measures for Meta technologies include, but are not limited to:

1. Brand early: brand or logo present from first second
2. Optimize for sound off: supers/captions/subtitles
3. Frame for mobile: 4:5 for feed, 9:16 for stories, 16:9 for in-stream
4. Optimal video length: under 10 seconds for feed, excluding in-stream

The analysis showed that campaigns with higher creative best practice adherence (or high CQS) had +66% higher ROAS vs. lower adherence (or low CQS). For every dollar spent, Nestlé saw 66% more returns on the

dollar from campaigns containing these creative guidelines.⁴

As Nestlé continues to ramp up its spend on digital and Meta technologies, the incremental efficiencies gained by increasing adoption of its Creative Hygiene principles are expected to quickly become effectiveness gains.

In short, Nestlé recognized that huge amounts of money would be spent on advertising and not have the intended impact. Early signs clearly indicate that “Brand Building the Nestlé Way” is preventing such wastage and revolutionizing the way their brand builders deploy effective creative.

Increase creative effectiveness across your platforms

In this new era of advertising, brands need to focus on producing the right content for the right channels. Repurposing a TV ad or press ad into a social or banner ad will not deliver the required results. Just as TV isn't visual radio and radio isn't audible print, social media (which now attracts more investment than linear TV),⁵ is a medium with its own rules. Producing work for Meta technologies or YouTube requires specialist skills and understanding of those platforms.

But it's not happening. There is a huge delta in advertising effectiveness. Vast amounts of money are being spent on advertising that does not have the intended impact. CreativeX's data shows on average that 20% of brands' creatives meet its standards of excellence. In other words, just two in every ten creatives are running at maximum efficiency.

To help advertisers create more effective campaigns on their platforms, Google, Meta, and Twitter have all developed creative principles shown, for example, to drive a 17% brand lift and a 30% sales lift (YouTube),⁶ deliver a 2.2x increase in ROI (Twitter),⁷ and double effectiveness (Meta).⁸ These best practices and an analysis of the company's creatives have helped Nestlé shift from TV-first advertising to digital and audience-first advertising. They could help other brands too.

1. Start with best practices from the experts

Get started by looking at platform best-practice guides for the channels you advertise upon, like YouTube ABCD's or Meta's Brilliant Basics. Consider how these can be applied globally and how they might be tailored or weighted by market or brand. Then build on these guidelines with proven internal creative drivers that you have statistically proven work for your brand, such as maximizing branded mentions.

2. Track meaningful metrics

Shift focus from using media metrics or outcomes metrics – such as viewability and engagement – to using more business-driven KPIs, such as sales and brand lift; this is essential for the effective measurement of digital media. Nestlé proved its Creative Hygiene principles delivered against business KPIs and so used a metric to measure adherence to them.

3. Simplify what you measure

For any significant organizational change, the key is rallying everyone, board included, behind one goal. One of

the keys to Nestlé's success was scaling the CQS, a very simple metric that measured adherence to Nestlé's Creative Hygiene principles. The metric simplified the creative process, letting individual brands know what they needed to include in their creative to maximize opportunities for it to be watched, be listened to, and be remembered.

4. Centralize ownership of creative quality in your marketing organization

Some brands have teams dedicated to maintaining creative excellence across the organization, and this structural approach can be helpful. These teams can coordinate alignment across multiple creative partners and drive internal awareness and responsibility for creative excellence.

5. Lift your CQS

Once you have a benchmark of your content quality through how many best practices your creatives include, you can start driving efficiencies. When building new assets, aim to include as many best practices as appropriate. You might set a CQS goal (such as 80%) for your agency to ensure all creative content meets a brand's minimal standards of excellence. You might want to increase the media spend behind creatives with a high CQS or reduce the creatives in the market that do not meet these guidelines.

Nestlé is not the only brand on this type of effectiveness journey. Brands like Unilever, Renault, Heineken, Mondelēz, and PepsiCo all have custom-built creative best practices that help coordinate thousands of marketers across agencies, internal teams, and 100+ markets to produce more effective creative campaigns. With more than 60% of global ad spend expected to be on digital media in 2022 (up from 50% before the pandemic), producing the right content for the right channels is an effective way to reach, influence, and win new customers.⁹ Recognizing that re-purposing a TV ad or press ad into a social or banner ad will not deliver the required results, these brands and others have also shifted marketing practices to be more digital- and audience-first.

Further reading

WARC Exclusive: [What the best metric in sports analytics tells marketers about ad effectiveness](#)

WARC Opinion: [Six questions brands need to ask about effectiveness – and why they matter](#)

WARC Exclusive: [Five creative effectiveness tips from Kantar's analysis of over 13,000 ads](#)

Sources

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2. Catalina via ARF, 2017
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5. WARC Data, The Investment Gap, 2021
6. Data2Decisions/Twitter AdCompass study, 2018
7. Ekimetrics, Executing for Effect, 2020
8. ThinkWithGoogle, Scrap these 5 creative assumptions for better YouTube ads, 2021
9. Zenith Media, Digital advertising to exceed 60% of global ad spend in 2022, 2021

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Michael Murray is the Assistant Marketing Manager at CreativeX, a company that powers creative excellence for the world's most loved brands. Brands including Unilever, Heineken, Google, Mars, and PepsiCo rely on CreativeX to automatically analyze and benchmark content – across 130 markets and 70 languages – against established best practices for creative quality, brand consistency, compliance, and representation.

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