

ANTI
ULTRA
PROCESSED
PLANNING

**The human made
guide to effective
comms strategy**

**FROM CRAFT MEDIA
LONDON**

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**CHAPTER
01**

**THE
CHEF'S
INTRODUCTION**

THE CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

ABOUT



CRAFT MEDIA LONDON

Craft Media London was founded in 2018 to do the hard thing: sit between media and creative, and join the thinking up. We join great creative thinking with effective media planning and then drive an idea across the whole ecosystem of a business to create impact at every touchpoint.

Eight years on, this gap remains at large; a turbulent macro-economic climate, a culture of 'nowism' and the rapid growth of AI continue to shift the goal-posts of what is perceived as valuable for businesses looking to improve the effectiveness of their communications with potential or existing customers.

This 'cookbook' is a culmination of nearly a decade's worth of Crafty thinking, with thousands of brilliant people and hundreds of interesting clients spanning categories and all corners of the globe. It takes our experiences from focusing on communications strategy across all touchpoints (not just paid media) and provides recipes for how to find clarity in the ultra-processed chaos that is abundant. We hope anyone who picks this cookbook up, or comes across the content in any of its forms finds it helpful in their marketing practice.

WHAT IS **ANTI** ULTRA-PROCESSED PLANNING?

The over-processed nature of planning is a clear parallel to the growing awareness and fight against ultra-processed food and the harm it causes.

Planning has become fast food; mass-produced, pre-packaged and dangerously addictive. Agencies are increasingly outsourcing strategic thinking to automated platforms, producing the same plans, the same logic, the same dull work. Meanwhile, the fundamentals of communication strategy,

human insight, cultural understanding, creative judgement, are being forgotten. Great comms planning is critical to effectiveness. Therefore, it is time to stop microwaving briefs, to start cooking again with fresh protein packed ingredients and to put care back into how dishes are constructed.

With this in mind, how could the fight against ultra-processed planning be anything but a cookbook?

WHY **NOW?**

"The more machines there are to replace men, the more men there will be in society who are nothing but machines."

Louis de Bonald

To be clear, this is not a Luddite crusade against technology. When used alongside human intelligence it is immensely powerful. Craft wouldn't be able to do what it does without it.

As an industry we're in a precarious position. We are feasting on junk without realising where we are headed or the long-term side effects. If we don't start remembering how to think, how to unpack problems with critical thought, we risk collectively forgetting the fundamentals. The recipes, structured thinking, and problem solving that this industry was built upon could become Michelin-star options that only a few ever get to sample.

In the past year alone we have seen a rise in bland plans coming back to us after providing specific and interesting client briefings, only to be told it was the recommendation of a system or machine. Whether or not you are confined to using a tool to answer briefs, it should never preclude critical thought to what is being churned out.

If we at Craft are seeing this, it doesn't take much to imagine the scale elsewhere: average, bland work that shouldn't have seen the light of day. The degradation of human critical thought within our industry is spreading.

THE 'AHA' MOMENT

In October 2025, as we were finalising the chapters for this cookbook, the urgency to publish became clear. Two industry studies from Experian and Forrester appeared in our inboxes revealing a crisis hiding in plain sight.

Forrester's report *The Next-Gen Marketing Platform Imperative* surveyed 310 CMOs and found that 32% now view agency platforms as completely interchangeable. If the focus shifts from investing in humans to investing in technology, where is the radical value creation or trusted point of difference?

Experian's report *'Media Buying in Transition'* surveyed 224 UK and Ireland agencies and found that 85% of respondents believe AI will drive most media decisions by 2030. At the same time, 73% say signal loss (clarity on data) has already made informed decisions harder.

What happens if systems fail though? A cyber-war cripples platforms, or the AI boom experiences a bust like the dot-com bubble? What do you rely on if your workforce has been trained to operate machines rather than think independently?

Neither report says this out loud: we are trying to solve a thinking problem with a purely technological solution. In other words, we're betting everything on ultra-processed planning without considering the side effects.

Racing to meet the needs of the biggest businesses, the industry risks synthetic commoditisation, the same tools, the same data, the same algorithms producing the same potentially dull thinking.

Ultra-processed work may be fine for the world's biggest business, where a majority of their adspend relies on efficiency. But what about the long tail of businesses who need something different? Businesses that want to work with humans as ambitious, intelligent or creatively minded as they are.

Where will they go when there are barely any humans left to ask?

That is why *The Anti-Ultra-Processed Planning Cookbook* exists. Its purpose is to protect and nurture the brilliance of human thought alongside technological advancement. When used together we create more value, for our careers, the businesses we work for and the clients we serve.

BEFORE WE SERVE UP

A very important thank you to the brigade of chefs who contributed to the writing, proof reading, and the design of this cookbook, without you we couldn't have done it:

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**CHAPTER
02**

PEOPLE, NOT AUDIENCES

PEOPLE, NOT AUDIENCES

A ZESTIER WAY IN

To excel in media or advertising, you need a natural interest in people. Uncovering what makes people tick, what influences their choices, and what their content consumption tells you about their thinking.

It is odd that so much of our industry reduces audiences to non-human terminology, using broad demographics, generalisations, or outsourcing understanding to platforms.

Anti-ultra-processed planning isn't about rejecting big data sets or tools. It's about getting under the skin of people's real lives and should always be the starting point for campaign planning. If you simply target 'ABC1 men 25-54' who are 'time poor' and 'like football,' you get mass but also thin, flavourless thinking that yields little depth.

Three fallacies distract from truly understanding the people we want to influence:

- The fallacy of generational 'insight'
- The fallacy of reaching all category buyers every time
- The fallacy of AI targeting

These fallacies are synthetic ingredients that add little nutritional value to the planning process, let alone better work.

**FRESH
THINKING**



THE FALLACY OF GENERATIONAL ‘INSIGHT’

Generational labels do not explain behaviour the way our industry needs them to. People in their twenties do not think, “What would a Gen Z do today?” They respond to economics, technology, culture, pressure, and their current stage of life. Groups bound by shared habits, beliefs, or tastes show far more cohesion than entire generations.

When a brief confidently declares, “the target audience is Gen Z,” alarm bells should ring. That label tells you almost nothing about what matters to them, the tensions they navigate, or what might genuinely move them, or people who think like them who happen to be 30 years older (and actually have the financial ability to buy more).

THE FALLACY OF TARGETING ‘ALL CATEGORY BUYERS’

This mindset grew with the rise of mass-reach orthodoxy: the idea that brands grow by reaching as many category buyers as possible. This is broadly true for huge brands with deep pockets, but with cheap online reach it has formed into an unquestionable rule for everyone.

The problem is that reach alone does not guarantee being noticed, and being noticed is non-negotiable without limitless budgets. Mass-media has its place. But when your understanding of people lacks specificity and context, your competitors who have done that work will steal from the generalised category lifting you have wasted money on.

THE FALLACY OF AI TARGETING

The prevailing advice from major platforms is simple: go broad, trust the algorithm, and let the machine work it out. These systems are powerful and process signals at a scale no human could. AI can distribute ideas and optimise delivery. But it cannot replace the human act of interpretation, taste and deciding what actually matters.

Creative quality is a bigger driver of business effects than targeting. And creative quality is profoundly shaped by how well you understand the people you are trying to reach. When planners think properly about people; their contradictions, pressures, habits, fears, and aspirations it changes the questions they ask, the work they push for, and the executions that make it into the world.

FRESH APPROACHES

PEOPLE, NOT AUDIENCES

These fallacies share a desire to make the work easier and faster. The irony is that this shortcut thinking weakens the work and drains the joy from it. The most satisfying part of comms planning has always been the act of discovery, whether that be from deep research, your own lived experiences or a conversation with another person.

This is what it means to plan for people, not audiences. Embrace their specificity, resist the shortcuts and create something that nourishes the brand, rather than filling it up with ultra-processed thinking.

COOKING AND PREPARATION TIME

Usually a couple of days more than the project timeline allows, combined with open eyes and ears as you navigate the world.

INGREDIENTS

1 large bottle of curiosity
A handful of patience
A few bags filled with different data sources
As many cultural reference points as required

METHOD

1. SELECT THE CORE INGREDIENT
2. SEASON WITH SELF-BELIEF
3. STUDY THEIR COMFORT FOODS
4. MAP THE WHEN AND THE WHERE
5. FACTOR IN SIMMERING TIME
6. BAKE IN THE STORY



STEP 1: SELECT THE CORE INGREDIENT.

Audience planning often goes wrong at the start.

Most briefs land with a huge audience, sometimes a category, sometimes “all adults” which reflects commercial ambition.

The best planning starts by choosing where to begin, working out who sits at the emotional or behavioural heart of the opportunity, and using them as a way in to understand everyone else. This is selecting the core ingredient.

Before touching data, talk to people; colleagues, friends, strangers in a queue, anyone who can offer a different perspective. This isn't to uncover the answer, but to surface hunches about who the core might be. These early hypotheses must be tested. Without them, audience analysis becomes directionless, and you drown in data trying to prove nothing in particular.

The core audience is rarely the biggest group. It's usually the people who feel the problem most sharply, care most deeply, or behave in a way that reveals something important about the category. Their choices are driven by something more than habit or convenience.

Segmentation, used properly, is incredibly helpful here. Techniques like clustering aren't about slicing people into more labels. They reveal meaningful differences, patterns of belief, motivation, and behaviour that averages hide. You start to see where the intensity lives, and intensity is always more useful than scale at this stage.

A simple sense check to ask yourself. If we built the entire campaign to resonate with this core group, would it still make sense to people outside it? If yes, you are starting in the right place. Human motivations radiate outwards.

A practical reason to start here is once a core audience is chosen, the work gets easier. Conversations are more focused. Creative discussions stop floating into abstraction because everyone pictures the same kind of person.

Instead of trying to say something inoffensive to everyone, you give yourself permission to say something meaningful to someone. That's usually where the most interesting work begins.

STEP 2: SEASON WITH SELF-BELIEF.

With a sense of who, we want to understand how an audience sees themselves and about who they believe they are when no-one is watching.

Try to understand the internal story people carry, how they think about their role in the world, whether they feel confident or overlooked, or what they worry about losing. These answers shape how people interpret messages long before conscious engagement.

We look for the tension between who people want to be and the reality they are navigating. That tension is usually where the most useful insight lives. When this is done properly, the audience feels like someone you recognise, someone with contradictions making sensible choices. It feels human. When this step is skipped, the work stays on the surface; it's accurate but rarely connects.

CHEF'S TOP TIPS:

- **Stay curious longer.** The first explanation is rarely the most useful one.
- **Look for tension.** The gap between aspiration and reality is often where the insight sits.
- **If the insight could describe anyone, it probably does.** Go back until it feels specific.



CHEF'S TOP TIPS:

- **Don't start alone.** Get with your team early and talk through hunches. Shared hypotheses give the analysis direction.
- **Treat hunches as new ingredients.** They are there to be tested, challenged, and if needed, discarded.
- **If your 'core' sounds polite, sensible or boring, go back.** You are probably still describing an average, not a person.
- **Notice how the room feels.** If ideas sharpen, you've likely picked the right ingredient.



STEP 3: STUDY THEIR COMFORT FOODS.

Next, aim to understand how that core identity shows up in everyday life. This is where you need to pay close attention to what people choose to do in their spare time: their hobbies, rituals, and the things they make time for.

Leisure is an underused shortcut to understanding people. What someone does for pleasure reflects how they want to feel, spend their energy, and the kind of person they are trying to be.

Survey data is useful, but it pulls you toward the mainstream: football, baking, going to the gym. More revealing are the combinations of interests that sit slightly off to the side. The smaller, peripheral things that say something distinctive when they appear together. Someone who watches football and does yoga tells you one thing. Someone who watches football and paints miniatures tells you something else entirely. These differences matter.

This opens up creative planning. When you follow these interests, people feel seen rather than targeted. The brand shows up in places that make sense.

A good example is the insurance brand Vitality's involvement with England Netball. Netball does not have the scale of football, but it has a deeply engaged following. By showing up there, Vitality stands out at a much lower investment. Smaller interests often offer disproportionate returns, giving you access to attention and goodwill harder to buy in mainstream environments.

This step also keeps the work grounded, stopping analysis from drifting into abstraction. You are talking about real behaviours in real places. This is where you think about the brand's body language, how it behaves in the real world, and what would resonate most.

When this step is skipped, media plans default to the obvious. When done properly, you spot environments where relevance is earned rather than forced.

CHEF'S TOP TIPS:

- **Expect survey data to pull you towards the mainstream.** Popular interests are context.
- **Do not dismiss smaller interests because of scale.** Peripheral passions offer better opportunities for relevance and stand out.
- **Ask where attention is more generous.** Be wary of crowded environments. Niche publications and dedicated communities reward brands that show up with intent.



STEP 4: MAP THE WHEN AND THE WHERE.

By this stage, we will have a good sense of who the audience is, how they see themselves, and what they enjoy. Resist the urge to jump straight into listing channels and budgets. What matters is not just *where* people can be reached, but *when* they are most open to being influenced, and in what context that influence stands a chance. Communication choices stop being a list and start to become a series of moments.

Touchpoints data is useful to see patterns, but don't stop at the channel name. Knowing someone listens to podcasts only goes so far. What matters is what they are listening to or watching, and *why*. The tone and genres they prefer. Whether they actively choose it or if it just fills space.

Someone who regularly spends time with long-form content is signalling a tolerance for nuance. Someone who gravitates towards fast-paced content may be looking for escape or relief from cognitive load. Both suggest very different ways of engaging.

These patterns form a media palate. Recognising that palate makes it easier to judge tone and pacing. You are responding to what people have already shown you they enjoy.

Pay close attention to how social these moments are. Private media consumption is very different from shared or talked-about experiences. A true crime podcast listened to alone is a different moment to a comedy podcast played out loud in the kitchen. This step is about matching the state someone is in to the message you want to put in front of them.

When done properly, you see opportunities others miss: moments where attention is generous, contexts where your message makes sense, and places where the audience is already in the right frame of mind. You are no longer asking where you can *buy* attention, but where attention is most likely to be *given*.



CHEF'S TOP TIPS:

- **Do not stop at the channel name.** Knowing someone watches TV tells you very little on its own.
- **Look for patterns of tone and genre.** These form a media palate that tells you how people like to think and feel.
- **Be wary of treating all attention as equal.** A second of attention means very different things in different contexts.



STEP 5: FACTOR IN SIMMERING TIME.

By this point, we should understand the audience well. But make sure not to skip the layer of time, and by that we mean the time that an audience has lived.

Age is blunt; lived experience matters more. The world people grew up in, the cultural cues they absorbed, and the moments that shaped how they think about progress, risk, and possibility.

Ask yourself a simple question: What did the world look like when these people were in their late teens and early twenties? What did culture feel like? What stories surrounded them? This will give you more to play with than the latest trend or topic ever will. It is deep.

In a recent piece of B2B work we had to understand senior IT decision makers. We found a clear and active love of science fiction, which seemed to conflict with the 'rational' stereotype. Digging into their formative years (the late eighties and early nineties) we saw that science fiction from that period was often optimistic, framing technology as possibility and human ingenuity.

That understanding unlocked an inspiring approach, treating technology as a force for progress and a way to challenge old assumptions.

Simmering time is about empathy, a genuine attempt to understand the world that shaped the people you are planning for. When you get that right, the work gains depth and is far less likely to patronise or underestimate the audience.

CHEF'S TOP TIPS:

- **Always ask what the world looked like when this audience was coming of age.** The answers often explain present-day behaviour better than anything contemporary.
- **Use the past to challenge stereotypes, not reinforce them.** If your view of the audience feels thin, you are probably missing this step.

**HIGH-PROTEIN
PLANNING**

**PLANNED
ONLY WITH
GOOD
INGREDIENTS**

**100%
LED BY PEOPLE
NOT PLATFORMS**

STEP 6: BAKE IN THE STORY.

This step is about editing, choosing, and deciding what matters, across a plan and for all disciplines, because just passing on everything from the first five steps unfiltered is far from helpful.

Start by asking; What is the status quo for this audience? What is shifting? Where are expectations being challenged? That gap is usually the most important part of the story.

Be deliberately selective. The skill is knowing which insights explain a lot with little effort and which are interesting but peripheral. Distil the analysis down to a small number of truths that can be held in the mind and used, truths that help a creative team and a client see their audience differently. Keep the rest in the appendix if you need to.

With this done well, you will have a shared understanding. Identity, interests, media choices, and formative experiences knit together. The audience begins to feel coherent.

This step introduces confidence. With a clear story, it is easier to say no to ideas that do not fit, to channels that feel wrong, or to creative routes that fundamentally misunderstand the audience.

Without this step, audience analysis often remains inert; people agree with it but struggle to act on it. With it, the work gains direction and momentum.

This is the moment where planning feels most like craft. You are deciding how to bring the ingredients together in a way that does justice to the people you are planning for. When you get it right, the story feels obvious in hindsight and becomes a driver of better work.

**FRESHLY
MADE
STRATEGY**

CHEF'S TOP TIPS:

- **Edit ruthlessly.** Not everything you've learned deserves to make it into the final story.
- **Anchor the narrative in change.** If nothing is shifting or under pressure, the story probably won't travel.
- **If it feels obvious in hindsight, that is a good sign.** Clarity looks simple once the hard work has been done.

You do not need to follow every step perfectly. Even spending time on just one or two will lead to richer audience understanding and clearer thinking. When the people you are planning for start to feel real, the work begins to take care of itself. That understanding is the foundation.

**CHAPTER
03**

NOTICE OVER REACH

NOTICE OVER REACH

DON'T FIT IN, STAND OUT

The UK advertising industry spends staggering sums of money trying to change how people think, feel, and behave. A sum equivalent to every person in the country seeing 50 BVOD ads a day.

In 2024 alone, £42.6 billion was spent on advertising, a 10% jump on the year before, with spending expected to climb steadily to nearly £48 billion by 2026 (Advertising Association, 2025).

Put differently, that's about £654 invested for every person in the country, every single year (Statista, 2024).

Yet when asked to confidently recall ads they saw yesterday, most people can't; even those of us who work in the industry, who make a habit of looking for and at adverts would struggle. Not just to name the brand, but to recall what the ad was trying to say (or sell), or where we saw it.

This is advertising's hardest problem. Not reach. Not targeting. Not measurement. It is, simply, to get noticed and therefore more likely remembered (recalled if you must).

Dave Trott, founder of the advertising agencies Gold Greenlees Trott, Bainsfair Sharkey Trott and Walsh Trott Chick Smith, once put it bluntly: "4% of advertising is remembered positively, 7% negatively, and 89% isn't noticed or remembered at all" (2008). The exact provenance of that number may be murky (the source is quoted as 'someone in research') but the spirit of it is backed up by countless studies.



Looking back at ad recall benchmarks across digital platforms tell a sobering story; most advertising money is spent on advertising that is not being noticed, let alone impacting how people think, feel and behave:

Advertising Platform	Category/Region	Ad Recall Uplift Norms
A Social Platform	FMCG	+5.2%
A Social Platform	EMEA	+6.6%

But looking at where the industry is spending money suggests that advertisers don't mind.

The fastest-growing part of the ad market isn't in the channels proven to earn attention, but in the formats least likely to, formats and approaches that rely on luck of being seen at a moment of discretionary spending weakness. Online display, for instance, grew more than 15% in 2024 (Advertising Association, 2025). Not only is this outpacing the market as a whole, but is the biggest increase in investment across all channels tracked.

This is the paradox. At a time when getting noticed is harder than ever, we're ploughing more money into media that people barely register. The IAB's 2022 benchmark for viewability sits at 70%, meaning that 30% of digital ads served were never actually seen by users. Even those that fall within the "viewable" 70% enjoy very little attention, just 50% of pixels viewable for 1 continuous second.

**PROPER
PLANNING
INSIDE!**

So why are we seeing this shift?

To some extent, it's easy to see why. Not only are digital channels seeing increased audience consumption (UK Adults now spend over four hours a day online) but the cost to serve your ads to users in these spaces can be cheaper than alternatives. Although whether the long-term value invested merits a long-term reward in these channels is another story.

At a £3 CPM, £100k delivers you c.33m impressions at 37% reach on a social media platform. Compare this to BVOD CPMs, and you are looking at c.3m impressions at just 4.5% reach.

Therefore chasing cheap reach is the advertising equivalent of filling up on empty calories: a comforting sense of volume right now, but with very little real nutrition long-term, leaving you hungry in an hour or so.

We have seen from research studies, professional experience and personal experience that reach does not equate to effectiveness. It doesn't even equate to being noticed.

Instead of asking ourselves "which plan gets us the biggest reach", the first thing we need to be asking ourselves as marketers is "why would anyone that matters to us notice this?"

**FRESH
APPROACHES**

NOTICE OVER REACH

COOKING AND PREPARATION TIME

Longer than automation, but worth the wait

INGREDIENTS

*A pinch of reality
A hunger to explore alternatives to a tempting reach number in isolation
A handful of high quality channels and formats
A consideration for context
A dash of bravery
Salt (optional)*

**FRESH
THINKING**

METHOD

STEP 1: START WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT MOST ADVERTISING IS IGNORED AND ASK THE QUESTION "WHY WOULD ANYBODY NOTICE THIS?"

Using this as the starting point to any comms activity fundamentally changes how you plan, because it immediately recognises that putting something in front of someone is not the same as having that person see, notice or register what you are trying to communicate.

Rather than chasing cheap impressions in high reach channels through smaller and smaller squares and rectangles, which has been proven to deliver lower attention (Lumen, 2021), it means prioritising high attention channels, and finding ways to better deploy those channels for greater impact.

Sure, it comes with the cost of lower impressions and reach, but the impact of these fewer impressions will be far greater.

A recent study on attention by Newsworks in 2025 has shown this. High-attention media campaigns deliver significantly better business outcomes, with media campaigns in high-attention formats boosting market share by 12%, thanks in part to a 17% uplift in brand effects.

It is worth pointing out there is a question to ask across every part of a communications plan, or as you look down 'the funnel'. Critically ask: does this media placement best serve the task for the brand/business, and does the messaging work best within this placement? The answer might not always be yes, but at least you have the start of a better conversation for what can be fixed or adjusted.

STEP 2: FOCUS ON QUALITY OVER QUANTITY; NOT ALL INGREDIENTS ARE EQUAL.

It's a Friday night and you are staying in. You've just plated up a delicious dinner of pasta alla norma and poured a glass of wine. You sit on the sofa to watch your new favourite drama. You have a choice of three screens to watch it on, your 50" inch TV, your 13" laptop or your 6" smartphone. Which would you pick?

Our guess? The 50" inch TV, due to a better audio-visual experience that delivers on impact.

The same principle applies for advertising, but this notion of impact is often lost when translating an impression into a single digit onto a plan.

The single impression delivered on the 50" connected TV is flattened; it is given equal weight and importance as a single impression on a 6" screen. It no longer takes into account the viewer experience or the fact that the TV impression is likely to be realised through the full 30 second ad, versus just 3 seconds, the standard measure for a video view on social media. Flattened measurement doesn't stop there as it typically ignores the fact that a TV impression is more likely to be a shared experience (key for driving brand fame through shared knowledge and understanding).

STEP 3: CONSIDER THE CONTEXT. ARE YOU REACHING PEOPLE AT MOMENTS OF GREATER RECEPTIVITY?

One of the problems with chasing reach and frequency through machine planning, is that the outcome often results in blindly "following people around the internet", rather than considering how all touchpoints can be used to, helpfully, intercept their lives. So let's play this out.

We have an audience; let's say keen golfers, with a good handicap. We have a product, a new line of clothing for looking sharp on the fairway. Alongside

This is a problem. Because research has demonstrated time and time again, that not all impressions are equal.

Not only do some media channels command more attention than others, which we know is linked to better outcomes, but comparing this against the cost of media shows the true cost for attention, which shows a fundamentally different shape to average CPMs. Where social and digital channels reign supreme in the fight for cheapest CPMs, taking into account cost per attentive seconds tell a different story.

This isn't a push back against digital channels on a plan, nor is this a blind support (ignoring the costs) for high quality AV content destined only for bigger screens. There is always a role for focused digital channels as well. What this is, is a blunt reminder to look beyond a reach or impression figure, to not conflate "more" with "better", or efficient with effective.

It is about having the permission to opt for the less obvious plan, that reaches less people within different channels and formats, but ultimately delivers greater impact and effectiveness.

this we have a machine that can find this audience through behaviours and signals, understandable as they watch and read up on a lot of golf related content online.

As the machine looks to prioritise reach and frequency against this audience above all else, our ad is delivered to the "right" person, but with absolutely no consideration for how the ad is being viewed.



Our best AV asset that captures the best feeling of golf is delivered as a pre roll ahead of a YouTube video about how to fix a crack in the wall (because that "right" person also needs to do a bit of handiwork) or sandwiched on a social feed between a friend's holiday photo and an influencer's gender reveal cake cutting. But that doesn't matter. We know this is the right audience, and an impression is an impression, after all. Right?

Wrong.

As we have seen above, not all impressions are equal. But it's not just the choice of how we deliver our ad that impacts notice, the environment in which the advertising is viewed* has just as much impact.

**It's important to note we haven't even got into the world of brand safety and contextual keywords, that's a whole other issue.*

For example, we know that advertising placed within quality programming can generate a 6%

point uplift in sales over standard advertising when compared to the pool, and up to a 10% point improvement in average attention. This is supported by IAB UK, Lumen and IPSOS MORI, who found that advertising on premium sites resulted in 3 x the attention of task sites.

We also know that ads viewed with someone else have been proven to drive 23% better recall rates than those viewed alone (Thinkbox 'Context effects', Map the Territory & Tapestry Research 2024).

Finally, we know that humans have context dependent memories, it's how we remember things by building association. This means that if you want your message to be salient in a specific context – for example when people are ordering drinks at a bar, or when shopping for their dinner in a store – these are the places you need to consider embedding your message (Shotton and Hanmer-Lloyd, 2022). This works not just on that exposure, but for future moments too.

STEP 4: DO NOT LET THE SAUCE SPLIT! MEDIA AND CREATIVE WORK BETTER WHEN THEY'RE EMULSIFIED.

Rory Sutherland has previously said that the separation of media and creative agencies in the 1990s was a "bizarre" and "weirdly dumb" decision (Sutherland, 2022, quoted in Elmore, 2023). We couldn't agree more; we have already hinted at this within this chapter, in the previous chapter and will do many more times throughout this whole cookbook. In the context of being noticed, it is inescapable to ignore.

Building a media plan without understanding the creative that will be featured in it, or vice versa, is like packing for a holiday without knowing the destination. You will likely end up with some clothes to wear (underwear is underwear, regardless of destination after all) but much of it will not be fit for purpose.

Developing creative and media plans in silos leads to ineffective communications. It is the reason why we see overtly long copy on roadside billboards that garner just a couple of seconds of attention, or copy and branding too small to be legible on mobile digital formats.

Not only is this wasteful of budget, but it is also a missed opportunity.

Numerous research studies have demonstrated the importance of creativity in driving advertising effectiveness. In fact, it is often cited as THE MOST important driver of effectiveness, ahead of all other elements including reach, media channel, context or target audience delivery. So why are media plans still so regularly developed without the creative in mind, and vice versa?



There have been creative best practice guidelines to try and tackle this. We all know them; design for mobile first, ensure branding is upfront, deliver the message in 30s or less.

However, more often than not, it asks the question of how to make a piece of creative smaller, shorter and, ultimately, more efficient for digital channels rather than with the bigger task at hand.

This is at odds with everything we know about creative effectiveness, which relies on emotive storytelling to achieve the best results, something that is famously difficult, if not impossible to achieve in 3 – 6 seconds on a vertical screen.

The most memorable and successful ads of the last decade and beyond have been launched on

big screens, using longer second lengths, with the brand only revealed at the end. It should be noted that whilst we are referencing TV in this, any broad fame driving medium can be considered for this.

That's because marrying creative and media goes deeper than ensuring a piece of creative is suited to the media channel it is being delivered in. This is important, but it is the minimum.

It is about understanding the concept and ambition behind the creative to better understand how media can make the idea and the thing being sold more famous. Additionally it is about understanding the total media channel mix and formats on the plan to understand how creative can be flexed to make a campaign as impactful as possible in any given environment.

STEP 5: GO OFF RECIPE AND BREAK THE PATTERN.

Let's say you are presented with a recipe for a stew. The recipe list reads onions, garlic, potatoes, carrots, celery, stout, broccoli, peas. When asked, which one stood out the most to you, what would you say? Most probably the stout.

This is because of The Von Restroff effect, also known as the "isolation effect", which anticipates that, when presented with a number of homogeneous stimuli, the one that is most likely to stand out and be remembered is the one that differs from the rest.

One of the easiest ways to trick the brain and gain attention is to break the predicted pattern. When a prediction fails, the brain leaps into action and attention becomes more highly focused in order to be primed to make sense of, or take in new information.

We can use this principle in our planning, considering where the ad or idea might have a chance to stand out because it's in a novel place. Does the tempo or message within the ad push against the context in which it is seen, or is it in a completely un-expected environment?

A quick example, you don't see many ads for toys in The Economist, but the percentage of parents reading that title is equal to the percentage of parents watching ITV. Yes it is a much smaller total audience, but for the right product or moment, this would be a really interesting way to be noticed against a sea of investment and ESG products.



STEP 6: IS THERE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHRINK THE FIGHT?

Most notably popularised by Les Binet and Peter Field in The Long and Short of It (2013), the relationship between SOV to SOM is well documented in marketing literature.

Unfortunately, not all brands have the budget to shout their next largest competitor, let alone the category, so you have to look at the challenge a different way.

For start-up brands especially, who often have shallower pockets than incumbents, hearing that their only solution to growth is outspending their competitors can be disheartening.

That's why if you set your mind to being noticed, then you start to think about how you shrink the fight to your terms, to help you win.

Put simply, shrinking the fight is about laser focussing your budgets and efforts to a smaller, more discrete area where you are most likely to win (a.k.a get noticed) rather than casting your net wide to just achieve reach.

This might come to fruition by concentrating your efforts on a specific audience, a context, a media channel or a region, anywhere where your budgets and efforts are most likely to have an outsized impact vs competitors. Of course you get bonus points for identifying a space that ticks a few of these and is underserved by competitors, this is where the 'notice' potential is greatest for your business.

For brands early in their advertising journey, this also provides an opportunity to prove advertising effectiveness at a smaller scale before full scale roll out.





**GET
OUT**

THE
**MIDDLE
LANE**

**CHAPTER
04**

GET OUT THE MIDDLE LANE

THE ANTIDOTE TO BLAND THINKING

INTRODUCTION

Being in the middle land is to be overtaken by bullish brands moving fast on one side, and compared to considered brands building slowly on the other. You're at the whim of the movements of others weaving in and out, reacting rather than improving.

As marketing teams and agencies trial and error how best to utilise AI, a lot of communications could start to look and feel even more similar, AI loves to pull things towards the middle. Most paid comms are already expensive wallpaper businesses put up in public spaces. AI's first frontier in disrupting marketing will be to reduce the cost of those generic ads. That's great for teams measured on how well their reach focused campaigns deliver and drive small shifts in clicks.

But this space is a problem. This is the middle lane many marketers inadvertently find refuge in. Not going too fast, trying to overtake competitors quickly. Not going too slow so that their work isn't keeping pace with the business it promotes. Cruise control becomes tempting, flip a switch, sit back, let the machine take over. But middle-lane marketing, much like middle lane driving, is a lazy place to be.

Good advertising is actually quite a hard thing to do. Getting any advertising, let alone good (or great) advertising into the world faces hurdle after hurdle, something often missed or forgotten by self prophesied prophets of LinkedIn.

**FRESHLY
MADE
STRATEGY**



First, the business environment prioritises next month and quarter over next year. A dangerous game to play when creatively driven campaigns have been shown to need time to work. They need a longer time period to build effectiveness (Field, 2016), with this effectiveness further compounding over time (System1, 2026).

Second, the cultural environment that moves at the cumulative pace of millions of scrolling thumbs every second of every day. Third, the fragmentation and atomisation of where people see communications makes it hard to know who you're reaching, where, or if they even saw it.

These factors compound maliciously to make marketers hedge their work, and agencies to play it safe too. Marketing teams are charged with generating demand using the most indirect methods possible. It's often a sore point their work is then judged on direct sales. It's no wonder many flee for the safety of treating it like a science more than an art.

Monitoring metrics replaces building lasting desire or cultural cache. Does this call to action (CTA) work better than that? Does putting my logo here in one location work better than another? Should I make it bigger? Smaller? Add a dog? Marketing has become an expensive game of spot-the-difference.

AI is and will likely continue to help make all this less of a headache. Sifting through subtle shifts in media metrics. Generate slight iterations of the same still photo. Recommend moving money from one media slot to another. It might even make measuring how media works a bit better. What they won't do is solve the root cause of one of comms biggest problems: dull work made to be palatable to as many as possible. Dull work that gets you stuck in the middle lane. It might even make it worse.

So how do we get out of the middle lane? How do brands get out of the cycle of react, adjust, decline? Try planning for someone, not everyone. Find or develop competitive advantage tailored specifically for a subset of customers. Sell it at the speed of culture. Move fast, make things.

**HIGH-PROTEIN
PLANNING**

PLANNED
ONLY WITH
GOOD
INGREDIENTS

**FRESHLY
MADE**
STRATEGY

GET OUT THE MIDDLE LANE

COOKING AND PREPARATION TIME

At the speed of culture, and your project timelines, sometimes the dish is ready in weeks, at others it might take months or years.

INGREDIENTS

*1 strategic focus finely diced
1 well understood audience, distilled from chapter one
2-3 cultural entry points
1 good reason you're different to competitors
Sprinkle of guile*

METHOD

STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR STRATEGIC CHALLENGE.

The first step in getting out of the middle lane is to truly understand the challenge that comms can help to solve. We say truly because, too often, briefs want to stay firmly in the middle-lane, with middling objectives that are safe and bland such as raise awareness, drive sales. One can quite easily lead to the other, but being specific at this point helps to set a different pace.

Using advertising to drive awareness and therefore sales is route one. Humans are, in most circumstances, more likely to choose (or reject depending on the circumstances) a product they have a level of familiarity with. The problem with these objectives are two fold, firstly it is true for almost all businesses and secondly it gives no sense of direction. Stuck in the autopilot of "put my ad in front of someone", you cruise along the middle lane with all other brands looking to drive awareness and sales.

To truly define your strategic challenge, you should aim to go many layers deeper. Even consideration on its own is too shallow. The questions you need to be asking are; is awareness really the problem? If it is, who are the people that need to be aware, and what about precisely? Advertising dogma tells us that we need to reach all category buyers at all times, but real life budgets rarely afford this, so why use it to reach category buyers least likely to purchase when others are more likely? This is especially true if the luxury of time and patience is not with you.

So by forcing ourselves to go deeper, we want to ask: Is the challenge further down the funnel? Where exactly are we finding people drop off? Crucially, why might we be seeing this? Is there a metric that is falling behind on expectations?

Especially when compared to the category? For example, are people actually aware of the brand/product but have doubts about its efficacy? Maybe it just isn't aspirational enough to warrant the price premium you are charging? Or is it that associations with your brand are so established and so entrenched from decades of trading that it just doesn't feel relevant anymore to a newer, more valuable audience?

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE.

As covered in the first chapter, don't define a target audience by a decade-wide age bracket. Or rely on insights like "they watch lots of social media videos" or "they like socialising with their friends". Insights like these describe most people, some of the time. But as Seth Godin pointed out in 2011, people are weird, and getting weirder. And that's a good thing for a planner.

A combination of social media, liberal society, and cities making people more individual has created space and need for people to bond to other people in ever nicher ways. But they don't connect in silos.

STEP 3: IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE.

Your product or the product you are asked to promote might be able to do many things and in one sense that's great, it gives you lots of angles and opportunities. But to make something stand out, it's often best to select one that really solves a specific problem, or creates a (temporary) advantage. If something you sell works incredibly well for some of your customers, that's as good an advantage as you're going to find.

And if it doesn't? Well, many marketers may remember in *Mad Men* when Don Draper stumbles on the winning line for Lucky Strike. The fact that 'It's Toasted' could apply to any cigarette doesn't

To get out of the middle lane, you need to find your own. And to do that, you need to look at the data past and present, to divine where the future lies and which lane you are taking.



More and more, we draw influence and identity from digital spaces. Digital spaces with links to wider networks, the infamous map of Reddit, is a lovely way of understanding and seeing how group cohesions work in weird and wonderful ways.

So find what makes some of your customers weird. Whatever it is, that's your way into their world. That's because understanding people behind the "target audience" is where the magic sits. Get that right, and everything else has a chance of working harder. If this all seems weird to you, go back and read chapter one.

matter. The *Mad Men* knew the warm fuzzy feeling those words foster would work wonders for the first brand to make itself famous with those words. The point here is if your brand operates in a competitive category where product is flogged based on like-for-like features, make yours stand out for its intangible value.

Your aim here is to find how your competitive advantage, real or perceived, can enter the weird world of what your audience obsesses about. This defends against a war of attrition through spend, and provides a sharper creative or creator brief too. It's a win-win.

STEP 4: PLAN FOR NOTICE THROUGH UNDERSERVED CATEGORY ENTRY POINTS.

With your audience understood and competitive advantage identified, now it's time to find a way to switch lanes. This is the part which takes the biggest effort, and might be seen by those who like logic as the messiest part of the process.

Earlier in this Cookbook, we have discussed the importance of planning for notice, not (just) reach. We have also discussed the need to sometimes go off-recipe, in order to break a pattern and stand out: the Von Restroff effect. This is the fundamental premise of Get Out of the Middle Lane.

To whip up your own creation of a delicious, nutritious and colourful salad, in an otherwise bland meal of bung-in-oven, beige, pre packaged foods, you want to find your point of opportunity. This means taking a deliberate step away from category defaults and identifying the fresh options.

Sustained growth does not come from doing the same things slightly better. For brands whose pockets are nowhere near as deep as the better financed, or bigger brands in their direct category, it comes from finding opportunities that others have missed and building

STEP 5: DON'T LET RESISTANCE STOP YOU!

When a business, and to that extent a team, has spent years following category norms, or the status quo expected of them, switching things up can feel risky. It can feel like an attack on the humans involved, not a direction for a brand. Big shifts trigger big questions, and more often than not, you face resistance. The temptation here is to fall back, retreat into the middle lane again.

But change doesn't happen by accident. It requires intervention. And change doesn't need to be absolute. A move by 10% is as much a change as a move to 100% (if anything, it is a more sensible approach).

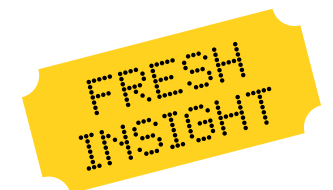
a presence in that area that becomes unmistakably yours (for as long as you can hold on to it).

A helpful way to explore where your advantage might come from is to use Category Entry Points, (Ehrenberg-Bass Institute), as a jumping off point:

- **Why?** (Do people buy the category)
- **When?** (Is this sold, or most needed)
- **Where?** (Do people need this product, or could come into contact with this brand)
- **With whom?** (Do people experience, or see this brand?)
- **With what?** (Does this product or brand work best?)

Even with these basic questions you can push harder. For instance, 'when' becomes a chance to look across days, weeks, months and seasonal moments, and an excuse to look back in time as well as ahead to see what might resonate in the future. Where, should be a rallying cry for every way the brand could and can be intercepted. Pushing this thinking laterally and asking what about or what if, will lead to richer results, and then the task is to remove the ideas or positions that don't serve you.

When faced with resistance, protect the change but keep it on a smaller scale. Ringfence a small portion of the overall budget to test a new route. Pilot an unconventional entry point before scaling it, and let the evidence build confidence first. Plot out a time period to make incremental changes. By taking this approach, your strategy is as much focused on the strategic changes to get mindsets out of the middle lane (perhaps including yours), before attempting to move the business and the brand.



**CHAPTER
05**

**BRANDS
NEED
BODY
LANGUAGE**

BRANDS
NEED

BODY

LANGUAGE

DANCE MOVES OPTIONAL

INTRODUCTION

How a brand shows up in the world is just as important as what it says.

This is one of the oldest ideas and most important considerations in communications planning, and yet it is fast becoming one of the most forgotten. Somewhere along the way, as the industry has hedged their bets on more tools and more automation, this layer of critical thinking has quietly slipped out of focus.

Today, most advertising systems are organised around two dominant disciplines.

Brand (and creative) planning tends to answer the question of what we are going to say. What story we will tell. What the brand will look like, with the odd 'big launch idea' or 'stunt' thrown in for good measure. Perhaps activating with a famous celebrity, or moment in the calendar.

Media planning, by contrast, tends to answer the question of where advertising will show up. Which channels, formats and paid environments? This is largely dictated by the task and the budget. And often resulting in an expression of the former in a combination of squares and rectangles. This seriously lacks any swagger, or sense of questioning why we are moving through the world this way.

Sitting between these two, critical in binding them together but perhaps being quietly ignored, is the discipline that receives far less attention: communications planning.

Comms planning answers a different question entirely. Not just what is said. Not just where we say things. But how we say it and show up accordingly.

It is the layer of thinking that gives texture, rhythm and coherence to a strategy, and allows a team to plan free of the anachronistic channel beliefs. You are planning to the tempo needed for the brand, governed by the strategic decisions. It governs the pace, weight and tone of activity. It shapes the environments a brand chooses to be seen in, the company the brand keeps, and just as importantly, the places it actively chooses not to show up in.

Comms planning concerns itself with far more than just what we say and where we say it, it governs more than just paid comms. It stretches into all channels (paid, owned, shared and earned), and is articulated through all the touchpoints where a business, its brand and products show up in the world.

Quite literally like mustard in a salad dressing of oil, salt, lemon juice and vinegar, it acts as an emulsifier, binding everything together to make a coherent whole.

When comms planning is done well, a brand develops a recognisable way of moving through the world. A consistency that goes beyond logos, colours or taglines. Something you can feel, even when the message itself changes. We call this a brand's body language.

Just as people have a natural posture, cadence and way of occupying space, brands do too. Some move loudly and expansively. Some are restrained and deliberate. Some are playful, provocative or confrontational. Others are calm, authoritative or quietly confident.

Crucially, this energy should not be interchangeable.

NothingTech does not move like Samsung.

Oatly does not move like Alpro.

Liquid Death does not move like Evian.

You get the picture.

Each of these brands have a distinct rhythm and intentional way of showing up; across creative, media choices, partnerships, formats and cultural entry points. Their communications feel coherent because they are guided by a clear sense of how the brand behaves, not just what it says.

None of this is accidental. It is body language, aka proper communications planning at work. The detractors might say they are smaller, challenger brands, and that they can't do this as they get bigger. And it might be the case that the whole is watered down, but the best brands communicating with body language hold on to this essence where it's needed, where it's most poignant, and that travels.

In human communication, we intuitively understand the importance of this. Research by Albert Mehrabian famously suggests that a significant proportion of communication is conveyed non-verbally; through posture, movement, tone and expression rather than words alone.

The same is true of brands: how something is expressed shapes meaning just as much as what is said.

Much of what a brand communicates about itself is conveyed not through copy or visuals alone, but through its choices. Where it appears. How often. In what contexts.

This is the quiet power of communications planning. It is the space between message and placement where strategy becomes lived reality. Where abstract positioning turns into something people can experience in the real world.

As agencies slimline to cut on costs and promise faster, comms planning has often been squeezed out in place of machine thinking. The wow of a big pitch win, and intense human thought (often playing unsung in the gaps) is lost as day-to-day delivery and efficiency takes over. Decisions become tactical. The question shifts from "how should this brand move through the world?" to "where do we put this piece of creative with this budget (that is late and we only saw yesterday)?"

When that happens, the centre of gravity moves. Without a clear point of view on body language, choices default to habit, efficiency or channel norms. Every agency leans into their own strengths and incentives. Paid media becomes the assumed answer, even when it may not be the right one. And slowly, the distinctive shape of the brand begins to blur.

This is how you end up with media plans that look eerily similar across wildly different brands. The same core recipe repeated over and over again. AV at the centre. A handful of digital channels layered around it. A supporting channel if budgets allow. The same structure applied to global giants and scrappy challengers alike.

When everything looks the same, brands stop feeling different.

That is the craft this recipe is concerned with. The craft of building and defining a brand's unique body language.



BRANDS NEED BODY LANGUAGE

COOKING AND PREPARATION TIME

Since the brand's inception, alternatively at the start of a new brand platform or major long-term campaign planning session.

INGREDIENTS

A brand (any size will do)
A sense of their unique position in the world
An understanding of category cues
Inspiration from adjacent worlds
Every. Single. Touchpoint.



METHOD

STEP 1: GET UNDER THE SKIN OF THE BRAND.

Start by being clear about who the brand actually is.

If it helps, use the brand archetype wheel. Not because it's perfect, but because it forces a choice. Contextualising the brand against familiar personalities quickly exposes what fits and what doesn't.

Often, two or three archetypes will feel plausible. That's fine, but don't stop there. Pick one. Body language only works when a brand has a clear centre of gravity. Indecision is how brands end up behaving like everyone else and being unintentionally beige. Use this as a point of discussion with your fellow agencies, team and clients. Push against the options versus the category.

STEP 2: LOOK OUTWARDS, NOT JUST INWARDS.

A brand's body language should be shaped by how it sits in the world as much as by how it sees itself.

Where is the brand in its journey? Is it a challenger still fighting general public permission, an

established player with scale and trust on its side, or is it on the slide to invisibility or rejection? This matters, because different positions demand different behaviours

STEP 3: BE HONEST ABOUT THE CATEGORIES YOU REALLY OPERATE IN.

Most brands define themselves too narrowly.

What you sell is only part of the story. How people experience you matters just as much. A £25 bar of soap is not competing in the same mind space as a supermarket own brand, it's operating in luxury.

A soap promising calm, energy or sleep may belong as much in wellness as it does in personal care.

Mapping the different intersections of price, purpose, emotion, culture to open up different routes for the brand to behave and show up. Ignore these, and you will likely default to category norms.

STEP 4: LOOK SIDWAYS FOR BEHAVIOURAL CUES.

Once you understand the space you want to be in, look at how other brands behave within it, what are their dance moves, how are they moving?

This is not about copying. It's about recognising the shared behaviours that signal belonging in a particular world, the panache of Mediterranean

luxury is different to Nordic pharmaceutical.

That's the level of body language you want to be thinking about.

Understanding these patterns helps you see which behaviours feel natural, which feel tired, and which might be worth breaking to stand out.



STEP 5: DEFINE YOUR BODY LANGUAGE BY CHOOSING WHAT TO BORROW AND WHAT TO REJECT.

Body language is a product of selection.

Decide which behaviours you want to adopt, which you want to avoid, and which you may grow into over time. Newer brands may need to borrow more cues to establish credibility. More established brands may need to break the rules to remain interesting.

The aim is not consistency for its own sake, but coherence, behaviour that ladders back to the brand's position and ambition.

The task here is to interpret, not imitate, because we all know the dangers of sticking to the middle lane.

STEP 6: AND REMEMBER – EVERYTHING COMMUNICATES!

A brand's body language is not expressed through paid media alone, in fact that's the last articulation.

In reality, most brand body language is realised outside of advertising, through sales teams, on shelves, packaging, partnerships, colleague events, earned media coverage and in the everyday moments where people encounter the brand without trying to. These touchpoints often do more cumulative work than campaigns ever will.

That's why body language has to stretch across everything, not just paid comms.

The pace, tone and behaviour you define should show up consistently wherever the brand exists in the world. When it doesn't, the work feels fragmented and the brand loses coherence.

Comms planning is the discipline that holds this together – ensuring that every touchpoint, whether paid, owned or earned, reinforces the same way of moving through the world.



**CHAPTER
06**

**PLAN
THROUGH
CULTURE,
NOT
CHANNELS**

SERVED UP WITH
AnalogFolk

PLAN
THROUGH
CULTURE,
NOT
CHANNELS

SERVED UP WITH

AnalogFolk

HOW TO USE LAYERS OF CULTURE TO DRIVE BRAND GROWTH

PREFACE

This chapter has been co-authored by **AnalogFolk and Craft** because **cultural fluency in marketing should not sit with one discipline alone.**

AnalogFolk brings the brand and creative lens: how to shape a distinctive idea that feels culturally fluent. Craft brings the comms planning lens: how that idea moves through culture and into people's lives, and how we prove it's working.

Strong brand thinking without comms planning can stay theoretical. Comms planning without a strong creative foundation becomes a distribution exercise that is efficient but forgettable. Bringing both together means the work is built to travel: culturally fluent creative with a clear point of view, translated into a plan with defined roles, smart channel choices, and measurement designed around effectiveness from the start.

**HIGH-PROTEIN
PLANNING**



INTRODUCTION: THE EXPANSION OF THE PLAYING FIELD

Something has shifted in how culture travels, and our industry hasn't fully caught up.

Mainstream media still creates shared moments and top-down momentum. But the internet has rewired the pace, pathways, and power dynamics of influence. Culture is now browseable, with one swipe, you can see what's gaining traction across communities, and those signals don't stay contained. They spread fast and get amplified at scale.

Think about drag culture. For decades it was rooted in local scenes and community spaces. Now, wider visibility through TV (including RuPaul's Drag Race), the mainstreaming of drag within hospitality and entertainment, and social media have turned performers into global reference points, making the codes of the scene legible to millions beyond the LGBT+ community (Feldman and Hakim, 2020). That is now the norm, not the exception.

Too many brands respond by chasing trends and borrowing cultural identity without earning it. Kantar is blunt: "Chasing trends won't cut it" (Kantar, 2025). Brands with genuine cultural relevance grow nearly six times faster than those without it (Kantar, 2025). That gap comes down to reach versus resonance. Reach is distribution. Resonance is the response you earn when the work lands, what makes people remember it, share it, and carry it forward. System1 and Effie's The Creative Dividend shows that emotionally strong creative drives disproportionate returns, accelerating when work resonates rather than simply appears (System1, 2026; Effie Worldwide, 2026). Cultural meaning is one of the strongest accelerants.



PART I: UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURAL CASCADE, A FOUR LAYER FRAMEWORK

FULL OF HUMAN THINKING

THE GREAT MULTIPLICATION (NOT JUST FRAGMENTATION)

Yes, audiences have fragmented. But "fragmentation" doesn't fully describe what has happened. The mainstream still exists, major cultural moments still unite millions, creating shared reference points that bottom-up approaches struggle to match. At the same time, the internet has made other cultural layers easier to see, easier to enter, and easier to influence. They've always existed, but they were harder for brands to access without proximity. Now they sit in plain sight.

The important part is how these layers interact. Practices born in tight-knit tribes can move into subcultures, shape identity spaces, and break through to the mainstream. Mainstream moments can travel the other way too, getting reinterpreted and remixed as they move through different groups. Understanding this movement, and knowing where your brand can credibly play is now a strategic imperative, not a side quest.



INTRODUCING THE CULTURAL CASCADE

Culture is a system. To plan with cultural fluency, we need to understand where culture forms, how it spreads, and how influence moves between layers. The Cultural Cascade is a framework for that. It consists of four layers:

- Mainstream
- Identity
- Subcultures
- Tribes

These layers are distinct but not separate. Signals travel between them in multiple directions, and meaning changes as it moves. The framework helps you work out where a signal is coming from, what it means in its original context, and what happens to it as it scales, helping you avoid surface-level borrowing and make better choices about where to place the work so it can travel with integrity.

THE FOUR LAYERS OF THE CULTURAL CASCADE

(HOW CULTURE LIVES AND FLOWS)



Signals travel up, down and across layers

LAYER 1: MAINSTREAM

CROSS-SCENE CULTURE WITH BROAD REACH

This is the visible surface: cultural moments that cut across all other layers and reach massive audiences simultaneously. The Eras Tour. The Super Bowl. Barbenheimer. Major sporting events. These are the touchstones that create shared vocabulary across otherwise disconnected

groups. The mainstream still matters enormously for broad awareness, category launches, and defending leadership. But by the time something's mainstream, it's usually been validated somewhere else first. It's where culture goes to be big, not where it goes to be born.

LAYER 2: IDENTITY

COMMUNITY-OWNED, LIVED IDENTITY SPACES AND RITUALS

This layer is about communities organised around fundamental aspects of lived experience: parenting communities, LGBTQ+ spaces, religious communities, immigrant diaspora networks, disability communities, professional identities. These aren't scenes you opt into for interest, they are lived experiences with their own rituals, challenges, and support networks. They're widespread (often spanning millions globally),

trust-heavy (because they deal with vulnerability), and cross-subcultural, a parent might also be into streetwear and gaming. The bar for authenticity is incredibly high. These communities have seen too many brands try to extract value without contributing meaningfully. The brands that succeed are those that genuinely support the community's needs and demonstrate real understanding of their lived experience.



LAYER 3: SUBCULTURES

BIG, NAMED SCENES WITH SHARED CODES

These are the recognisable cultural movements: hip-hop culture, streetwear, skateboarding, K-pop fandom, gaming culture, sneakerhead culture, running culture. Full cultural ecosystems with their own media, influencers, gatekeepers, and

evolutionary paths, and crucially, opted-into spaces. You choose to participate based on genuine interest. Over half of adults are actively involved in at least one subculture. They're substantial, influential, and accessible, if you approach them correctly.

LAYER 4: TRIBES

SMALL, PRACTICE-LED CREWS IN TIGHT NETWORKS

This is the most intimate layer: small groups of people who actually do things together regularly. Not just share interests, but actively practise together, create together, show up for each other. The Discord server of game modders actively shaping game culture. The running crew with unique rituals and branding that's become a recognised entity in the

city. These groups are culturally productive, deeply trusted, and largely invisible to brands. This is where genuine advocacy lives. When someone recommends your brand within their tribe, it carries exponentially more weight than any advertisement. You can't force your way in, you can only create conditions that make it more likely tribes will adopt you.



HOW BRANDS SHOULD SHOW UP (COMMS BODY LANGUAGE ACROSS THE FOUR LAYERS)

Understanding the layers is one thing. Knowing how to actually move through them is another. Each layer has its own logic for how brands earn

attention, how communications land, and what role they're expected to play. Get it wrong and you break the relationship before it starts.

**HIGH-PROTEIN
PLANNING**

MAINSTREAM

When brands communicate through mainstream culture, the focus is usually associative breadth rather than depth. The aim is to reach a lot of people at once, which means comms planning becomes an orchestration job. You're managing reach, frequency and channel roles across a multi-touchpoint ecosystem, and it's easy for the comms idea to get diluted in the push to hit mass numbers. Add the cost of entry, and planning can drift towards efficiency as the main motivator, rather than keeping people and culture at the heart of the plan.

The cultural planning risk in mainstream is surface-level association. Big AV buys or a badging exercise can get you visibility, but visibility alone doesn't make the brand part of the moment. Showing up in the mainstream later should be about being distinctive at scale, a clear central idea rooted in a real cultural truth, translated across touchpoints without stripping out the meaning.

IDENTITY

This is the layer where we often see lazy planning. A recent YouGov study found that around two-thirds of white Britons say they feel well represented in advertising in terms of race, while more than half of ethnic minority Britons say they do not, despite the increased visibility of diverse faces on screen (YouGov, 2025). Planning for identity can be far

more purposeful. That might mean speaking to new parents on social media in the early hours. It might mean understanding the intricacies of Ramadan and Eid for Muslim communities. Planning for identity is about understanding what moments carry weight, what voices matter, and what impact looks like in that lived context.

SUBCULTURES

This layer is all about context. People in the same subculture can look nothing alike on paper. Take cosplay: a 55-year-old man in Berkshire who's spent two decades immersed in Warhammer 40K lore, and a 21-year-old graduate in London obsessed with Sailor Moon since she was six. Same scene, totally

different lives, totally different media habits. The common thread isn't age or postcode, it's the shared codes and behaviours of the scene. The strongest work comes from immersion: reading the forums and Discords, paying attention to what people celebrate, argue about, and reject.

TRIBES

Tribes get overlooked in comms planning because most plans are built to maximise reach through efficient broad targeting. But this layer plays a different role. It's low volume and high intensity. If the product fit is right, engagement can be stronger than any other layer, and the outputs matter because tribes create advocacy and influence that travels beyond the group.

That changes what you plan. You can't rely on standard targeting, and you can't force frequency through paid. The plan needs a route in, usually through tribe gatekeepers, and a clear value exchange that fits the crew's practice.

Authenticity is the entry point. Without it, the work won't get picked up. With it, you can generate meaningful signals quickly: adoption, repeat use, organic mentions in the places the tribe already communicates, and referrals.

For smaller brands, this is often a smart starting point. You can win loyalty with a few early adopters, learn fast, and then scale once you've got proof of what lands. That is diffusion of innovation in practice (Rogers, 2003), and it should shape where and how you show up.

**FRESH
APPROACHES**

UNDERSTANDING THE CASCADE

These layers don't just coexist, they actively influence each other. Upward: a practice developed in a tribe (say, a specific way of customising sneakers) gets adopted by a broader subculture, becomes part of how people express identity, and eventually breaks through to mainstream

fashion. Downward: a mainstream moment gets reinterpreted by subcultures, becomes meaningful to identity groups, and sparks activity in tribes. The strategic opportunity is understanding where your brand naturally fits and how you can facilitate (not force) movement between layers.

**FRESHLY
MADE
STRATEGY**

PART II: THE STRATEGIC ROADMAP – PLAYING ACROSS ALL FOUR LAYERS

This roadmap bridges strategy and execution, turning a point of view into a comms system with clear objectives, defined roles by layer, and decisions on channels, moments, creative formats, and

measurement. The goal is not to be everywhere, but to be deliberate about what each layer is doing for the brand and how those layers work together over time.

STEP 1: KNOW WHAT YOU STAND FOR (BEFORE YOU STAND ANYWHERE).

Before you engage with any layer of culture, you need to define your own cultural position. Not your brand values, your actual, specific perspective on what matters and why. Brands with genuine cultural traction tend to have a singular, consistent point of view. JD Sports isn't "sportswear retail." They have a clear youth-led streetwear stance that resonates across identity spaces (working-class UK youth identity and Black British youth culture where trainers and tracksuits signal belonging), subcultures (football

terrace culture, sneaker culture, grime and drill scenes), and tribes (grassroots football teams, local dance crews, drill collectives where kit and footwear are part of the uniform). That point of view travels because it's consistently expressed, even when the formats change.

Your job as a planner is to identify the cultural tension your brand can help resolve. The expression will shift by layer; the point of view stays constant.

STEP 2: FIND YOUR ENTRY POINTS.

The framework becomes strategically useful when you map where you naturally belong. The goal isn't to be everywhere, it's to be present where you can be most authentic and effective. Be honest about which layers you fit. Most brands won't play equally across all four, and that's fine.

Once you know which layers you're playing in, find the right entry points. These aren't just places, they're moments, behaviours, practices, and signals, and they change by layer.

In the mainstream, the strategy is about timing, message clarity, and reach. In identity spaces, entry requires long-term commitment, not a campaign. In subcultures, you need cultural translators: not the biggest influencer, but the most respected voices. In tribes, you mostly can't enter directly, but you can create conditions that tribes adopt. Strava doesn't outwardly market to running crews; they create tools running crews use (and support them). The crews do the rest.



STEP 3: SPEAK THE LANGUAGE (OF EACH LAYER).

Tone and communication style need to shift by layer:

In the Mainstream, you can be clearer, bolder, more universal – humour and emotion that translate broadly work here.

In Identity spaces, you need to demonstrate lived understanding, not observed understanding. When Always launched #LikeAGirl, it worked because it articulated something girls and women had experienced but might not have had language for. Authenticity here means having voices from the community tell their own stories.

In Subcultures, you need genuine fluency in the scene's language, references, and values. The brands that succeed in streetwear don't just put logos on hoodies, they understand the history, the beefs, the respect dynamics.

With Tribes, keep it practical and unpretentious, skip the brand speak entirely. Think tool documentation, not marketing copy.



STEP 4: YOUR COMMS BODY LANGUAGE.

In the Mainstream, the comms idea has to be crystal clear, one brand message that holds its shape across channels and formats. Assume clutter, and make deliberate choices about where to place the biggest assets and when to concentrate effort.

For Identity communities, the goal is to earn a role by showing up in ways that are genuinely useful and aligned with how the community already communicates. Impact comes from depth of relevance, not sheer presence; measure beyond impressions to signals like quality of response and whether the community indicates you've earned permission to participate.

Subcultures reward specificity, earn participation, and don't force attention. Contribute something the scene values, collaborate with trusted voices, and choose formats that invite response.

At the Tribe level, comms become about behaviour rather than messaging. Tribes can be collaborators as much as an audience: talent, testers, and cultural consultants who help shape ideas and keep the codes right.



STEP 5: EXECUTE THROUGH OPEN IDEAS – THE CREATIVE PHILOSOPHY FOR CULTURAL COOPERATION.

Most campaigns are built to be seen. The most culturally impactful work is built to be “built upon”. This is where **Open Ideas** become your guiding creative philosophy.

Traditional advertising is built on “Big Ideas”: complete, polished concepts designed for passive consumption. These still have their place in mainstream communications. But if you’re serious about activating culture, you need a different approach. Open Ideas are unfinished by design, creative concepts that explicitly invite communities to shape, remix, and make their own. The shift is from “we control the message” to “we spark the conversation”: from campaigns with endpoints to programs that evolve continuously.

Open Ideas work at every layer but manifest differently.

- At the Mainstream level, Doritos’ “Crash the Super Bowl” invited anyone to create ads, turning passive viewing into active creation at mass scale.
- At the Identity level, Dove’s Real Beauty provides a framework for redefining beauty standards that Black women, disabled women, older women, and trans women can each engage with from their unique perspectives, without the brand controlling the narrative.
- At the Subculture level, Nike’s Air Max Day gave sneakerhead culture a date (March 26th) and framework where the community designs customs, shares collections, and creates content year-round. The community has taken ownership, it’s theirs now, not just Nike’s.
- At the Tribe level, Converse Rubber Tracks provided free recording studio access to local music collectives. They didn’t dictate what music should be made, they offered infrastructure. Each collective used the resource differently. Converse simply enabled the practice.

‘Open Ideas’ can also be built to travel across all four layers: beginning in tribes where practices are born, spreading through subcultures that amplify and refine them, taking on meaning in identity spaces, then reaching the mainstream once already validated below. Vaseline Verified works this way, starting with practical Vaseline hacks that circulate in tight networks, which the brand tests and “verifies.” That device gives the subculture layer (beauty, hair, skincare scenes) something concrete to adopt and share. Because the idea is instantly legible, it can then break into the mainstream without losing the truth it started with.

Effective ‘Open Ideas’ are unfinished by design, include clear participatory mechanisms, allow different groups to express themselves uniquely within the framework, and are designed for ongoing engagement, not campaign endpoints. Be clear on what must stay consistent – the point of view and the behaviour you’re asking for – while leaving outputs, voices, and formats genuinely open. Traditional campaigns have beginnings and ends; ‘Open Ideas’ operate as programs that evolve with participation. The brands that master this by moving from controlling messages to sparking movements are the ones building cultural relevance that compounds over time.



STEP 6: MEASURE DIFFERENTLY AT EACH LAYER.

Different layers require different metrics because they serve different strategic purposes. Separate leading indicators (signals the work is landing) from lagging indicators (business impact), and agree what you will optimise versus what you will protect.

Mainstream: Traditional metrics still matter. Reach, frequency, awareness lift, consideration, sales impact. You’re investing in broad visibility, so measure broad visibility outcomes. Agree the reach and frequency ambition up front, and measure creative recognition alongside brand effects.

Identity: Measure belonging and support. Do community members feel seen and valued? Is there a sustained engagement, not just campaign spikes? Include community impact and guardrails: did it help, and did it avoid unintended harm?

Subcultures: Look at credibility markers. Are you being referenced positively by respected voices in the scene? Are subculture members creating content with your brand? Are you being cited as an authentic player?

Tribes: Use proxies for adoption and advocacy, repeat use, referrals, organic mentions in the places the crew already communicates, and complement with qualitative learning. Look for whether the brand becomes part of the practice rather than a one-off talking point.

The sophisticated approach builds measurement frameworks that capture all four layers, understanding that a brand with mainstream visibility, identity community support, subcultural credibility, and tribe-level adoption is extraordinarily powerful.

FRESH THINKING

DIGESTIF: THE CULTURAL CASCADE.

Understanding these four layers and how they cascade influence in both directions gives you a more sophisticated framework for building cultural relevance. You don’t need to play in all four. But you need to understand all four to make strategic choices about where to invest, how to create, and what success looks like.

The brands growing fastest are those getting fluent in this cascading system, knowing when to go broad with mainstream moments and when

to go deep with identity support, when to build subcultural credibility and when to enable tribes. They’re creating Open Ideas that can move between layers rather than closed campaigns trapped in one. The playing field has expanded. The strategic opportunity is understanding not just that these layers exist, but how they influence each other, and where your brand can most authentically participate in that cascade and where that might take you.

FULL OF HUMAN THINKING

**FREQUENCY
NEVER**

**STOPS
WORKING**

**CHAPTER
07**

FREQUENCY

NEVER

STOPS
WORKING

BUILDING REASONS NOT TO BE MISSED

INTRODUCTION

In our chapter **Notice Over Reach**, we had previously discussed the fallacy of automated planning as a means of maximising a reach figure alone. The reason being? That reach does not equate to being seen or noticed, nor does it equate to effectiveness.

In fact, when thinking about reach and frequency, one of the most common ways that media plans are judged and compared to one another, it is often in frequency that media plans are under seasoned, and under-calculated.

Both a highly valuable and highly underserved ingredient in effective comms, Craft believes that every plan needs a heavier serving of frequency. And it's not just Craft who agrees. Industry studies have demonstrated the importance of frequency in driving client outcomes.

For example, research from the Journal of Advertising identified the number of exposures required to take a consumer from initial attention through to action (Burton et al., 2019).

It found that at 1 – 2 ad exposures, the ability of the ad to evoke emotion is just enough to motivate consumers to pay attention. At 3 – 10 ad exposures, cognitive thoughts about the ad start to drive consideration and evaluation. It is only at 10+ ad exposures that the ad's ability to evoke emotion pushes consumers into action, the ultimate goal of any business.

FRESH
INSIGHT



For a Crafty client, we saw this in action at the + mark, with significant uplifts only being reached once we had hit a frequency of 13+ on their plan. With regards to this example we were lucky they had a full econometric set up, and were a long-standing advertiser. Whilst not every brand has this luxury or tools at its disposal, you can short-hand an answer. Look at the estimated frequency on a paid plan (the easiest denominator) and seek to improve it by at least 30%.

This is further supported by Nielsen's Digital Brand Effect Study (2017), who identified a positive correlation with increases in ad awareness and intent as a result of increased exposure.

And based on this research, you'd be forgiven to think that the answer lies in delivering the same asset to the same audience in the same environment over and over again as a means of hitting that all important frequency. And the answer to that is no (except for a very very limited number of examples).

Utilising frequency most effectively requires exposures from a number of different channels. From ad processing (Jeanes and Beal, 2012), to persuasion (Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit, 2011), purchase intent (Klapdor et al., 2015) and ROI (Analytic Partners, 2016), a number of research studies have proven that multichannel campaigns are more effective at delivering client outcomes. This is because they all slightly encode within the brain differently. The frequency builds a tapestry of understanding.

Good news for us then that the last few years has seen an explosion of media channels and formats. In today's current media climate, layering additional paid channels feels limitless with so many options to choose from.

However, the challenge comes in choosing the right media mix in an increasingly fragmented media landscape, and ensuring that there is consistency across all exposures.

Because effectiveness through frequency doesn't just come from layering touchpoints, it comes from landing the same message through those multiple and different touchpoints again, and again and again...



FREQUENCY NEVER STOP WORKING

COOKING AND PREPARATION TIME

Years

INGREDIENTS

Distinctive Assets

A unifying campaign or comms idea

A handful of high quality channels

A big scoop of quality reporting data, or metrics.

1 x exposure

Another exposure

Another exposure



METHOD

STEP 1: LOOK BEYOND 1+ REACH; AIM FOR A MINIMUM OF 3+ AND INCREASE THE FURTHER DOWN THE PURCHASE JOURNEY YOU ARE LOOKING TO INFLUENCE.

The point of advertising is to try and get audiences who wouldn't normally buy you to consider you.

This is hard, and no better demonstrated than benchmarks for consideration shifts across different categories. At 1% increase, this is a good result. Shifting that to +3%? This is outstanding.

Brand Metrics: Growth Benchmarks			
Average metric growth compounded over a minimum of two years: Consideration			
	OK	Good	Outstanding
FMCG	Maintain	1%	3%
Retailer	Maintain	1%	3%
Services	Maintain	1%	3%
Durable Goods	Maintain	1%	3%

Table : Tracksuit Brand Growth Benchmark Tool (<https://www.gotracksuit.com/us/blog/tools-and-templates/brand-benchmarks-tool>, accessed: April 2026)

What this tells us is that advertising is unlikely to have an effect immediately. This is further compounded by the fact that only a small % of people will ever be in-market for your product at any given time, least not when you are finally in the place to advertise in a given period.

Nudging these potential buyers from attention, to aware, to consider, to purchase takes more than a single campaign exposure.

And whilst research has shown that the biggest effect from advertising is seen from 0 exposure to 1 exposure (Ehrenburg-bass Institute for Marketing Science, 2010, Planning for Synergy of Multi-Platform Media) a degree of frequency is required to drive behaviour.

STEP 2: THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS.

The proliferation of media channels is not new news. From just three terrestrial TV channels in the 1980s in the UK, we are now bombarded with 100s of TV channels and countless more social channels, online video, radio, podcasts. With over one billion website pages and advertising infiltrating everything (even UK Cub Scout badges can be sponsored!) advertising really is everywhere.

And with this proliferation of channels, many industry articles bemoan the fragmentation of media and the various negative effects that come with it; splintered attention, a lack of shared cultural experiences and that all but lost – mass reach – to name a few. But with it, also comes opportunity. The opportunity to build frequency of touch across platforms.

We have previously discussed the benefit of layering multi media channels as a means of driving

So how do we know the level of frequency and exposure to aim for within our plans? It really depends on your objective.

Knowing that one to two exposures is just enough to process attention, might lead us to plan to this minimum. But that is a rule for the few, if you are a new advertiser or have a completely new product or service, that initial frequency number needs to be much higher than perhaps what you would need if you are an old-timer.



frequency most effectively. And there is a reason for that. Referred to as “lots of littles” by Dr. Grace Kite, the cumulative effect of additional channels do slightly different but complimentary jobs that creates something greater than the sum of its parts.

That opportunity isn't a happenstance, it needs to be considered. In their 2010 study Planning for Synergy of Multi-Platform Media, the Ehrenburg-bass Institute for Marketing Science demonstrated that the most effective multi-media campaigns create a media mix that helps to build 1+ reach, broaden timings, widen context of touch-points and provide an enhanced repetition of visual, auditory and textual assets.

As mentioned previously, by building a tapestry of impressions, in different places you are not only building frequency, but the ability for the given communications to be remembered.

STEP 3: TRUE COMMS PLANNING IS MORE THAN JUST PAID, ALL PARTS MATTER.

With many traditional media agencies working to a commission model, it's no wonder that conversations around communications are so often centred around paid, and paid alone.

This is a missed opportunity, and a big one too.

According to MESH Experience (2025) owned and earned channels don't just make up a significant part of your brand's total exposures, but owned

touchpoints in particular have a stronger effect on your brand's consideration. In any planning approach, there should be detailed thought to and around how these channels can work with and around a paid plan, and vice versa. A good comms strategy provides recommendation on the role and activation thought for owned, shared and earned, alongside paid to ensure that all exposures plays a clear role that ladders up to the same objective.

CHEF'S TOP TIPS:

- Do not forget about owned, earned and shared; it is not just the remit of other agencies and the brand's marketing team.
- Consider every exposure. Where and how a consumer might be exposed to your message. How do you create a sense of consistency across these touchpoints?
- Consider a POESM kick off prior to launch. Use this session to run through what is being run in each channel to capture any missed opportunities before it falls through the sieve.



STEP 4: TO KEEP MESSAGING CONSISTENT AND FRESH, GALVANISE AROUND A COMMS IDEA.

All of these brands have had many different advertising executions over the years but the comms idea at the heart of it has remained consistent.

Not only does this allow you to land the key message for your audiences to take away (read: frequency), it also allows you to do it in a way that stays fresh, particularly when looking to embed an idea over the course of decades.

Comms Idea	Brand	Year of Launch
Campaign for Real Beauty	Dove	2004
Should Have Gone to	Specsavers	2002
Dirt is Good	Persil	2005
You're Not You When You Are Hungry	Snickers	2010

'Campaign for real beauty'... 'Should have gone to' ... 'Dirt is good'... 'You're not you when you are hungry'. What do they all have in common? They are all brilliant, and famous, comms ideas. So famous in fact, you already know the brand.

That fame has been compounded over many many years, critical consistency and frequency, to enable a creative concept to embed in our minds.

STEP 5: KEEP IT GOING, AND GOING... AND GOING... AND GOING...

As we have seen, some of the most famous comms campaigns benefit from continued presence. Despite this, most advertising suffers from short-termism. The reasons for this are varied and probably circumstantial to the business at any given time.

Research from Cannes Lions & WARC, and the IPA have both warned of the rise in short-termism, with marketers focussing their efforts on short term campaigns focussed on activation, as opposed to long-running brand building campaigns.

Even within the world of TV advertising (which is famously expensive in terms of production, not just in terms of monetary value, but time, resource and energy), the average number of days that

a TV ad spends on air is around 81 days for the UK (Williamson, 2023).

There's a number of reasons why this is.

Presumed wear out from marketers whose own frequency and exposure to a campaign is significantly higher than that of the average consumer. With single campaigns often taking months to plan, shoot and bring out to the world, marketers mistake their own wear out as an accurate reflection for the general public (who, as we have seen, most likely did not even notice the ad).

This is further exasperated by CMO tenure. Looking to make their own stamp on the brand, agency reviews and new campaigns are commonplace

with the arrival of a new CMO. However, this is often reviewed and revamped again in 3 years and 6 months' time – the average tenure of a CMO today (King, 2025) and certainly not enough time for a brand building campaign to become truly famous.

This is especially true when you consider the fact that some of the most famous advertising campaigns actually took some time to see returns.

"But what about wear out!?", we hear the naysayers shout?

Well, System1 don't see anything in their data that raises concerns about wear out

(Williamson, 2023). In fact, they find that whilst the performance of ineffective ads don't get any better the longer they run, they also don't get worse (read: wear out). For better performing ads, their effectiveness actually improves over time (especially if they include "right-brained" features like recurring characters or slogans).

The argument then perhaps is to forgo a week's activity in a campaign if it means you can afford a higher quality concept, track or director. Because those ideas will last much longer in the minds of consumers, and the assets will stay usable for much much longer too.

CHEF'S TOP TIPS:

- Don't mistake your itchy feet with consumer wear out!
- Ask yourself – do you really need to make a new TV ad?
- Where possible, galvanise yourselves around a comms idea.
- Express it through different creative executions and across different formats.
- Keep it going!

FRESH APPROACHES

100%
LED BY PEOPLE
NOT PLATFORMS

FRESH
APPROACHES

PLANNED
ONLY WITH
GOOD
INGREDIENTS



**CHAPTER
08**

**MEASURE
WHAT
MATTERS**

MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

WAYS TO MEASURE EFFECTIVENESS MEANINGFULLY

INTRODUCTION

At a time when developments in the industry have made proving advertising effectiveness more difficult, developments in the economy at large have also made it more essential than ever.

Effectiveness has and will always matter. Whether you were trying to sell toothpaste in the 1950s through a single TV ad, or promoting a holiday destination across a complex ecosystem of influencers and creators today, the fundamental role of advertising has never changed: to generate demand and grow the bottom line.

What has changed is the complexity and the scrutiny.

As discussed in a previous chapter, advertising has become vastly more complicated. Where a single creative in a single channel might once have sufficed, modern media plans are layered across an expanding number of channels, formats and touchpoints. Added to this, how and where products are sold or accounted for has broadened.

This is not inherently a bad thing; as we have seen, the accumulation of small effects across channels (i.e. “lots of littles”) can be powerful. But it does introduce a significant challenge for measurement.

With campaigns spanning multiple channels alongside promotions, CRM, pricing activity and distribution changes, marketers are left asking difficult questions. Which channel worked hardest? Which combinations mattered most? What drove what? All at a time when advertising has become infinitely more measurable.

FULL OF
HUMAN
THINKING



This is the great oxymoron of modern marketing. Today we can measure impressions, viewability, clicks, views, view-through rates, comments, site visits and conversions, the list goes on. The abundance of available data creates an illusion of precision, yet often strips measurement of meaning.

For over a decade we have known many commonly reported digital metrics do not correlate meaningfully with business outcomes. Ehrenberg-Bass, Binet & Field and Comscore demonstrated this as far back as 2012. Yet we still devote significant time debating whether a small increase in CTR or VTR is “good” or “in line with benchmark”. Our hunch? Is that in line with the benchmark or not, it doesn’t really matter!

What we often label “post-campaign analysis” is really a post-buying analysis. It tells you whether the media delivered what you paid for, efficiently and at acceptable quality. Without brand, behaviour or business metrics alongside, it tells you very little about whether the campaign actually worked.

This distinction matters because effectiveness has never been more important.

The aftershocks of Covid are still being felt, and built upon by global crisis after global crisis. Inflation remains stubborn, household budgets are squeezed and consumers are becoming more selective; buying less, trading down or choosing cheaper alternatives. Advertising becomes increasingly important to win a share of those stretched wallets. Yet marketers are under growing pressure to justify investment

not through clicks or views, but through brand, behaviour and business outcomes.

The good news is the industry is waking up. Once the domain of econometricians and award juries, effectiveness has become an industry-wide fixation. But whether that fixation is in the right place is still for debate. Entries to the IPA Effectiveness Awards continue to rise, with 79 submissions in 2024 alone. Coupled with the IPA’s Effectiveness Accreditation launched in 2021, the message is clear: Effectiveness is no longer optional. It is central to everything we do.

This is why we have approached this chapter differently.

Closing the loop on effectiveness requires collaboration. Agencies need access to business data. Measurement partners provide specialist expertise. Media owners hold signals that help contextualise results.

So we invited two independent partners to contribute their perspective.

LoopMe approaches measurement through planning and buying, challenging reliance on less meaningful metrics.

IMS approaches it through analytics, exploring the realities of ultra-processed analytics.

It is with this combination we can provide a more rounded view.

PLAN AND BUY MEANINGFUL METRICS, BY LOOPME

loopMe™

Advertising influences how people think, feel and behave. Yet most media plans are still bought against proxies such as clicks, views and impressions.

These are easy to measure but rarely connect to the outcomes brands actually care about.

Over time the industry has refined these signals. Viewability improves hygiene. Attention added nuance. Each step was progress, but still removed from the central question: Did this campaign influence people?

Today technology allows us to move closer to that answer. Instead of planning around exposure alone, it is now possible to estimate and buy media against brand outcomes, including the number of people likely to move into awareness, consideration or positive perception. Digital media planning can therefore move from delivering impressions to delivering influence.

INGREDIENTS

- **A clear brand objective:** Defined before the plan is built. What exactly should change in people’s minds – awareness, perception, preference or intent?
- **Live intelligence:** Technology that measures influence while campaigns are running, turning brand outcomes from retrospective reporting into a signal planners can act upon.
- **Direct access:** Real-time visibility so marketers can adjust media based on outcomes rather than proxy metrics.

CHEF’S TOP TIPS:

- Media metrics are **not measures of effectiveness**. They are correlatory metrics at best.
- Prioritise **brand, behaviour and business metrics**. Sales is the ultimate goal, but not always immediate.
- Decide what good looks like **upfront**. Effectiveness should never be defined retrospectively.
- Track supporting metrics – they may reveal something unexpected.
- Treat measurement as **collaborative**. Sharing business data is essential.

FULL OF
HUMAN
THINKING

HIGH-PROTEIN
PLANNING

PLANNED
ONLY WITH
GOOD
INGREDIENTS

METHOD

STEP 1: DEFINE WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE.

Start with benchmarks. Across categories and channels there is already a credible understanding of expected brand lift. Measurement partners and media owners have run enough studies to know what outcomes typically look like.

Use these benchmarks when building the plan. Once reach is estimated, apply expected lift rates to project the number of brand outcomes the plan should generate. Even this small step allows you to move from exposure to anticipated influence.

STEP 2: OPTIMISE FOR OUTCOMES.

When outcomes are defined upfront, optimisation changes. Instead of maximising reach or frequency in isolation, planners optimise channel mix and partner selection to maximise outcomes such as awareness, perception shift or purchase intent.

This introduces deliberate trade-offs. Breadth vs depth. Awareness vs persuasion. Reach vs influence.

STEP 3: WORK WITH PARTNERS WHO GUARANTEE IMPACT.

Media guarantees already exist. We expect partners to deliver reach and frequency, and digital added viewability guarantees. The next step is working with partners willing to underwrite brand outcomes, not just report them.

Guarantees turn planning assumptions into shared responsibility. If outcomes are not achieved, partners deliver until they are.



ANTI ULTRA-PROCESSED ANALYTICS BY IMS



Earlier chapters explored ultra-processed planning: default channel mixes, templated optimisations and “because the machine said so” logic. Even less discussed for now is its twin: ultra-processed analytics.

If planning risks becoming wallpaper, ultra-processed analytics is the paste holding it up.

This chapter is about measurement that supports bravery, not beige.

Measurement that emerges from dashboards and quietly trains marketers to choose the safest options, because they are easiest to measure, justify and repeat.

THE ULTRA-PROCESSED ANALYTICS PROBLEM

ULTRA-PROCESSED ANALYTICS HAS THREE CHARACTERISTICS

It measures what's easiest, not what matters

Metrics like last-click conversions, in-platform ROAS, CPMs and CTRs dominate because they are readily available.

What they miss are the outcomes that drive growth: incremental profit, durable demand, mental availability, retention and pricing power.

If you only measure the easy, you will only fund the easy.

It hides assumptions behind outputs

Numbers arrive with the authority of maths but without the accountability of explanation.

Models are always opinionated. Tools built by platforms inevitably favour those platforms.

It creates false certainty

Dashboards often present simple answers to complex systems:

“This channel has the best ROAS.”

“Meta drove £X of sales.”

But those conclusions only hold within specific assumptions, windows and measurement methods.

Good analytics does not remove uncertainty. It helps you manage it.



THE SHORT-TERM FEEDBACK LOOP

Ultra-processed analytics is addictive because it provides constant feedback. Spend goes in.

A number goes up. The behaviour repeats. Soon the measurement system becomes a vending machine of quick wins.

But immediacy is not the same as importance. Short-term metrics don't just reflect behaviour, they shape it.

The more you optimise to them:

- The more you favour channels that report well.
- The more brand investment loses oxygen.
- The more organisations value what can be measured fastest.

THE POINT OF ANALYTICS

Analytics exists to answer one question: What should we do next? If it cannot influence a decision, it is decoration.

Good analytics should resemble an investment memo, not a lab report:

- Protect demand-harvesting channels like search.
- Reallocate spend when performance channels saturate.
- Invest where future demand will be created.

Three principles matter most:

- **Return:** commercial impact, not platform ROAS.
- **Risk:** how confident we are in the result.
- **Time horizon:** effects that compound over years.

When marketing is treated as capital allocation, analytics changes shape. Precision matters less than decision quality.

WHOLE-FOOD ANALYTICS

Strong measurement systems triangulate signals:

- **Commercial results:** sales, margin, retention.
- **Behavioural signals:** search demand, site journeys.
- **Brand signals:** memory, attention, perception.
- **Experiments:** geo tests and incrementality.

One source can mislead. Four sources converge.

Just as when you are planning a campaign and looking to triangulate sources to build understanding, you need to triangulate your analytics to better understand what has happened and where you could go.

CHEF'S TOP TIPS:

- No metric without a decision attached.
- Confidence beats false precision.
- Show ranges, not single numbers.
- Triangulate sources.
- Measure long-term effects like long-term effects.
- Tools are ingredients, not the meal.



FRESH APPROACHES



FRESH THINKING



PLANNED ONLY WITH GOOD INGREDIENTS



PROPER PLANNING INSIDE!



100% LED BY PEOPLE NOT PLATFORMS



FRESH APPROACHES



**CHAPTER
09**

**BRAND
DEVELOPMENT
MODELS**

BRAND DEVELOPMENT MODELS

AN ORGANISED SHOPPING LIST

INTRODUCTION

The best opportunity for marketers and planners to develop their skills in understanding opportunity whilst folding in brand and media thinking into a business model.

The other seven chapters in this cookbook have concerned themselves with how to approach individual and very important facets of anti ultra-processed thinking. This chapter is all about processing. We should be clear that a Brand Development Model (BDM), as we have named it, is not a new concept for organising and understanding market opportunity. Market orientation and business development models have been around for decades. Open any well regarded business or marketing textbook from the last 60 years and you'll see tabulation of data from various sources, used to aid choices.

A good BDM relies on having a range of internal and external data sources, laid out clearly in a table, alongside unique and independent brand thinking. It helps make clear decisions about what to do across countries or regions, or any other set of fixed variables (geographic regions are common and simple to define). From this overview of data, more specific and nuanced jobs for communications can be realised, and better thinking realised.

The vantage point is that by taking on the role of organising and understanding the data you come across within a planning and strategy challenge, you will be able to synthesise and see opportunity. A skill that like any other improves with practice. A skill that if you just rely on someone else coding and dashboard to give you 'answers' is never stretched.

The beauty of a BDM therefore is in the process itself for the individual or the team as much as the input and output of data and direction, it also goes one step further in providing two other benefits:

- 1. Mutual Understanding:** A BDM creates fast familiarity by laying out available and supplied data, alongside planning work, allowing teams to quickly grasp a new multi-market challenge. The act of sourcing and laying out this data helps planners process information and see patterns and opportunities. Setting out the facts clearly is invaluable.
- 2. Business Development:** While a BDM can contribute to establishing the job to be done (JTBD) and budget deployment, the BDM can evolve into a Business Development Model. Armed with robust data, it enables planning or marketing teams to see the bigger picture and strategically make recommendations for regions and business growth and the role of marketing to support this.

THE BRAND DEVELOPMENT MODEL

COOKING AND PREPARATION TIME

Dependent on access to data, a few days to a few weeks.



INGREDIENTS

A brief, or at least an understanding of the businesses/ brand challenge.

Business data including customers and future targets (by market).

Brand tracking data or suitable proxy (e.g share of search).

CPM data for different channels across the communications funnel.

Macroeconomic data related to your category.

Macro and Target audience understanding.

Supporting planning thinking, perhaps derived from the other chapters of AUPP.

Access to secure Google Sheets or Microsoft Excel.

A COMPLETED BDM SHOULD PROVIDE:

1. A single truth for global and local marketing teams and agencies to align on.
2. A confident business case for budget allocation across territories.
3. An ability to outline how a brand platform can be articulated with nuance across different regions or markets.



METHOD

Regarding the below we will make an assumption that columns are used for markets (or regions) and rows for clusters of data. A simple table and

framework is available to download on the Craft Media website if needed.

A crude visual representation is here to help you visualise the phases:

	Region A	Region B	Region C	Region D
Macro Data (Market, category & media data)				
Human Data (Target audiences & brand tracking data)				
Market Direction (JTBD & investment weighting)				

PHASE 1: MARKET AND CATEGORY DATA.

Consider the data needed to compare markets objectively and find common “units of value.” Question the challenge and formulate a clear ‘ask’ for data from the client or insight team. Broad data is acceptable; the goal is a base understanding.

- **Macroeconomic & Category Data:** Look for annual category spend, sector growth trends, and consumer confidence trackers. Every category is different, understanding where the business is wanting to grow will help focus the data you prioritise.
- **Competitor Data:** Where possible include competitor SOM or business size in relation to your brand as a way to understand your position in each market.
- **Media Cost Data (CPMs):** CPMs provide a broad sense at a base level of how much it might cost to be noticed by audiences within markets. Publicly available CPMs offer a consistent base, and it is better if they are slightly higher than perhaps what your brand is used to paying (if you have that knowledge), as it provides a safety net for early planning.



PHASE 2: ADDING HUMAN DATA.

This phase allows us to layer in human opportunity by understanding the total addressable audience alongside our target audiences data.

- **Macro Human Market Data:** Determine how many people in each market fit your total addressable audience. These large datasets show the total size of the opportunity, and help create a case for being overseen or overheard. This should be broad; it might be people with passports if you are a travel company, or alcohol drinkers if you are selling beer. Simple and big.
- **Customer Data:** Focus on customer data and brand perception. Try to include a few years of customer data. Include average order value or annual customer value, and where appropriate, average cost per acquisition (CPA). Detail the targets for each market. Include market-by-market brand tracking data (unaided awareness, consideration, usage, preference) and scores

for competitors if available. This uncovers your brand's velocity and where it might be slowing down. Look to be granted access to a simple Looker studio, or brand tracking dashboard if you don't already have access. This will reduce drag on teams and again get you closer to the business of the brand.

- **The Target Human Audience:** If you have followed early chapters you will have a really interesting core audience. If possible, replicate this cohort in different markets, using tools like GWI to give you that uniformity. By placing an audience size against each market, you can see where you might need a broader lens or can double down. Make sure you check your sample sizes in your survey data. If too small, reduce the audience build complexity where possible. In this instance this is ok, you are building a bigger picture, but need confidence your data is robust.

PHASE 3: CALIBRATING THE BDM AND ACTIONS.

With your data laid out, move from raw numbers to informed budget deployment. A weighted approach is used to ensure big markets don't absorb the entire budget. Begin to calibrate your budgets on a second sheet.

1. **Market Categorisation:** Group markets into strategic buckets, based on importance to business: eg protect, grow and explore. This assumes the business already has a sense
2. **Topline Budget Deployment:** Proportionally allocate budgets based on the percentage of planning audience by market category group.

linked to sales and cost of business that it knows where it is currently, and in the future hopes to make more money. If this data is unavailable, use macro data from stage one to inform a set of key markets to focus on

CHEF'S TOP TIP:

Depending on the level of nuance required, use CPMs of market media costs to further refine budget allocation, therefore accounting for the difference cost of media to achieve the JTBD.



PHASE 4: TURNING DATA INTO INFORMED CHOICES.

The data table is a source of truth, but it does not account for budget usage by market. Evolve the BDM to speed up decisions by defining the JTBD and incorporating a communications framework.

1. **Defining the JTBD by market:** The data indicates what is needed for instance a mature market may focus on protecting leadership. Your work on understanding how to get out of the middle lane, or to plan for notice not just reach may help you here in defining what task comms has to undertake. Try to limit the number of JTBD's, too many and you will create confusion across the business.

2. **Roles for comms by market:** Based on the JTBD for each country, consider the weighting of effort for comms across a funnel (a simplistic device, but helpful in decoding brand actions to a table). Using your understanding of CPM's in a given market, a guidance on budget weightings linked to the JTBD through the funnel by market. The creative route and attitude and ambition of the marketing team is a key part of this discussion and direction you are able to set.

- **Tip:** Include your comms framework and a guide to the standard jobs to be done on another tab. Create locked and editable versions for manual budget adjustments.

PHASE 5: THE ONGOING STORY.

A BDM is not "set and forget." Revisiting this data at 3 or 6-month intervals transforms the model into a strong source of planning and decision-making in line with business results.

- **Quarterly Checks:** These pulse checks provide clarity on why results turned out a certain way compared to initial decisions. Updates to brand

tracking or customer data should be added if they provide value. Often a brand QBR provides the best reason to both revisit and supply the data (handily in one place).

- **Six-month or year-end Reviews:** Assess how far the broadest decisions have changed the brand's fortunes. Having the macro datasets on hand makes seeing the bigger picture easier.

CHEF'S FINAL TIP

Explaining how to build an excel sheet in a book is a strange endeavour. However the choice of canvas actually becomes immaterial. What this BDM process should represent is a clear direction on steps for how to get closer to the commercial challenge of your brand, and the role marketing can play in supporting it. In an industry where so much potential understanding can be hidden behind a dashboard, take time to understand a market manually and everything else in this book will flow even more easily.

FULL OF HUMAN THINKING

FRESH THINKING



**CHAPTER
10**

**AFTER
DINNER
THOUGHTS**

AFTER DINNER THOUGHTS

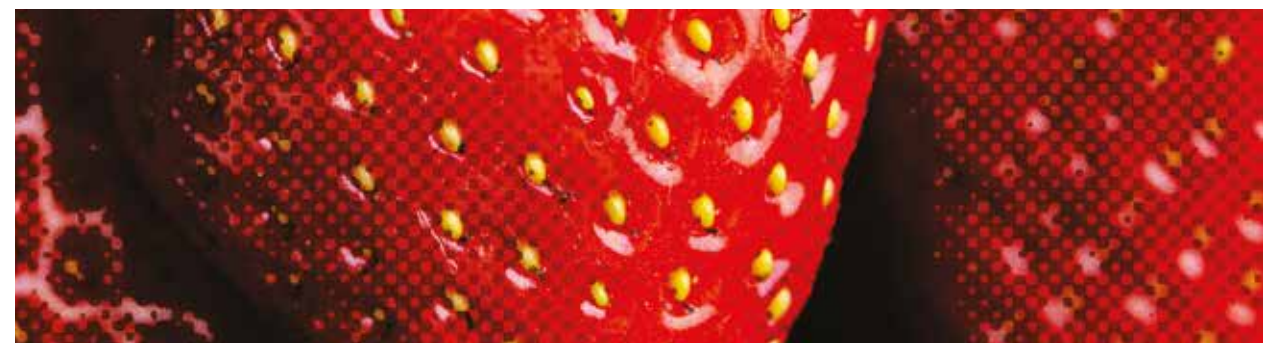
A COOKBOOK FOR EVERYONE

A cookbook for everyone with an ambition to embrace the endless possibility of human thought.

We wrote this cookbook with the intention of trying to share ways in which human thinking will and should continue to support and drive business growth within the world of marketing. Over the six months between concept and publication, AI noise and 'infobesity' remained deafening. This only galvanised us further. With any emergent orthodoxy there is space for an alternative, in this case the alternative is to hold on to human thought, judgement and critique. These skills can only be kept sharp if we remember to engage them, if we continue to cook for ourselves, making nutritious healthy decisions.

As we said at the very start we chose a cookbook theme as an analogy to the challenges within the food industry that affect everyone, impacts that have been realised too late for too many. This is our small attempt to protect some of the very central concepts of thinking, that the marketing and advertising world has been built on from being lost, and may only be cared about when almost extinct.

Now get back in the kitchen before it's too late.



FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To our wonderful Crafties past and present, in some shape or form you have all had a role to play in making this book a reality, through the exceptional, action orientated thinking you have contributed, and continue to deliver for our clients. An attitude of 'how can I improve on last time?' is why this agency is here today.

To everyone of our clients, from the early years, to those we work with in 2026 and those we are yet to meet. Thank you for collaborating with us, for the interesting questions you pose, and for recognising the value of comms strategy to find new answers to old questions.

To the myriad of businesses and agencies we work with, your openness to collaborate, to want

to explore new possibilities and to mesh with us as part of your team and vice versa is a blessing. Without this, we would have nothing to show for our labours except powerpoint charts.

To the wider industry, whether it is the trade and industry bodies, the individuals and everything in between, thank you for sharing and celebrating work and thinking. Without this, not only would this book have been impossible, but our wider industry would not be as well informed as it has the potential to be today and beyond.

And lastly to those at Craft, AnalogFolk, IMS and LoopMe who have had a significant role in making this all a reality thank you, we couldn't have done it alone, and nor would we have wanted to.



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ALL DIGITAL REFERENCES CAN BE FOUND LINKED HERE



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