Making Magazine Creative Accountable:
How to Improve Magazine Ad Effectiveness

Full Study — Includes Creative Diagnostic Tool

Consumer engagement with advertising has emerged as a key discussion point in the ongoing effort to improve advertising accountability.

Research has shown that creative quality is the most important factor in affecting advertising results, although media engagement also plays a role.* Therefore, Magazine Publishers of America (MPA) wanted to know: **Can learning from magazine engagement research be used to strengthen the effectiveness of magazine advertising creative? And if so, how?**

In tackling this topic, MPA first examined the impact of magazine engagement on advertising effectiveness, including whether findings would be broadly applicable across ad categories and magazine genres. Then MPA explored how learning could be applied to creative development.

Based on study findings, MPA has developed an easy-to-administer diagnostic tool (available on pages 10–12) that allows advertisers to assess consumer engagement with magazine advertising creative—and consequently help to strengthen ad recall and action-taking.

Key Findings

- **More engaged readers are more likely to recall and act on magazine advertising than less engaged readers**
- **The overall relationship between greater reader engagement and higher ad effectiveness holds true consistently across advertising categories and magazine genres**
- **Magazine reader engagement is driven by magazine advertising, not just editorial content**
- **Using engagement metrics to pre-test advertising creative can help to improve ad recall and action taking by providing valuable insights into how consumers connect with the ad**

*Sources: "Identifying Key Metrics for Magazine Planning," Ware, Baron and Edge, 2005 Worldwide Readership Research Symposium; "Exploring Media Engagement," Eubank and Griffiths, 2007 ARF Audience Measurement 2.0

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STUDY APPROACH

In approaching the development of a creative diagnostic tool, MPA leveraged findings from Northwestern University's Magazine Reader Experience Study,* which revealed that, in general, reader experiences that drive magazine reader usage also drive advertising impact. The learning became the basis for conducting new research surveys with Affinity LLC, which was selected because of their vast VISTA Print Effectiveness Rating Service database of magazine ad recall and action-taking information. Studies focused on the following questions:

- Can a direct relationship between magazine reader engagement and advertising effectiveness be proven?
- If so, does the relationship remain consistent across advertising categories, specific advertising executions and magazine genres, and what are the implications?
- How can media engagement findings be applied to help develop more effective magazine creative?

In addition, to understand how the creative diagnostic tool might work in a "real-world situation," MPA conducted in market tests with Bayer Aspirin and the automotive advertiser, Lincoln.

*Findings from the Magazine Reader Experience Study are available at www.magazine.org/research.

This document as is available for download at www.magazine.org/engagement. Also available online: Appendix — Additional Information on Methodology and a document that details only the creative diagnostic tool.

Affinity LLC, an innovative marketing and research company, specializes in advertising effectiveness and media engagement. Their suite of research products includes the VISTA Print Effectiveness Rating Service, which measures the performance of more than 30,000 magazine ads annually.

Magazine Publishers of America (MPA) is the industry trade association for consumer magazines. Established in 1919, MPA represents more than 240 domestic publishing companies with approximately 1,400 titles, more than 80 international companies and more than 100 associate members.

For more information on the research presented here, please contact Wayne Eadie, Senior Vice President, Research, Magazine Publishers of America, at weadie@magazine.org or Tom Robinson of Affinity Research at tom@affinityresearch.net. For copies of related MPA resources, please e-mail promotion@magazine.org or visit MPA's website: **www.magazine.org.**

Making Magazine Creative Accountable: How To Improve Magazine Ad Effectiveness — Full Study.
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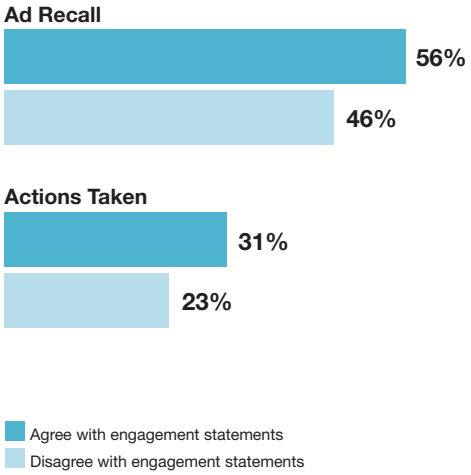
Proving a direct relationship between ad engagement and ad effectiveness

To learn whether higher levels of engagement with magazine advertising correlate with higher advertising effectiveness, MPA asked Affinity LLC to quantify consumer engagement with magazine advertising across a large group of ads. Affinity tested more than 5,000 ads in 70+ MPA member magazines among 25,000 respondents, using key experiences that drove engagement in the Magazine Reader Experience Study. Ad recall and actions taken were then compared among more engaged and less engaged readers.

Results confirmed prior learning that **greater reader engagement is directly linked to increased advertising recall and actions taken:**

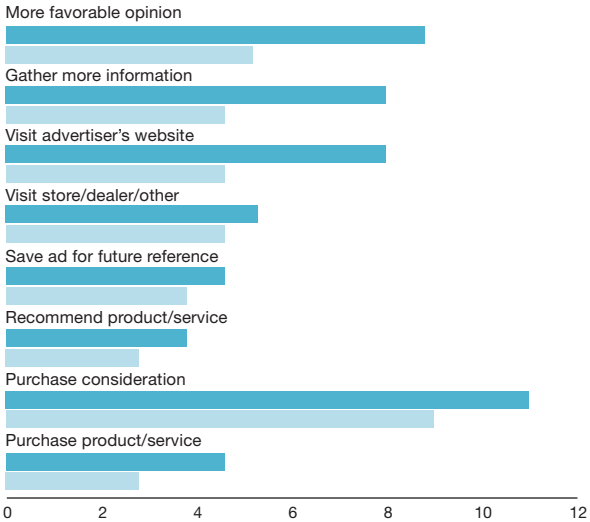
- Engaged readers recalled ads 22% more than less engaged readers
- Engaged readers were 35% more likely to take action in response to magazine advertising more than less engaged readers
- Engaged readers were more likely to take action in all of the individual factors that comprise overall actions taken

Overall Ad Recall and Actions Taken in Response to Magazine Advertising



Top/bottom 2 box scores among total respondents
Source: Affinity, 2006

Individual Actions Taken in Response to Magazine Advertising



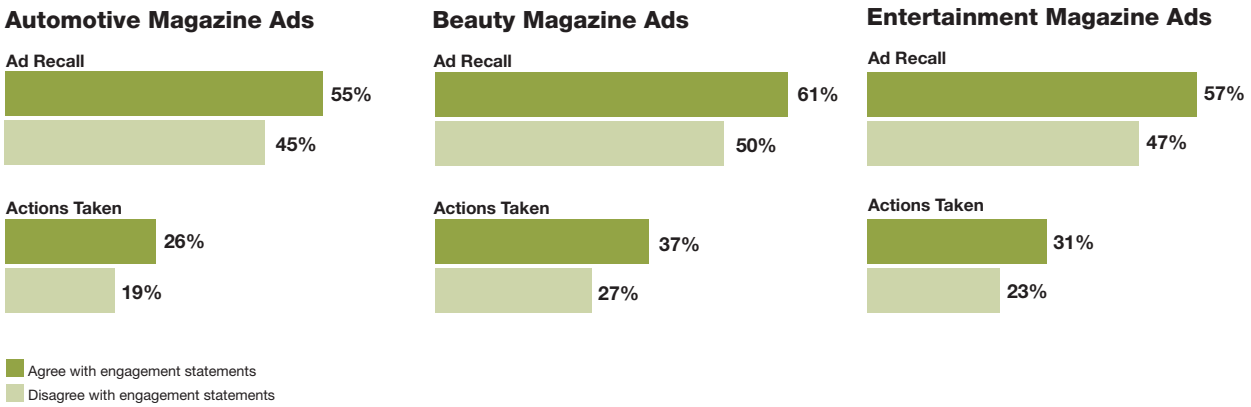
More information on the methodology for this research may be found in the appendix to this document at www.magazine.org/research.

Examining whether ad engagement drives effectiveness across advertising categories

MPA and Affinity next compared the ad recall and actions taken scores of more engaged readers to those of less engaged readers for 18 advertising categories to learn whether higher reader engagement consistently correlated with higher recall and actions taken. The more than 5,000 ads studied were classified according to the VISTA standard ad category definitions.

The finding: **Increased reader engagement led to greater advertising recall and overall actions taken across all 18 advertising categories.** Three examples:

- Automotive ads—a category that targets a wide range of demographic groups
- Beauty ads—primarily geared toward women
- Entertainment ads—generally directed towards younger consumers



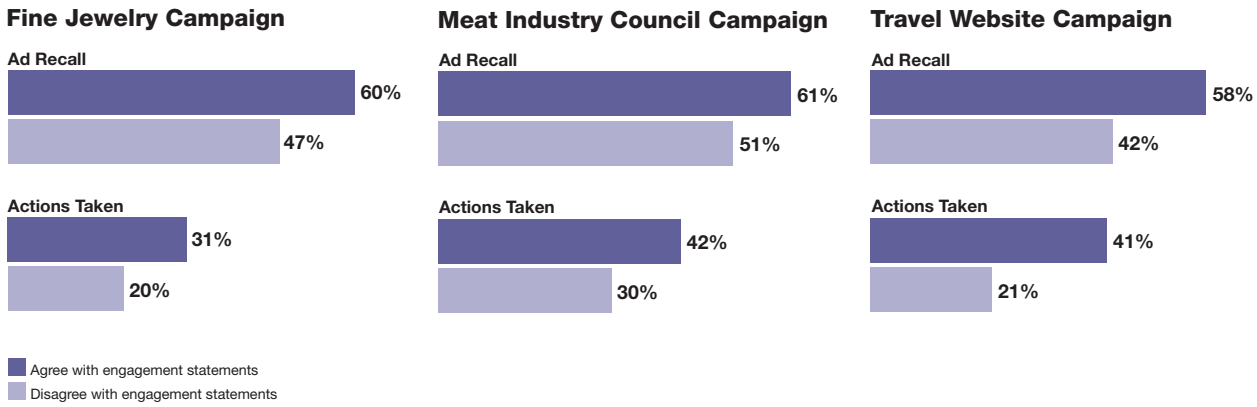
Top/bottom 2 box scores among total respondents
Source: Affinity, 2006

To determine whether findings for advertising categories also applied to individual ad campaigns, 15 brand campaigns were selected for analysis, based on the following criteria:

- The products reflected different ad categories, different target audiences (based on examining the magazines in which the advertising ran) and varying purchase/behavioral dynamics (based on price, length of purchase cycle, etc.)
- Each campaign needed at least three insertions measured by Affinity to provide sufficient data for analysis

Results showed that **higher engagement scores correlated with higher ad recall and overall actions taken for each of the 15 ad campaigns studied,** for example:

- A jewelry ad, which appeared in magazines targeted to young women and in magazines read primarily by upscale adults
- A food execution, which ran ads in magazines that reach men and women 35+
- A travel website ad, scheduled in magazine genres such as business, celebrity, fitness luxury and travel

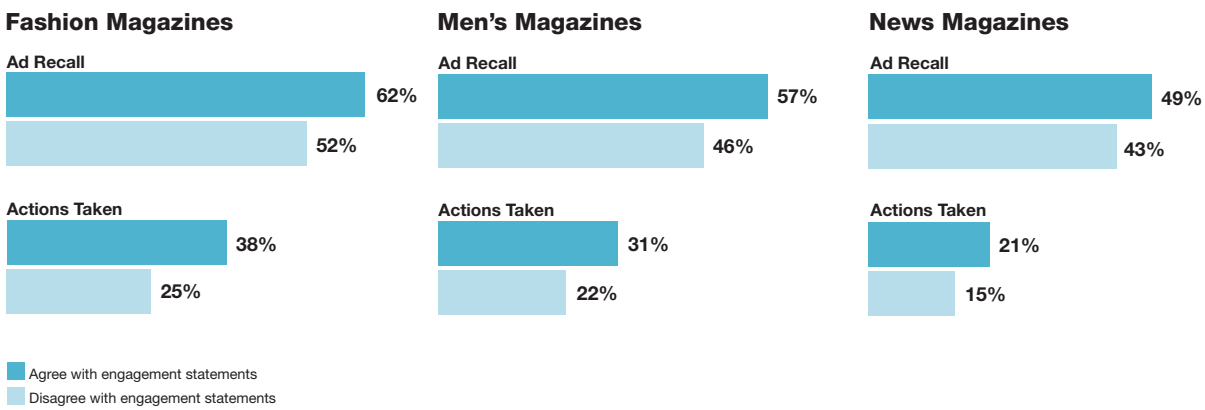


Top/bottom 2 box scores among total respondents
Source: Affinity, 2006

Examining whether ad engagement drives effectiveness across magazine genres

MPA and Affinity also examined whether or not higher engagement levels boosted advertising results across different magazine genres, based on the 15 genres defined in Affinity's on-going studies. **Across the 15 magazine genres, engaged readers scored higher in ad recall and overall actions taken,** even though the various genres attract different types of readers, such as:

- Fashion magazines
- Men's magazines
- News magazines



Top/bottom 2 box scores among total respondents
Source: Affinity, 2006

Data on all advertising categories and magazine genres may be found in the appendix to this document at www.magazine.org/engagement.

Comparing findings across magazine genres and ad categories

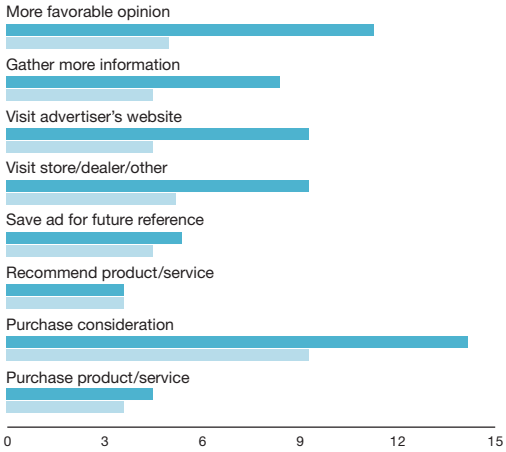
MPA and Affinity compared the patterns of actions taken among different magazine genres and advertising categories that represent a significant amount of their ad content. They found that the patterns of actions taken within a specific magazine genre were generally consistent with the patterns of actions taken from related ad categories, indicating that **advertising, not just editorial content, plays an important role in overall reader engagement** with magazines. (Note: patterns were not identical, as magazines include advertising from multiple ad categories.)

The following four examples of magazines genres and ad categories within them illustrate this:

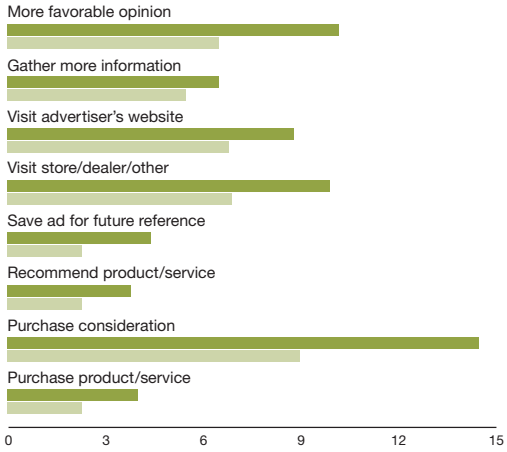
Magazine Genres

Related Ad Categories

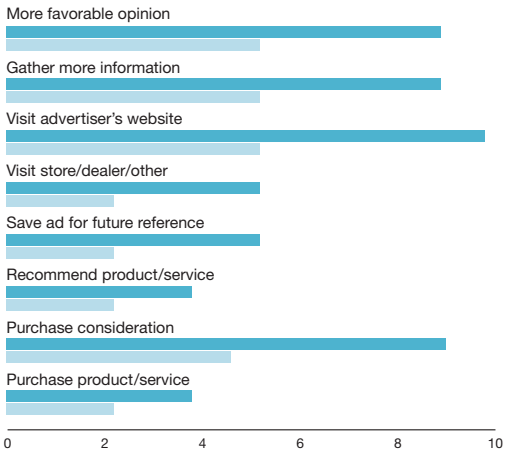
Fashion



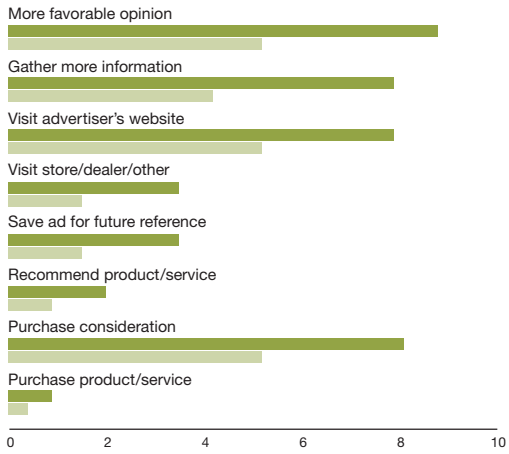
Apparel Ads



Automotive



Automotive Ads

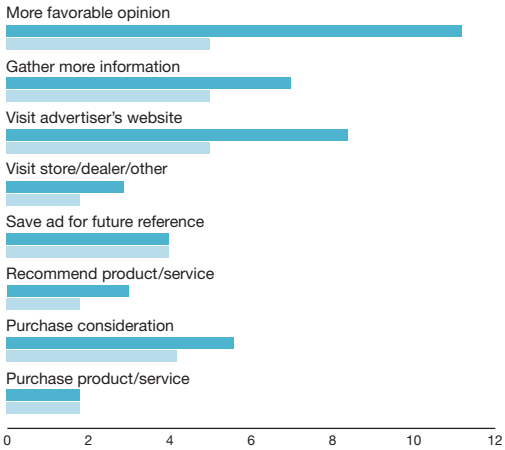


Agree with engagement statements
Disagree with engagement statements

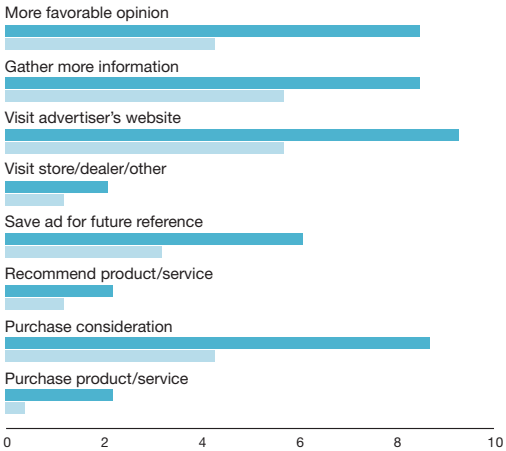
Top/bottom 2 box scores among total respondents
Source: Affinity, 2006

Magazine Genres

Business/Finance

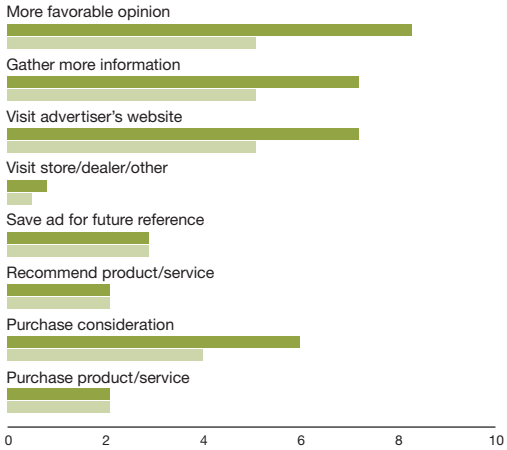


Travel

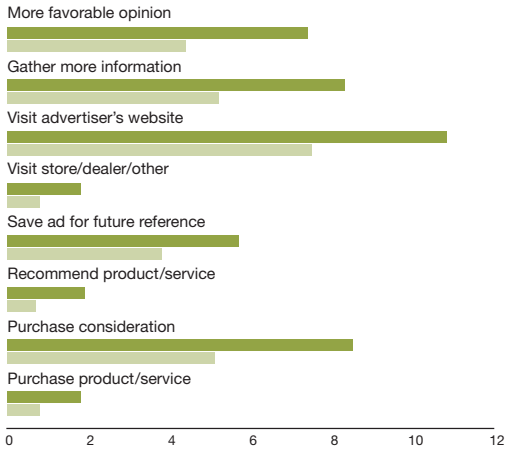


Related Ad Categories

Finance Ads



Travel Ads



Agree with engagement statements
Disagree with engagement statements

Top/bottom 2 box scores among total respondents
Source: Affinity, 2006

This learning reinforces findings from other research:

- **Advertising is a valuable component of magazine content for readers**
- **Relevance is a key component in enhancing ad effectiveness**

Data on all advertising categories and magazine genres may be found at www.magazine.org/engagement.

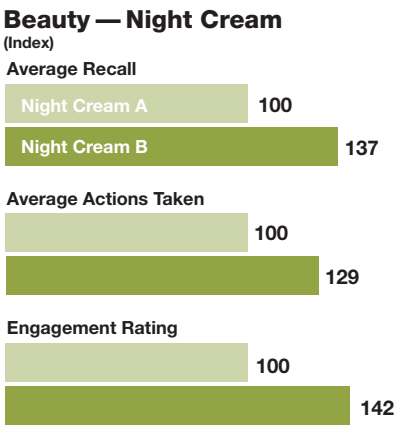
Examining whether engagement findings can predict creative impact

Having determined that reader engagement drives magazine advertising effectiveness, MPA sought to learn whether engagement attributes might be used to help understand and even predict the effectiveness of magazine advertising creative.

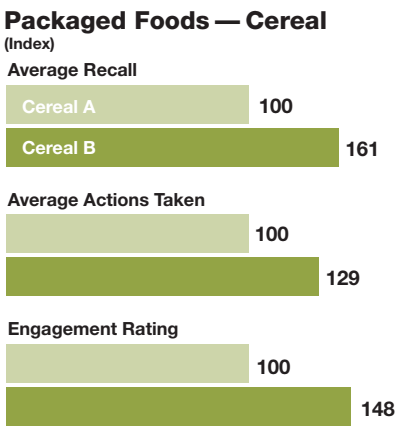
To simulate how magazine engagement might be used to evaluate creative, six brands—two brands from each of three different categories—were identified for testing. The brands were selected based on their existing recall and action taking scores from Affinity's VISTA database: one brand in each category scored well above the VISTA category norm; the other performed near the VISTA category average. Then consumers were asked to assess an individual advertising execution from one of the brands being studied, and results were analyzed. Specifically:

- A digital representation of one of the ads was sent online to readers of magazines in which the ad had run
- Readers were asked to complete an accompanying survey* to assess their engagement with the ad
- The resulting engagement rating was paired with the existing VISTA recall and action taken scores for that ad, and the attributes that drove engagement were ranked*
- The engagement ratings, top-ranked attributes, and recall and action taking scores for the two ads within a category were examined to learn if the ad with the higher engagement score yielded higher advertising results and what factors drove engagement

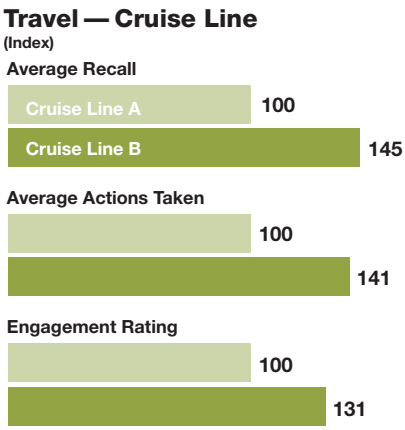
Findings showed that **the engagement survey predicted advertising results in all three categories: ads with higher engagement ratings had higher ad recall and action-taking scores. Furthermore, top-ranked attributes varied among the ad categories.**



Source: Affinity, 2006



Source: Affinity, 2006



Source: Affinity, 2006

*See pages 10 – 12 for the process and survey questions used to calculate engagement.

Creative diagnostic case studies: Bayer Aspirin and Lincoln

With the findings from the three test categories in hand, MPA thought it would be valuable to see how the creative diagnostic tool worked in-market. Two advertisers wanted to assess their magazine creative using the diagnostic tool—Bayer Aspirin and automotive manufacturer Lincoln—although they chose to participate for different reasons:

- Bayer Aspirin wanted information about how consumers' engagement with two existing ads could help in developing new creative
- Lincoln thought that the analysis could help in considering the rotation schedule for two ads used in an existing campaign

Each advertiser specified a target for testing the ads with Affinity. As with the matched sets of ads previously tested, Affinity then sent a digital version of one of the two ads, plus an accompanying survey, to the target identified. Results from the creative diagnostic tool provided valuable insights by showing what attributes drove recall and actions taken for each ad. Because in both cases the ads had already appeared in magazines, Affinity was able to compare the resulting engagement scores to the ads' recall and action taken scores from the VISTA database.

Bayer Aspirin

To learn more about how consumers' connected with their ads Bayer Aspirin chose two ads that were above the category norm, based on results from the VISTA database. If similar attributes emerged as the key drivers of results, then the agency and client felt that they could use the findings to continue to enhance consumers' emotional reaction to their ads, which they judged to be a critical quality in an advertising category that often focuses on product information.

Findings indicated that a number of engagement drivers were similar for the two ads, including "I believe this ad," "This ad helps me picture things in my mind," "This ad deals with something I can relate to" and "This ad leaves me feeling good." Importantly, generating these emotions was not at the expense of communicating about the product, as "I have a better sense of this product" was also among the top attributes. Quantitative results validated the learning: consumers resonated more strongly with the top five ranking attributes on the ad that led in action-taking.

Lincoln

Lincoln found that two ads that they selected yielded different results in the marketplace and that engagement attributes could help to explain why. The ad with the higher engagement rating overall also produced higher scores for recall and actions taken. Furthermore, the ad with the highest scores was consistently stronger among individual engagement attributes, besting the other ad in 18 of the 26 attributes.

Based on the top ranking statements for both ads, Lincoln's results showed that the most important attributes in determining consumer engagement included "This ad leaves me feeling good," "This ad is sophisticated," "The ad is pretty cool," and "This makes me picture things in my own mind."

The top 15 ranked attributes for brands studied may be found at www.magazine.org/research.

How to use the creative diagnostic tool

Based on the test results with Bayer Aspirin and Lincoln and the three matched sets of ads, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the creative diagnostic tool developed by MPA can be a valuable tool in magazine creative development. The tool can be used to understand emotional connections as an end in itself or help to predict magazine advertising impact. Importantly, since tests can be conducted online, they can be executed inexpensively and quickly. The turnaround time for the Bayer and Lincoln tests took less than 10 days, once the ads to be tested had been selected and the desired target had been identified.

An agency or advertiser who wants to employ the creative diagnostic tool should use the following guidelines:

1. **Select the ads to be analyzed.** The analysis may include executions for your own brand(s) and/or those of a competitor. The ads should be easily distinguished from one another (e.g., a different headline alone does not provide enough variation to be tested using this method).

2. **Work with a research company that can effectively survey your target.** The research company should be able to identify consumers based on your designated target audience, which might be defined by product usage habits, demographic characteristics or readers of magazines most likely to be on your media schedule. The study presented in this document was administered online, which provided fast turnaround and cost efficiency. However, in-person or mail interviews can also be used. Whatever method is chosen, the survey approach should be consistent over time, if there is a desire to compare results from multiple surveys and/or build a database to enhance learning.

3. **Administer the survey.** Respondents should see only one ad. When the ad is presented, ask respondents to indicate their agreement with the 26 experiences for the ad, using the questionnaire on page 12. While over time the number of statements may be refined, MPA recommends using all 26 statements at this time, since what drives engagement for specific categories and demographic groups is not yet known.

4. **Generate enough responses for valid analysis.** Ideally, results will include at least 200 respondents. This will allow for segmentation of responses, such as by gender and broad age and income groups within the overall target audience.

A document that details only the creative diagnostic tool is available for download at www.magazine.org/engagement.

5. **Assess which ad generates overall higher engagement levels.** Calculate the percent of engaged readers for each of the 26 statements by adding the percent of those who somewhat and strongly agree. Total the percent of strongly/somewhat engaged readers for all 26 statements, and divide the total by 26. The ad with the higher rating is the more engaging ad. It is important to note that the score should not be used in isolation, but should be paired with qualitative assessment, as noted below, to understand what drives engagement.

6. **Examine which attributes drive engagement for each ad and how that affects results.** Although work to date has shown that better ad results may be driven by higher engagement ratings among more factors, they can also be driven by higher scores among the top ranking factors that are most critical in determining engagement. You can add to your learning by:
   - Ranking all 26 attributes by percent of those who strongly or somewhat agree for each ad, and then seeing what statements drive engagement for each ad: are they similar or different?
   - Looking at the specific statements in which each ad excels or is weaker to decide how insights can be used to strengthen either or both ads
   - Examining how the ads compare on key factors by totaling agreement scores for the top five (or 10) statements and dividing by five (or 10) to see if those scores differ from the overall scores

7. **Build learning over time.** Consider creating a database of engagement results across multiple surveys, in order to assess what drives success for your brand(s). The database may include results for different campaigns, products and/or target audiences. Analysis may yield valuable insights that increase the odds for future success.

8. **Use survey results as a diagnostic tool, not a score.** Use survey results as a diagnostic tool, not a score. As noted, the pattern of responses can provide important information that can help to strengthen advertising, whether looking at the results from a single test or examining a database consisting of the results of many tests over time. Looking at the engagement rating alone will not yield these insights.

Going Forward MPA is interested in continuing to learn about how consumers interact with magazine advertising to help advertisers improve advertising effectiveness. Advertisers or their agencies who wish to explore partnership opportunities with MPA should contact **MPA@promotion.org.**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
I believe this ad	●	●	●	●	●
This ad touches me deep down	●	●	●	●	●
This ad effects me emotionally	●	●	●	●	●
This ad will lead me to try new things	●	●	●	●	●
This ad shows me how to do things	●	●	●	●	●
I would likely share this ad with others	●	●	●	●	●
I would likely talk about this ad with others	●	●	●	●	●
This ad is for someone like me	●	●	●	●	●
This ad deals with something that I relate to	●	●	●	●	●
This ad inspires me	●	●	●	●	●
This ad makes me feel good about myself	●	●	●	●	●
This ad is sophisticated	●	●	●	●	●
I have a better sense of the product	●	●	●	●	●
I found this ad humorous	●	●	●	●	●
This ad leaves me feeling good	●	●	●	●	●
This ad is an escape for me	●	●	●	●	●
This ad absorbs my attention	●	●	●	●	●
This ad makes me smarter	●	●	●	●	●
I get ideas from this ad	●	●	●	●	●
This ad updates me on things I follow	●	●	●	●	●
This ad makes me picture things in my mind	●	●	●	●	●
I look at the pictures in this ad and say “wow”	●	●	●	●	●
This ad is pretty cool	●	●	●	●	●
This ad is unusual	●	●	●	●	●
This ad has something that surprises me	●	●	●	●	●
I would want to save this ad	●	●	●	●	●

A document that details only the creative diagnostic tool is available for download at www.magazine.org/engagement.

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