

# The creative crystal ball

How new data guarantees your creative will succeed, before you hit launch



# Introduction

Data has fuelled creative for years – but there's always been something missing.

- We feel the creative is good, but do we know why?
- We know the creative could be better, but do we know how?



What if we knew creative was going to knock it out of the park, before we even hit launch?

## What if we had Predictive Creative?

Predictive Creative is the art of diving into quantitative data – information that hasn't been readily available until now – to craft creative that we KNOW will outperform.

Using a heady mix of strategy, tools and techniques, it is now possible to assemble creative elements according to a measurable, repeatable formula that science says will work.

That's right, science. The creative process struggles when too much subjectivity gets involved. Loud voices win. Assumptions trump evidence. Using quantitative data to inform creative choices makes the process much more objective. Creative strategists are then free to focus on the bigger picture, safe in the knowledge that the execution is going to be as effective as it can possibly be.

This brings benefits beyond an optimised banner ad. Introducing objectivity allows both agencies and clients to follow the data. It creates an atmosphere that is more collaborative, less combative. Bringing together institutional knowledge, shared understanding and data-led decision-making makes the creative process preflight more effective all round. Not to mention the nail-biting wait to find out whether all the debate of 'cute dog or no cute dog' in the ad actually worked out in the end.





To understand how Predictive Creative is the missing piece that slots into the rest of the campaign performance puzzle, this report looks at:

- key areas of focus in the modern creative process
- tips for campaign improvement
- the worst culprits for waste in the creative process
- insight into the consumer's cognitive load
- agentic AI's role in creative optimisation
- the four pillars of creative success
- ...and how Predictive Creative has become the latest staple for commercial impact

The Creative Crystal Ball from SmartAssets shows how you can combine institutional knowledge, AI, and data to enhance and expand your creative output and deliver repeatable, predictable campaign success.



# Your creative process today

Google's EEAT (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) content requirements are raising the bar. Creative quality accounts for 70% of campaign performance. Subpar creative is likely to fail – **even if the execution itself was perfect.**<sup>1</sup>

More and more is demanded of marketers every day and they have an ever-growing range of tools to deliver it, but still they fear they are producing creative that is less impactful, less relevant and a missed opportunity. How do we turn that around?

"Creative insights fuel relevance and resonance, media insights drive reach and results. The best campaigns come from marrying creative insight (what makes people feel) with media insight (what makes people act). A sharp creative idea without smart media is ineffective; and a perfectly placed message without emotional relevance is just noise. Essentially, they both matter as much. Creative insights move the work from category convention to cultural relevance, giving the idea emotional depth, and media insights provide contextual smarts allowing brands to outmaneuver, not outspend."

**Adil Khan**  
CEO of Forsman ME

## Are you **BOLD**?



**51%**

say no.

Their customer insights are too weak to inform bold creative choices

## Are you **FAST**?

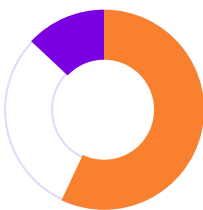


**57%**

say no.

They can't react to cultural events

## Do you take **RISKS**?



**29%**

say no.

They are strongly risk-averse, creatively<sup>2</sup>

**13% said yes**

## Are you **FRESH**?



**16%**

say no.

They also struggle to drive engagement (16%) and traffic (15%)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smartassets.ai/resources/why-creative-intelligence-is-an-essential-tool-for-scaled-media-performance>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.marketingdive.com/news/brands-appetite-wanes-creative-risk-taking-per-lions-research/747129/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://digitaloft.co.uk/content-marketing-statistics/>

# Best practice in optimising the creative campaign process

## Collaborate to ideate

Clarify ownership of each campaign workflow stage but come together to brainstorm, reducing data blind spots.

↑15%+

**Sales lifts.** The result of Nike's collaborative audience research and competitor analysis<sup>4</sup>

## Blend qual, quant and psychological methods

Anything from focus groups to surveys and A/B tests refine your messaging.

↑30%+

**ROI increase** after moving creative quality from average to great<sup>5</sup>

### Qualitative methods:

Focus Groups, In-depth Interviews, Direct Questioning

### Quantitative methods:

Surveys, A/B Testing, Central Location Tests

### Physiological methods:

Eye Tracking, Galvanic Skin Response, Electroencephalography

## Prototype and test

An online retailer who used AI to analyse performance data on hundreds of assets including CTAs and colour. Successful assets included in new briefs to predict performance pre-launch.<sup>6</sup>

↓75%

**Decrease** in development time

## Score campaign elements

Use tools and AI to analyse historical data, validating effectiveness and reducing iteration cycles.

↑28%

**Increase** campaign results when finding the 'sweet spot' for text, font, logo, emotion etc.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.admetrics.io/en/post/ad-creative-workflow-best-practices>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.kantar.com/inspiration/advertising-media/can-ad-testing-really-predict-sales-impact>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2024/blueprint-for-ai-powered-marketing>

<sup>7</sup> <https://lbbonline.com/news/magic-numbers-asking-the-right-questions-with-eric-walzthony>

## Automate variant generation

1hr → 5 minutes. The time to generate 5-10 fresh ad variants without and with variant automation.

↓92%

**Decrease** in time to generate ad variants

## Respect platform-specific optimisation

15 seconds = 5x more engagement on TikTok  
+5 minutes = ideal engagement time on YouTube

↑40%

engagement rates when platform-specific ToV, rather than uniform ToV across all channels

↑53%

conversion when using dynamic creative optimisation

↑60%

less cost to convert than generic campaigns<sup>8</sup>

## Avoid ad fatigue with regular refreshes for large-scale advertisers

Dynamic ads featuring 24 different meals a day, every day. Automated ad variant switching based on the time of day.

### Nestle Indonesia saw

↑32%

Increase in purchase conversion

↑40%

Increase in average order value

↑34%

Increase in ROAS

↑30%

Official store growth q-on-q<sup>9</sup>

## The four pillars of creative success—so far...



### ONE

Collaborative ideation and stakeholder involvement



### TWO

Data-driven creative strategy



### THREE

Prototyping, A/B testing and validation



### FOUR

Continuous optimisation post-launch

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.v-xplore.com/why-platform-specific-social-media-marketing-packages-matter/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://jivox.com/case-studies/nestle-boosts-conversions-for-cpas-campaigns/>

# Say goodbye to wasteful, frustrating processes

Waste is a dirty word. Not just for shareholders or the CFO who need to see every penny count. With most assets stored digitally, there is a huge carbon cost to overloading on the .jpg, .mp4 and .wav.

And quite frankly, scattered, duplicated, out-of-date and just plain wrong assets cluttering up the place are driving your creative teams NUTS.

Getting the creative process running smoothly has a lot to do with eliminating waste.

\$100bn – the cost of the number of assets sitting in company systems that are **NEVER USED**.<sup>10</sup>

The ones that are used are still costing companies money:

**35%**

of ads lack correct branding

**12%**

of ads use incorrect dimensions

**50%**

omit a call-to-action

## US-based consultant, Bob Stanke, used Six Sigma to identify the Seven Wastes in Lean Six Sigma Marketing:

- 1. Transportation:** Moving assets about, getting lost in emails, moving from one database to another.
- 2. Inventory:** Not knowing what you have and not knowing what you need leads to duplication and waste. Or not enough assets and delay.
- 3. Motion:** Assets getting stuck in approval chains, editing suites, client conversations.
- 4. Waiting:** Getting stuck, needing to be reprocessed or reproduced all causes delay. Delays cost money.
- 5. Overprocessing:** Not enough consensus on what is needed up front means too many tweaks, too many cooks spoiling the asset broth.
- 6. Overproduction:** Or, 'just in case' disease. Producing multiple assets before they're needed because the photographer/client/product is there.
- 7. Defects:** All of the above result in mistakes. Unapproved changes are made, the loudest voices in the room trump the most informed ones. Assets are de-optimised in real time.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <https://lbbonline.com/news/over-half-of-content-produced-isnt-activated-leading-to-billions-in-wasted-spend>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bobstanke.com/blog/seven-wastes-lean-six-sigma-marketing>



## How do you tackle waste?

In 2022, McKinsey talked about 'working vs non-working spend'. Essentially, what you spend on distributing communications (working spend) versus how much it costs to make the thing you're distributing (non-working spend). Both can have wastage and both can be cut.

## AI is making it worse – sort of

# 73%

the number of global marketers actively using GenAI tools in workflows. It means more, faster, but also asset overload and brand inconsistency.<sup>12</sup>

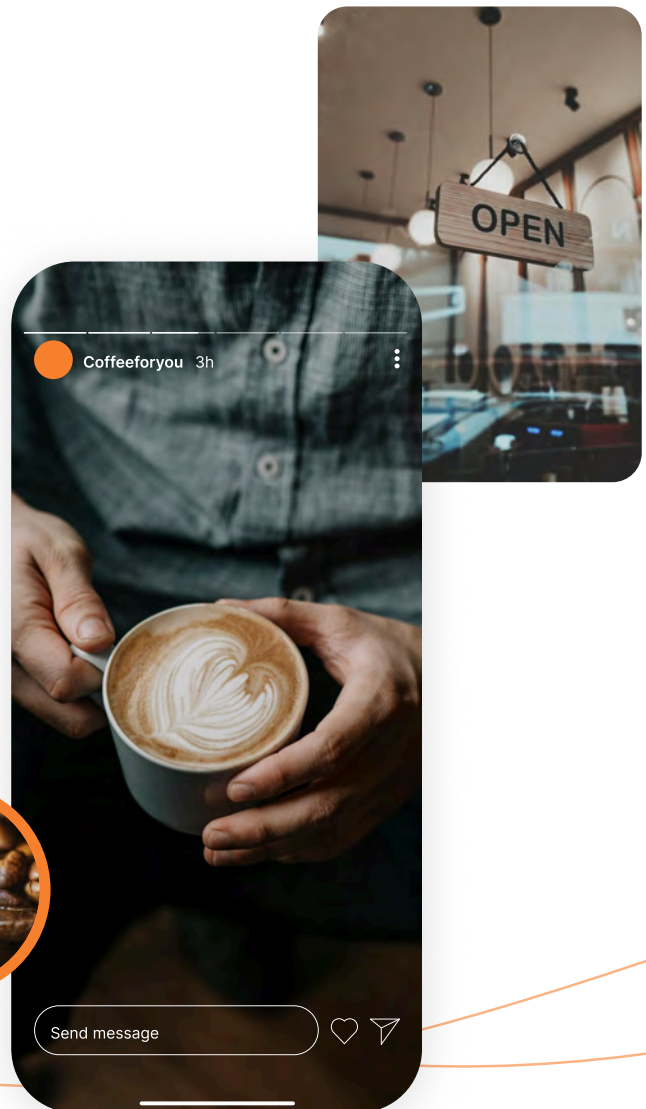
# \$65 million

"Once [a global telecom company] understood what it was spending and where, it revamped how this work got done. It retained the larger agencies for inspiration and ideas, saved budget by developing an in-house agency to craft campaigns, and established a new set of partnerships with agencies that could execute **low-cost advertising production tasks such as resizing images or translating ads into multiple languages**. The revamping of its agency model took a couple of years for the company to complete, but it led to **\$65 million in annual savings**."<sup>13</sup>

"The efficiency gains of using AI for creative asset production are well known and gaining traction. What's exciting about this is the potential to limit media and production waste by using predictive models to inform asset creation, which was a hot topic amongst leading marketers at Cannes this year."

**Ajit Sivadasan**

*President & Global Head of DTC, Lenovo*



<sup>12</sup> <https://www.smartassets.ai/resources/why-creative-intelligence-is-an-essential-tool-for-scaled-media-performance>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/growth-marketing-and-sales/our-insights/beyond-belt-tightening-how-marketing-can-drive-resiliency-during-uncertain-times>



# Capture customer attention – build on it for engagement

Once you've optimised your workflow and trimmed the fat, it's time to think about what really matters. The customer. **They're a busy bee these days.**

Whether you're fighting for saliency, trying to capture the moment, right place, right message, right time – they're OVERWHELMED.

Fighting cognitive overload is very real and getting front of mind is about boxing clever, boxing SMART.

S

## Small sections

Breaking down information into small, clear chunks increases information recall by 46% compared to unstructured information.<sup>14</sup>

M

## Mayers' multimedia learning

Psychologist Richard Mayer suggests people absorb information best when it's presented in both words and pictures, across a range of channels. Mayer's 12 principles create clear, concise, compelling ads but the essence is: Create clear, compelling, controlled ad content.<sup>15</sup>

A

## Advertising attention

When multiple sources aren't competing for their attention, consumers can give a lot of attention to ads (5.8 out of 7 on one scale). But when they're very distracted, this drops to a mean of 4.2 out of 7. You can combat this with an emotional ad, which captures a gaze time of 3.1 seconds, even under high cognitive load, compared to only 2 seconds with a rational ad.<sup>16</sup>

R

## Relevant recall

Some of the most celebrated ad campaigns don't have the best recall. The Sony Bravia famous 'bouncing balls' campaign won many awards and half of the respondents in one study remembered it. But only 9% knew it was for Sony.<sup>17</sup>

T

## Triggers

Psychological elements help ads stand out by tugging at primal needs. Anchoring and decoys can trigger price sensitivity and an eye for a bargain. The Paradox of Choice means that a smaller selection of products makes people more likely to buy (30% on a smaller range vs 3% on the larger). Familiarity is also key, building up a 'history' with the consumer across multiple channels makes them more likely to buy.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> <https://emulent.com/blog/cognitive-load-and-marketing/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.digitallearninginstitute.com/blog/mayers-principles-multimedia-learning>

<sup>16</sup> <http://scipro.ru/article/04-03-2025>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/good-good-ad-cognitive-load-holds-key/1578739>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.smartinsights.com/conversion-optimisation/conversion-optimisation-strategy/3-cognitive-triggers-to-increase-customer-conversion/>

Assess ads according to SMART principles, across the 7 major factors impacting consumer cognitive load:

| Factor           | Low Cognitive Load (Good)             | High Cognitive Load (Bad)            | Platform/Format Notes          |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Memorability     | Simple, focused, minimal distractions | Overloaded, cluttered, too much info | Short-form: brevity is key     |
| Aesthetics       | Clean, harmonious, uncluttered        | Busy, decorative, clashing colors    | Mobile: simplicity essential   |
| Engagement       | Emotional, instantly relatable        | Complex, metaphorical, slow build    | Short-form: instant engagement |
| Brand Presence   | Early, clear, frequent                | Delayed, subtle, hidden              | Skippable: early branding      |
| Distinctiveness  | Unique but clear, novel yet familiar  | Abstract, confusing, inside jokes    | Social: immediate clarity      |
| Attention        | Bold, single focal point, contrast    | Multiple CTAs, scattered focus       | Mobile: one focal point        |
| Visual Heirarchy | Clear order, logical flow             | No order, competing elements         | Mobile top-down, single column |



“**Attention is the ultimate luxury**, and grabbing it is the ultimate challenge. Marketers need to be very clear about what sets their brand apart, and express this in a way that evokes emotion for the product. **We gravitate to brands with unique personality**, and that stand out unapologetically. So, instead of chasing trends, focus on strengthening your brand’s identity and share stories that genuinely resonate. Make your unique brand qualities undeniable, iconic and universally admired.”

**John Sadeghipoor**  
Chief Marketing Officer at Lulu Guinness

# Optimise and strategise, don't theorise

There are some tried and tested 'truths' about campaign optimisation that can generally be agreed on; tactics that easily strengthen your message and target those customer cognitive load issues without necessarily needing a deep dive into analytics, or a paddle through personalisation...

## Microcopy/Language

↑121%

conversions when using Action verbs i.e. Get Started vs Submit

↑90%

CTR when you make it personally relevant i.e. Start MY free trial<sup>19</sup>

↑124%

conversions when you remove doubt i.e. No credit card needed<sup>20</sup>

## Remove clutter

↑232%

conversions when you remove distractions around CTAs<sup>20</sup>

**Note:** this is culturally specific. Consumers in China prefer 'busy' UX<sup>21</sup>

## Big up pixels

90%

CTR when you make the CTA button BIG

48×48px – minimum recommended button size (Google), 44×44px (Apple)

## Time and place

↑70%

conversions if the CTA button is at the end of the product page<sup>22</sup>

## True colours

↑17%

Blue increases CTR<sup>23</sup>

↑22%

Luxury loves purple<sup>23</sup>

21-34%

Red beats Green for urgency<sup>24</sup>

If we listed all the creative elements that we know work better one way rather than another, we'd be here all day. And it would be very generic. Wouldn't it be better to know instinctively what's right for our own brand? **Some might say gut feel is the magic ingredient. Intuition is important, but accuracy is better.**

<sup>19</sup> <https://emulent.com/blog/cognitive-load-and-marketing/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/personalized-calls-to-action-convert-better-data>

<sup>21</sup> <https://digitalcreative.cn/blog/how-china-ux-is-different>

<sup>22</sup> <https://wisernotify.com/blog/call-to-action-stats/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/hidden-power-color-how-your-cta-buttons-secretly-influencing-goel-uta1c/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://cxl.com/blog/which-color-converts-the-best/>

# More than a robotic beast of burden – Agentic AI’s value in the creative process

The multiple elements for creative success outlined in this report are things creatives could do and probably should do to optimise every single one of their campaigns. But we live in the real world. There are only so many hours in the day, only so many hands on deck. They simply can’t do it all.

## Agentic AI is the robot in your pocket that means you can.

### Creative optimisation

Proactively makes real-time adjustments to in-flight campaigns.  
Continuous variant testing reducing cycles from weeks to minutes.

### Workflow efficiency

Accelerates production through automated resizing, variant generation and localising content  
Cuts steps in campaign journeys from 135 to 85, go to market 25%-35% faster.<sup>25</sup>

### Preserve brand voice

Train AI on brand guidelines, use JSON-based voice profile to deliver a consistent brand voice at scale.<sup>26</sup>

### Trend prediction

In 2023, AI flagged a trend of retro sneaker unboxing to Nike, six weeks before the trend peaked. The company launched a timely, targeted campaign that boosted sales by 37% in its target demographic.<sup>27</sup>

### Enhanced targeting

Performs cross-data synthesis autonomously  
Unifies media data, neuromarketing insights (i.e. heatmaps) and psychometrics.

“We’re able to employ agents to automatically generate rules from scientific research and then help us at the implementation phase. We provide sets of recommendations that won’t deviate from the original creative. It’s minor adjustments like adapting the language or shifting the logo somewhat, mostly cosmetic things or maybe formatting or layout.”<sup>28</sup>



**Eric Walzthöny Kreutzberg**  
CTO of SmartAssets

## 80/20 Rule

### Agentic

80% of personalisation activity

### Human oversight

20% personalisation activity

<sup>25</sup> <https://creative.salon/articles/features/agentic-ai-accenture-song>  
<sup>26</sup> <https://www.meadowbrooke.co.uk/ai-powered-content-strategy-how-to-build-an-authentic-ai-brand-voice-in-n8n/>  
<sup>27</sup> <https://dialzara.com/blog/how-ai-predicts-social-media-trends-before-they-happen#ai-powered-trend-prediction-transforming-business-strategies>  
<sup>28</sup> <https://lbbonline.com/news/agentic-ai-is-making-space-for-the-biggest-creative-impact>



# How Agentic AI differs from Traditional AI<sup>29</sup>

| Feature          | Traditional AI                | Agentic AI in Media                       |
|------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Decision-Making  | Requires human input          | Fully autonomous and adaptive             |
| Content Creation | Assists in content generation | Independently generates and optimizes     |
| Personalization  | Rule-based recommendations    | Real-time, context-driven personalization |
| Interactivity    | Limited responsiveness        | Dynamic adaptation based on user behavior |



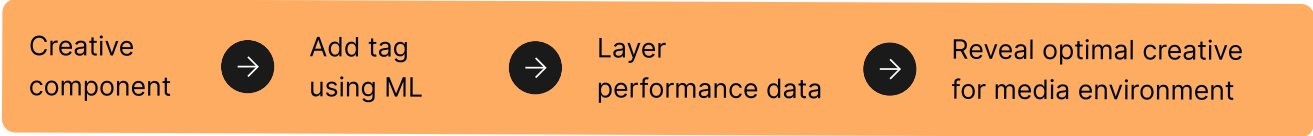
Having reached Agentic AI, we are now able to refine all the elements that have come before – build in autonomous decision-making, test and optimise as often as is desired, delve deeper into customer insights and patterns to anticipate rather than react to trends. But there is one, final piece of the puzzle that will turn the Crystal Ball from wishful thinking to scientific predictor of success. **Predictive Creative.**

## The **fifth** pillar of creative success: Predictive creative

### Not all content is created equal

Predictive Creative is the art of diving into qualitative data – data we haven't readily had access to until now – to craft creative we know will outperform the standard.

Qualitative data trumps gut feel. It is the analysis of individual elements of campaigns not just quantitatively – by the numbers – but also by actual performance.



<sup>29</sup> <https://www.tredence.com/blog/agentic-ai-media>

## The core components of Predictive Creative



### Atomic Tagging

Marking every element, however small, of a creative asset for analysis. Colour, objects, position, logos, regulatory content, copy, audio...



### Analytics

From one to three years' performance data gives insights into how each atomised element of an asset can impact overall creative performance.



### Optimisation

Using performance data to adjust creative pre-flight to save further work once the campaign is live and ensure more immediate, potentially greater, success.



#### Optimisations don't have to be dramatic.

40% of creative assets one agency received were the wrong-size for the media they were to be used for.

*Quick fix: change the dimensions and resolution.*

## The Predictive Creative Audit

Sometimes, pre-flight optimisation is sexy. By looking into the top creative decisions that made a difference to brand KPIs, the relevant assets can be adjusted to suit.

The result is a very specific creative recommendation based on historical assets that audiences have already interacted with.

**3x**

ROI spend for FMCG co with predictive A/B testing.

## Predictive Creative vs Dynamic Creative Optimisation – 10 v 1

For dynamic creative optimisation to give a reasonably accurate campaign tailored to the target audience, creatives develop 10 versions only to keep one.

**No waste**

In Predictive Creative, only one version is ever created.

## In summary

The creative process is long overdue refinement. With today's tools and techniques, even in a bafflingly large and complex media environment, that refinement is entirely possible.

Bringing together attention to detail (adjusting for platform particularities), efficient workflows, reducing waste, optimising for customer needs and introducing intelligent time-saving agentic AI, adding Predictive Creative to the mix is the cherry on top of the campaign gateaux.

Marketing is about helping brands and business grow, so in today's landscape there's a good argument that says the worst thing you can be is ignored. That implies both that risks are necessary and helpful - for cut-through, impact, memorability - but also that they're actually less risky than ever. The alternative certainly doesn't look like much fun."

**Toby Southgate**

*Global CEO of We Are Social*

## About SmartAssets

SmartAssets solves the challenge of creative inefficiency in marketing by turning creative content into a measurable, optimisable asset. Blending machine learning, computer vision, and natural language processing to deeply analyse ad creative—both visual and written—SmartAssets is the first fully data-driven, AI-powered solution for optimizing creative effectiveness.

While traditional platforms focus on media delivery and targeting, SmartAssets addresses the most overlooked variable in performance marketing: the creative itself.

The platform has transformed creative strategy for some of the world's biggest advertisers across FMCG, retail, luxury and tech.

Across clients, SmartAssets has boosted ROAS by up to 300%, saved 500+ hours per campaign brief, and helped teams consistently produce high-performing content. It's not just a tool, it's becoming the industry standard for creative decision-making.

**+300% boost**

in **ROAS** for a leading luxury cosmetic brand.

**+89% increase**

in **click-through-rate** for a global electronics client.

**500+ hours**

time saved **per brief** for a global fintech company.