

Borrow what they already know

A worksheet for finding the faces, habits, sounds and formats your audience already recognizes, and turning one of them into an ad idea.

Part 1

Why borrowed assets work

Part 2

Five places to look

Part 3

Four worksheets

Part 4

Gatsby, worked through



Your audience already knows things. Use them.

Every new ad has a recognition problem. People have to notice it, remember it and credit it to the right brand. A borrowed asset gives you a head start, because the audience knew it before your ad aired.

THE CASE BEHIND THIS GUIDE

Gatsby Moving Rubber, Japan, 2006

Mandom built the launch ad for a new hair wax out of three things its young male audience already knew.

A face	A habit	A song
Takuya Kimura, the actor whose look young Japanese men copied.	"Kimutaku syndrome": men had been copying his hair and clothes since 1994.	The Stylistics' 1975 hit, with one line rewritten to sing "I can give you Gatsby".

7.4 million units shipped in ten weeks. By the end of September 2006, Gatsby's share of men's hair wax had risen from 33% to nearly 60% (by value, excluding convenience stores; Mandom via Nikkei xTECH).

The research agrees. One study found ads using songs people already knew were recalled more often than ads with original jingles (90% against 78%). Original jingles were slightly better at getting the brand named (61% against 54%). Gatsby got both by rewriting a known song around its name.

Meaning travels too. Consumer researcher Grant McCracken (1989) showed that people carry what a famous person stands for over to the product they appear with.

How to use this guide

Work through it with your team in one sitting. Bring a pen and someone who talks to customers every week.

1

List

Note everything your audience already pays attention to.

2

Test

Score each asset on four tests and keep the strongest.

3

Make it yours

Put your name inside the asset so the memory points to you.

4

Write it

Turn the winner into an idea you can brief.

Five places your next ad might already exist

Go through each one and write down anything your audience would recognise in under two seconds. Use the questions to prompt your team.

1

People they follow or copy

Whose look, voice or opinions does your audience copy? Who do they already trust?

Example: Gatsby cast Takuya Kimura, a man famous for his hair, to sell hair wax. In Singapore, the government used Phua Chu Kang during SARS because heartland audiences already trusted the character.

2

Habits and trends already spreading

What does your audience already do, copy or argue about without anyone asking them to?

Example: Young Japanese men had copied Kimura's hairstyles for over a decade. Gatsby's ad simply handed them the product to do it with.

3

Songs, sounds and phrases

What could they finish or quote back to you? Which sound would make them look up from their phone?

Example: Gatsby rewrote a 1975 love song. Closer to home, Pizza Hut Singapore turned its hotline, 6235 3535, into the jingle, and Canadian 2 for 1 Pizza's number, 6241 0241, carries its offer.

4

Formats they already watch

Which shows, video styles or social formats does your audience sit through to the end?

Example: a game show, a cooking video, a get-ready-with-me clip, a street interview, a before-and-after reveal. A familiar format tells viewers how to watch before your story starts.

5

Your own past work

What do customers still remember from your old ads, packaging, shopfront or slogan?

Example: In September 2026, Gatsby brought Kimura back for Moving Rubber's 20th anniversary, using the same structure as the 2006 spots.

The asset audit

Write down every asset your team can think of. Aim for at least eight before you judge any of them; the scoring comes on the next page.

Type: 1 People · 2 Habits and trends · 3 Songs, sounds, phrases · 4 Formats · 5 Your own past works

THE ASSET	TYPE	WHERE YOUR AUDIENCE MEETS IT	HOW WELL THEY KNOW IT
1			1 2 3 4 5
2			1 2 3 4 5
3			1 2 3 4 5
4			1 2 3 4 5
5			1 2 3 4 5
6			1 2 3 4 5
7			1 2 3 4 5
8			1 2 3 4 5
9			1 2 3 4 5
10			1 2 3 4 5
11			1 2 3 4 5
12			1 2 3 4 5

Tip: ask your sales or customer service team. They hear what customers quote, copy and complain about every day.

Four tests for every asset

Take the assets that scored 4 or 5 on Worksheet 1 and run each one through these tests. Score every test from 1 (weak) to 3 (strong).

Recognition

TEST 1

Would most of your audience recognise it within two seconds, without explanation?

Gatsby: Kimura's face and the Stylistics melody both pass instantly with young Japanese viewers.

Fit

TEST 2

Does what the asset stands for match what your product promises?

Gatsby: a man famous for his hair, selling a wax for restyling hair.

Swap

TEST 3

Put a competitor's logo on the idea. Does it still work? If it does, the asset isn't yours yet. Score 3 only when the swap breaks the idea.

Gatsby: a hard-hold wax couldn't run "do whatever you want with it". The idea only works for a restylable product.

Room for your name

TEST 4

Can your brand name, product or offer sit inside the asset itself, so remembering the asset means remembering you?

Gatsby: one line of the song became "I can give you Gatsby".

10 to 12

Strong.
Take it to Worksheet 3.

7 to 9

Worth developing.
Fix the weakest test first.

4 to 6

Drop it, or keep it for a later campaign.

Worksheet 2 · Scorecard

ASSET	RECOGNITION			FIT			SWAP			NAME			TOTAL		RIGHTS AND COST CHECKED?
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3			Yes · No
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3			Yes · No
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3			Yes · No
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3			Yes · No

Rights and cost: songs, footage, characters and famous faces usually need permission and a fee. Check what you can use, and what it costs, before you fall in love with an idea.

Point the memory at your brand

A borrowed asset arrives with attention already attached. That attention is only useful if it ends on your brand. This page covers the two jobs that make that happen: linking your name to the asset, and stopping the asset from taking the credit.

1. Put your name inside it

Memory works by association. When people meet the asset again, it brings back whatever was attached to it.

The strongest link forms at the moment people pay most attention, usually the part they repeat: a hook, a catchphrase, a gesture or a number. If your brand sits in that part, it comes back every time the asset does. If it sits after it, the link is much weaker.

Find the peak. Identify the single line, sound or moment people repeat most.

Attach one thing. Choose your name, your number or your offer. Attaching more than one splits the memory.

Say it and show it together. The link is stronger when people hear and see your brand at the same moment.

Repeat it the same way. Use the asset with the same placement in every execution. The link grows each time it repeats.

Rule of thumb: if someone retells the ad to a friend, your brand should come up without them trying.

2. Keep the asset from stealing the ad

Researchers call this the vampire effect. A strong asset competes with your brand for a few seconds of attention, and viewers remember the asset while forgetting who paid for it. The risk grows with how famous the asset is, and with how loosely it connects to your product.

The fix is to plan the hand-off: the exact moment attention passes from the asset to your brand. Storyboard that moment first, then check your script or board against this list.

- ☐ Your brand or product is on screen while the asset is playing

- ☐ Nothing the borrowed person says competes with your name.

- ☐ The last thing on screen is your product or logo.

- ☐ The asset does one job, and that job points back to you.

- ☐ If you removed the asset, the idea would still make sense for your product

How attention should move through your ad

1

Notice

The borrowed asset wins the first seconds, because people already know it.

2

Connect

Your brand appears inside the asset while attention is at its highest.

3

Remember

The asset steps back and the ad ends on your brand alone.

Turn your best asset into an idea

Fill in one card for each asset that scored 10 or more. If a line is hard to fill in, go back to the tests: that is usually where the idea is weak.

IDEA CARD

A

My audience already loves

We make it ours by

In the ad, viewers see _____ and hear

The last thing on screen is

IDEA CARD

B

My audience already loves

We make it ours by

In the ad, viewers see _____ and hear

The last thing on screen is

IDEA CARD

C

My audience already loves

We make it ours by

In the ad, viewers see _____ and hear

The last thing on screen is

Gatsby Moving Rubber, run through this guide

Here is how the 2006 launch would look on these worksheets. The scores are our own reading of the campaign.

Worksheet 1 and 2, filled in

ASSET	TYPE	RECOGNITION	FIT	SWAP	NAME	TOTAL
Takuya Kimura	People	3	3	2	1	9
Men copying his look ("Kimutaku syndrome")	Habits	3	3	3	2	11
The Stylistics, 'Can't Give You Anything (But My Love)'	Songs	3	2	3	3	11

Worksheet 3, filled in

IDEA CARD

GATSBY, 2006

My audience already loves

TAKUYA KIMURA'S HAIR, WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN COPYING SINCE 1994, AND A 1975 LOVE SONG THEY HALF-KNOW.

We make it ours by

REWRITING THE HOOK TO SING "I CAN GIVE YOU GATSBY", AND SHOWING HIM RESTYLE HIS HAIR ON CAMERA WITH OUR WAX.

In the ad, viewers see _____ and hear

KIMURA IN A SHARP SUIT AGAINST WHITE, HAIR LOOSE AND MOVING / THE GATSBY VERSION OF THE SONG, WITH NO DIALOGUE.

The last thing on screen is

SIX COLOURED MOVING RUBBER TUBS ABOVE THE GATSBY LOGO

CONCLUSION

What the filled-in worksheets tell

The habit and the song scored highest

Both reached 11 by passing the swap and name tests, where most borrowed assets fail.

Kimura alone stalled at 9

He brought recognition and fit, but his name left no room for the brand. The rewritten song filled that gap: he carried the meaning and the song carried the name.

The hand-off is built in

The idea card ends on the six tubs and the logo, so attention finishes on the product.

For your own worksheets: combine assets so each one covers another's weakest test. Pair an asset that brings recognition with one that can carry your name. Gatsby's result, 7.4 million units shipped in ten weeks, shows what that pairing can do.

Got an idea on the table? Let's Talk

epitomecollective.com

info@epitomecollective.com

Sources. Launch figures and market share: Mandom, reported by Nikkei xTECH (December 2006). Spots, shoot and casting: Mandom press releases (August and December 2006). Music recall figures: Comunicación y Hombre, "Approaching the effectiveness of music in advertising". Meaning transfer: McCracken (1989), Journal of Consumer Research. Vampire effect: Erfgen, Zenker and Sattler (2015), International Journal of Research in Marketing. Kimutaku syndrome: Wikipedia, "Takuya Kimura". Gatsby 2026 return: Natalie (September 2026). Gatsby and Moving Rubber are trademarks of Mandom Corporation. This guide is an independent analysis and is not affiliated with Mandom.