CONSUMER ACQUISITION

The Definitive
Guide To
**CREATIVE
TRENDS**
For
**MOBILE
GAME
ADVERTISERS**

Summer 2020

Introduction

We've all seen big changes in user acquisition (UA) advertising in the last few years. Artificial intelligence (AI) is automating more and more of media buying, as the best practices outlined in Facebook's Structure for Scale framework demonstrate.

As a result, the AI optimizing the ad platforms has gotten better and better, it's leveled the playing field for advertisers big and small. Now, creative is the key differentiator driving profitable UA.

And, while quality and volume of creative are key factors in success, we've discovered that they're not the only factors that drive UA success.

Monitoring creative trends and doing in-depth competitive analysis are a must within any UA orcreative team today. We'll share the latest trends and best practices we're seeing.

But, cutting edge advertisers don't stop there. They also incorporate market segmentation analysis by integrating player profiles and user motivations into their creative strategy.

Player profiles are actually an old idea in game design, but they're a very new idea in advertising. As of late last year, only about 10% of the UA teams we reached out to were using player profiles, and they tended to be the most elite advertisers.

Understanding player profiles and emotional hooks may change how you see ads forever. It's a wickedly effective framework for motivating users, but also a great lens to use as you analyze competitors' creative.

There are alsomedia buying implications to a player profile methodology. Player profiles favor different copy / calls to action, websites, apps, and even YouTube channels. So, if a UA managerwanted to squeeze every possible drop of ROAS from an audience, they would segment that audience based on different player profiles.

It will take some experimentation to figure out whether it's appropriate to segment creative and audiences for player profiles, or if it's better to just make different ads for the different personas and to let the algorithm figure out optimal performance.

And, all of this from creative trends research and competitive analysis to deep dives into playermotivations, is further fueled by the power of creative testing.

We've developed a new approach to creative testing that solves the adage of "why the control always seems to win" through extensive research, which we'll reveal in this paper.

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Creative is any advertiser's best opportunity for a competitive advantage in social advertising, and it has been since 2019. Here's why:

1. Expensive, third-party automated adtech platforms aren't as much of a competitive advantage as they used to be. Facebook and Google's platforms have integrated the best features of those tools and offered them as standard features to campaign dashboards. All that fancy adtech is now available in your ad accounts, for free. However, if you are spending over $250,000 per month or running multiple titles, an inexpensive ad management platform like AdRules can greatly simplify your workflow and increase productivity.

2. If you're spending less than $250,000 per month, you may not need expensive, high-end ad jockeys. Automation features have taken a lot of the controls away from UA managers and ad accounts with smaller ad spends have become easier to manage. However, if you are spending over $250,000 per month or across several networks, you may find it helpful to look for inefficiencies in automated solutions. There are still many levers where a Rockstar UA manager will outperform an algorithm.

Those two factors alone leave creative as the most critical competitive advantage. Because you can now run powerful campaigns without adtech, and lower-spending advertisers can actually get good results, two key competitive advantages are gone. Creative is now critical.

The data backs this up. After managing over $3 billion in ad spend, we've seen creative prove itself over and over as the single-best driver of ROAS.

Across our portfolio of accounts, we've found that 75% of the ROAS gains we've generated for clients can be directly attributed to creative optimization. Compare that to 15% of the ROAS gained from audience expansion, and 10% of the ROAS gained from media buying tactics and optimization.

Audience expansion and media buying tactics are still fantastic tools for the Rockstar UA manager, but creative wins hands down. Creative is king.

But not all creative is created equal.

Just pumping out more and more creative variations from winning ads won't give you the advantage you need. You need high-performance new concepts and control-beating fresh ideas. Those can be hard to find. Only 1-3 ad concepts out of 20 ever beat the control.

To know which creative assets and elements deliver big results, you need an efficient, accurate testing system. Without the efficiency, it's easy to blow your budget on testing variations that end up generating a disproportionate percent of non-converting spend.

This can be more a challenge than it might seem. Beating the control is surprisingly hard… but more about that later.

If that looks different than how you're managing UA campaigns right now, it's time to bring your advertising – and your entire UA program – into 2020.
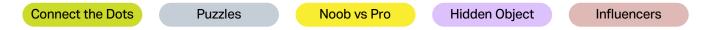
Creative Tunnel Vision and How to Overcome It

Even with a world-class testing methodology and creative optimization process, your creative team needs fresh ideas. They have to be aware of all the trends in ad creative that your competitors know about and are already taking advantage of.

To increase the success rate of creative testing while eliminating creative tunnel vision, we are sharing our proprietary creative strategies for gaming genres. We've reviewed thousands of Facebook and Google ads to create a "visual taxonomy" of creative trends. We use those trends to generate a list of fresh creative concepts informed by competitive ads, player motivations, and advertiser performance.

As Picasso said, "Good artists borrow, great artists steal!" Once you identify your competitors' best ads, you have an endless supply of "tested" concepts. However, we have found that analyzing competitive creative, as challenging as it is, is not a UA or Design function. It appears to be a cross-disciplinary exercise.

At this particular snapshot in time, in 2020, we're seeing trends like these that drive ad performance:

Connect the Dots	Puzzles	Noob vs Pro	Hidden Object	Influencers

Again: These trends come and go faster than fashion, and you need to be in touch with the heartbeat of online advertising across thousands of advertisers to even recognize the trends in the massive number of ads launched every day. Then, once you've recognized them, you need to adapt these creative trends so you can use them in your own ads. Get it all right, then test it with a super-efficient creative testing system, and you win the prize: New ad creative that beats the control.

It's all a little bit like baseball… you're only as good as your last hit.

Trying to keep up with trends that evolve so rapidly is hard. Trying to do it while you maintain ROAS is even harder. And expecting the same team of people to do it over and over again, week after week… is damn near impossible. Eventually, almost covertly, creative teams learn what works and what fails and then "play it safe" with their creative. They'll default back to their greatest (and safest) hits of the past and become just a little bit too cautious about testing any out of the box ideas that might not work. We call this "creative tunnel vision".

Unfortunately, while many out of the box ideas don't work, some will. And one or two of those ads – those unlikely, out of the blue winners – could have delivered you a 10-40% leap in ROAS. But if your team never develops those out of the box ideas, they'll never test them. You'll never know how much revenue you've missed.

This is why an outside team can be so helpful. And why competitive analysis should be a core skill of somebody in every creative team.

Competitive analysis has two key benefits:
- It lets you peer into an almost endless library of tested concepts (tested with your competitors' ad budgets, not yours).
- It increases your success rate for your new concepts, so your entire testing program involves a lot less risk.

Think of all this shared knowledge as the "wisdom of creative crowds." Fortunately, we have ample resources to make competitive analysis efficient. Creative research tools like AdRules are great, as are SocialPeta and AppAnnie and many others. There's even Facebook's ad library, which is completely free, though it only lets you see which ads your competitors are running, not how those ads have actually performed.

If that's not enough, you can also check out our resource of over 500,000 competitive video ads from Facebook and Google AC advertisers. Just remember to check competitive benchmarks data so you can recognize what's breakout performance and what's just average for that genre.

Creative Trends & Recommendations

Although creative trends change fast, they also vary dramatically across genres. And so while it is good to know broad creative trends, you'll also want to hone in on your particular niche. Of course, you'll also want to overlay all this with actual performance data. We want to chase trends that boost ROAS, not just chase every trend that comes along.

Here is our full list of Creative Trends for Q3 2020.

- **Achievement:** Primary focus on mastery of a game.
- **Cards:** Anything to do with card games, such as solitaire, poker, gin rummy, spades, etc.
- **Casino:** Slots and other casino related games.
- **Cats:** Concepts which include cats as an element.
- **Characters:** Focused on game characters, such as in a countdown of their powers or attributes.
- **Challenge:** A difficult task a player has to complete to win.
- **Choices:** Choosing an option that directs the narrative.
- **Comedic VO:** Voice over, usually accompanying gameplay, that mimics a user playing the game.
- **Competitive:** Comparing the app against other apps or games.
- **Connect the Dots:** Connect the dot puzzles that, when completed, show an image.
- **Current Events:** Having to do with recent news or events that impact society (e.g., Covid-19).
- **Design:** Anything that has as its primary element decoration or design, from home design to cake decoration.
- **Fashion:** Concepts that use fashion, style, appearance and/or clothing as a primary element.
- **Female Story:** Women overcoming obstacles and misbehaving men.
- **Footer:** Bottom headline or imagery on a video or image concept.
- **Game Trailer:** An overview of the game, often using cards and gameplay to describe the overall experience.
- **Gameplay:** Simple gameplay from the game, sometimes simulated.
- **G-Rated Humor:** Humor that's safe for the kiddos.
- **Gross Humor:** Poop, puke, pee and other bodily functions.
- **Hidden Object:** Items that have to be found within a setting; can be video or still image.
- **Header:** Headline on a concept that is usually present through the duration of the spot.
- **Image:** Simple still image, sometimes with copy.
- **Influencers:** Utilizing influencers and/or celebs to deliver the primary message.
- **Locks & Gates Puzzle:** Puzzles that use a lock/gate challenge, often with the aim of freeing a game character.
- **Match 3:** Any ad that is for a Match 3-type game.
- **Memes:** Comedic text on an image, often building on something that's already viral.
- **Mental Benefits:** Messaging that touts the mental benefits of the game, such as sharpening your mind or memory.
- **Music-Based:** Video that has music as a primary element, such as a music video.
- **Noob vs. Pro:** Amateur gameplay contrasted with experienced gameplay.
- **Outliers:** Unique concepts that don't fit a current trend.
- **Paint by Numbers:** Filling in a black & white image with color.
- **Peril Picker:** Picking items to help a game character in a perilous situation.
- **Pickers:** Picking items that impact the narrative, often cause & effect.
- **Player Focused:** Concepts built around players, from player versus player to types of players in the game.
- **Pop Culture:** Concepts that leverage pop culture and trends.
- **Pregnancy:** Pregnancy and the challenges of motherhood featured prominently.
- **Puzzle Challenge:** Brain teasers and other challenges that aren't connect the dots or locks/gates.
- **Relaxation:** Concepts that tout relaxation as a primary benefit.
- **Renovation:** Rebuilding, redesigning and other architectural or DIY projects, often going wrong.
- **R-Rated Humor:** Risque, bawdy, sexually suggestive and other adult humor.
- **RPG:** Ads for Casual and Simulation Role Playing Games.
- **Social Connecting:** Involving people connecting on social media or via text
- **Spot the Difference:** Finding the differences between two versions of the same image.
- **Testimonial:** Focused on a player's review and/or experience of the game.
- **Timed/Budget Challenge:** A task that is driven by a time or monetary limit.
- **Word Search:** Centered on finding words or reordering letters to form a word.

To get you started with this, we've developed seven genre-specific creative trend reports. Here are the highlights from several:

Word Games Trends

Competitive Analysis ▶

Wordscapes, WordWhizzle Search, Word Cross Puzzle, Word Cookies!, Word Collect, Word Hunt, Word Tiles, Scrabble, Words with Friends, Word Connect, WordTrip, Word Mania. To view competitive videos, click here.

Competitive Trends ▶

- Paper Puzzle: Mimicking gameplay with paper version.
- Scientific claims: "30 minutes a day sharpen your brain" "Neuroscientists recommend playing this game to stay young."
- Challenges: "What's Americans' favorite food?" "Can you find this item?"
- Reasons to play the game: Meet friends, upgrades, learn new words, game tutorial.
- Whimsical: "The first word you see is your destiny!"
- Relaxing themes: "What are you doing to decompress?" Soothing landscapes and music.

◀ Concept: Clever challenges

- Introduce a question that must be answered by gameplay
  - Examples
    – What word is fake?
    – What's the synonym of a word
- Timed challenges that force users to act fast
  – Find five three letter words!

Concept: Mix reviews with gameplay

- Showcase the benefits of playing the game by adding reviews
- Emphasize by adding name of user and country
- Still make gameplay the center of ad

Concept: Paper puzzle

- Show "paper version" of game by adding a challenge
- Examples:
  – Americans love ____
  – Find 15 words
  – Picnic items
  – School supplies
  – Recipe ingredients

Concept: Mix footage with gameplay

- Mix UGC with gameplay to add realism to game
- Mix footage with game elements to showcase various game elements

Concept: Claim intro

- Introduce gameplay with a short 2-3 sec intro card based on:
  – Mental benefits
  – Aspirational (Success, intelligence)

Concept: Goal intro

- Introduce gameplay with a short 2-3 sec intro card based on:
  – Improvement (Improve your vocabulary)
  – Learning (Learn new words!)

Concept: Relaxation intro ▶

  • Introduce gameplay with a short 2-3 sec intro card based on:
    – Relaxation and "me time"
    – Soothing copy that incites "time for yourself"
    – "Get lost and find words"
    – Relaxing imagery

Card Games Trends

Competitive Analysis
▼

  • Competitors (Card Games): Solitaire Deluxe 2, Solitaire Tri Peaks, Spades Plus, Mobilityware Solitaire, WSOP, Solitaire Cube
  • Competitors (Casino/Lottery): Lucktastic, 21 Blitz, Lucky Day, Caesars Casino Official Slots, House of Fun Slots, Lucky Lottery Scratchers, Slotomania Vegas Casino Slots, Cube Cube, Worldwinner, Jack pocket, SpinToWin Slots, Dice with Ellen
  • Competitors (Shopping/Cash Back): Inbox Dollars, IBotta, Receipt Hog, Shopkick, Surveys on the Go, Swagbucks
  • Competitors: Rummy Royale, Gin Rummy Plus, Gin Rummy Best Card Game, Gin Rummy Master, Spades, Spades Card Classic, Solitaire Deluxe 2, Solitaire Tri Peaks, Spades Plus, Mobilityware Solitaire, Fairway Solitaire, WSOP, Hearts World Tour, Klondike Farm Adventure, 21 Blitz, Bingo Town, Bingo Blast, Hearts Card Game Classic, Solitaire Time Warp, Grand Gin Rummy, Solitaire Epic Adventures, Bingo Pop, House of Blackjack 21, Bingo Bash, Wild Classic Slots, Poker Face Live Texas Hold Em, Zynga Poker, Blackjackist, Backgammon Live, Dominoes Gold, MobilityWare Solitaire, Flip & Dive 3D, Flip Dunk, NBA 2K Mobile, Chess Royale
  • View competitive videos here.

  • App Explainers: Videos explaining how the game or app works with users/players, screenshots/game play, and rewards. (Caesars Casino, Gin Rummy Plus, Inbox Dollars)
  • Real Winners/Testimonials: Videos featuring real winners and amounts they've won. (Lucktastic, Lucky Day)
  • Newsreel: Videos showing newsworthiness of the app based on real or fake news coverage. (House of Fun Slots, Jackpocket)
  • Casino Lifestyle: Videos with colorful slot machine graphics and/or big band music. (Caesars Casino, Gin Rummy Plus, WSOP, Slotomania, Spades Plus, Spin to Win Slots)
  • Community: Videos featuring gameplay between players, or texts between players regarding the app itself. (IBotta, WorldWinner)
  • Winners/Testimonials: Videos featuring winning moments and real winner testimonial. (Skillz)

Competitive Trends

- Game Overviews/Gameplay: Overview of how to play, game elements and gameplay, sometimes with a picker manipulating cards. (Grand Gin Rummy, Spades Plus, many others)
- Player Focused: Player versus player with player avatars or live video inset, often focused on range or types of players. (Poker Face, Blackjackist, many others)
- Covid-Related: Videos with messaging built around boredom, being stuck at home or not connecting with friends. (Gin Rummy: The Best Card Game)
- Relax/Train Your Brain: Messaging centered on the way the game sharpens your mental skills and/or relaxes you. (WSOP, MobilityWare Solitaire)
- Player Testimonial: Positive reviews or testimonial regarding the game. (21 Blitz)
- Heat of the Moment: Hyper-focused moments in the game when a big decision will make or break you. (WSOP)
- Humorous Voice Over: Mock announcer(s) or player voice over, used over gameplay. (WSOP, Flip & Dive 3D, Flip Dunk)
- Real Game Footage: Live footage intercut with gameplay. (Flip Dunk, WSOP, Zynga)

Player Motivations

Demographics: As of last estimate, there were currently over 170 million active social casino gamers worldwide, with millions of players playing on any given day (Martin, 2014). To put this in perspective, social casino gamers outnumber online gamblers 4:1. Perhaps surprisingly, **the average social casino gamer is a 40-year-old middle class woman and women make up over 2/3rds of social casino gamers** (Superdata, 2016). That said, social casino games seem to be a popular form of entertainment across all stages of life, including among adolescents and young adults (Kim, Wohl, Gupta, & Derevensky, 2016, 2017; Griffiths & Wood, 2007).

Motivations: Motivations for playing social casino games are likely similar to motivations for engaging in gambling (Wohl, Salmon, Hollingshead, & Kim, in press). That is, people may play for **fun and entertainment, to pass the time**, to **relax**, **relieve boredom** or to **distract themselves** from negative emotions. Additionally, a portion of gamers may be attracted to the social feature of social casino games, such as seeing their **scores on leaderboards** and **sharing their achievements** on Facebook. Yet, some social casino gamers may use free-to-play simulated gambling games to practice their 'skills' before playing for real money gambling.

- *Social Casino Games: Current Evidence & Future Directions, Hyoun S. Kim, University of Calgary*
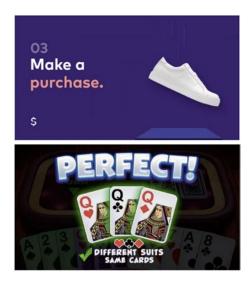
Gaming Psychology of Near Misses

"…Near-misses have some intrinsic appeal for our reward circuitry, tricking those brain cells into believing that we won even though we actually lost… This suggests that, from the perspective of our dopamine neurons, **near misses are virtually indistinguishable from actual wins.** Both forms of feedback tickle our reward circuitry, which is why Vegas invests in games and algorithms that are full of close calls. For a casino, **the beauty of a near miss is clear: Although we've lost money, if feels as if we won."**

• *The Near-Miss Effect, Jonah Lehrer, Wired Magazine, 3.28.11*

Although no studies have investigated the ramifications of Candy Crush near-misses, one can make reasonable inferences based on **near-misses in other scenarios. In slot machine games, near-miss outcomes encourage the urge to continue play despite the absence of reward** (Côté et al. 2003; Kassinove and Scharev, 2001; Clark et al. 2009; Billieux et al. 2012). In general, **the idea of falling just short of a big win appears to facilitate players wanting to continue with the game** in the belief that practice makes better, or more spins will eventually lead to success (Kassinove and Schare 2001).

• *The Candy Crush Sweet Tooth: How Near Misses in Candy Crush Increase Frustration, and the Urge to Continue Gameplay: Journal of Gambling Studies, Volume 33, Issue 2, pp 599–61*

Concept: App Explainer

Explainer videos showcasing how the game works and how players win money
- Legitimizes app while demonstrating how you win
- Demystifies the game, lowering barriers to play
- Demonstrates how the game works

Competitive Landscape/Share of Voice
- Caesars Casino, Gin Rummy Plus, Solitaire Deluxe 2,
- Dice with Ellen, Inbox Dollars, Shopkick, many more
- Dosh: 76.8% Share of Voice
- Gin Rummy Plus: 70% Share of Voice

Concept: Spokesperson ▶

Use a spokesperson/actor to appear in a variety of videos
- App demonstration/overview
- Interviews with real winners
- Aspirational/optimistic stories

Competitive Landscape
This has been used by established sweepstakes firms, e.g. Publisher's Clearing House - to their advantage

Concept: News Coverage/PR ▶

Create videos that leverage any news coverage of the app
- Portrays the app as a legitimate way to win money and by playing card games
- Removes barriers new players might have to downloading and playing, e.g. fear it's a scam
- Provides social proof that card games are bona fide

Competitive Landscape/Share of Voice
- House of Fun Slots, Jackpocket
- House of Fun Slots: 7% SOV
- Jackpocket: 21% SOV

◀ **Concept: Card Game Influencers**

Create videos featuring influencers such as Mikey Slice and PickTooth
- Attracts players while legitimizing the game
- Demonstrates you can win money by playing
- Aligned with eSports trend and builds on success of poker TV broadcasts and programming

Competitive Landscape
- Seen more in games featured on live game streaming sites like Steam and Twitch

Concept: E-Sports Cards ▶

Portray real winners as athletes
- Static images of winners in athletic/heroic poses
- Graphics like baseball cards with stats and nicknames
- Leverages skill of card game players, downplaying luck
- Aspirational
- Funny but tongue-in-cheek
- Aligned with eSports trend and builds on success of poker TV broadcasts and programming

Competitive Landscape
- Twist on the "Real Winner" creative featured in games like Solitaire Cube, Lucktastic and Lucky Day

Concept: Competitive ▶

Juxtapose real money card games and social card games
- Why play regular solitaire when you could win money just for playing?
- Short videos compare and contrast screenshots of "boring" card games with winners and excitement of real money card games
- Other videos could juxtapose dull looking stock imagery of people with "Plays Solitaire" winners/stars

◀ **Concept: Winners/Testimonials**

Real (or not) winner testimonials perform well across all sub-genres. Testimonial videos tend to run long, so consider featuring them on your website and on YouTube

- Create still imagery ads featuring female winners
- Consider opening shots of cash with motion instead of static imagery
- Create videos combining winners and gameplay
- TikTok style videos of female players playing/winning
- Create short videos that better utilize the emotion of the winner testimonials
- Create winner reels that leverage multiple winner testimonials into one video

Concept: Game Explainer ▶

Create videos that explain how to play Rummy Stars and Spades Royale:
- Showcases superior game graphics
- Demystifies the game, lowering barriers to play
- Demonstrates how the game works
- Engages potential players
- 1 concept currently in production

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Gin Rummy The Best Card Game: 92% SOV
- Grand Gin Rummy: 89% SOV
- Spades Plus: 100% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets players interested in Social & Mastery motivation models

Concept: Player Types ▶

Showcase the different types of players in Rummy & Spades
- Can use "real" players (stock footage)
- Types such as "The Risk Taker," "The Slow & Steady," "The Trash Talker"
- Combine with gameplay scenarios

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Zynga Poker: 59% SOV
- Poker Face: 100% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets players interested in Social motivation model

◀ Concept: Character Countdown

Feature avatars while giving them a backstory and/or special talents:
- Can adapt to "types of players" as well
- Showcases animation style
- Can use humorous voice over
- Player backgrounds further game narrative

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Rise of Kingdoms: 28% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets players interested in Achievement motivation model (power & completion) and narrative

Concept: Game Benefits ▶

Create videos that leverage the benefits of playing Gin Rummy & Spades:
- Scientific evidence that card playing relieves stress, boost immune system, improves motor skills, and increases memory function and socialization
- Targets an older demographic (50+)

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- WSOP: 24% SOV
- MobilityWare Solitaire 31% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets players interested in relaxation and enjoyable self-improvement/
- self-preservation (a game with benefits)

Concept: Player Testimonial ▶

Create videos featuring influencers or real players who enjoy
Gin Rummy Stars & Spades Royale:

- Attracts players while legitimizing the game
- Demystifies the game, lowering barriers to play
- Could be combination of gameplay and remote/zoom
  interview or supers

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Dominoes Gold: 87% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets players interested in Social motivation model

◀ **Concept: Heat of the Moment**

Dramatize the make or break moments in a game:
- Engage players by presenting them with options to win
- Demonstrates strategy and tension of gameplay
- Provides lesson in how game works

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- WSOP: 16% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets players interested in Social & Mastery
  motivation models

Concept: Play by Play ▶

If you've ever watched WSOP, you've heard the announcers doing play by play
(and a lot of random conversation). Let's bring that "announcer" feel to Rummy
Stars & Spades Royale:
- Adds humor to the games
- Makes games feel "larger than life"
- Gives the games a more sport-like feel, rather than the older
  demographic it can sometimes be associated with

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- WSOP: 6% SOV
- Flip & Dive 3D: 89% SOV
- Flip Dunk: 90% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets players interested primarily in fun & entertainment

Concept: Avatar Lives

What do these avatars do when they're not playing cards? Let's put them in funny 2D situations (in a car, in a restaurant) where we can utilize their shape and engage them in mundane conversations
- Breakthrough for this category where there is almost exclusively gameplay
- Showcases visual style of the game
- Can combine with gameplay

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- N/A

Player Motivations:
- Targets players who will be attracted to visual style and narrative

Concept: Near Misses

Create videos of gameplay in which near wins happen repeatedly and lead to FAILS:
- Waiting for Gin card when other player puts down the card you need
- Going down and getting undercut by a point
- Can feature voice over or supers underscoring frustration

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Multiple games using this technique but it has not been used in social casino games; missed opportunity given psychology of near misses

Player Motivations:
- Capitalize on near-misses motivating players to keep playing as much or more than wins

Concept: Slams/Music Video

Use R&B or other genres to create game art-based music videos:
- Syncopate music to cards getting slammed down in gameplay

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- AFK Arena: 78% SOV
- King's Raid: 25% SOV
- Tap Sports Baseball: 16% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets players who will be attracted to music and visual style

Social Casino App Trends

Competitive Analysis

Competitors: DoubleDown Casino, Jackpot Party Casino, Slotomania, House of Fun, Goldfish Casino, Heart of Vegas, Hot Shot Casino, Hit it Rich!, DoubleU Casino, Quick Hit Slots, Slotomania, 21 Blitz, GSN Casino, Caesars Casino Slots, Lucky Lottery Scratchers, Worldwinner, WSOP, SpinToWin Slots, Jackpocket, Huuuge Casino, Wizard of Oz Slots, Big Fish Casino, Cashman Casino, Pop! Slots, Bingo Blitz, Coin Master, FaFaFa Gold Slots Casino, June's Journey, Cradle of Empires

Top Solitaire Competitors: Coin Kings, Coin Runner, VeryDice, Lucktastic Match, Crazy Coin Pusher, Coin Master, Lucky Day, Piggy Go - Clash of Coin, Bricks n Balls, Bricks Ball Crusher, Casino Coin Pusher, Pirate Kings, Disney Emoji Blitz, Match to Win, Wordscapes. View competitive videos here.

Competitive Trends

- **Game Overview/Gameplay:** Gameplay with an overview of the game, levels and rewards. (Big Fish Casino, Jackpocket, many more)
- **Bonus:** Gameplay focused on offering free rewards, coins and bonuses when you sign up. (Cashman, Double Down, many more)
- **Players/Gameplay:** Split screens showing players enjoying the game with gameplay. (21 Blitz, WSOP, Heart of Vegas)
- **News Report:** Real or fake news clips showing the importance of the game. (Jackpocket, Casino Slots)
- **Celebs:** Celeb spokespersons advocating for the game. (Coin Master, Jackpocket)
- **Puzzles/Hidden Object:** Brain teasers designed to engage viewers. (June's Journey, Cradle of Empires)
- **Mortised Gameplay:** Gameplay shown with backgrounds and licensed characters. (Wizard of Oz, Game of Thrones, Hit it Rich!, Hot Shot Casino)
- **Seasonal:** Gameplay with seasonal additions reflecting Halloween, Christmas, and other holidays. (Huuuge Casino, Quick Hit Casino, Slotomania, many more)
- **Fake Text:** Two characters or "real players" interacting via text, discussing game or daring them to play.
- **Split screens:** Noob vs. Pro, Winner vs. Loser, Comparing screens with highlighted part of screen, explosive elements.
- **Players with UI elements:** Showing "players" using elements of the game in real life situations (Game buttons, coins, interacting with characters).
- **Coin, Money and Gift Cards showers:** Big wins are seen often with luring monetary elements and prizes/ overtaking the screen or as transitions.
- **Celebrities:** Games that monetize well rely on celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez and The Kardashians to be part of their advertising efforts.
- **Real footage background + UI:** Using the original game UI while exploring soothing, nature-based backgrounds as the perfect game backdrop.
- **Spinning wins with prizes:** Faux Spinning wheel with Prizes and mascot encouraging user to spin.
- **Connect the dots:** A drawing outline is presented and final picture is revealed at the end, connecting drawing to gameplay.
- **Color by numbers/Draw:** Replicating old coloring books, a simple drawing is colored one color at a time until character or game scene is revealed.

- **Matching Cards:** Faux matching/pairing game where two correct cards reveal a prize or game feature.
- **Save the character:** Obstacle, puzzle-like concept where I character in peril needs to be saved.
- **I Spy/Found the Object:** Find one or several objects that are directly associated with the game.
- **Relaxing Themes:** Adding a touch of escapism and relaxation to an otherwise challenge-based game
- **Current events:** COVID-19 and Tiger King themes dominating the space currently.

Player Motivations

Demographics: As of last estimate, there were currently over 170 million active social casino gamers world-wide, with millions of players playing on any given day (Martin, 2014). To put this in perspective, social casino gamers outnumber online gamblers 4:1. Perhaps surprisingly, the average social casino gamer is a 40-year-old middle class woman and women make up over 2/3rds of social casino gamers (Superdata, 2016). That said, social casino games seem to be a popular form of entertainment across all stages of life, including among adolescents and young adults (Kim, Wohl, Gupta, & Derevensky, 2016, 2017; Griffiths & Wood, 2007).

Motivations: Motivations for playing social casino games are likely similar to motivations for engaging in gambling (Wohl, Salmon, Hollingshead, & Kim, in press). That is, people may play for fun and entertainment, to pass the time, to relax, relieve boredom or to distract themselves from negative emotions. Additionally, a portion of gamers may be attracted to the social feature of social casino games, such as seeing their scores on leaderboards and sharing their achievements on Facebook. Yet, some social casino gamers may use free-to-play simulated gambling games to practice their 'skills' before playing for real money gambling.

- *Social Casino Games: Current Evidence & Future Directions, Hyoun S. Kim, University of Calgary*

Gaming Psychology of Near Misses
"...Near-misses have some intrinsic appeal for our reward circuitry, tricking those brain cells into believing that we won even though we actually lost... This suggests that, from the perspective of our dopamine neurons, near misses are virtually indistinguishable from actual wins. Both forms of feedback tickle our reward circuitry, which is why Vegas invests in games and algorithms that are full of close calls. For a casino, the beauty of a near miss is clear: Although we've lost money, if feels as if we won.

- *The Near-Miss Effect, Jonah Lehrer, Wired Magazine, 3.28.11*

Although no studies have investigated the ramifications of Candy Crush **near-misses, one can make reasonable inferences based on near-misses in other scenarios. In slot machine games, near-miss outcomes encourage the urge to continue play despite the absence of reward** (Côté et al. 2003; Kassinove and Scharev, 2001; Clark et al. 2009; Billieux et al. 2012). In general, **the idea of falling just short of a big win appears to facilitate players wanting to continue with the game** in the belief that practice makes better, or more spins will eventually lead to success (Kassinove and Schare 2001).

> • *The Candy Crush Sweet Tooth: How Near Misses in Candy Crush Increase Frustration, and the Urge to Continue Gameplay: Journal of Gambling Studies, Volume 33, Issue 2, pp 599–61*

Concept: Faux Hidden Items/Puzzle Gameplay ▶

Faux "relaxing" games interrupted by exciting gameplay:
- Begin video with slower games like hidden items or word games, with header: "Need something more exciting?"
- Slot gameplay bursts into frame, obliterating slower game and showing exciting slot gameplay
- Slot gameplay shows jackpots, wins and bonuses

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- N/A

Player Motivations:
- Targets women with "relaxing" ad; women represent 2/3rds of all social casino players

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◀ Concept: Mortised Gameplay

Feature slot gameplay in mortised environments that take advantage of the beautiful game animation:
- Showcases game graphics
- More eye-catching than simple gameplay
- Positions game as premium "Vegas-type" slot play
- "Wall of Wilds!", "10x", etc

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Goldfish Casino: 9% SOV
- Hit it Rich!: 73% SOV
- Wizard of Oz Slots: 7% SOV
- Hot Shot Casino: 14% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Engages players looking to distract themselves from negative emotions or to relax

Concept: Comedic Voice Over ▶

Videos that juxtapose slot play with comedic voice over:
- Showcases slot play and graphics
- Mimics player dialogue
- Uses subtitles

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- 21 Blitz: 56% SOV
- Rise of Kingdoms: 72% SOV
- Questland: 8% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Mirrors social nature of slot play

◀ **Concept: Picker Jackpot**

Leverage success from Match 3 games, test simple pickers to game situations, such as picking coins to match 3 Fu Babies:
- Increase engagement with viewers
- Showcases slot play, game graphics and characters

- **Competitor/Share of Voice:**
- Cradle of Empires: 16% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Engage players looking fun & entertainment

Concept: Near Misses ▶

Create videos of slot game play in which near misses happen repeatedly:
- Slot wheels should tease an almost win
- FAIL or ALMOST supered on near miss slot play

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Multiple games using this technique, but it has not been used in social casino games; missed opportunity given psychology of near misses

Player Motivations:
- Capitalize on near misses motivating players to keep playing as much or more than wins

Concept: Seasonal ▶

Create new versions of the game incorporating seasonal graphics:
- Christmas, Halloween, Chinese New Year
- Attract players with refreshed creative

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Quick Hit Slots: 5% SOV
- Heart of Vegas: 7% SOV
- Slotomania: 9% SOV
- Huuuge Casino: 6% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Target players looking for fun & entertainment during seasonal holidays

◀ **Concept: News Report**

Videos that showcase slots in a "fake news" report:
- Stands out in a sea of gameplay ads
- Good for launching new episodes/chapters

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Jackpocket: 16% SOV
- Casino Slots: 7% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Engage players looking fun & entertainment

Concept: Real Player/Gameplay ▶

Create iterations of current gameplay/real winner ads by adding commentary/voice over:
- Comedic
- Adds another element of entertainment

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- 21 Blitz: 56% SOV
- Rise of Kingdoms: 72% SOV
- Questland: 8% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Mirrors social nature of slot play

Concept: Connect the Dots ▶

SO RELAXING

Fun way to introduce game to new users
- Starting with an undefined shape
- Hand slowly begins to connect the dots
- Figure is revealed - it's a bear!
- Character comes to life and transitions to gameplay
- CTA

Options
- Challenging header
- Relaxing header

Competitor/Share of voice
- 32%

◀ **Concept: Color by Number**

Fun way to introduce game to new users
- Starting with a colorless drawing of known character
- Hand selects colors to paint the image
- Figure is colored
- Character comes to life and transitions to gameplay
- CTA

Options
- Challenging header
- Relaxing header

Competitor/Share of voice
- 24%

Concept: Matching Cards ▶

New way to introduce game to new users
- Starting with an inciting question
- Hand tries to find right pairs
- Right pair is found
- It's a match + gameplay
- CTA

Options
- Challenging header
- Relaxing header

Competitor/Share of voice
- 26%

FIND THE PURPLE BEAR?

Concept: Save the Character ▶

New way to introduce game to new users
- Starting with a recognizable game character
- Character needs to be rescued
- User is given several options to do so
- After several attempts character is free
- CTA

Options
- Fail ending
- Mysterious ending

Competitor/Share of voice
- 43%

◀ **Concept: Find the Object**

Introduce game to new users in a whimsical way
- Find the purple bear
- Find the watch
- Find the giant coin
- Find 5 things

Format options
- Static carousel
- Video with timer

Competitor/Share of voice
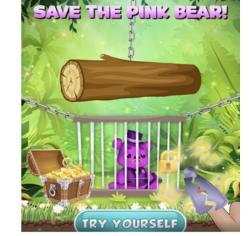- **63%**

Concept: Relaxing Themes ▶

- Alluring new users that are looking to escape
  - Including a relaxing header
  - Use soothing backgrounds but keep game UI
    - Moving Nature-scapes
    - Moving shapes
    - Static images
    - Insertion of users relaxing at home while playing
- Soothing music and effects
- Calming CTA
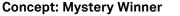 - "Sit back and relax"

Competitor/Share of voice
- 40%

Concept: Mystery Winner ▶

  • **Carousel emphasizing Amazon Sweepstakes**
    – Each card shows a single winner
    – Copy simply reads
      ◦ He/she won!
    – Last card shows a silhouette with a question mark
    – Copy reads
      ◦ Will you be next?
              › Amazon Gift Card next to it
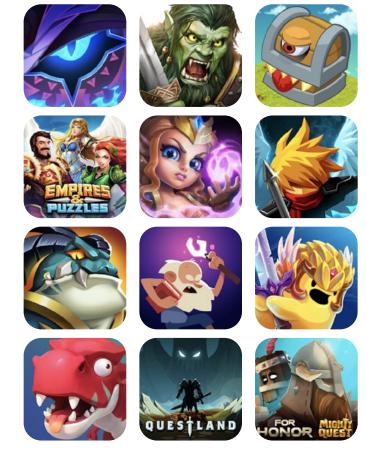
Competitor/Share of voice
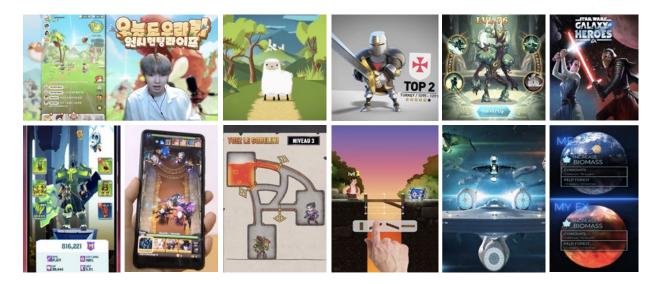 • 26%

Social Casino App Trends

Competitive Analysis

Competitors: AFK Arena, Idle Heroes, Tap Titans 2, Hero Wars, Taptap Heroes, Empires & Puzzles: Epic Match 3, Legendary: Game of Heroes, Almost a Hero, Clicker Heroes, Ulala: Idle Adventure, Hopeless Heroes: Tap Attack, The Mighty Quest for Epic Loot, Rise of Kingdoms, Questland: Hero Quest, Mighty Quest for Epic Loot, Rise of Kingdoms, Questland: Hero Quest, Clash of Clans, FTL, Dead Ahead: Zombie Warfare, The Elder Scrolls: Legends CCG, Stormbound, Gods of Olympus, TerraGenesis: Star Settlers, Nova Empire: Space Commander, Bit City, AdVenture Communist, Godus, The Battle Cats, South Park: Phone Destroyer, Space Arena: Build & Fight MMO, Fire Emblem Heroes, Dungeon, Inc: Idle Clicker, Sid Meier's Civilization VI, Star Trek Fleet Command, Dawn of Titans, DomiNations, Star Wars Galaxy of Heroes, Craft Warriors, Mushroom Wars 2, Armello, Deep Town: Idle Miner Factory, Epic Battle Simulator 2, Zombie Gunship Survival, Hades' Star, Prison Architect, King's Raid, Hustle Castle, Fallout Shelter, Tiny Tower, Second Galaxy
View competitive videos here.

Competitive Trends

- **Influencers:** Gameplay featuring influencers and in-game commentary. (Ulala)
- **Game Overview/Gameplay:** Gameplay with an overview of the game, levels and rewards. (AFK Arena, Idle Heroes, many more)
- **Countdowns:** Characters, weapons or powers listed in order of their "awesomeness." (AFK Arena, Rise of Kingdoms)
- **Puzzles:** Characters featured in puzzles that are not reflective of gameplay. (Hero Wars)
- **Humor:** Comedic voice over juxtaposed against heroic gameplay/character footage, or dialogue between players. (Rise of Kingdoms, Questland)
- **Music Influenced:** Aggressive metal music combined with gameplay, or as a music video. (AFK Arena, King's Raid)
- **Game Trailer:** Gameplay with an overview of game graphics, levels and rewards. (AFK Arena, Star Trek Fleet Command, Star Wars Galaxy of Heroes, many others)
- **Characters & Countdowns:** Characters, weapons or powers listed in order of their "awesomeness." (AFK Arena, Rise of Kingdoms)
- **Puzzles:** Characters featured in puzzles that are not reflective of gameplay. (Hustle Castle)
- **Humor:** Comedic voice over juxtaposed against heroic gameplay/character footage, or dialogue between players. (Rise of Kingdoms, Questland)
- **Music Influenced:** Aggressive metal music combined with gameplay, or as a music video. (AFK Arena, King's Raid)
- **Player Focused:** Gameplay that features inset player imagery and reactions, or player interviews. (Space Arena, Mushroom Wars, DomiNations)
- **Noob vs. Pro/Level Focused:** Gameplay that shows experienced versus new players, often based on level completion. (Space Arena)

Player Motivations

Idle Clicker gamers are not primarily casual gamers. In fact, they have a perfectly average core gamer profile... most are driven by Completion (collect stars, complete all missions) and Power (leveling up, getting powerful gear), and least driven by Excitement (fast-paced, thrilling, surprises) and Fantasy (being someone else, some- where else).

- *Nick Yee, The Surprising Profile of Idle Clicker Gamers, Quantic Foundry*

Concept: Influencer Gameplay ▶

Create short videos featuring influencers playing game:

- Attracts players while legitimizing the game
- Demonstrates how to win stages and rewards

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Ulala: Idle Adventure: 51% SOV

◀ **Concept: Character Countdown**

Feature characters in a countdown of best characters, powers and/or weapons:

- Showcases animation style, range of characters and/or powers
- Humorous voice over
- Generates higher engagement (curiosity over rankings)

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Rise of Kingdoms: 28% SOV

Concept: Character Puzzles ▶

Create videos featuring characters in brain-teasing puzzles:

- Engages "completion" and "power" motivators for Idle RPG players
- Shows characters in familiar environment

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Hero Wars: 100% SOV

◀ **Concept: Comedic Voice Over**

Create videos that juxtapose gameplay with comedic voice over.

- Showcases gameplay and/or characters
- Mimics gamer dialogue
- Uses subtitles

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Rise of Kingdoms: 72% SOV
- Questland: 8% SOV

Concept: Choices ▶

Add simple pickers to characters and game situations:
- Increase engagement with viewers

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- AFK Arena: 6% SOV
- King's Raid: 4% SOV

◀ **Concept: Music Based**

Use of Heavy Metal or other genres to create game trailers and game art-based music videos
- License Steve Liberace metal song "Crush Them All" to create music video featuring game characters
- Create gameplay videos featuring different types of music to test.

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- AFK Arena: 78% SOV
- King's Raid: 25% SOV

Concept: Game Overview/Trailer ▶

Create new edits of game trailer:
- Utilize new music (test different genres)
- Utilize comedic voice over

◀ **Concept: PVP Gameplay**

Augment gameplay with inset view of players experiencing the game
- Attracts players while legitimizing the game
- Demonstrates how to win stages and rewards

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Mushroom Wars 2: 6% SOV
- Star Arena: 37% SOV

Concept: Noob vs. Pro ▶

Create split screen videos showing amateur versus experienced gameplay:
- Highlights "motivation through frustration"
- Demonstrates how to win stages and rewards

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Space Arena: 20% SOV

◀ **Concept: Player Interviews**

Create videos that combine gameplay with interviews of actual game players and/or influencers:
- Attracts players while legitimizing the game
- Creates PR buzz around the game
- Consider doing remote interviews while gaming conferences are on hiatus

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- DomiNations: 23% SOV

Concept: Character Countdown ▶

Feature characters from specific crews (Epic, Legendary, Common, etc) in a countdown of best characters, powers and/or weapons:
- Showcases animation style, range of characters and/or powers
- Can feature over the top voice over
- Generates higher engagement (curiosity over rankings)

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Rise of Kingdoms: 28% SOV

◀ **Concept: Character Puzzles**

Create videos featuring Pixel Starships characters in brain-teasing puzzles:
- Engages "completion" motivator for strategy players
- Could be accomplished with minimum animation with word-based puzzles on game background, engaging sci-fi fans

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Hustle Castle 47% SOV

Concept: Female-Centered Ads ▶

Create ads that utilize more female characters and storylines:
- Attracts more female gamers
- Can be accomplished in character countdowns, puzzles
- Competitor/Share of Voice:
- N/A

Create ads that utilize more female characters and storylines:
- Attracts more female gamers
- Can be accomplished in character countdowns, puzzles

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- N/A

◀ **Concept: Comedic Voice Over**

Create videos that juxtapose gameplay with comedic voice over.
- Showcases gameplay and/or characters
- Mimics gamer dialogue

Uses subtitles
Competitor/Share of Voice:
Rise of Kingdoms: 72% SOV
Questland: 8% SOV

Concept: Choices ▶

Add simple pickers to characters and game situations:
- Increase engagement with viewers

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- AFK Arena: 6% SOV
- King's Raid: 4% SOV

◀ **Concept: Music Based**

Use of Heavy Metal or other genres to create game trailers and game art-based music videos.
- Create gameplay videos featuring different types of music to test
- Try retro music to fit style of game

Competitor/Share of Voice:
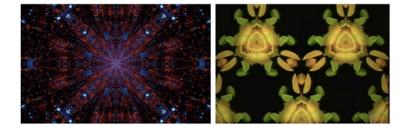- AFK Arena: 78% SOV
- King's Raid: 25% SOV

Concept: Pixel Art ▶

Utilize game graphics to create "pixel art"
 • Highlights beauty of pixel games
 • Create kaleidoscope videos by
   mirroring quadrants
 • Visually arresting

Competitor/Share of Voice:
 • N/A

Entertainment App Trends

Competitive Analysis

Top Competitors: Netflix, Hulu, Disney+, Tubi, Philo, Pluto TV, Starz, Sling, Crackle, Paramount Network, SyFy, BET Now, Shudder, Vudu. View competitive videos here.

Competitive Trends:

Movie Trailers: Videos with movie trailer style content, featuring multiple titles. (Vudu, Pluto, Shudder, Netflix, Sundance Now)
Promoting Exclusive Content: Videos or images promoting exclusive or original content. (Hulu, Vudu, Netflix, Starz, BET, Crackle)
Special Offers: Videos or images with special offers. (Netflix, Hulu, Philo, Starz)
Competitive: Videos or images comparing prices to competitor or cable. (Sling, Hulu, Pluto)
Movie Poster: Images leveraging a singular movie or TV series to promote the service. (Vudu, Hulu)
Genre content: Video or images promoting a specific genre (sports, horror, etc.). (Sling, Shudder, Hulu)
Shared Passion: Videos or images that engage passion communities (e.g., Star Wars fans) with quizzes, trivia, and profiles. (SyFy)
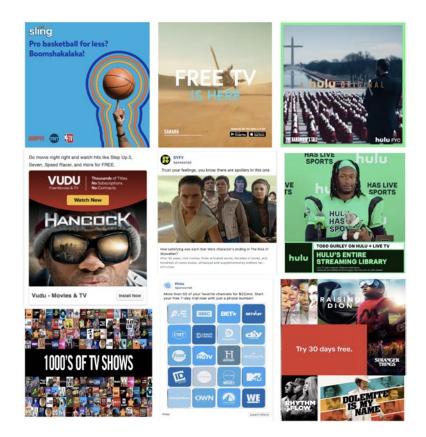
User Motivations:

What are you looking for in an Entertainment app?
- Something to put myself in a positive mood
- Background noise until I finally fall asleep
- Escape the commute
- Relax and enjoy some "Me Time"
- Looking for a good action/family movie
- Reality TV
- Something short before work
- "Anything to help me wind down from work"

Why do you open an Entertainment up?
- Unwind/settle in
- Relax and escape
- A quick laugh

What need are you fulfilling when using an entertainment app?
- Eliminate boredom
    - I need my time to not worry about anything and just relax, catch my breath, be lazy and pamper myself
- Elevate mood + aid sleep
    - Laugh and have good thoughts before going to bed
- Access to content
    - Fulfills some nostalgia of shows I used to watch with family or siblings growing up
    - Catch up on new/old movies I haven't seen before
    - I am able to select from a huge pool of movies and shows and I am not limited to what I can and can't watch
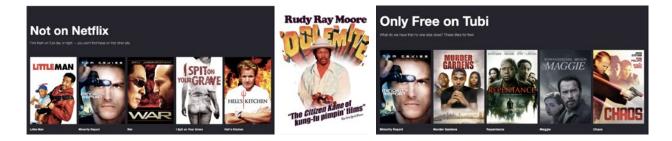   - Find movies I might have a hard time finding on another service

Concept: "Only on…" / "Not on…" ▼

Focus on exclusive content. User profiles suggest hard-to-find content is a big reason for using multiple entertainment apps
- "Only on…", "Only free on", "Not on <competitor>…" are all appropriate messages.
- Images
  - Leverage specific exclusive titles, especially if those that are free to watch.
  - Feature hard-to-find titles that have remakes/sequels that competitors are hyping, e.g. Tubi promoting the original "Dolemite" when Netflix went all out on "Dolemite is My Name".
- Video trailers
  - 00:15-00:30 second trailers that feature a combination of scenes and dialogue from multiple movies and alongside "Only on…" or "Not on…" messaging.

Insight
Given the popularity of Netflix and Disney+, it may be advisable to target them as competitors

Concept: Genre-Focused Creative ▼

Evolve current movie poster creative to focus on genres and seasonal titles, from Black cinema and Nostalgia TV to Academy Award-winners and seasonal/holidays
- Users sees specific genres not necessarily available on category leaders such as Netflix & Hulu.
- Image ads include
  - Awards season focus on Oscar-winning titles, e.g. Chinatown. Movie poster or multiple titles.
  - Seasonal focus: summer blockbusters, holiday movies, etc..
  - Call out unique genre titles available.
- Videos
  - 00:15-00:30 second trailers hype specific genres and seasonal offerings with scenes/dialogue from multiple titles.

Concept: Creativo Centrado en el Género ▼

Evolve current movie poster creative to focus on genres and seasonal titles in video and image creative, specifically targeting Spanish-speaking audiences
- Memes with captions in Spanish.
- Genres focused on Spanish-speakers, e.g.:
- Para niños y familias
- Peliculas en Español
- Telenovelas y series

Concept: Shared Passion ▼

User profiles suggest a love a of nostalgia, old movies and TV series. Let's reward that passion by using memes, quizzes and trivia to engage film buffs, movie fans and TV addicts

- Expand memes to use scenes from nostalgic TV and film.
- Simple quizzes about old and new films and TV shows:
  – What actor starred in Greatest American Hero?
- Random trivia about new and old genres:
  – John Travolta turned down the role of Forrest Gump. (Photoshop his face into iconic Tom Hanks pic?)
- Combine with competitive "Only on…" or "Not on…" messaging.

Insight
- SyFy and Shudder are currently running similar campaigns.

Concept: YouTube Pre-Roll with Google Vogon ▼

TV and movie fans regularly look up scenes on YouTube. Create pre-roll ads that target the specific genre they are looking at, with Google Vogon ads
- Example of how Campbell's Soup utilized technology here.
- 00:10 second pre-roll ads target range of categories, with emphasis on competitive messaging:
    – Horror: "Scared of costly subscriptions? Stream your favorite horror movies for free with <app>."
    – Sports: "Don't pay to play with <competitor>. Stream great sports movies for free with <app>."
    – Kids Shows: "Put the money you'd spend on <competitor> in the kids' college fund. Stream for free with <app>."

Puzzle and Hidden Object Games Trends

Competitive Analysis

Puzzle game competitors: June's Journey, CC Friends Saga, CC Soda Saga, Gardenscapes, Homescapes, Toon Blast, Toy Blast, Cookie Jam, Sweet Escapes, Lily's Garden, Funky Bay, Best Fiends, Lost Island, Manor Cafe, Resort Hotel, Passion Puzzle, Design Home Express, Meow Match, Diner Dash, Pet Rescue Saga, Choices, My Home:Design Dreams, My Cafe, Word Villas, Vineyard Valley, Township.

Hidden Object game competitors: Pearl's Peril, Criminal Case, The Secret Society, Agent Alice, CSI Hidden Crimes, Diggy's Adventure, Hidden City, Letters from Nowhere, Murder in the Alps, Mysteries of the Past, Tropi-cats, Adam Wolfe: Dark Detective Mystery Game, Adventure Escape, Hidden Objects Mystery Society, Pearl's Peril, Seeker's Notes: Hidden Mystery, Bubble Island, Survivors: the Quest, Temple Run 2, Township: Farm & City Building, Horse Haven World Adventures, Klondike Adventures, Diamond Dash, Stand O'Food, Virtual City Play-ground, Just Dance Controller, Just Dance Now, Trials Frontier, Ubisoft Club, Cage & Aviary Birds, Clipomatic, Colorfy, Color Your Call, Galatea, Murder Minute, Paint Color, Quiz Crazy, Shudder, Tarot
To view competitive videos, click here.

Competitive Trends ▼

Cinematic Storytelling: Romantic, dramatic stories (Murder in the Alps, Criminal Case, Galatea)
Female-centered storytelling (StoryScape, Solve It, Galatea)
Cats! "Find the Cat" concepts are becoming more ubiquitous and beginning to evolve (Criminal Case, Hidden City)
Hidden Object Countdowns (Pearl's Peril, Hidden City)

Concept: Story-focused challenges ▼

- Attract Hidden Object players with hidden object challenges in a movie trailer like format, like Murder in the Alps and Criminal Case.
- Try counted clues in Criminal Case style (before and after)
- Use a series of images/hidden object challenges that tell a story (similar to Murder in the Alps)

Concept: Story-focused countdowns ▼
Use crime scenes to create more of a story in finding hidden objects (Pearl's Peril, Criminal Case, Murder in the Alps)

Concept: Character-centric Stories ▶

- Utilize simulation/role playing-style (e.g. Pocket Gems Episode)
  technique to tell character-centered stories (Solve It, Storyscape)
- Create simple puzzles that "save" your main character - targeting
  both solitary story-centric and self-challenger players (Homescapes)
- Tell character-centered stories with voice over and/or supers
  (Galatea, Dream Home Solitaire)

Concept: Gameplay Methods ◀

- Combine live action people playing the game (relaxed,
  escapist) with gameplay (Klondike, Pearl's Peril)
- Combine gameplay with leaderboards (Tropicats)

Concept: "Find the Cat" ▶

- Incorporate saturated interiors with food with "Find the Cat"
  challenge or other short headers/items:
    – "Find the Gun"
    – "Find the Dog"
    – "Find the Rope"
    – "Find 5 Cats"
    – "Find 5 Oranges" (Criminal Case, June's Journey)
- Consider using cinemagraphs like the bar scene (Pearl's Peril, Hidden City)

Concept: Timed hidden object challenges ◀

- Try different timed hidden object games that still incorporate
  a story, e.g. "Save Your Patient". (Hidden City, Pearl's Peril)

Match 3 Puzzle Games Trends

- **Competitors:** Fishdom, Gardenscapes, Homescapes, Mansion Blast, Home Design Challenge, Wild scapes, Slices, Township Farm & City, Wordscapes, Clockmaker, Meow Match, Home Design Makeover, Jelly Juice, Lily's Garden, My Home, Paint by Number, Sweet Road, Vineyard Valley, Brain Out, Candy Crush, Cookie Jam, Disney Magic Kingdoms, Fashion Blogger, Fashion Boutique, Museum Story, Sweet Escapes, Tropicats, Tropic Trouble, Choices, Dragon City, Episode, Hustle Castle, Lost Island, Merge Dragons!, Party in My Dorm, The Simpsons, Covet Fashion, Klondike, Minecraft, Clash of Clans, June's Journey, Panda Pop, Manor Cafe, Home Blast, Hidden Resort
- **Top Competitors: Match 3:** Toon Blast, Farm Heroes Saga, Bubble Witch 3 Saga, Toy Blast, Candy Smash Mania, Jewel Crush, Jewel Fever, Candy Blast Mania, Candy Pop, Sugar Blast, Cookie Jam Top Match 3 game.
- **Top Competitors: Building:** Matchington Mansion, Homescapes, Gardenscapes, Township, Fishdom, Coin Master

View competitive videos here.

Competitive Trends

- **Puzzles:** Locks & Gates and other puzzles that challenges users to free a game character (Fishdom, Gardenscapes, Homescapes, many others)
- **Picker Videos:** 3D or 2D situations with picker, often resulting in disastrous fails. (Township, Sweet Escapes, Manor Cafe, many others)
- **Hidden Items:** Videos or still images that contain hidden items the user must find. (Meow Match, June's Journey)
- **Design Challenges:** Tasks that must completed within an allotted time or budget. (Design Home, Sweet Escapes)
- **Real Player Gameplay:** Split screen featuring a player and gameplay. (Jelly Juice)
- **Female-Centered Vignettes:** Women overcoming adversity and men behaving badly in soap opera situations. (Lily's Garden, Choices, Vineyard Valley, My Home: Design Dreams)
- **Choose Your Adventure:** Series of situations where you choose between two actions. (Choices, Episode)
- **Game Controller:** Picker that mimics a game console, guiding character through levels. (Candy Crush, Hustle Castle)

- **Lifestyle and Gameplay:** Showing lifestyle footage and gameplay that matches image (Toon Blast, Farm Hero Saga)
- **Gameplay + Side Character:** Gameplay elements leaving screen to interact with character (Candy Blast Mania, Candy Smash Mania,)
- **Mixing gameplay with narrative:** Storybook narration, Coloring book style (Bubble Witch Saga))
  3D effect: Characters "floating" above gameplay (Farm Heroes Saga)
- **Funny but still cute:** Evil character getting hit by gameplay, mentioning how you can't get weight by playing candy games (Candy Blast Mania, Bubble Witch Saga))
- **Incorporating game to solve a problem:** Using gameplay to find key to escape a room (Candy Smash mania)
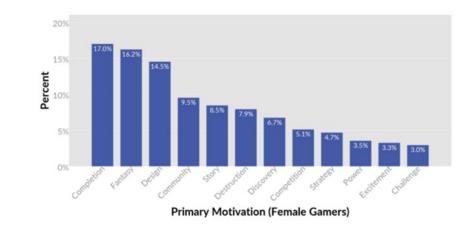
Player Motivations

Sample motivations for playing:
- Stress relief
- Complete levels or beat score
- Killing time
- Escape from "real life"
- Socialize with friends, family or other people

The Most Common Primary Motivations for Women are Completion and Fantasy For

For women, Completion (get all stars/collectibles, complete all missions) and Fantasy (being someone else somewhere else) are the most common primary motivations, while Exitement (fast-paced, action, surprises thrills) and challenge (practice, high difficulty missions) are the least common.

Primary Motivation (Female Gamers)

These gender differences seem to align with stereotypes, but as we've pointed out before, age differences are often just as large if not more so. We'll touch on age later in this post.

Completion is the Most Low-Risk, High-Reward Motivation

One finding that surprised us was how consistently high Completion (get all stars/collectibles, complete all missions) placed across all the charts. Whether we're comparing gender or age segments, Completion is always in the top 3. Completion is a very low risk, high-reward motivation.

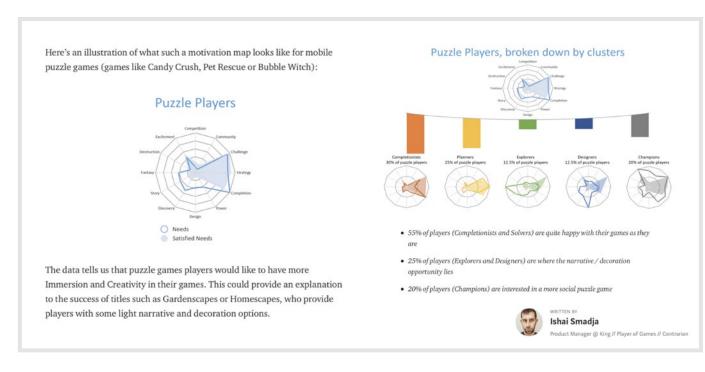> *Whether we're comparing gender or age segments, Completion is always in the top 3*

Source: Quantic Foundry, 7 Things We Learned About Primary Gaming Motivations From Over 250,000 Gamers

Game Player Motivations

Here's an illustration of what such a motivation map looks like for mobile puzzle games (games like Candy Crush, Pet Rescue or Bubble Witch):

Puzzle Players

○ Needs
○ Satisfied Needs

The data tells us that puzzle games players would like to have more Immersion and Creativity in their games. This could provide an explanation to the success of titles such as Gardenscapes or Homescapes, who provide players with some light narrative and decoration options.

Puzzle Players, broken down by clusters

Completionists 30% of puzzle players | Planners 25% of puzzle players | Explorers 12.5% of puzzle players | Designers 12.5% of puzzle players | Champions 20% of puzzle players

- 55% of players (Completionists and Solvers) are quite happy with their games as they are
- 25% of players (Explorers and Designers) are where the narrative / decoration opportunity lies
- 20% of players (Champions) are interested in a more social puzzle game

WRITTEN BY
Ishai Smadja
Product Manager @ King // Player of Games // Contrarian

Concept: Faux Hidden Items Gameplay ▶

Faux "relaxing" games are interrupted by exciting interactions/fights between characters:
- Begin video with slower games like hidden items or word games, with header like "Find 5 Bats"
- Characters break through painting as others chase with a (baseball) bat.
- Competitor/Share of Voice:
- N/A

Player Motivations:
- Decorative/creative opening could attract puzzle players

Concept: Locks and Gates ▶
- New 2D animation style
- Try characters in "How to Loot?" where a lock releases sweets or allows her to escape
- Test "What's Next?" vs FAIL - to appeal to new users
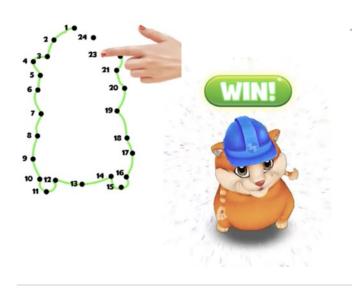- Leverage "dumb ways to die" assets

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Gardenscapes: 96%
- Homescapes: 36%

Player Motivations:
- Engage puzzle players who want to complete challenges

◀ **Concept: Connect the Dots**

Create videos where finger connects dots to create characters:
- Simple background
- Engages viewer's curiosity
- Can speak to game truths like Clockmaker's "We know you're tired of Match-3 ads.."

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Sweet Escapes, EA

Player Motivations:
- Targets player need for creativity and narrative in games

Concept: Serial Storytelling ▶

Serial storytelling style:
- Soap opera clichés and adult situations to capture the attention of the 25-54 female demographic.
- Minimal scenes ("UP" style opening)
- Rival characters fighting over a love interest.
- Female characters overcoming odds and bad male behavior.

Competitor/Share of Voice:
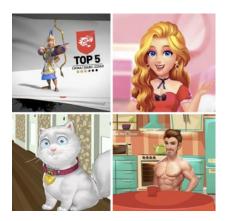- Lily's Garden: 91% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets player need for narrative in games

Concept: Perilous Situations ▶

- Rescue situations: Feature characters. Leverage pop culture, movies, or just mini games.
- Character holding rope bridge (Indiana Jones)
- Character holding a clock (Harold Lloyd).
- Dumb ways to die concepts
- HS/GS "in a theme tied to the game"

◀ **Concept: Character Countdown**

Feature various characters in a countdown:
- Showcases animation style, range of characters and attributions
- Generates engagement (curiosity over list of characters)

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Rise of Kingdoms: 28% SOV

- Player Motivations:
- Targets completionists seeking to master levels/characters

Concept: Pop Culture ▶

- "Nailed It" TV show, predicted winner, iterate with new items (gingerbread) 2 item pickers, new fail, new kitchen items.
- Best Fiends throwback ad featured familiar "I Love Lucy" black and white opening. Leverage familiar TV show opens with characters that speak to our target demo.

◀ **Concept: Hidden Objects**

- Count off hidden items or count the difference between side by side images of environments.

Concept: Comedic Voice Over ▶

Create videos that juxtapose gameplay with funny voice over:
- Showcases gameplay and graphics
- Mimics player dialogue
- Uses subtitles

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Icing on the Cake: 54% SOV
- Rise of Kingdoms: 72% SOV
- Questland: 8% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Mirrors social aspect of puzzle games

◀ **Concept: Character Competitions**

Feature game characters in different competitions:
- Slap Off
- Strip Poker (word search removes items of clothing, will keep it PG)
- Funny way to show character in new environment

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Slap King: 100% SOV
- Slap Master: 100% SOV
- Sinful Puzzle: 13% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets competitive players

Concept: Off to the Races ▶

Create videos featuring game characters in different races
- Water slide race, Car race, running race
- Dress up characters as mascots at baseball game, make it interactive with "see who wins"
- Showcases characters in new game environment
- Engages viewers who'll want to see who wins

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Aquapark: 83% SOV
- Player Motivations:
- Targets competitive players

Concept: One Word at a Time Stories ▶

Simple text-based videos with attitude that entice or antagonize viewers:
- Simple background
- Easy to make and test
- Can speak to game truths like Clockmaker's "We know you're tired of Match-3 ads..."

Competitor/Share of Voice:
- Clockmaker 83% SOV

Player Motivations:
- Targets player need for creativity and narrative in games

◀ **Concept: Incorporate gameplay cleverly**

Audience Profile: Completion & Design
- Make the gameplay a crucial component of the ad story.
- Examples
  - Gameplay allows you to open a door to escape room
  - Gameplay gives the key to save a character
- Use various shapes to present gameplay (heart-shaped, flower, circle)

I'm sure you can't escape

Concept: Mix Lifestyle and Gameplay ▶

Audience Profile: Fantasy
- Opening ad with lifestyle that matches gameplay/characters
- Adding elements of game characters to lifestyle footage
- Make Lifestyle part of the story

Concept: Maximize Gameplay Blocks ▶

Audience Profile: Fantasy, excitement
- Make gameplay parts interact with other elements of ad
- Examples:
  – Gameplay blocks hit evil character
  – Gameplay blocks come to life and take over screen
  – Gameplay blocks talk to each other discussing
    ways to make a big move

◀ Concept: Risqué Ideas
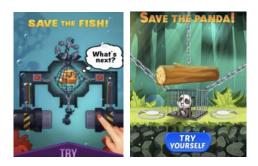
Audience Profile: Destruction and
- Excitement
- Less brand focused
- Irreverent elements
  – Examples:
  – Inclusion of gross items
  – Physical discomfort
  – Can't look away style
  – Humor

Concept: Target Different Player Motivations ▶

Target Different User Clusters
- CTA always on in non-picker: Play Now, Try Yourself, etc.
- End Card "FAIL" appeals to certain users, test "What's Next?", "Try Yourself", etc.

◀ Concept: Test Gameplay Elements

Continue using hand style creative, but make it have a purpose
- Selection crucial to narration
- Selection moves ad forward

Concept: Add Narrative ▶

- Add narrative to best performers transitions to explain the story better
- Help understand what the goal is

◀ **Concept: Test Level Completed - Player Motivation**

- Ad levels completed to gameplay best performers (Audience main motivation is completion)
- Emphasize the amount of levels
- Challenge user to get to higher levels

Concept: Test Mini Fails vs One Big Fail ▶

- Show a succession of mini fails followed by the big fail ending
- Add fail sounds to emphasize mistake

Simulation Role Playing Games Trends

Competitive Analysis

Competitors: Avakin Life, Chapters: Interactive Stories, Choices: Design Home, Cooking Diary, Covet Fashion, Design My Room, Episode: Super Stylist, Episode: Choose your Story, Fill in 3D, Hollywood Story, House Flip, I Peel Good, Icing on the Cake, IMVU Avatar, Ink Inc., Journeys: Interactive Series, Lily's Garden: Design & Relax, Linda Brown, Linda Brown: Interactive Story, Love Sick, Moments: Choose Your Story, My Cafe, My Home: Design Dreams, My Story, My Story: Choose your own Path, Paint by Numbers, Party in My Dorm , Pottery, Secrets: Game of Choices, Storyscape, Super Stylist, Township, What's your Story?

To view competitive videos click here.

Competitive Trends

- Event/Date Prep with Character Reaction: Picker utilized for hair/makeup/clothing, with character reaction (Hollywood Story, My Story, Lovesick)
- Choices-Style situations: Empowered female characters given option to choose their next move (Episode, Choices, Avakin Life, IMVU Avatar)
- Men Behaving Badly: Women triumphing over adversity and badly behaving men (Choices, Episode, Love Sick, My Cafe, many others)
- Relaxing, Mindless Expressions of Creativity: Decorating, painting and cooking apps that display simple gameplay, sometimes comedically (I Peel Good, Icing on the Cake, Fill in 3D, Pottery)
- Creative Expression/Design: Using pickers to create and furnish rooms, houses, etc. (Design Home, My Home: Design Dreams)

Competitive Trends (cont.)

- Female characters in peril: Females suffering and crying but overcoming the obstacles and ultimately having the last laugh.
- Mean Girls: Cruel characters making fun of unpopular/weak girls, but ultimately losing against them.
- Time Progressions: Narrative style ads where present conflict is explained by going back in time or forward to future.
- Outfit Selections Montage: Showing many outfit or make up choices. Dressing up girls for an event/date/contest
- Choosing between two interests: Main character torn between conflicting interests (Best friend and lover, two lovers, money or love).
- Awful Dates: Female characters enduring awful dates/relationships but finding a better partner in the end or having to decide what outcome to choose.
- Competitive Nature: Friends competing for better date/outfits/more likes on Instagram/popularity.

Concept: Poor Pregnant Woman ▼

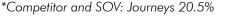Trends: Females in Peril, Awful men
- Pregnant woman about to reveal baby news to future dad.
- Plot options
    - A) Guy has other plans
        ◦ He's about to reveal he doesn't love her anymore/is leaving her.
    - B) She finds him cheating on her with someone else (Sister/agent/friend)
- Ending
    - Woman has to make a difficult decision as a cliffhanger

Competitor and SOV: Journeys 20.5%

Concept: Revenge with Timing Elements ▶

Trends: Mean Girls, Time, Competitive
- Bullied girl gets her payback years later
  - Starts in present time with bride crying/husband cheating with sexy attendee
  - Sexy attendee memory takes her back to High School days
  - Turns out bride was very mean and bullied sexy girl

Options appears with
  - Revenge
  - Let it go
- Scene returns to present time with choice made and consequences

Competitor and SOV: My Story, Journeys 25.5%

◀ Concept: Ugly Betty with a Twist

Trends: Mean Girls and Outfit Selections
- Girl is made fun of because of her looks
  - She decides to go home and change her appearance
  - A picker screen appears next to her
  - She selects new make-up, clothes, hair and removes glasses/braces
  - (I'd avoid doing the weight loss part)
- Her "new me" comes to school and tries to seduce her crush
- Two options appear
  - Crush rejects her because she's now like everyone else
  - He lusts after her and dumps his girl

Competitor and SOV: My Story, What's your story 18.5%

Concept: You vs. Your Friend with a Twist ▶

Trends: Competitive, Outfits, Two loves
- Friends compete to find hottest date
  - Two frenemies go to Tinder to find a hot date
  - Side by side screens show each swipe
  - Both choose a guy but this part is not revealed
  - Next, both girls are seeing choosing different outfits (fast montage)
- Twist end, they both arrive to meet the same guy
- Guy must make a choice
  - He chooses one
  - He chooses both

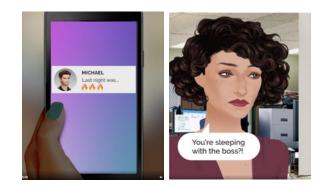*Competitor and SOV: Kim K. Hollywood 31.5%*

Concept: Sleeping with the Boss ▶

Trends: Awful dates, Mean Girls
- Woman gets in trouble for sleeping with boss
  - Girl is reading a text she just received while at work
  - Snarky coworker reads it too and discovers coworker is sleeping with boss
- Jealous coworker has several choices
  - Send a chain email to the whole company
  - Blackmail coworker
  - Reveals she's also sleeping with him
- Boss also makes a decision based on news
  - Fires them both
  - Asks for a threesome

Competitor and SOV: Journeys 12.5%

Concept: You're not the father ◀
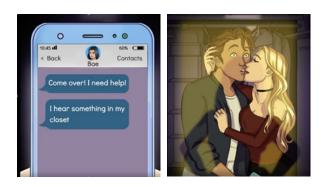
Trends: Awful dates/Choosing between two
- Guy discovers positive pregnant test in garbage
  - He's excited about becoming a dad
  - His girlfriend is in the other room texting another guy
  - She seems upset
  - She tells the other guy the baby is actually his
- Choices
  - Tell the boyfriend baby is his
  - Tell him the truth

Concept: Something in the closet ▶

Trends: Awful dates
- Girl comes home and hears a noise in the closet
  - She's scared so texted her boyfriend to help her find out
  - Boyfriend doesn't reply
- Choices
  - Girl decides to call the cops
  - She investigates on her own
- Outcome
  - Turns out boyfriend is in closet with someone else

Simulation Lifestyle App Trends

Competitive Analysis

- **Top Competitors:** Vertical: Design Home, Home Design Makeover, Property Brothers, House Flip, Home Design 3D, My Home Design Dreams, Home Maker, My Home Design Story, HomeCraft, House Designer, Home Street, Home Design, Dream House, Design this home, Word Villas, Planner 5D, House Flipper.
- **Top Competitors:** Apps: Zillow, RedFin, Realtor.com, Homescapes, Gardenscapes, SimCity BuildIt, Home Design Story, Design This Home, Home Design Makeover!

To view competitive videos, click here and select competitor tab.

Competitive Trends

- **Day and Night:** Show transitions from day to night, provoking an emotional response. (Sim City)
- **Text Transitions:** Transition frames with colorful text in different shapes. (Home Design Makeover, HomeCraft)
- **Emphasize Copy Matching an Emotion:** "Bring Vision to Life," "Create your vision," "The Power is yours." (Sim City)
- **Client Based:** Design for a specific client. (Property Brothers, Home Design Makeover)
- **Creative Expression/Design:** Use pickers to create and furnish rooms and houses, while adding encouraging messages. (My Home: Design Dreams, Home Design Makeover)
- **Unique End Cards:** End ad with mobile device and gameplay, search engine style, flipping logo. (Home Design Makeover)

Player Motivations

Motivations: "The idea of getting by in 2030 is just too big to wrap my head around, the path there is too obscure and has too many steps, so sometimes I have to turn on my Xbox... in order to feel like I'm making concrete progress in something I can control."

Design Home's recent appeal, and razor-sharp focus on real-life products and design trends, can tell us something about **the type of void aging millennials are seeking to fill.** They are a generation scorned by the Great Recession, holed up in city rentals, and unable to afford new homes or furniture. But they also can't help but be influenced by social media and the excessive displays of wealth that comes with it. **They long to feel what it's like to afford the lifestyle of a successful adult.**

The House That 'Design Home' (and Millennial Anxiety) Built, Alyssa Bereznak, The Ringer

Concept: Present a Challenge to Solve ▼

Explore stories with an issue to solve, targeting creative decision makers:
- Present problem in opening: "Help grandma sell her house"
- Decor is customized based on client needs, using pickers and furniture options

Concept: Give Users the Power ▼

Utilize empowering language to engage users who want to feel more in control of their design process:
- Mix game footage with compelling copy that speaks to directly to users' ability to creative with their decision making
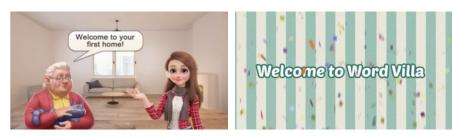

Concept: Show the Possibilities ▼

- Engage users and help them express their personal style by showing an array of different styles and options
- Give users a creative outlet by transporting them to idyllic yet achievable homes

Concept: Incite Relaxation

Invite users to relax and unwind with concepts that compel them to disconnect:
- Calming colors, imagery
- Copy that incites relaxation and "me time"

Concept: Before and After

Create videos that show before and after transformations:
- Use various headers, split screen and "Cinderella Transformations" which flip screens and highlight drastic changes

Concept: New Intros and Outros

Create new intro and outros utilizing available assets:
- Test Intros with full logo (Design Home Makeover, Property Brothers, HomeCraft)
- Add search engine feature to end card (House Flip)
- Open first frame with a challenge or question ("Can you help me?") (My Home Design Dreams)

Concept: Test New Transitions

- Try full frame, colorful transitions with compelling text (Home Design Makeover)
- Test different transition styles (Color blocks, Brick style, My Home Design Dreams)

Sports Games Trends

Competitive Analysis

Competitors: MLB Tap Sports Baseball 2020, 8 Ball Pool™, Real Boxing 2, My NBA 2K20, Tennis Clash: Online League, NBA 2K Mobile Basketball, Asphalt 9: Legends, Basketball Stars™, Homer City, MADDEN NFL MOBILE FOOTBALL, Golf Battle, WWE SuperCard, Oh My Goal! - Soccer, Baseball Boy! MLB 9 Innings 20, NBA LIVE Mobile Basketball, Dream League Soccer 2020, MLB Champions, FIFA soccer, EA SPORTS™ UFC®, PBA® Bowling Challenge, Football Strike, Score! Hero, PGA TOUR Golf Shootout, NBA 2K20, R.B.I. Baseball 20, NBA JAM by EA SPORTS™, Football Manager 2020 Mobile.
View competitive videos by hitting competitor tab here.

Competitive Trends

- **Gameplay/Game Overview:** Shots of gameplay that showcase graphics and players. (Home Run Clash, NBA 2K, Boxing Star, many more)
- **Distance Challenges:** Simple gameplay that challenge viewers to hit an object as far as they can. (Baseball Boy, Slap Master)
- **Competition:** Videos dramatizing head to head competition between players. (Darts of Fury, Home Run Clash)
- **Noob vs. Pro:** Videos displaying bad versus good gameplay. (Darts of Fury, Mini Golf King)
  Real Player Footage: Real footage replacing game characters and gameplay. (Tennis Clash, Sniper Arena, Draft Kings)
- **Cinematic Techniques:** Slo-mo, camera pans, and other cinematic techniques utilizing game characters. (Johnny Trigger, Mr. Bullet, Sniper Arena, Tennis Clash)
- **Augmented Gameplay:** Illustrations, emojis, talk bubbles and voice over added to gameplay or characters (Mr. Bullet, Draft Kings, Flip & Dive 3D)
- **Game Controller Overlay:** Game controller overlay on gameplay to give it a game console effect. (Tennis Clash, City Fighter Vs. Street Gang)

Concept: Statcast ▶

Create videos that incorporate statistics into gameplay
  • Overlay graphics to show distance of tape measure
    shots and challenge viewers to play and hit home runs
  • Overlay graphics on pitching stats and ground covered
    by outfielders, challenging viewers to beat their opponent

Competitor/Share of Voice
  • Baseball Boy: 90% SOV
  • Slap Masters: 100% SOV

◀ **Concept: Character Countdown**

Create a countdown of featured players in the game
  • Showcases animation style, range of players and stats
  • Use baseball card like graphics
  • Generates engagement (curiosity over list of characters)

Competitor/Share of Voice
  • Rise of Kingdoms: 28% SOV

Concept: Trash Talk Voice Over ▶

Juxtapose gameplay with player trash talk
  • Showcases gameplay and graphics
  • Mimics player dialogue and chat portion of the game
  • Uses subtitles

Competitor/Share of Voice
  • Icing on the Cake: 54% SOV
  • Flip & Dive 3D: 90% SOV

◀ **Concept: Emoji Gameplay**
Feature gameplay with emoji overlays and talk bubbles
to communicate player emotions
  • Humorous
  • Humanizes players
  • Showcases game graphics

Competitor/Share of Voice
  • Mr. Bullet: 3% SOV
  • Flip & Dive 3D: 90% SOV
  • DraftKings: 12% SOV

Concept: Real Game Footage ▶

Intercut gameplay with real footage, so that it's hard to tell what's real and what's the game
- Showcases game graphics
- Promotes simulation aspect of the game: "Closest thing to being on the field"

Competitor/Share of Voice
- Tennis Clash: 50% SOV
- Sniper Arena: 3% SOV

◀ **Concept: Announcer Calls**

Re-create the feel of a famous announcer calling a legendary game with gameplay and voice over
- Creates emotional "what if" scenarios (see MLB The Show 2012 "Cubs Win" ad here)
- Engages viewer's curiosity
- Highlights the passion of sports fans

Competitor/Share of Voice
- N/A
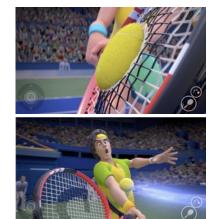
Concept: Cinematic Stories ▶

Create videos using cinematic techniques and voiceover to up the emotional ante of the game
- Showcases game graphics
- Utilizes nostalgic sports documentary feel
- Appealing to sports fans

Competitor/Share of Voice
- Tennis Clash: 2% SOV
- Johnny Trigger: 97% SOV
- Mr. Bullet: 3% SOV

◀ **Concept: Noob vs. Pro**
Create side-by-side videos of good and bad gameplay, with "Noob vs. Pro" header
- Shows the difficulty of the game
- Triggers player competitive urge
- Incorporates head-to-head aspect
- Highlights both "wins" and "fails" - both powerful hooks for players

Competitor/Share of Voice
- Darts of Fury: 13% SOV
- Mini Golf King: 12% SOV

Concept: Sports Chants ▶

Create a sing-along music video of gameplay with a famous sports chant
- E.g. bouncing ball version of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame"
- Most chants are in the public domain
- Showcases graphics and gameplay
- Will appeal to sports fans (specific team chants could accompany more targeted campaigns)

Competitor/Share of Voice
- N/A

Before you can develop your creative, based on your learnings of trends, you'll need to first understand your audience and who it is you are targeting.

Why do people play mobile games? What motivates them to choose one app over another, or to click on one ad over another? What motivates them to continue playing a game rather than just playing it once?

The answer lies in a concept called "horizontal segmentation." It's an idea that remade the food industry a few decades ago and has remade several other industries since then. We believe it's about to remake user acquisition and Facebook ads, too.

Pasta sauce, pickles, and Howard Moskowitz

The first champion of horizontal segmentation in consumer marketing was a guy named Howard Moskowitz. Moskowitz, a food researcher and psychophysicist, had been asked to find the perfect sweetness level for a new type of Pepsi. But after he dug into the problem, Moskowitz discovered there was no perfect level of sweetness for the new type of Pepsi. There were only perfect levels of sweetness.

Or, as Malcolm Gladwell explains this in his TEDTalk on the subject, there was no perfect Pepsi – there were only perfect Pepsis. Click here.

Pepsi, unfortunately, wasn't sold on this concept. Moskowitz had to keep pitching it far and wide, with tepid reception, until a pickle company gave his idea a spin. And Howard, true to form, found them not the perfect pickle, but their perfect pickles – zesty, classic, etc.

That was a good start, but the revolution of horizontal segmentation didn't take off until Prego, a pasta sauce company, hired Moskowitz. Moskowitz, once again, went out and did a ton of research about how people felt about pasta sauce. He returned with not the perfect pasta sauce, but with the perfect pasta sauces.

Most famously, Howard returned with a recommendation to make chunky pasta sauce. No other company had been selling chunky sauce, and pasta sauce makers weren't aware that people even wanted chunky sauce. But because Prego trusted Howard and the research that pointed to this unmet need, Prego launched a line of chunky pasta sauce. And went on to sell $600 million of it over the next few years.

Horizontal Segmentation for Facebook User Acquisition

So, what does all this sauce talk have to do with user acquisition? Everything, actually. Because in essence, Moscowitz had unearthed the following ideas:

   a) People are not all the same.
   b) While people are not all the same, if you study them in large groups you will find they tend to cluster around a certain set of profiles or preferences. Personas, if you will.
   c) With enough data and data analysis, these preference clusters can be found.
   d) If you develop products expressly tailored for each of these preference clusters, you can sell more stuff. A lot more stuff.

Gladwell explains in his TEDTalk that, for example, if his audience was to get together and make one perfect brew of coffee together, they would individually give that brew a collective average score of about 60 on a scale of zero to 100.

But if the group was allowed to break up into coffee clusters based on certain dominant preferences and was able to make coffee expressly designed for each of those preferences, the satisfaction score for those preference-driven brews would rise to about 75 to 78.

As Gladwell explains, "The difference between coffee at 60 and coffee at 78 is the difference between coffee that makes you wince and coffee that makes you deliriously happy." (Gladwell 17:16).

So, to paraphrase what Moskowitz and Gladwell have explained and to bring it into the context of Facebook and Google user acquisition:

   • There is no perfect game. There is no perfect way to advertise or marketing for that game, either.
   • But there are perfect games. There are perfect ads.
   • Finding the persona clusters or player profiles in gaming for these games and ads (and more specifically, finding the motivations of these persona clusters) will let us create ads that make people dramatically happier and take the action we want them to take (click, download, purchase, or view ads).

This is clearly an evolution – if not a revolution – in how most UA and design teams have been doing creative for user acquisition.

Most UA and design teams have been approaching their advertising and creative strategy with the assumption that there was a perfect game, a perfect app, a perfect ad. "A platonic ideal," as scholars say.

What if that's not so? What if there are only perfect apps, perfect games, perfect ads?

What if we could talk to people based on what motivates them to play the game?

What if we could take a video ad – the exact same video – and then adjust the copy or the call to action based on what motivates different users to want to play? By tailoring messages according to what those player profiles will most respond to, could we increase ROAS by… 20%? 30%? Or could we expand the game into a whole new audience segment?

Game Theory and User Behavior Models

If you know your way around game theory, you'll know we already have quite a few detailed studies about different gaming profiles and user personas.
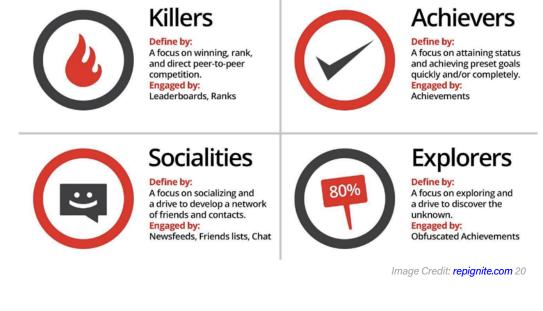
So, we actually have quite a lot of information about what motivates people to play games.

You can look to "Fogg's Behavior Model," or Scott Rigby's Player Experience of Need Satisfaction (PENS) model. Or you can view your users through something simpler, like "The Big Five," or the "Five Factor Model." Paula Neves breaks that model out well in her article Looking at Player Motivation Models,

- **Openness to Experience:** If one is inventive and curious or consistent and cautious.
- **Conscientiousness:** If one is efficient and organized or easy going and careless.
- **Extraversion:** If one is outgoing and energetic or timid and reserved.
- **Agreeableness:** If one is friendly and compassionate or challenging and detached.
- **Neuroticism:** If one is sensitive and nervous or secure and confident.

The five traits, under the acronym OCEAN, are therefore treated on a spectrum where you can be open or closed to experience, conscientious or unconscientious and so on."

Bartle's Player Types, in particular, may be the model that the gaming industry embraces the most.

Killers
Define by:
A focus on winning, rank, and direct peer-to-peer competition.
Engaged by:
Leaderboards, Ranks

Achievers
Define by:
A focus on attaining status and achieving preset goals quickly and/or completely.
Engaged by:
Achievements

Socialities
Define by:
A focus on socializing and a drive to develop a network of friends and contacts.
Engaged by:
Newsfeeds, Friends lists, Chat

Explorers
Define by:
A focus on exploring and a drive to discover the unknown.
Engaged by:
Obfuscated Achievements

Image Credit: repignite.com 20

In fact, given the names of the player types and their descriptions in Bartle's model, it almost seems like some of these player types have already filtered down into ad creative.

Image Credit: ConsumerAcquisition.com 2020

Or maybe behavior models aren't quite your thing. Maybe you want to view things through the lens of which types of emotional hooks appeal to different player types.
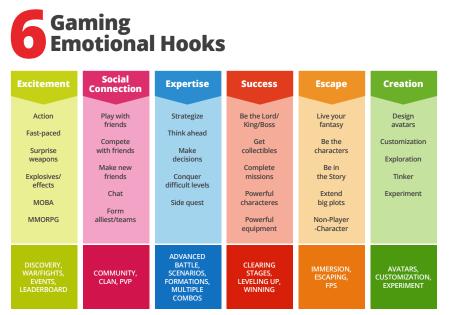
6 Gaming Emotional Hooks

Excitement	Social Connection	Expertise	Success	Escape	Creation
Action	Play with friends	Strategize	Be the Lord/ King/Boss	Live your fantasy	Design avatars
Fast-paced	Compete with friends	Think ahead	Get collectibles	Be the characters	Customization
Surprise weapons	Make new friends	Make decisions	Complete missions	Be in the Story	Exploration
Explosives/ effects	Chat	Conquer difficult levels	Powerful characteres	Extend big plots	Tinker
MOBA	Form alliest/teams	Side quest	Powerful equipment	Non-Player -Character	Experiment
MMORPG					
DISCOVERY, WAR/FIGHTS, EVENTS, LEADERBOARD	COMMUNITY, CLAN, PVP	ADVANCED BATTLE, SCENARIOS, FORMATIONS, MULTIPLE COMBOS	CLEARING STAGES, LEVELING UP, WINNING	IMMERSION, ESCAPING, FPS	AVATARS, CUSTOMIZATION, EXPERIMENT

Image Credit: ConsumerAcquisition.com 2020

As a UA manager or designer (or even a game designer, but that's another article), you can start seeing your user base through any of these different models. And you can start customizing your creative and your advertising tactics accordingly.

Examples of Player Profiles

Cutting-edge UA and design teams are already exploring these different models and applying them to their user base. When we polled our clients, we learned that about 10% of them have these sort of persona profiles in place. Typically, these models are being generated in marketing departments through the use of user surveys.

So, here's what an actual player profile might look like. This is sample data, but it gives you an idea of what information gets included and how detailed these profiles tend to be.

Psychographics

Motivations for Playing

Challenge: I enjoy using my brain to solve puzzles or problems	35%
Stress Relief: Let's me relieve stress	25%
Achievement: It feels good to complete levels or beat my score	22%
Kill Time: It gives me something to do while waiting for other things	19%
Escape: Helps me forget about "real life"	17%
Social: Lets me socialize with friends, family or other people	08%

Distinguishing Traits

The main reason I play is to show myself what I can do	56%
I see myself as someone who loves solving puzzles and problems	55%
I most enjoy playing games alone	52%
I'm motivated by the achievement I feel after accomplishing something difficult	50%
I'm motivated to finish all levels in the games I play	48%
I prefer trying to beat my own past performance	46%

Top 5 Favorite Game Genres Played

Card (Solitaire, Spades, UNO, etc.)	89%
Match-3 (Marchington, Candy Crush, Homescapes, Cookie Jam, etc.)	46%
Word (Words with Friends, Scrabble, Boggle, Wheel of Fortune, etc.)	39%
Puzzle (Jigsaw puzzles, Crossword, Sudoku, etc.)	33%
Trivia (Trivia Crack, QuizUp, Jeopardy!, SongPop, etc.)	17%

Engagement

Game Elements

Complete Quests	96%
Use Boosters	93%
Track Leaderboards	92%
In-Game Rewards	84%
Play Mini-Games	69%
Participate in Events	60%
Collect Characters	49%

Clubs/Guilds/Social

In a Club	90%
Complete Club Quests	88%
Gather Perks	83%
Completed in a Club Contest	78%
Gifted Club Members with Items from the Club Shop	55%

Payer Demographics

Gender

30% / 70%

Age

Under 18		03%
18-25		06%
26-35	Mean age: 47	17%
36-45		28%
46-55		30%
56-65		22%
65+		09%

Income

Less than $25,000	15%
$25k to less than $35k	08%
$35k to less than $50k	13%
$50k to less than $75k	16%
$75k to less than $100k	06%
$100k to less than $150k	04%
$150k or more	03%
Prefer no to say	32%

Note how the graphic shows what this particular player profiles most cares about in the game. The Demographic info is included, but what will really shape our creative is in the left column. Demographics might help a little, but user motivations are the driver.

So, we can take the motivations from these different player clusters and look at what's unique about them. We can also see which other titles they're playing. This helps us come up with new creative ideas and a new list of competitors, which in turn lets us do better competitive analyses.

Armed with this information, almost any designer would immediately understand that they need to create different ads for these different player segments. These are different audiences. Even if the ads are ultimately meant to sell the same game to all the different profiles, ads tailored to each profile are going to perform dramatically better than one ad designed to try to please them all.

Even being able to swap out different bullet points for each player persona could result in tremendous improvements to ROAS.

People Can't Always Tell You What They Really Want

Before you try to apply all this by launching a user survey or research study, know this: People may not be able to tell you what they really want. Because they don't know.

Sometimes, you don't know what you really want until you happen to stumble upon it.

For example, Moskowitz, the pasta sauce researcher, discovered that many people wanted chunky pasta sauce, not the perfectly smooth pasta sauce that was only available at the time. Only with some unusually clever research was Moskowitz able to unearth this desire.

Gladwell describes this elegantly by talking about coffee. As he explains, if you ask the typical American what type of coffee they like, they'll say "I want a dark, rich, hearty roast." (10:40). But in actuality, most of us don't really want a dark, rich, hearty roast. Only about 25-27% of us actually like a dark, rich, hearty roast. Most of us like milky, weak coffee. But we'll never, ever say that.

All this, of course, turns standard product research on its head. It means all those surveys and focus groups and other tactics we've been using to figure out what people want from our games are not the full story.

But this is exactly the principle that put Apple on the map. Steve Jobs didn't go find out what people wanted from a better cassette player. He built them something beyond their imagination: The iPod.

Henry Ford is often quoted with a similar sentiment: "If I had asked them what they wanted; they would have said faster horses."

So what we may be aiming for here is a quantum leap, not an iteration. Whoever can figure it out, systematize it, and apply it to game design and creative strategy could well become a billionaire. Or another Howard Moskowitz.

Player Profiles as "UA Creative Strategy 2.0"

For the past two years, we've watched Facebook and Google move towards fully automating UA advertising. And because the algorithms of those two ad platforms have been getting better and easier to use all the time, much of the qualitative side of UA management is now best done by machines.

Creative, however, is still best managed by humans. This includes all aspects of creative – creative development, creative strategy, and creative testing. Creative is our best competitive advantage now that the ad platforms have removed the competitive advantage third-party adtech used to deliver.

But now, with player profile theory, there's a whole new dimension to creative. It takes everything to another level.

Once we can see into what's motivating people to play games, we've discovered a whole new level of creative theory. It makes getting overly focused on button colors look downright shallow.

All the creative elements we've been focused on up until now (colors, sounds, even ad copy) need to be realigned to serve these customer motivations.

With player profiles theory and player motivations, we have crossed into Creative Strategy 2.0.

Creative Testing and
Why the Control Is So Hard to Beat

High-performance creative is a rare thing for social advertising. In our experience, after spending over $3 billion dollars driving UA across Facebook and Google, usually only one out of twenty ads can beat the "best performing control" (the top ad). If a piece of creative doesn't outperform the best video, you lose money running it. Losers are killed quickly, and winners are scaled to the moon.

The reality is, a vast majority of ads fail. The chart below shows the results of over 17,100 different ads. Spend is distributed based on ad performance. As you can see, out of those 17,000 ads, only a handful drove a majority of the spend.

$73,000,000 Spend

Winning Ads

+17,100 Videos Tested

The high failure rate of most creative shapes creative strategy, budgets and ad testing methodology. If you can't test ads quickly and affordably, your campaign's financial performance is likely to suffer from a lot of non-converting spend. But testing alone isn't enough. You also have to generate enough original creative concepts to fuel testing and uncover winners. Over the years, we've found that 19 out of 20 ads fail (5% success rate), you don't just need one new creative: You need 20 new original ideas or more to sustain performance and scale!

And you need all that new creative fast because creative fatigues quickly. You may need 20 new creative concepts every month, or possibly even every week depending on your ad spend and how your title monetizes (IAA or IAP). The more spend you run through your account, the more likely it is that your ad's performance will decline

Creative Testing: Our Unique Way

Let us set the stage for how and why we've been doing creative testing in a unique way. We test a lot of creative. In fact, we produce and test more than 100,000 videos and images yearly for our clients, and we've performed over 10,000 A/B and multivariate tests on Facebook and Google.

We focus on these verticals: gaming, e-commerce, entertainment, automotive, D2C, financial services, and lead generation. When we test, our goal is to compare new concepts vs. the winning video (control) to see if the challenger can outperform the champion. Why? If you can't outperform the best ad in a portfolio, you will lose money running the second or third place ads.

While we have not tested our process beyond the aforementioned verticals, we have managed over $3 billion in paid social ad spend and want to share what we've learned. Our testing process has been architected to save both time and money by killing losing creatives quickly and to significantly reduce non converting spend. Our process will generate both false negatives and false positives. We typically allow our tests to run between 2-7 days to provide enough time to gather data without requiring the capital and time required to reach statistical significance (StatSig). We always run our tests using our software AdRules via the Facebook API. Our insights are specific to the above scenarios, not a representation of how all testing on Facebook's platform operates. In cases, it is valuable to retain learning without obstructing ad delivery.

To be clear, our process is not the Facebook best practice of running a split test and allowing the algorithm to reach statistical significance (StatSig) which then moves the ad set out of the learning phase and into the optimized phase. The insights we've drawn are specific to these scenarios we outline here and are not a representation of how all testing on Facebook's platform operates. In cases, it is valuable to have old creative retain learning to seamlessly A/B test without obstruct- ing ad delivery.

Let's take a closer look at the cost aspect of creative testing.

In classic testing, you need a 95% confidence rate to declare a winner, exit the learning phase and reach StatSig. That's nice to have but getting a 95% confidence rate for in-app purchases may end up costing you $20,000 per creative variation.

Why so expensive?

As an example, to reach a 95% confidence level, you'll need about 100 purchases. With a 1% purchase rate (which is typical for gaming apps), and a $200 cost per purchase, you'll end up spending $20,000 for each variation in order to accrue enough data for that 95% confidence rate. There aren't a lot of advertisers who can afford to spend $20,000 per variation, especially if 95% of new creative fails to beat the control.

Stat Sig Is Expensive	Non-Stat Sig: Cheap IPM Testing
95% Stat Sig: Game Averages	95% Stat Sig: Game Averages
1% Purchase Rate	0.5% Install Rate
100 Purchases	100 installs
$200 $/Purchase	$2.00 $/Install
$20,000 / Creative	$200 / Creative ($20 Intl') BOOM

So, what to do?

What we do is move the conversion event we're targeting for up in the sales funnel. For mobile apps, instead of optimizing for purchases we optimize for impression per install (IPM). For web- sites, we'd optimize for an impres- sion to top-funnel conversion rate. Again, this is not a Facebook recommended best practice, this is our own voodoo magic/secret sauce that we're brewing.

IPM Testing Is Cost-Effective

A concern with our process is that ads with high CTRs and high conversion rates for top-funnel events may not be true winners for down-funnel conversions and ROI / ROAS. But while there is a risk of identifying false positives and negatives with this method, we'd rather take that risk than spend the time and expense of optimizing for StatSig bottom-funnel metrics

How We've Been Testing Creative Until Now

When testing creative we typically would test three to five videos along with a control video using Facebook's split test feature. We would show these ads to broad or 5-10% LALs (Lookalike) audiences, and restrict distribution to the Facebook newsfeed only, Android only and we'd use mobile app install bidding (MAI) to get about 100-250 installs.

If one of those new "contender" ads beat the control video's IPM or came within 10%-15% of its performance, we would launch those potential new winning videos into the ad sets with the control video and let them fight it out to generate ROAS.

We've seen hints of what we're about to describe across numerous ad accounts and have confirmed with other advertisers that they have seen the same thing. But for purposes of explanation, let's focus on one client of ours and how their ads performed in recent creative tests.

In the two months, we produced +60 new video concepts for this client. All of them failed to beat the control video's IPM. This struck us as odd, and it was statistically impossible. We expected to generate a new winner 5% of the time or 1 out of 20 videos – so 3 winners. Since we felt confident in our creative ideas, we decided to look deeper into our testing methods.

The traditional testing methodology includes the idea of testing a testing system or an A/A test. A/A tests are like A/B tests, but instead of testing multiple creatives, you test the same creative in each "slot" of the test.
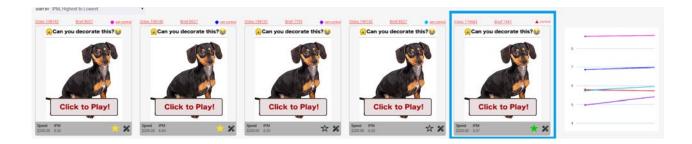
If your testing system/platform is working as expected, all "variations", should produce similar results assuming you get close to statistical significance. If your A/A test results are very different, and the testing platform/methodology concludes that one variation or another significantly outperforms or underperforms compared to the other variations, there could be an issue with the testing method or quantity of data gathered.

First A/A test of video creative

Here's how we set up an A/A test to validate our non-standard approach to Facebook testing. The purpose of this test was to understand if Facebook maintains a creative history for the control and thus gives the control a performance boost making it very difficult to beat – if you don't allow it to exit the learning phase and reach statistical relevance.

We copied the control video four times and added one black pixel in different locations in each of the new "variations." This allowed us to run what would look like the same video to humans but would be different videos in the eyes of the testing platform. The goal was to get Facebook to assign new hash IDs for each cloned video and then test them all together and observe their IPMs.

These are the ads we ran… except we didn't run the hotdog dog; I've replaced the actual ads with cute doges to avoid disclosing the advertiser's identity. IPMs for each ad in the far right of the image.

Things to note here:

The far-right ad (in the blue square) is the control.
All the other ads are clones of the control with one black pixel added.

The far-left ad/clone outperformed the control by 149%. As described earlier, a difference like that shouldn't happen. If the platform was truly variation agnostic, BUT – to save money, we did not follow best practices to allow the ad set(s) to exit the learning phase.

We ran this test for only 100 installs. Which is, our standard operating procedure for creative testing.

Once we completed our first test to 100 installs, we paused the campaign to analyze the results. Then we turned the campaign back on to scale up to 500 installs in an effort to get closer to statistical significance. We wanted to see if more data would result in IPM normalization (in other words, if the test results would settle back down to more even performance across the variations). However, the results of the second test remained the same. Note: the ad set(s) did not exit the learning phase and we did not follow Facebook's best practice.

The results of this first test, while not statistically significant, were surprisingly enough to merit additional tests. So, we tested on!

Second A/A test of video creative

For our second test, we ran the six videos shown below. Four of them were controls with different headers; two of them were new concepts that were very similar to the control. Again, we didn't run the hotdog dogs; they've been inserted to protect the advertiser's identity and to offer you cuteness!

The IPMs for all ads ranged between 7-11 – even the new ads that did not share a thumbnail with the control. IPMs for each ad in the far right of the image.
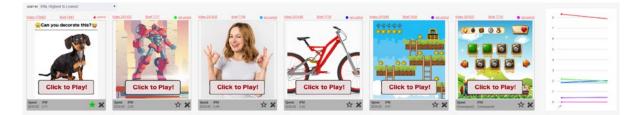

Third A/A test of video creative

Next, we tested six videos: one control and five visually similar variations to the control but one very different to a human. IPMs ranged between 5-10. IPMs for each ad in the far right of the image.

Fourth A/A test of video creative

This was when we had our "ah-ha!" moment. We tested six very different video concepts: the one control video and five brand new ideas, all of which were visually very different from the control video and did not share the same thumbnail.

The control's IPM was consistent in the 8-9 range, but the IPMs for the new visual concepts ranged between 0-2. IPMs for each ad in the far right of the image.

Here are our impressions from the above tests:

Facebook's split-tests maintains creative history for the control video. This gives the control advantage with our non-statistically relevant, non-standard best practice of IPM testing.

We are unclear if Facebook can group variations with a similar look and feel to the control. If it can, similar-looking ads could also start with a higher IPM based on influence from the control — or perhaps similar thumbnails influence non-statistically relevant IPM.

Creative concepts that are visually very different from the control appear to not share a creative history. IPMs for these variations are independent of the control.

It appears that new, "out of the box" visual concepts vs the control may require more impressions to quantify their performance.

Our IPM testing methodology appears to be valid if we do NOT use a control video as the benchmark for winning.

IMP Testing Summary

1. During our testing, we noticed that Facebook maintains creative history for the current video winner during an A/B test. This makes the control video very difficult to beat when using our IPM testing methodology.

2. Ads that are visually similar to the control appear to be grouped together in terms of how the algorithm treats them. They are also automatically given a higher IPM (impressions per thousand) value, even at the very start of a test.

3. Any new creative that is visually very different from the control does not share this creative history. This "very different creative" will start the test with a lower IPM. As a consequence of this, any creative that is visually very different from the control will require more time and money to "warm up" its creative history. It will also require more time and money to get out of the learning phase and into the optimized phase before it ever has a chance of competing against the control.

Here's what this all looks like in terms of the performance of different ads:

If the split-testing did not maintain creative history, the starting value for IPMs would be much closer. But as you can see in the chart above, this is not what our tests show is happening.

This feature causes test results like the one below, where we have set up a brand new test with an existing control, and right at the start, the control is granted an IPM around 8-9, but all the other (visually very different) ads get IPMs around 0-2.

Interesting, eh?

This discovery forced us to retest a lot of creative and re-think our testing methodologies. The good news is that after re-testing a lot of our old creative, 95% of the newly retested creative that had previously failed to beat the control, actually improved its performance to a 85% failure rate (as opposed to the 95% failure rate all that creative had had before). This all resulted in a 29% lift in ROAS thanks to our new approach to testing, which takes into account the "creative history" factor in Facebook's testing algorithm.

It took us a lot of work… but ultimately, we got a 29% lift in ROAS.

So how can you work with creative history being maintained? Watch our video for the step by step process, but basically, don't use a control video as the benchmark for testing new creative. Don't put your control inside the split-test of your new creative concepts. Instead, run all your new creative concepts against each other – without the control. Then let these "challenger" videos build up enough learning to effectively compete with the control "champion video."

Creative Testing 2.0

Given the above results, those of us testing using IPM have an opportunity to re-test IPM winners that exclude the control video to determine if we've been killing potential winners. As such, we recommend the following three-phase testing plan.

Creative Testing Phase 1: Initial IPM Test

- Use 3~6 creatives in one ad set with MAI bidding (NEVER include the control in the ad set)
- Less expensive than Facebook split testing but not a best practice and will not achieve statistically relevance
- 5% LAL in the US (for other countries, still use 5% LAL)
- This will give you an audience reach of 10M or smaller (other geos)
- Isolate one OS (iOS or Android)
- Facebook Newsfeed only
- Generate over 100 installs (50 installs are acceptable in high CPI scenarios)
- 100 installs: 70% confidence with 5% margin of error ° 160 installs: 80% confidence with 5% margin of error
- 270 installs: 90% confidence with 5% margin of error
- Lifetime budget: $500~$1,000 to drive installs that reach more than 70% confidence level
- The goal is to kill IPM losers quickly and inexpensively and then take top 1~2 IPM winners to phase 2

Creative Testing Phase 2: Initial ROAS Test

- Once you have high IPM winners identified, you can move into initial ROAS testing to see if high IPMs also will generate revenue
- Create a new campaign
- Test IPM winners from Phase 1 with AEO or VO
- 10% LAL, auto-placement, Android or iOS but do NOT test using WW audiences, chose only one country
- 1 ad set with IPM winners from phase 1
- Create new campaigns for new IPM winners from next rounds – do not add winners from other tests
- Lifetime budget: $800~$1,500

Creative Testing Phase 3: ROAS Scale Test

- Choose winners from Phase 2 with good ROAS
- Use CBO, create new ad set and roll them out towards the target audiences that produce good results for the control
- New ad set for new creative winners from different testing rounds
- Never compete against control in an ad set, instead, have them separated and compete for more budget within the same campaign

Note:

We're still testing many of our assumptions and non-standard practices.

- Is it helpful to warm up IPM winners and establish "creative history" by purchasing installs in inexpensive countries?
- How long should IPM winners be "isolated" from the control to allow time for learning to be built up?
- 5-10% of LaL is contingent on the population of the country being tested?
- Results don't appear to change being run as 1 ad per ad set or many ads per ad set?
- Will lifetime vs daily budgets matter?
- Does a new campaign matter?
- Does resetting the post ID matter?
- Should creative testing be isolated to a test account?

We look forward to hearing how you're testing and sharing more of what we uncover soon.

Conclusion

Once you understand how the social advertising platforms, Facebook and Google, are changing their AI and tools, and you understand the power of testing, it's clear: **CREATIVE IS KING.**

So you know creative is the best path to high ROAS. Creative trends allow you to effectively steal ideas from competitors. Player profiles extend the audience and performance of your ads, while enhanced creative testing saves time and money.

These elements should all be shaping your creative strategy. You know all this requires a lot of testing – and efficient testing, at that – to surface the high-performance creative you need to keep your campaigns alive.

We've gotten to know it well after performing more than 10,000 A/B and multivariate tests on Facebook and its competitor, Google. We produce more than 100,000 video and image ads every year. We have managed over $3 billion in paid social ad spend.

Hopefully the learnings from our work have helped you understand the landscape and the trends rising in "Creative Strategy 2.0" and "Creative Testing 2.0".

If you'd like to learn more about our creative testing system, and what we've learned about Facebook's testing algorithm, check out our fun explainer video or read our white paper on the subject.