



# Creative Inspiration

## Match 3 Games

Facebook & Google Ads



# 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 or creative 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 also [media 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 manager wanted 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 player motivations, 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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## SECTION 1

# Why Creative Is So Important

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.

## SECTION 2

# Inspiration for Match 3 Games

## Facebook and Google Ads

### 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](#).



## Match 3 Competitive Trends

<b>Puzzles</b> <p>Locks &amp; Gates and other puzzles that challenges users to free a game character (Fishdom, Gardenscapes, Homescapes, many others).</p>	<b>Picker Videos</b> <p>3D or 2D situations with picker, often resulting in disastrous fails. (Township, Sweet Escapes, Manor Cafe, many others)</p>	<b>Hidden Items</b> <p>Videos or still images that contain hidden items the user must find. (Meow Match, June's Journey)</p>	<b>Design Challenges</b> <p>Storybook narration, Coloring book style (Bubble Witch Saga) 3D effect: Characters "floating" above gameplay (Farm Heroes Saga)</p>
<b>Real Player Gameplay</b> <p>Split screen featuring a player and gameplay. (Jelly Juice)</p>	<b>Female-Centered Vignettes</b> <p>Women overcoming adversity and men behaving badly in soap opera situations. (Lily's Garden, Choices, Vineyard Valley, My Home: Design Dreams)</p>	<b>Choose Your Adventure</b> <p>Series of situations where you choose between two actions. (Choices, Episode)</p>	<b>Game Controller</b> <p>Picker that mimics a game console, guiding character through levels. (Candy Crush, Hustle Castle)</p>
<b>Lifestyle and Gameplay</b> <p>Showing lifestyle footage and gameplay that matches image (Toon Blast, Farm Hero Saga)</p>	<b>Gameplay + Side Character</b> <p>Gameplay elements leaving screen to interact with character (Candy Blast Mania, Candy Smash Mania)</p>	<b>Mixing gameplay with narrative</b> <p>Storybook narration, Coloring book style (Bubble Witch Saga) 3D effect: Characters "floating" above gameplay (Farm Heroes Saga)</p>	<b>Funny but still cute</b> <p>Evil character getting hit by gameplay, mentioning how you can't get weight by playing candy games (Candy Blast Mania, Bubble Witch Saga)</p>
<b>Solve a problem Games</b> <p>Using gameplay to find key to escape a room (Candy Smash mania)</p>	<b>Spot the Differences</b> <p>Side by side images with subtle differences, often tied to IQ. (Hidden Relics, Mystery Manor, June's Journey)</p>	<b>Locks &amp; Gates</b> <p>Puzzles using locks &amp; gates to release a character. (Fishdom, Gardenscapes, Homescapes, many others)</p>	<b>Testimonial/Game Review</b> <p>Review of game with VO or supers. (Meow Match, Jelly Juice)</p>
<b>Game Trailers</b> <p>Film-style trailer, sometimes using simple titles. (Wild Life: A Puzzle Story)</p>	<b>Puzzle with Purpose</b> <p>Puzzles that help a character complete a challenge (Toon Blast, Charm King, Angry Birds)</p>	<b>Player Focused</b> <p>Players inset in gameplay or shown playing game. (Jelly Juice, Tropicats)</p>	<b>Female Story</b> <p>Women overcoming adversity and men behaving badly. (Lily's Garden, Choices)</p>
<b>Choose What's Next</b> <p>Stories where you pick an option and direct the narrative. (Choices, Matchington Mansion)</p>	<b>Peril Picker</b> <p>Pickers that attempt to save a character from danger. (Matchington Mansion, Meow Match)</p>	<b>Timed Challenge</b> <p>Puzzles solved within a set time, often leading to fails. (Hidden Relics)</p>	<b>Hidden Object</b> <p>Hidden items the user must find. (Meow Match, June's Journey)</p>

# Match 3

## Creative Concepts We Recommend

### Concept: Locks and Gates

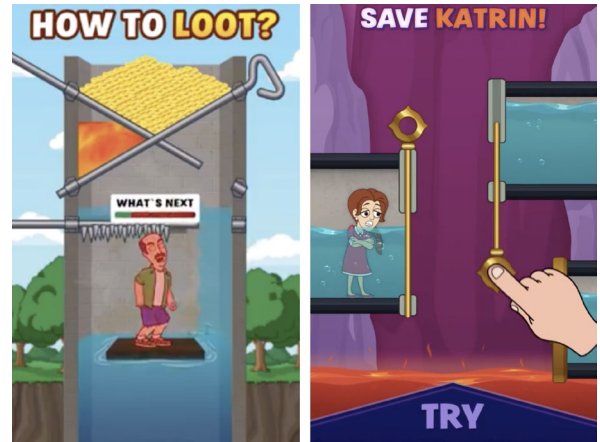
- New 2D animation style
- Try characters in "How to Loot?" where a lock releases sweets or allows her to escape
- Test "What's Next?" vs FAIL - to appeal to new users
- Leverage "dumb ways to die" assets

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:

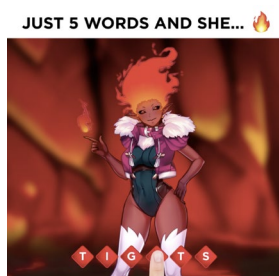
- Showcases gameplay and graphics
- Mimics player dialogue
- Uses subtitles

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



After 23 tries I still haven't reached the ocean



### Concept: One Word at a Time Stories ▶

Simple text-based videos with attitude that entice or antagonize viewers:

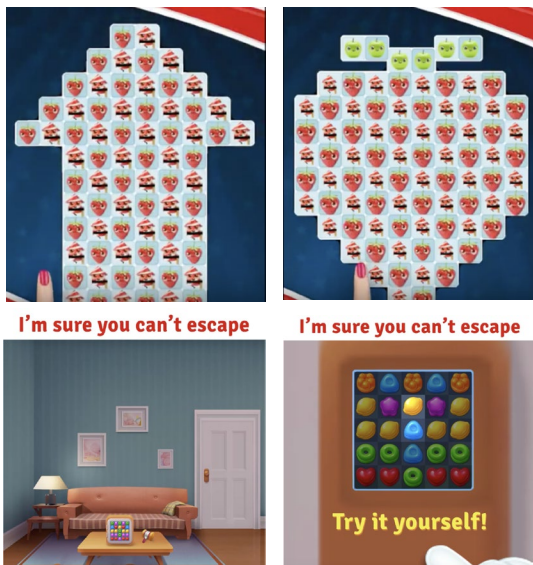
- Simple background
- Easy to make and test
- Can speak to game truths like Clockmaker's "We know you're tired of Match-3 ads..."

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)

### 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

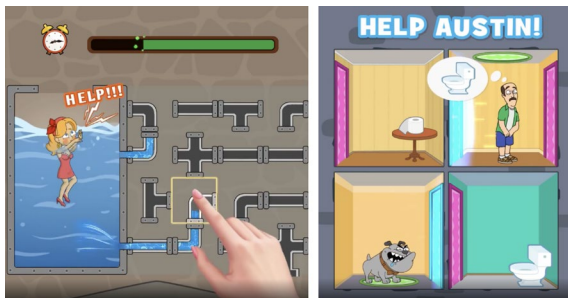
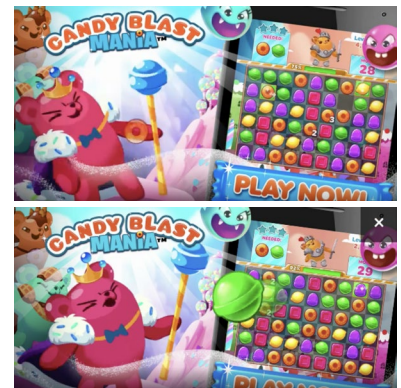




## Concept: Maximize Gameplay Blocks

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

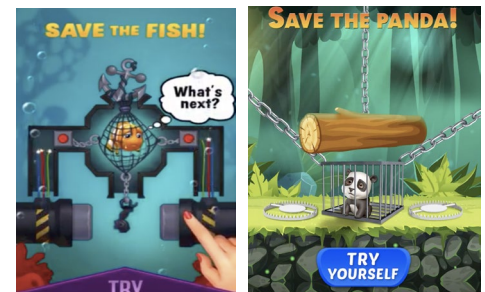
Audience Profile: Destruction and

- 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

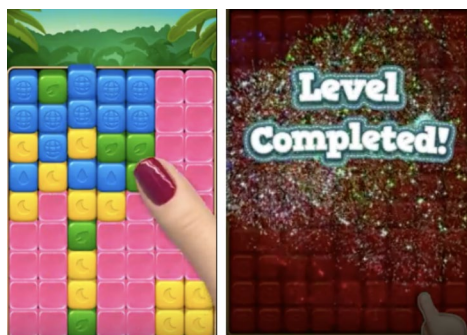
Continue using hand style creative, but make it have a purpose

- 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

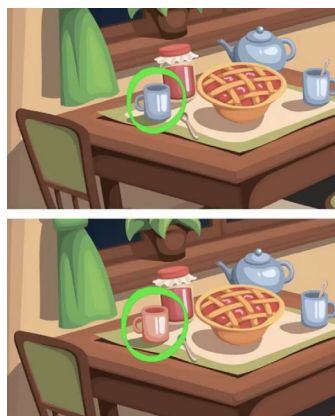
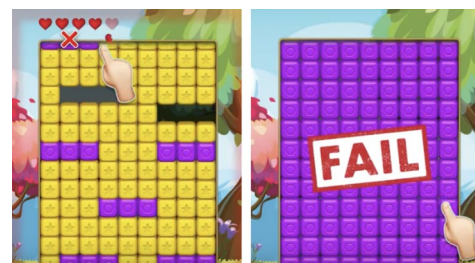


### ◀ Concept: Test Level Completed - Player Motivation

- 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



### ◀ Concept: Spot the Differences

Feature characters in “spot the differences” videos:

- Showcases animation style, range of characters and attributions
- Can be timed or not
- Can utilize game scenes or characters

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Hidden Relics: 25% SOV
- June's Journey: 10% SOV
- Differences: Find 'em All: 100% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Targets completionists seeking to master levels/characters

## Concept: Visual Puzzles ▶

Create image and/or video concepts that utilize optical illusions or visual tricks.

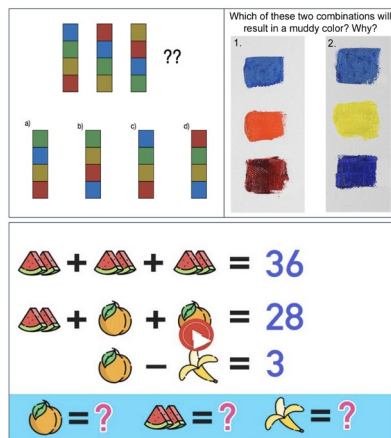
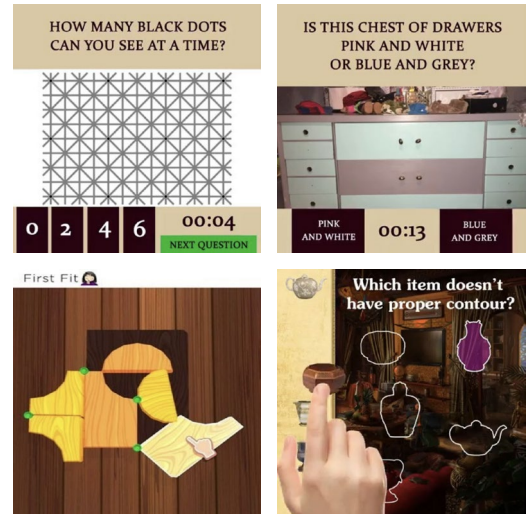
- Leverages strength of image concepts
- Visually arresting
- Engages viewers to solve
- Object Match

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Hidden Relics: 25% SOV
- Sentence: 15% SOV
- Fit'em All: 100% SO

Player Motivations:

- Targets players looking for immersive brain teasers



## ◀ Concept: Brainteasers

Utilize portions of the game to create brainteasers:

- Gem sequence: "What Comes Next?"
- Gem color combiner: "What Color?"
- "What do the gems equal?"

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- N/A

Player Motivations:

- Targets players looking for immersive brain teasers

## Concept: Skill Challenge Puzzle ▶

Create skill games involving game assets:

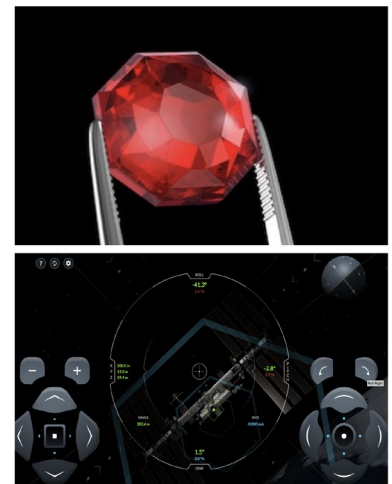
- Place the gem in the ring
- Similar to Spacestation docking simulator but with a ring base & gem

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- N/A

Player Motivations:

- Targets players looking for skilled challenges while keeping gems top of mind



### Concept: Peril Pickers ▶

Explore perilous situations and picker styles, with characters:

- 2D Animation
- Can put them in desert-like situations or game-like settings where items lead to their rescue or fail

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Matchington Mansion: 100% SOV
- Manor Cafe: 100% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Targets player need for humor, narrative and completion



### ◀ Concept: Other Styles of Pickers

Create picker videos that don't just use renovation or peril setup:

- Experiment with POV of viewer or character
- Encompass a challenge (e.g., memory game, where Jenni has to remember which gems are missing)

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- My Cafe: 11% SOV
- Cooking City: 52% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Targets player need for completion

### Concept: Emotional Rescue ▶

Create videos highlighting consumer need for relaxation and emotional wellbeing, with Genies & Gems being an easy solution:

- Create with simple titles and simulated player gameplay

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Cooking Diary: 2% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Targets current societal mindset





### Concept: Supered Stories

Simple text-based videos with that entice or resonate with viewers:

- Simple background
- Easy to make and test
- Can speak to game truths like Clockmaker's "We know you're tired of Match 3 game ads..."
- Can combine with gameplay

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Clockmaker: 58% SOV
- Sweet Escapes: 12% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Targets player need for narrative in games



### Concept: Player Focused/Testimonial

Create videos incorporating characters either playing the game or reviewing it:

- Use real game reviews
- Can use as supers or voice over
- Can show players inset enjoying the game during gameplay

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Jelly Juice: 19% SOV
- Episode: 100% SOV
- My Cafe: 6% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Targets player need for creativity and narrative in games

### Concept: Character Makeovers

Create videos where picker alters character appearance:

- "Give Character a Makeover" (pick new glasses, hair, etc)
- "Give Trix a Trim" (shampoo, haircut)

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Matchington Mansion (SOV not yet available)

Player Motivations:

- Targets player need for creativity and narrative in games



## Concept: Game Trailers ▶

Create a trailer/overview video for the game utilizing movie trailer techniques:

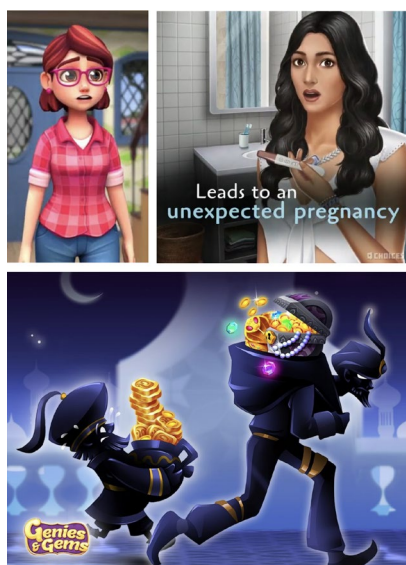
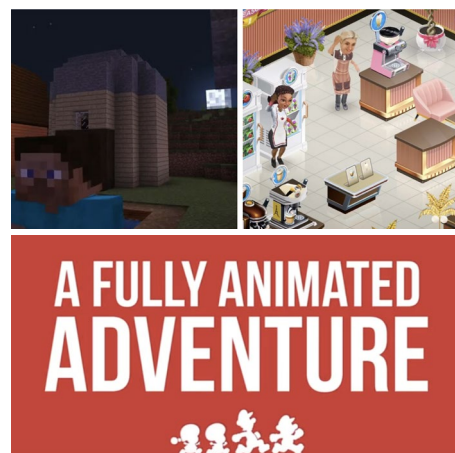
- Slo-mo, montage, title cards, music
- Gives viewers sense of the game while upping overall impression of game

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Minecraft: 80% SOV
- My Cafe: 6% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Player's understanding of overall game



## ◀ Concept: Female Centered Vignettes

Create stories centered on characters overcoming obstacles to get stolen gems back:

- Inherent conflict with bandits/thieves
- Gives viewers (majority female) a character to connect with and root for

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Lily's Garden: 81% SOV
- My Home: 35% SOV
- Choices: 97% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Player need for narrative story

## Concept: Hidden Prizes ▶

Feature gift cards or other prizes in a hidden objects image or video concept:

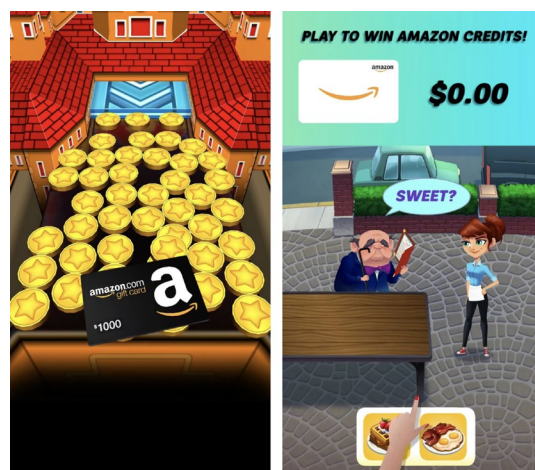
- Adds element of reward beyond finding objects
- Could tie to in-game promotion

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Diner Dash: 72% SOV
- Coin Dozer: 98% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Targets players looking for further rewards beyond gameplay



### Concept: Game Trailer/Music Video ▶

Use music create game art-based music videos:

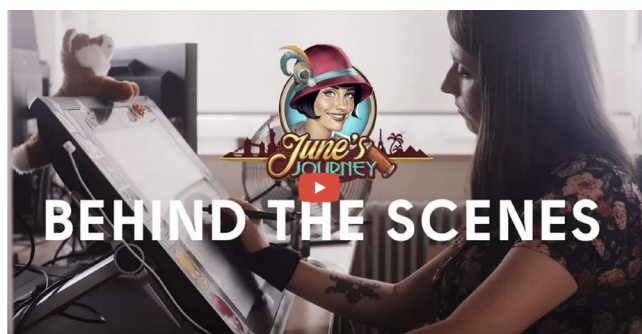
- Syncopate music to gem explosions and drops

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



### ◀ Concept: Making of the Game

Give players a peek behind the curtain and the making of the game:

- Markedly different from other game ads
- Messaging could be about the care taken with the game and story

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- N/A

Player Motivations:

- Targets players who are interested in decoration & narrative

### Concept: Continued Evolution of Puzzles ▶

Create puzzle videos (connect the dots, word finder) that continue to succeed for competitors (e.g. Sweet Escapes, Zynga):

- Simple background
- Engages viewer's curiosity

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Sweet Escapes: 16% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Targets player need for completion





### Concept: Puzzle Challenge

Engage potential players with puzzle challenges that feature game characters:

- Figure out how to wake Liam after storm
- Nurture/save turtles by directing water back to their lagoon
- Renovate damaged structures on island (e.g. a bridge that's out)
- Solve simple puzzle (like test tube candy puzzle) featuring objects from gameplay

Competitors utilizing trend:

- Fishdom, Wildscapes, Township, Brain Out, Sweet Escapes, Tropic Trouble, Hustle Castle

Motivation:

- Targets achievement masters while renovation puzzles could also target expressive creators



### Concept: Puzzle With Purpose

Create puzzles with purpose that combine Match 3 or other gameplay with character situations:

- Match 3 gameplay rewards help renovate animal habitats
- Word finding locates object (e.g. Liam's ball)
- Match 3 gameplay removes barriers to allow animals to escape perilous situations

Competitors utilizing trend:

- Toon Blast, Charm King, Angry Birds

Motivation:

- Targets achievement masters while renovation puzzles could also target expressive creators

### Concept: Animal Pickers

Try pickers that renovate animal habitats or nurture the animals, which can result in fails or wins:

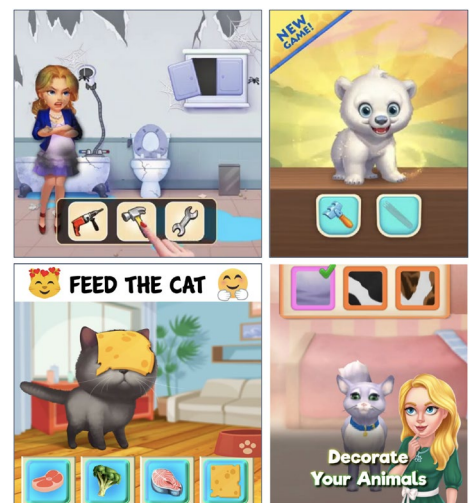
- Picker concepts that rebuild different animal structures or improve their design/look
- Cake or other decorative opportunities (character birthday cake!)
- Choosing what to feed different animal characters (e.g. no steak for character since he's a vegetarian)
- Animal salon where you can pamper animals (haircuts, bathe, detangle, etc.)

Competitors utilizing trend:

- Wildscapes, Matchington Mansion, Mansion Blast, Meow Match

Motivation:

- Targets expressive creators as well as nurture/cuteness themes



### Concept: Player Focused ▶

Create videos focusing on player experience of game:

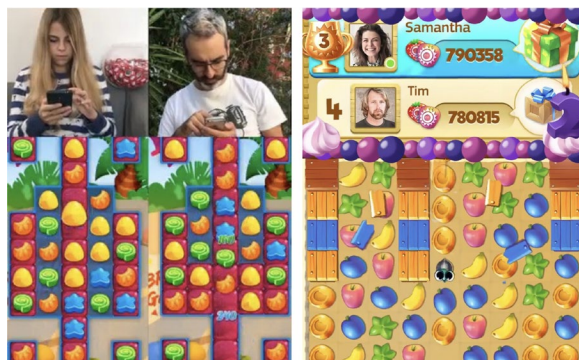
- Inset player enjoying the game with gameplay and “So Relaxing” header
- Player enjoying design element versus player enjoying Match 3 achievement (makes both players happy)
- Profile types of players

Competitors utilizing trend:

- Jelly Juice, Tropicats

Motivation:

- Targets expressive creators and achievement masters



### ◀ Concept: Female Focused

Create short vignettes focusing on female animal characters and how they overcome stereotypical male behavior, using talk bubbles or gestures to communicate:

- Characters talking about another character until he happens to walk by
- Character talking empowerment with her animal sisters
- Characters and a party; One gets angry when male animal starts talking to another as if the main character isn't there
- Ongoing series in which a couple tries to resolve their conflict

Competitors utilizing trend:

- Lily's Garden, Choices

Motivation:

- Targets expressive creators and need for immersion and narrative, as well as adult themes

### Concept: Choose What's Next ▶

Let players affect the narrative and dramatize conflict between animals, focusing on more adult themes (jealousy, anger and other emotions) and one character's experience of them:

- A couple start hanging out; what should he do? (Barge in or Leave them be?)
- One character is hogging the limelight at a party again (Tell her or go somewhere else?)
- One overhears two girls talking about her hair. (Confront them or Run away?)

Competitors utilizing trend:

- Choices

Motivation:

- Targets expressive creators and need for immersion and narrative, as well as adult themes





## Concept: Testimonial

Create videos and images that feature that feature player testimonials:

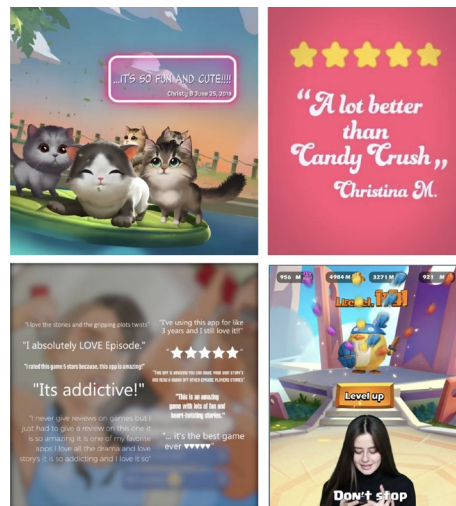
- Supered player testimonials over characters and backgrounds (multiple)
- Review of game with voice over/subtitles combined with gameplay and scenes
- Player inset giving review of game over gameplay

Competitors utilizing trend:

- Meow Match, Jelly Juice

Motivation:

- Targets expressive creators and need for immersion and narrative, as well as adult themes



## Concept: Achievement

Create videos that chronicle what achievement looks like in the game:

- Place characters on top of Match 3 object tower to represent levels
- Contrast Day 1 achievement with achievement on successive days (Day 10, Day 30, etc)

Competitors utilizing trend:

- Pet Rescue Saga

Player Motivations:

- Targets Achievement Masters

## Concept: Animal Testimonials

Feature animals giving reviews of why they like the game (inspired by the old Nick Park Creature Comforts series and BBC's Walk on the Wild Side):

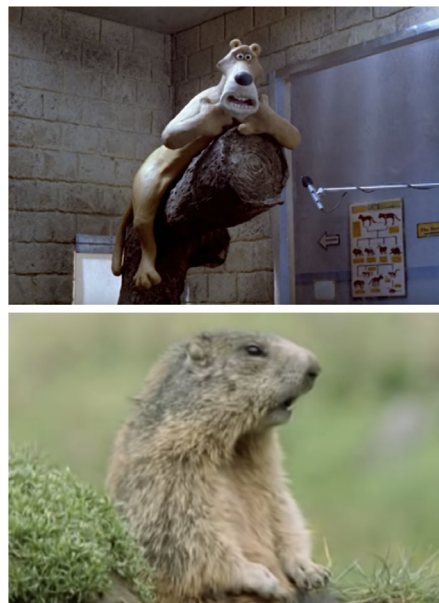
- Real animals giving reviews of the game, their favorite:
  - Prairie Dog: "I wonder if Alan has heard of Wild Things Animal Adventure? It's got puzzles and animal friends and tons of levels. Alan! Alan!"
  - Find similar footage of real animals and create voice over
  - See "Walk on the Wild Side" [here](#)
  - See Nick Park's "Creature Comforts" [here](#)

Competitors utilizing trend:

- N/A

Player Motivations:

- Targets animal lovers who love puzzle games



### Concept: Choose Your Option ▶

Utilize “Choices” type option to let players feel more in control of the narrative :

- Engages viewers
- Fits well with “chapters” used in the game

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- Choices: 97% SOV
- My Cafe: 15% SOV
- Episode: 88% SOV

Player Motivations:

- Player need for narrative story



### ◀ Concept: Fairy Tales

Continue to explore different variations on fairy tales with main character:

- Clever way to connect narrative and gameplay
- Two main characters mashup with third main character
- “Sword in the Stone” with main character

Competitor/Share of Voice:

- N/A

Player Motivations:

- Targets players interested in narrative

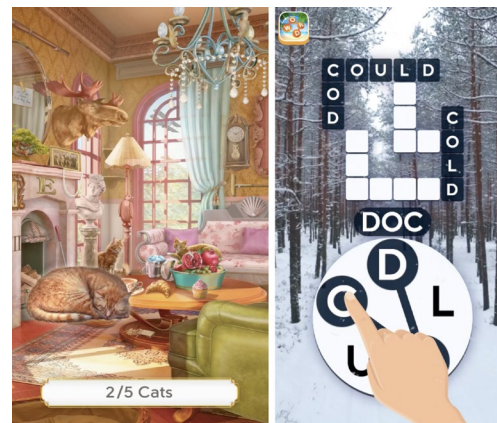
### Concept: Faux Hidden Items Gameplay ▶

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



## SECTION 3

# Using Player Profiles for Market Segmentation and Creative Targeting

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.



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, Mos-cowitz 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.

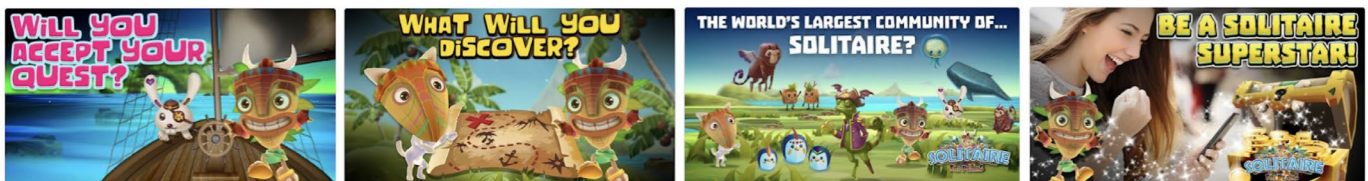
The five traits, under the acronym OCEAN, are therefore treated on a spectrum where you can be open or closed to experience, conscientious or unconscientious and so on."

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



*Image Credit: repignite.com 2014*

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 characters	Extend big plots	Tinker
MOBA	Form allies/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	Engagement	Payer Demographics
<b>Motivations for Playing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Challenge:</b> I enjoy using my brain to solve puzzles or problems 35%</li> <li><b>Stress Relief:</b> Let's me relieve stress 25%</li> <li><b>Achievement:</b> It feels good to complete levels or beat my score 22%</li> <li><b>Kill Time:</b> It gives me something to do while waiting for other things 19%</li> <li><b>Escape:</b> Helps me forget about "real life" 17%</li> <li><b>Social:</b> Lets me socialize with friends, family or other people 08%</li> </ul> <b>Distinguishing Traits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The main reason I play is to show myself what I can do 56%</li> <li>I see myself as someone who loves solving puzzles and problems 55%</li> <li>I most enjoy playing games alone 52%</li> <li>I'm motivated by the achievement I feel after accomplishing something difficult 50%</li> <li>I'm motivated to finish all levels in the games I play 48%</li> <li>I prefer trying to beat my own past performance 46%</li> </ul> <b>Top 5 Favorite Game Genres Played</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Card</b> (Solitaire, Spades, UNO, etc.) 89%</li> <li><b>Match-3</b> (Marchington, Candy Crush, Homescapes, Cookie Jam, etc.) 46%</li> <li><b>Word</b> (Words with Friends, Scrabble, Boggle, Wheel of Fortune, etc.) 39%</li> <li><b>Puzzle</b> (Jigsaw puzzles, Crossword, Sudoku, etc.) 33%</li> <li><b>Trivia</b> (Trivia Crack, QuizUp, Jeopardy!, SongPop, etc.) 17%</li> </ul>	<b>Game Elements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete Quests 96%</li> <li>Use Boosters 93%</li> <li>Track Leaderboards 92%</li> <li>In-Game Rewards 84%</li> <li>Play Mini-Games 69%</li> <li>Participate in Events 60%</li> <li>Collect Characters 49%</li> </ul> <b>Clubs/Guilds/Social</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In a Club 90%</li> <li>Complete Club Quests 88%</li> <li>Gather Perks 83%</li> <li>Completed in a Club Contest 78%</li> <li>Gifted Club Members with Items from the Club Shop 55%</li> </ul>	<b>Gender</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Male 30%</li> <li>Female 70%</li> </ul> <b>Age</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Under 18 03%</li> <li>18-25 06%</li> <li>26-35 17%</li> <li>36-45 28%</li> <li>46-55 30%</li> <li>56-65 22%</li> <li>65+ 09%</li> </ul> <p><b>Mean age: 47</b></p> <b>Income</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less than \$25,000 15%</li> <li>\$25k to less than \$35k 08%</li> <li>\$35k to less than \$50k 13%</li> <li>\$50k to less than \$75k 16%</li> <li>\$75k to less than \$100k 06%</li> <li>\$100k to less than \$150k 04%</li> <li>\$150k or more 03%</li> <li>Prefer no to say 32%</li> </ul>

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.

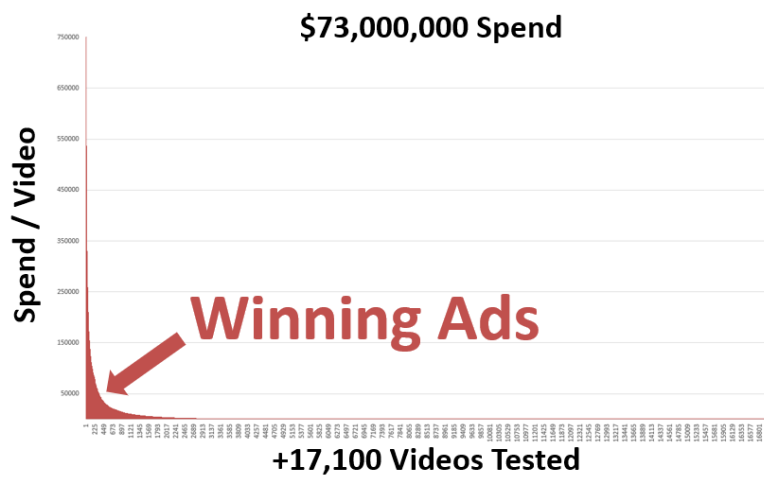


## SECTION 4

# 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.



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 obstructing 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.

<b>Stat Sig Is Expensive</b>	<b>Non-Stat Sig: Cheap IPM Testing</b>
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 Int'l) <b>BOOM</b>

### **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 impression 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.

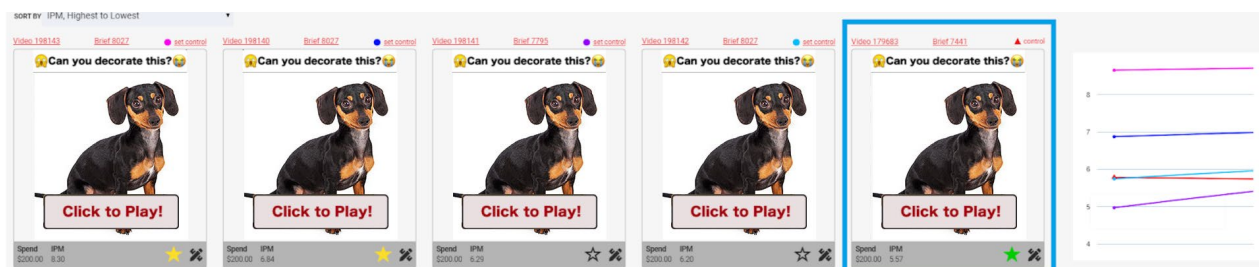
If your testing system/platform is working as expected, all "variations", should produce similar results assuming you get close to statistical significance. If your A/A test results are very different, and the testing platform/methodology concludes that one variation or another significantly outperforms 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.

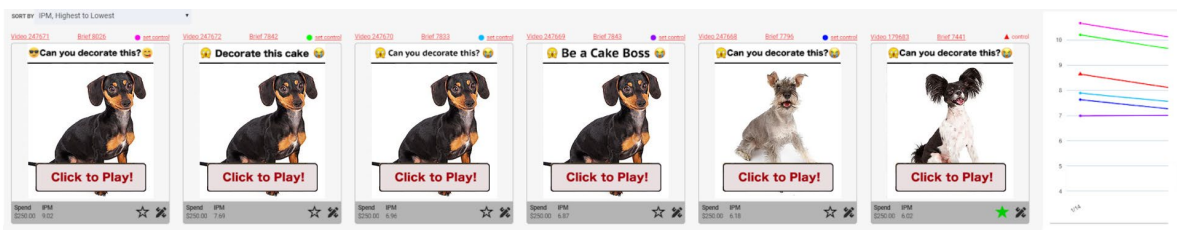
Once we completed our first test to 100 installs, we paused the campaign to analyze the results. Then we turned the campaign back on to scale up to 500 installs in an effort to get closer to statistical significance. We wanted to see if more data would result in IPM normalization (in other words, if 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

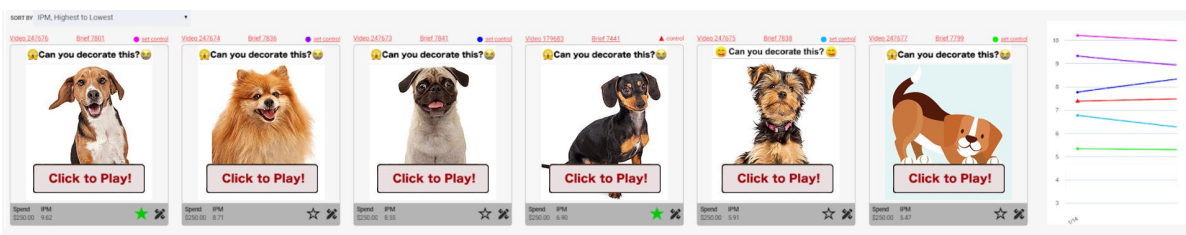
For our second test, we ran the six videos shown below. Four of them were controls with different headers; two of them were new concepts that were very similar to the control. Again, we didn't run the hotdog dogs; they've been inserted to protect the advertiser's identity and to offer you cuteness!

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

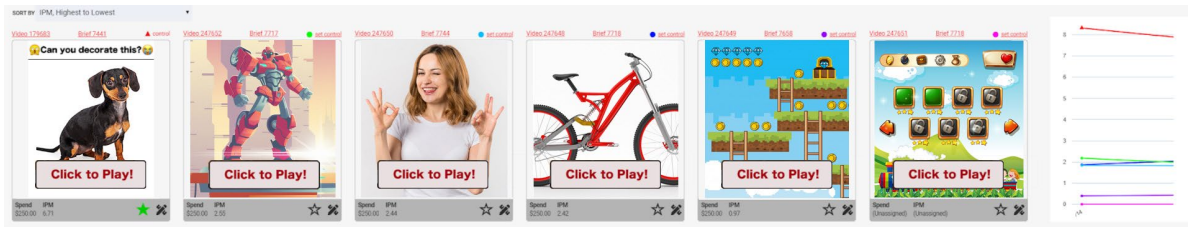
Next, we tested six videos: one control and five visually similar variations to the control but one very different to a human. IPMs ranged between 5-10. IPMs for each ad in the far right of the image.



## 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.

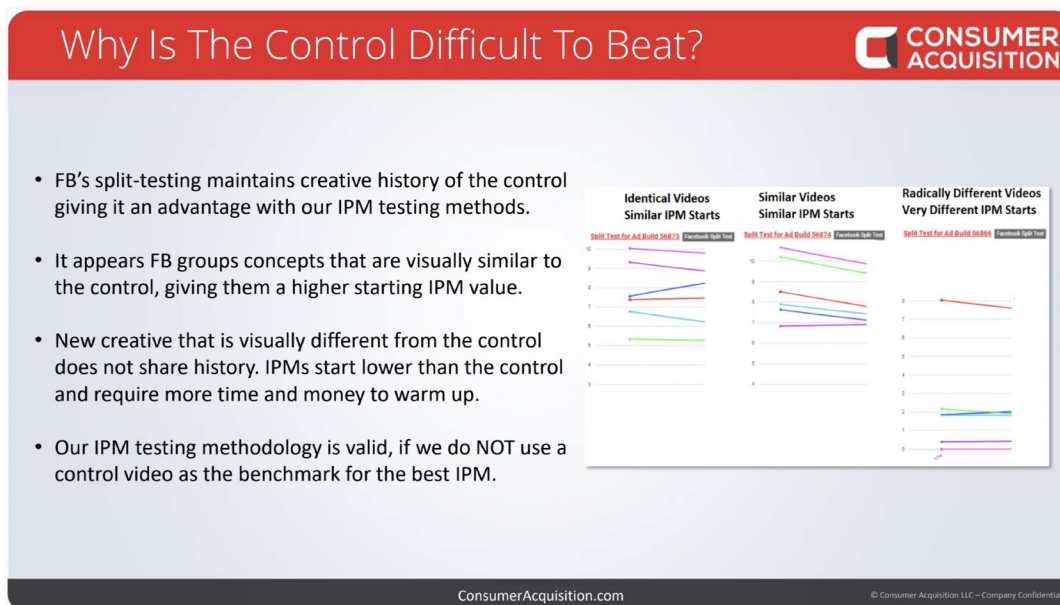
Our IPM testing methodology appears to be valid if we do NOT use a control video as the benchmark for winning.

### 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.

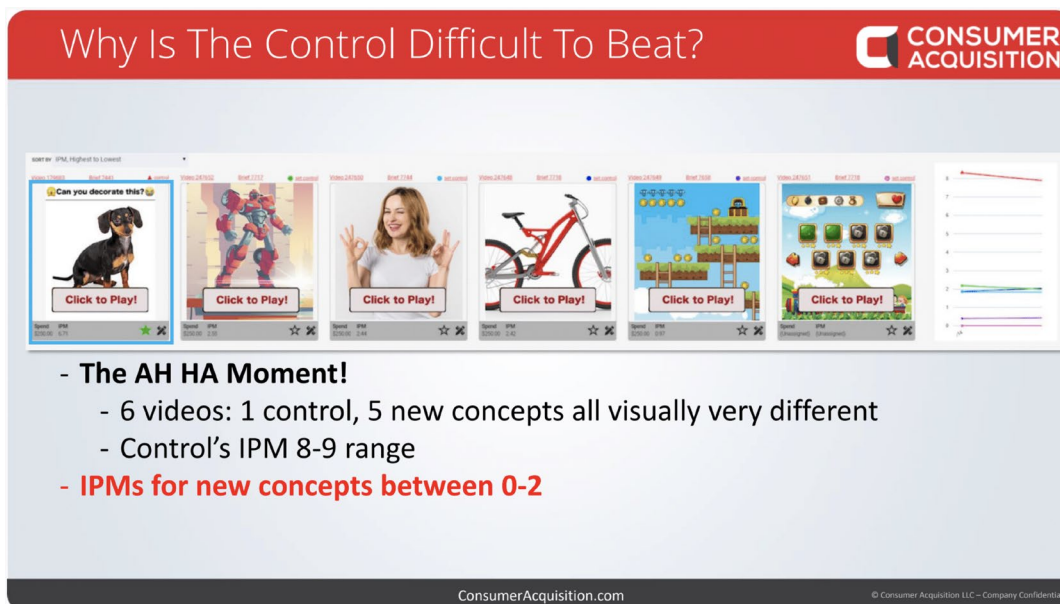


Here's what this all looks like in terms of the performance of different ads:



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.](#)



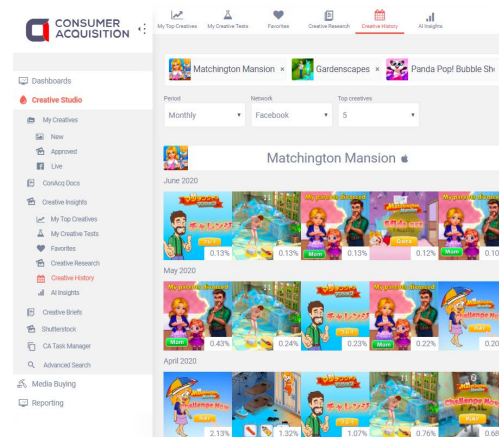
## FREE CREATIVE TESTING

- For the first time, anyone who becomes a client will have access to FREE Facebook Creative Testing.
- You can remove the burden of A/B testing creative from your internal UA team.
- You cover the media fees, and Consumer Acquisition's world-class UA team will manage the media buying of creative split tests for FREE (0% of spend) using our proven 3-step methodology detailed above.
- Contact: [Sales@ConsumerAcquisition.com](mailto:Sales@ConsumerAcquisition.com) if you would like to take advantage of this offer.



## FREE CREATIVE INSPIRATION

- Want to know which of your competitors' video creative really drive their best performance?
- View +1,000,000 video ads from competitive apps and see which creatives work.
- To get full access to all FREE Creative Inspiration, please register for a free AdRules account or contact [Sales@ConsumerAcquisition.com](mailto:Sales@ConsumerAcquisition.com) for more information.



## FREE MOBILE APP INDUSTRY BENCHMARKS

- Ever wonder how your mobile game or app KPIs perform vs industry benchmarks?
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- See competitive KPIs like CTR, CPM, CPC, CPI, IPM, Conv%, country breakdowns, and more.
- To get full access to FREE industry benchmarks, please register for a free AdRules account or contact [Sales@ConsumerAcquisition.com](mailto:Sales@ConsumerAcquisition.com) for more information.

