

Double Take

➔ How creative quality doubles
the commercial impact of
Out-of-Home advertising





Foreword

Out-of-Home (OOH) is one of the most powerful, public and trusted platforms in marketing. It reaches more people each week than live TV in markets around the world. It's unmissable and part of the fabric of daily life.

 **But high visibility doesn't always mean high effectiveness**

That's why **System1**, experts in measuring and predicting creative effectiveness, and **JCDecaux**, the world's leading OOH company, have partnered to understand what makes OOH creative really work.

This whitepaper draws on predictive testing of over **1,000 real-world OOH ads** globally tested with over 180,000 real people. Within that dataset, we conducted a creative effectiveness deep dive to uncover what drives emotional response and brand recognition in OOH. And, for the first time, we've linked **System1 data** with **JCDecaux's effectiveness data**, connecting creative quality directly to real-world brand and business outcomes.

What we've found is clear. When OOH creative sparks emotion and is clearly branded, it does not just stand out. It delivers stronger business outcomes. The very best creative can deliver **twice the commercial impact**. We call it the Double Take effect.

Through our partnership, we've found that compared to lower-scoring ads, ads that score more than 3 Stars on **System1's Star Rating** deliver:

-  **Double** the commercial impact
-  **Over 3x stronger** brand sentiment
-  **Nearly 3x better** message recall
-  **More than twice** the spontaneous brand awareness
-  **A 50% higher chance** of driving consumer action

Positive branded emotion performs, and in a media channel built on visibility and frequency that performance compounds fast.

This report lays down the five creative behaviours that separate the forgettable from the unforgettable: the behaviours that earn attention, emotion, and memory. It's a global playbook for marketers who want their OOH campaigns not just to be seen, but to earn a Double Take.



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Key take-outs

1

2x commercial effect

OOH creative with high Star Ratings drive twice the business impact

Our testing showed that emotionally engaging, well-branded OOH delivers significantly stronger in-market results. Ads that scored more than 3 Stars were twice as effective vs 1- and 2-Star ads in driving commercial outcomes.

2

+50% more likely to be remembered

Creative quality boosts attention and memory

Well-branded campaigns were over 50% more likely to be remembered. High Fast Fluency increases the chance that a 2-second exposure creates lasting memory.

3

More emotional = more effective

Positive emotion is the single biggest driver of OOH impact

Campaigns that triggered feelings like Happiness or Surprise delivered significantly higher brand recall, preference, and action taken.

4

Fluent branding multiplies impact

OOH creative aligned with assets across the media mix drives 2x higher recall

When campaigns used familiar characters, colours, or tone, recognition increased significantly. Fluent branding helps the brain process faster and recall more easily, strengthening memory links over time.

5

3 in 5 OOH ads are underperforming

Only 2 in 5 campaigns create branded emotional impact

Most OOH creative fails to build memory or trigger feeling. Despite the high visibility of the medium, many campaigns are quickly forgotten. The opportunity is there, but most creative doesn't take it.

6

There's a better way

The best-performing work followed the same creative principles

Our research identified five creative behaviours shared by the most effective OOH ads: **Be realistic. Be distinctive. Be consistent. Don't be dull. Bend the rules.**

The creative disconnect

Being seen but not remembered is OOH's biggest blind spot



Walk through any city and you'll see the scale of OOH. Creative fills buildings. Billboards stretch across motorways. Digital screens pulse in stations and shop fronts. It is one of the most public and unavoidable forms of media on the planet.

And the fundamentals are strong. OOH reaches nearly everyone, every week. For example, in the UK, OOH has become the only media channel to deliver 90%+ weekly reach¹, reaching 98% of the UK population according to ROUTE.

In a fragmented media landscape, OOH offers rare mass reach and shared cultural moments. It remains one of the last true broadcast platforms.

OOH is a long-term performer.

Profit Ability 2, based on £1.8 billion of UK media spend, found that **57% of OOH's return comes from long-term brand effects⁵**, making it a valuable tool for sustainable growth.

OOH is built to build brands

According to EssenceMediacom's **Signalling Success 2²** study, OOH sits in a powerful intersection of:

And JCDecaux and Clear Channel research, **The Moment for Trust³**, showed people are:

➔ **Signal strength:** people associate it with credible, trustworthy messaging

➔ **7% more likely to trust brands** advertised on OOH than on other media

➔ **Active attention:** people genuinely notice it in the moment

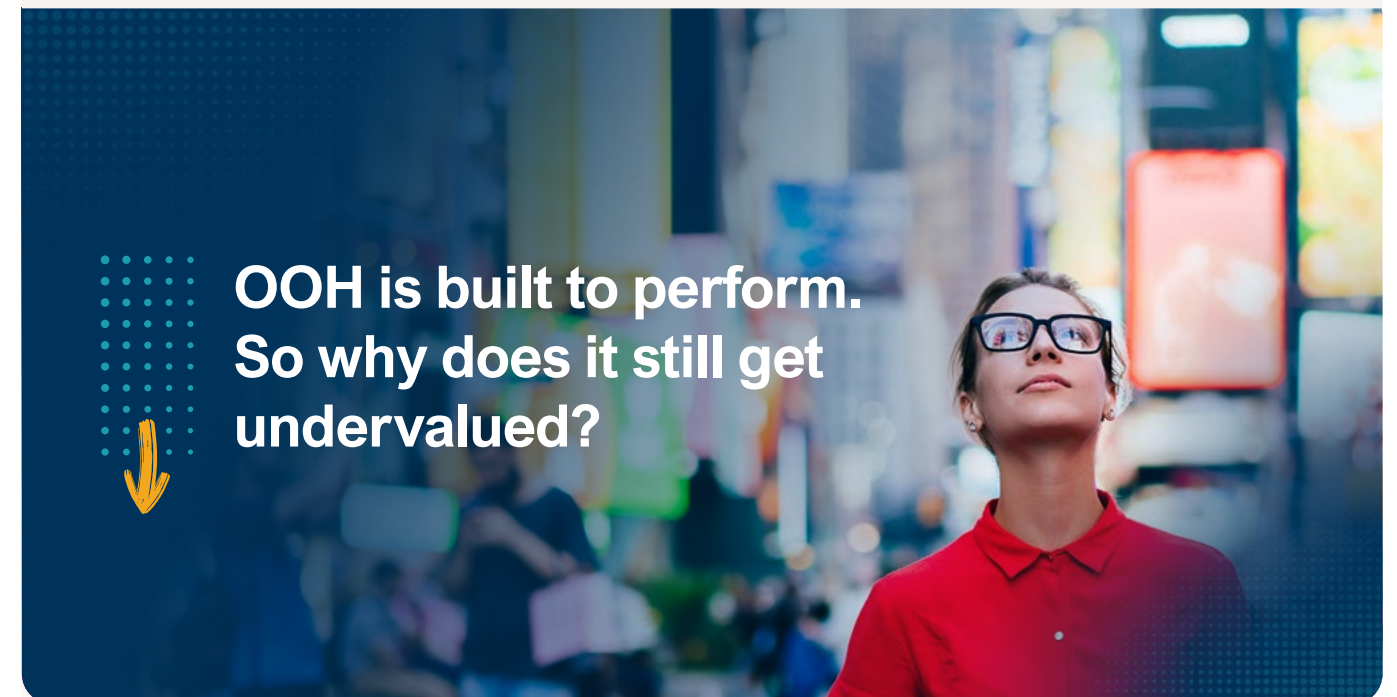
➔ **4% more likely to believe brand claims** made on OOH

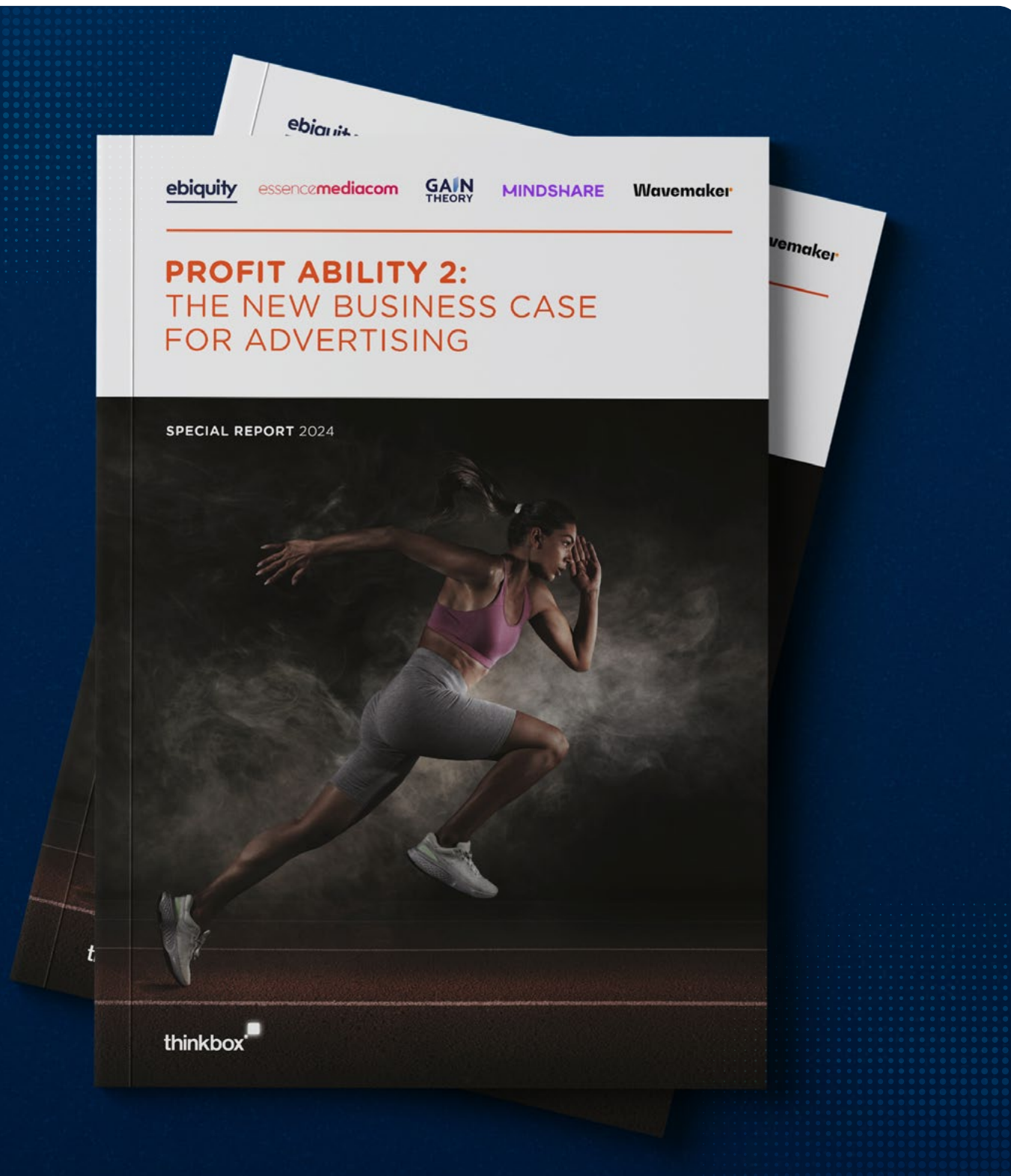
➔ **High weekly reach:** comparable to TV, often at a lower cost

➔ **And 1 in 4 agree** that OOH is a platform for good²



**OOH is built to perform.
So why does it still get undervalued?**





The profit gap

The **Profit Ability** studies reveal something important: the **effectiveness of OOH varies more than it should**.

- ➔ In **Profit Ability**, OOH had a **profit likelihood of just 48%⁴**, meaning less than half of campaigns delivered a profitable return
- ➔ OOH made up 8% of total ad spend, yet accounted for only **3% of ad-generated profit³**
- ➔ Even in **Profit Ability 2**, which accounts for long-term effects, OOH contributed just **3.1% of total advertising profit**

This isn't a weakness of the medium. It's a signal that something else is holding OOH back.

1. Creative quality is inconsistent

OOH works differently from most media. It doesn't interrupt content; it is the content. It doesn't demand attention; it has to earn it. There's no sound, no scroll, no story to lean on. Ads must land in just a couple of seconds or not at all.

That makes OOH uniquely powerful, but also creatively demanding. And too many campaigns fail to meet that challenge.

OOH's creative quality varies dramatically. In our global testing, only 2 in 5 campaigns create meaningful branded emotional impact. The rest? They're seen but not remembered.

And if they're not remembered, they don't change behaviour.

2. OOH is often measured incorrectly

Traditional models like Marketing Mix Modelling (MMM) have historically undervalued OOH's true contribution, not because it doesn't work, but because the data feeding the models was incomplete.

New research from JCDcaux and Nielsen has shown that when you add location-level data into MMM, OOH's performance dramatically improves:

- ➔ **+42% uplift** in ROI
- ➔ **+78% increase** in correlation between spend and sales outcomes

Better data proves what creative has been struggling to show: OOH works when it's seen, felt, and measured properly.

So, this isn't a media problem. It's a creative and measurement disconnect and both can be solved.

That's what this report sets out to do. Not just to prove that OOH works, but to show how to make it work harder, with creative that earns attention, triggers emotion, and sticks in memory.

And we've found that when brands get it right, the results aren't just better, they're transformative.

¹Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. (2024). TouchPoints: Making Sense (6th ed.).

²Kirk, R. (2024). Signalling Success 2: More proof that the media is the message. EssenceMediacom.

³JCDcaux & Clear Channel (2021). The Moment For Trust.

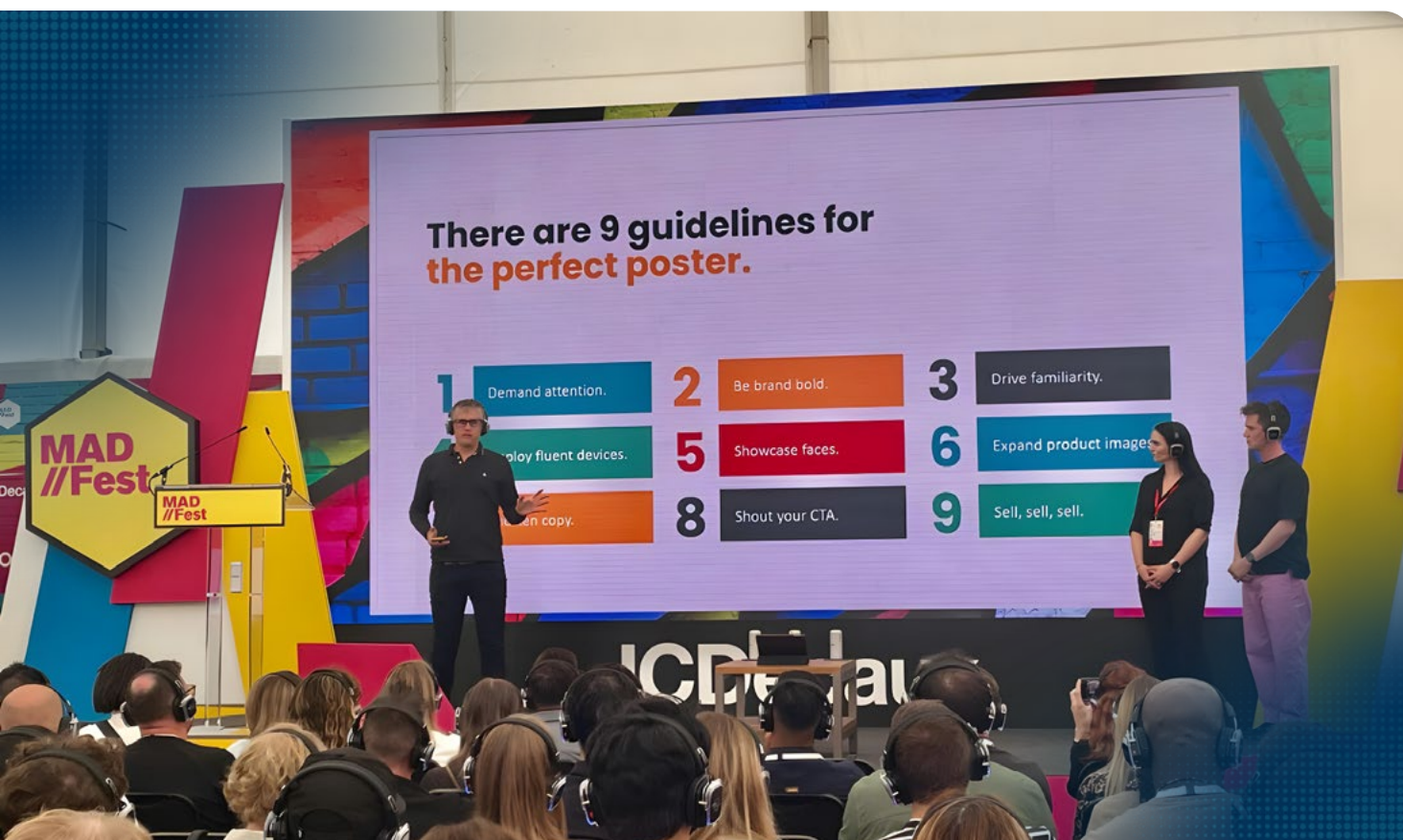
⁴Ebiquity & Gain Theory. (2018). Profit Ability: The business case for advertising. Thinkbox.

⁵Ebiquity, EssenceMediacom, Gain Theory, Mindshare, & Wavemaker UK. (2024). Profit Ability 2: The new business case for advertising. Thinkbox.

⁶JCDcaux UK & Nielsen (2024). Location Matters For MMM.

System1 and JCDecaux

A global partnership to reconnect media and creative



To understand this 'creative disconnect', we needed two things. First, we needed scale. Real campaigns. Real environments. Real-world performance. Second, we needed a way of measuring the creative quality of OOH.

This report is the result of a first-of-its-kind global partnership between System1 and JCDecaux. By combining System1's expertise in creative effectiveness with JCDecaux's leadership in OOH media, we set out to measure the real link between creativity and success in OOH.

Over the past 3 years, we've built and used our proprietary OOH pre-testing tool to test over 1000 real ads with hundreds of thousands of real people. It uses System1's Test Your Ad platform, adapted to reflect how people see OOH in the real world.

Our testing tool shows each ad to 150 people for 2 seconds, based on average real-world viewing time from leading attention studies by Lumen⁷. After the 2-second window, people will see the ad again and can choose to skip on when their attention fades, just like they might in real life if something caught their eye.

⁷Lumen Research & TVision. (2022). Bringing cross-platform attention measurement to global advertisers.

And this emotional brand data culminates in System1's three predictive metrics:



Star rating

Our headline metric, Star Rating predicts long-term brand growth by tracking the emotional response people feel after viewing the ad. The more positive the feeling is, the higher the rating and the greater the predicted commercial return. Validated by the IPA, it acts as a true multiplier for media investment.



Spike rating

Spike captures the intensity of emotion in the moment. High emotional intensity leads to higher short-term sales response. It's our read on how powerful the ad is at sparking immediate action.



Fluency

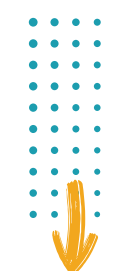
Fluency tells us how quickly and clearly the brand is recognised in a cluttered media landscape.



Creative attention

Built specifically for the OOH environment, this metric tracks how long it takes for people to skip on from the ad. It allows us to connect creative execution with attention and understand how that attention influences emotional response and ultimately effectiveness.

And because this is OOH, we also included a fourth metric:



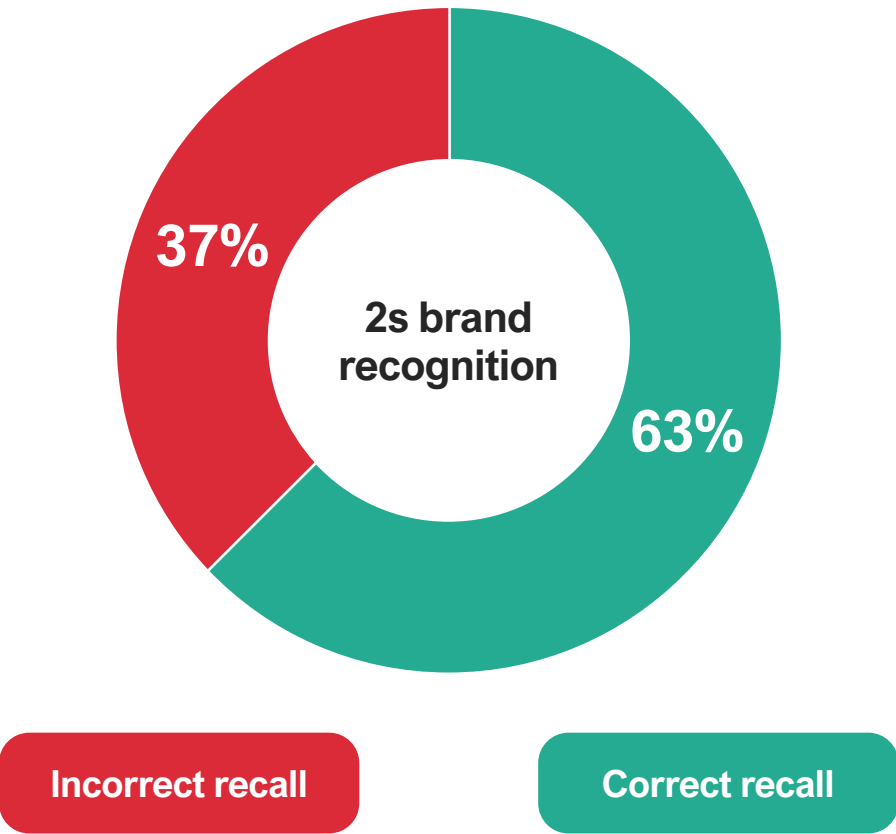
Testing in this way has revealed a stark truth about creativity in OOH.

3 in 5 OOH ads are not working hard enough

1. The brand problem

A third of global campaigns were not clearly linked to a brand in the 2-second window. People saw them but could not say who they were from. In a fast-moving medium like OOH, where attention is brief and competition for attention is high, branding needs to be instant and obvious. Without it, the opportunity to build memory is lost.

1 in 3 global OOH exposures still result in no brand recognition

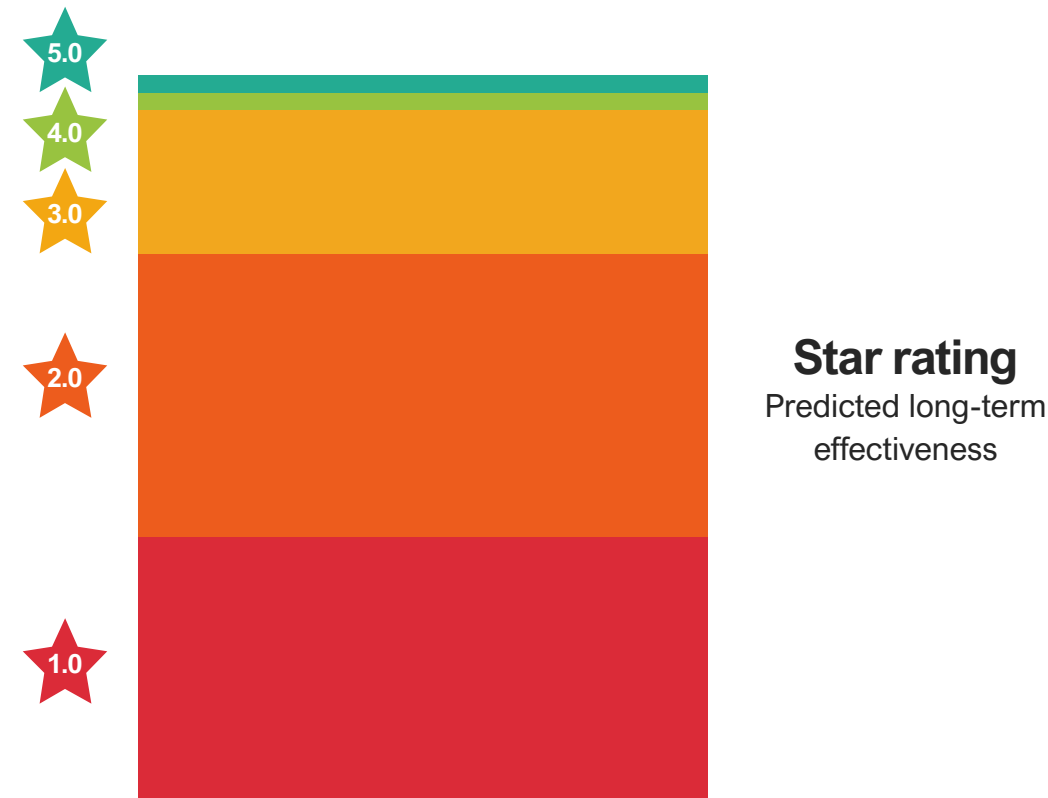


1,220 Out-of-Home campaigns tested with over 180,000 respondents globally using System 1's Test your Ad Outdoor platform, measuring 2-second brand recognition.

2. The emotion problem

Then, even when the brand was recognised, most campaigns did not create sufficient emotional engagement to change behaviour. In fact, almost 40% of ads scored just 1-Star in System1's testing, the lowest level of predicted long-term effectiveness.

Nearly 40% of global OOH ads generate no emotional response



1,220 Out-of-Home campaigns tested with over 180,000 respondents globally using System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor platform, measuring branded emotional response.

Put those together, and the reality is hard to ignore: **3 in 5 OOH ads are not doing what they are supposed to do.**

They are seen but not remembered. As a result, they fail to deliver the long-term brand-building potential OOH is capable of.

That's a problem because OOH is often chosen for its power to build fame. It's a

trusted medium that reaches huge audiences at scale and high frequency. But if the creative doesn't earn attention or make people feel something, that powerful media space goes to waste.

However, we're seeing this as a huge creative opportunity. Because as this report reveals, when brands do get the creative right, the results are transformative.



The creative opportunity

Recognising the creative gap in OOH was only the start. We knew there was a huge opportunity to do more than just diagnose the problem. We wanted to prove what better looked like with real-world results to back it up.

System1 and JCDcaux decided to take our partnership a step further. We set out to make a connection that had never been made at scale before, linking creative quality in OOH directly to brand and business outcomes.

Through a first-of-its-kind study, we brought together two powerful datasets:

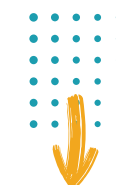
System1

System1's validated creative testing, capturing emotional response, brand recognition, and attention

JCDcaux

JCDcaux's extensive database of campaign effectiveness results, spanning brand lift, consideration, and sales metrics

The result is a piece of research unlike anything seen before in OOH. For the first time, we can map how specific creative choices shape brand memory, emotional engagement, and commercial success.



So, what did we find?

The Double Take effect

When creativity works, everything changes

Creative quality does not just improve results: it multiplies them.

Campaigns that achieve brand recognition within the crucial first 2 seconds show a **54% higher** campaign recall.

Campaigns that trigger a strong emotional response go even further, delivering:

- ➔ **Double** the commercial impact
- ➔ Over **3x stronger** brand sentiment
- ➔ Nearly **3x better** message recall
- ➔ **More than twice** the spontaneous brand awareness
- ➔ A **50% higher** chance of driving consumer action

Metric	1-2 Star	3-4 Star	Uplift
Commercial effect	+37%	+74%	2x the impact
Key message recall	+0.9%	+3.4%	+278% increase
Sentiment lift	+3%	+11%	Over 3x stronger
Spontaneous brand awareness lift	+1.8%	+4%	More than double
Key action taken	30%	45%	50% more likely to act

In a media channel built on frequency, this kind of creative edge compounds quickly. For example, data from ROUTE showed a month-long national OOH campaign ran across 825 sites and reached approximately 14.4 million people (about 27% of the adult population) with an average frequency of 8 exposures. It’s not just working better: it’s working harder, more often.

We call this the **Double Take effect.**

Because great OOH creative doesn’t just get seen. It earns a second glance. It builds emotion, brand memory, and long-term commercial value.

The rest of this report shows you how, through the five Double Take behaviours that earn attention, emotion, and memory, separating the forgettable from the unforgettable in OOH.

How to earn the Double Take

The five creative behaviours that turn attention into impact

When we analysed the OOH campaigns that truly worked, five creative behaviours stood out again and again. Get them right, and you unlock memory, emotion, and commercial impact:

- ➔ **Be realistic:** Design for the glance
- ➔ **Be distinctive:** Stand out in public
- ➔ **Be consistent:** Build memory with fluent branding
- ➔ **Don’t be dull:** Make people feel fast
- ➔ **Bend the rules:** Break the format, not the brand

Let’s break them down.

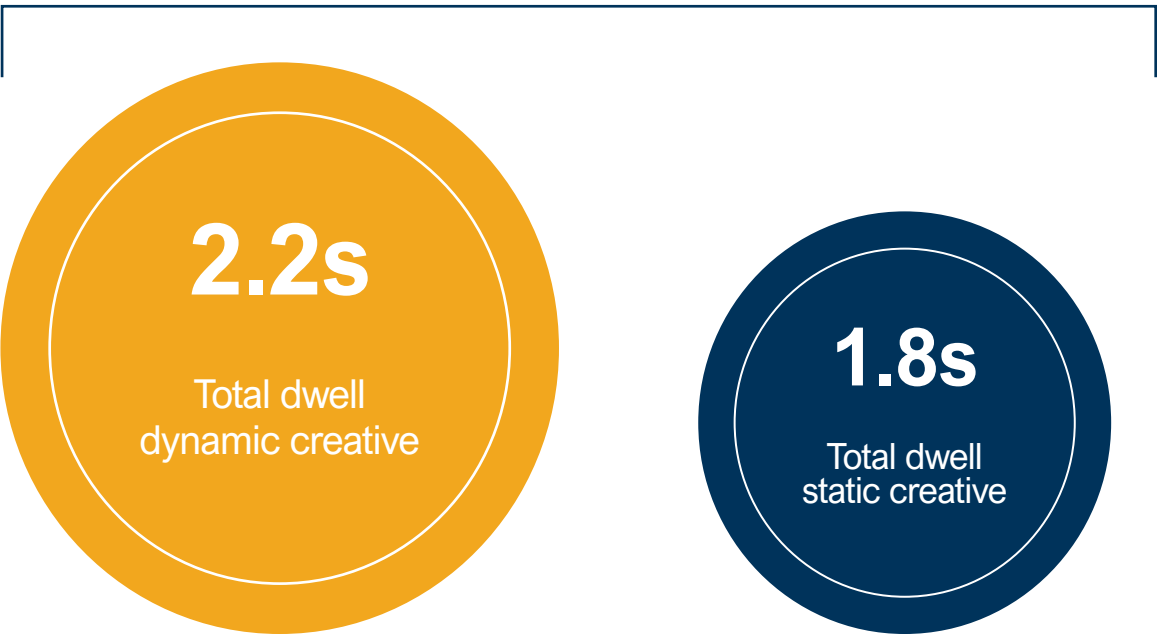
Be realistic

Design for the glance

OOH is a 2-second medium. JCDecaux's work with attention experts Lumen shows that the average dwell time on a static poster is just **2 seconds**. That is the reality marketers are working with. And it is why realism is the first creative behaviour that separates the forgettable from the effective.

The magic number - two seconds

2.0 seconds average attention



JCDecaux

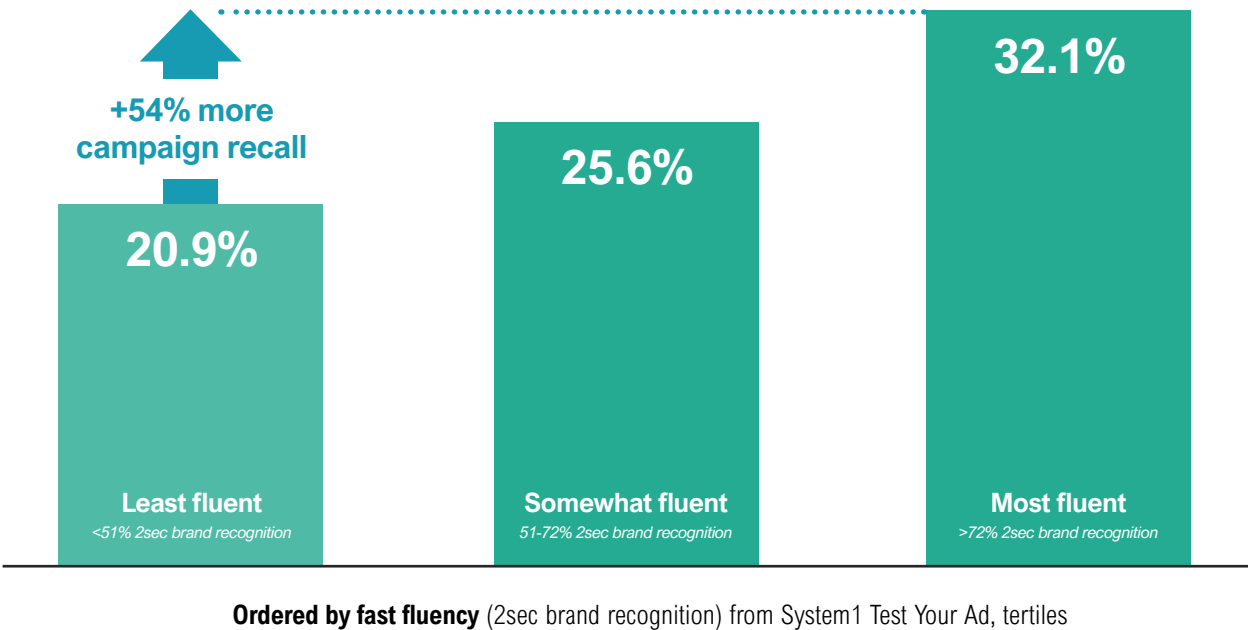
LUMEN

In that blink of time, either you land the brand or the opportunity is lost. When we tested hundreds of real-world OOH campaigns, the pattern was clear. Ads that achieved **brand recognition within 2 seconds** saw a **+54%** boost in overall campaign recall.

When the brand was immediately obvious, memory followed. OOH rewards realism. Speed of brand recognition unlocks OOH's full brand-building power. It's the foundation of effectiveness.

Achieving brand recognition within 2 seconds is key for campaign recall

Prompted Out-of-Home recall
Brand lift studies



73 Out-of-Home campaigns measured pre/post with 22,000 respondents. Analysed with System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor testing with 10,950 respondents, measuring their branded emotional response. Brand lift studies and System1 testing conducted separately with at least 6 months between studies.

Why a third of OOH ads fail the 2-second test

Most OOH creative is not designed with real-world attention in mind. It's designed in a meeting room, not on a motorway.

In practice, a third of exposures fail to trigger brand recognition. Even fewer spark any kind of emotional engagement. And the reason is simple: creative complexity kills clarity. Every additional message, every extra word, every visual distraction reduces the chance of instant recognition. More messages mean lower levels of recall.

Designing for real-world attention

Getting OOH creative right starts with accepting the realities and turning them into advantages.

Here's what works:

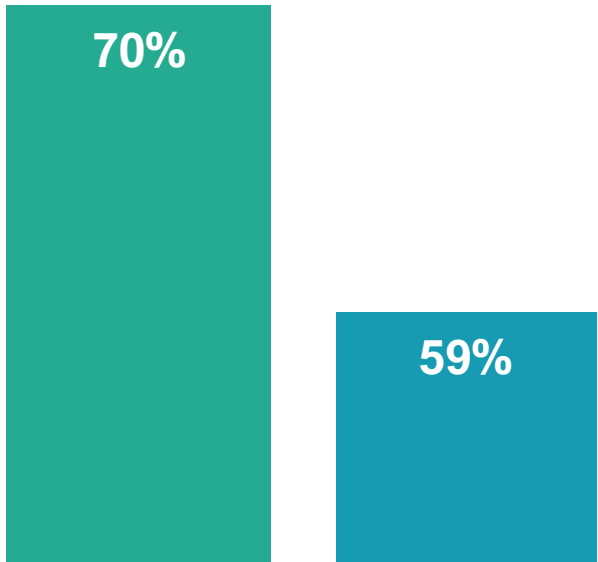
1

Simplicity wins

Complexity kills recall. Every extra second someone needs to understand an ad is a second you do not have. Our data shows that OOH ads with fewer than seven words outperform those with more. The fewer the words, the stronger the brand recognition.

OOH with more words gets less brand recognition

2sec brand recognition (%)



Less than 7 words More than 7 words

150 Out-of-Home campaigns analysed with 22,500 respondents using System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor testing, measuring their branded emotional response.

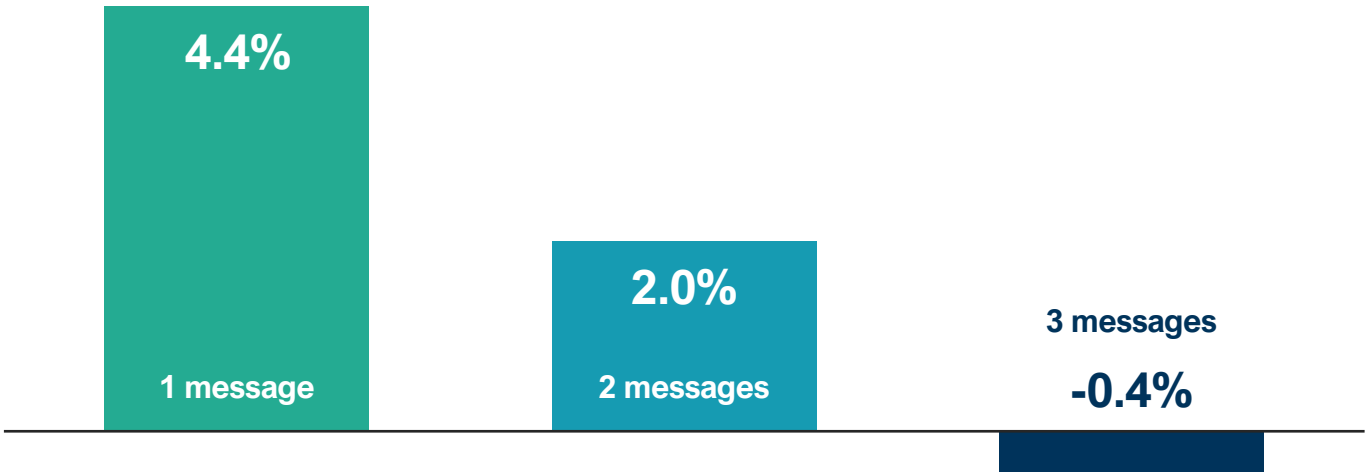
Similarly, ads that try to cram multiple messages into a single execution see dramatically lower effectiveness. When it comes to OOH, one clear message beats many.

80

Fluency rating:
Exceptional

Trying to do too much reduces how useful the advertising is

Key brand association Lift (%), exposed/non exposed



73 Out-of-Home campaigns measured pre/post with 22,000 respondents. Analysed with System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor testing with 10,950 respondents, measuring their branded emotional response. Brand lift studies and System1 testing conducted separately with at least 6 months between studies.

87

Fluency rating:
Exceptional

Designing for real-world attention

Getting OOH creative right starts with accepting the realities and turning them into advantages.

Here's what works:

2

Brand bold and early

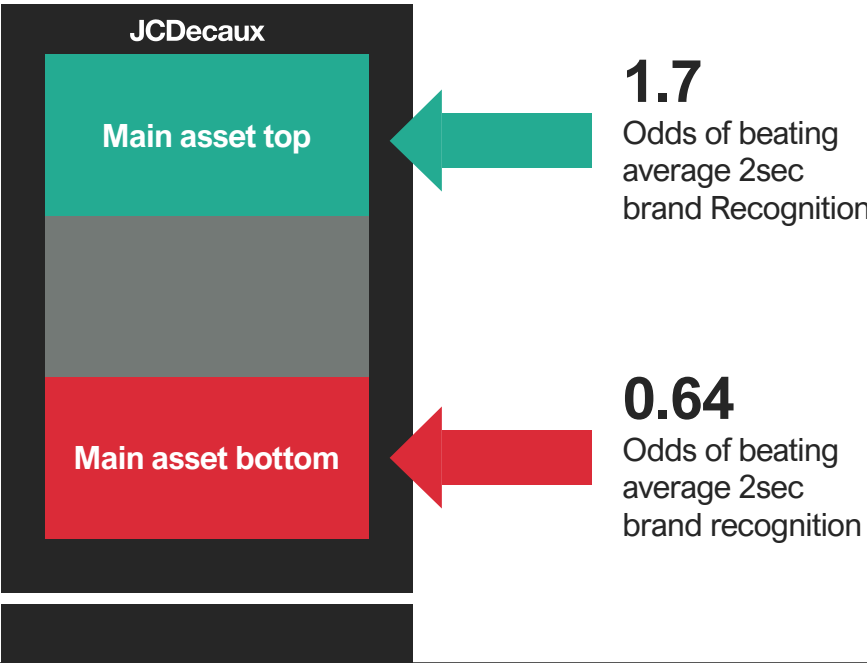
Branding needs to be immediate and obvious. People naturally scan OOH ads from top to bottom. So, if your branding is placed at the top, you nearly triple your chance of achieving high brand recognition.

Similarly, ads that try to cram multiple messages into a single execution see dramatically lower effectiveness. When it comes to OOH, one clear message beats many.

Put your brand where their eyes go first.

Viewers read OOH top down.

Branding at the top of OOH makes ads 2.7x more likely to cut through.



And it is not just about placement. It is about impact.

Don't be afraid to brand. Logos that occupy at least 10% of the creative area boost viewing time by +28%.

The image shows a JCDecaux billboard for Bimbo's 'Es Querer' sandwich campaign. The ad features a large, appetizing sandwich with various fillings. The background is a blurred city street at night. Below the billboard, performance metrics are displayed:

- Star rating: 5.4 (Exceptional)
- Spike rating: 2.04 (Exceptional)
- Fluency rating: 99 (Exceptional)

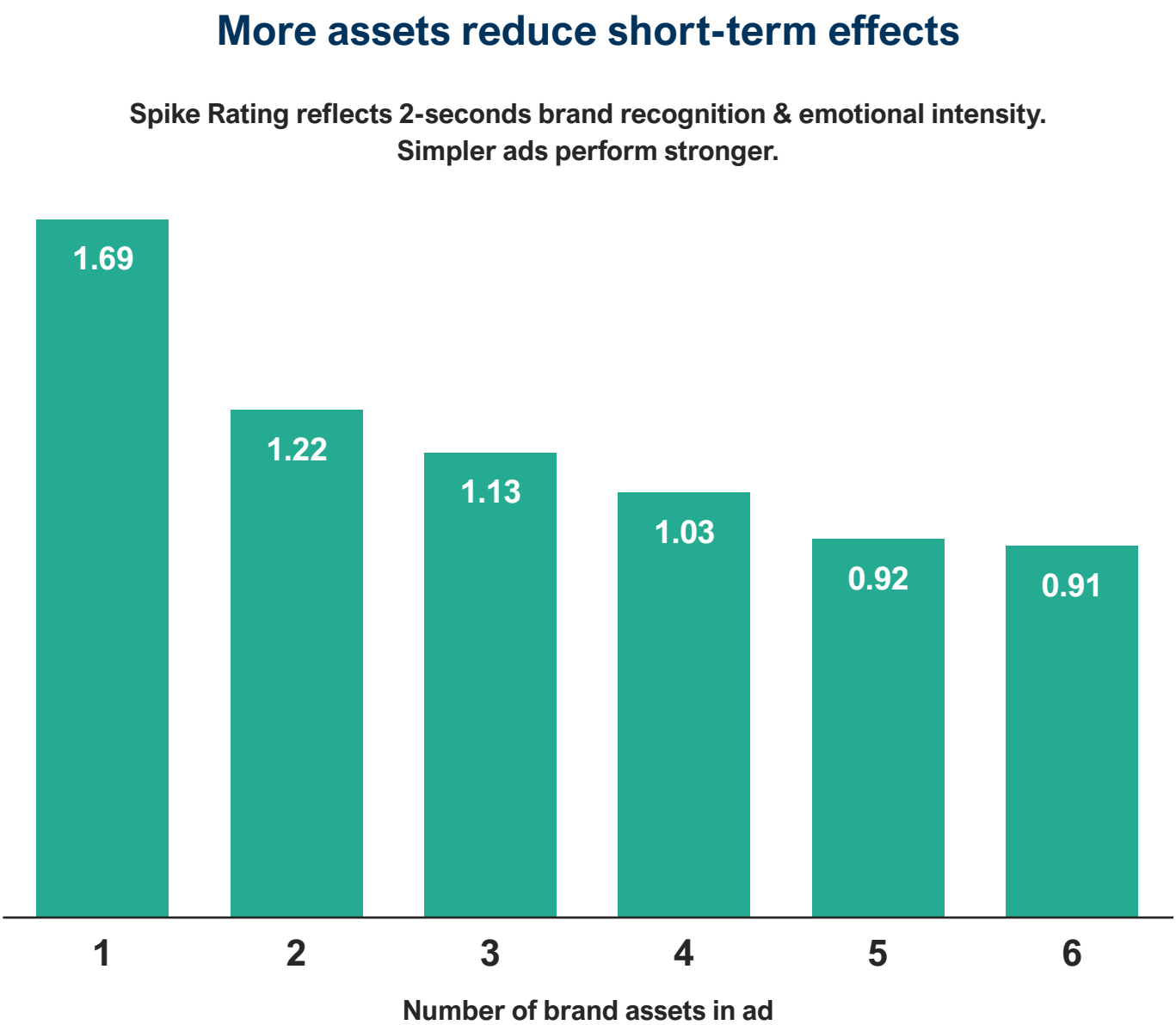
A Spanish flag icon is also present, indicating the campaign's location.

150 Out-of-Home campaigns analysed with 22,500 respondents using System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor testing, measuring their branded emotional response.

3

Be choiceful with brand assets

It can be tempting to throw every brand asset you have onto an OOH ad. But we've been able to show that more is not better. Adding more brand assets actually dilutes emotional intensity and short-term sales effects (Spike Rating). The strongest performance came from campaigns using just one or two distinctive assets, not five or six.



150 Out-of-Home campaigns analysed with 22,500 respondents using System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor testing, measuring their branded emotional response.

Star rating:
Exceptional

Spike rating:
Exceptional

Fluency rating:
Exceptional

Be distinctive

Stand out in public

In OOH, creative doesn't just compete with other brands; it engages with dynamic public environments. Streets, skylines, and stations are full of life, movement, and character. Your ad isn't shown in a controlled setting, it earns attention amid a world rich in energy, colour, and motion.

Here, being merely "on brand" is a starting point; to stand out, you must tap into the vibrancy of context and create work that feels at home yet unmistakably yours.

Why being distinctive pays

Not all OOH formats offer the same kind of attention and that changes how distinctiveness works.



The best creative adapts to its environment without losing clarity or brand recognition.

Viewable time and how long people actually look depends on the format:⁸

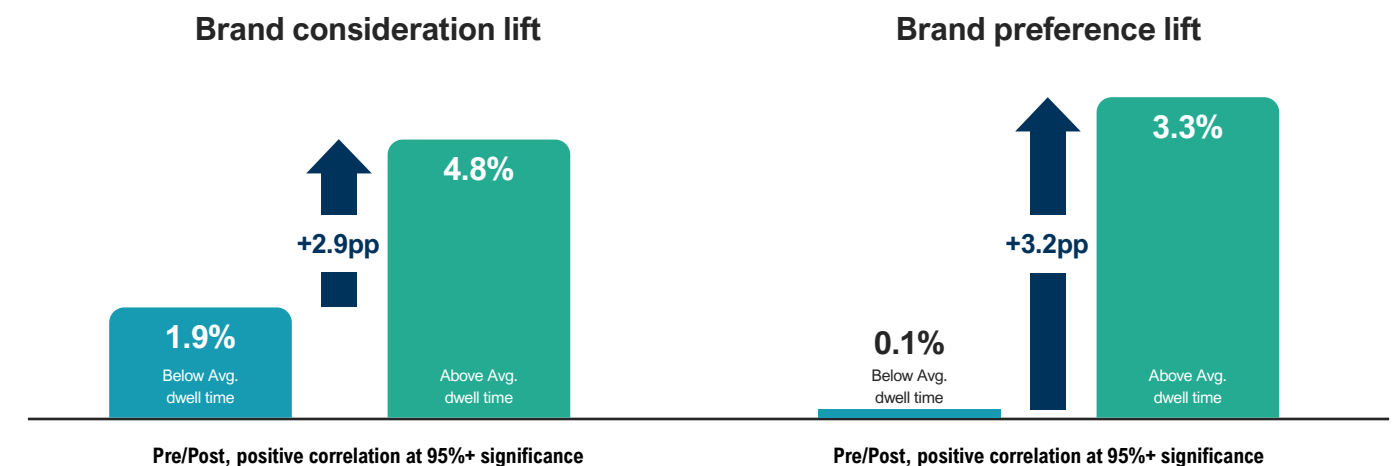
- ➔ **Driving formats** (like roadside billboards) offer just over a second of real attention. Clarity and branding must land instantly.
- ➔ **Walking formats** offer slightly more time but still demand fast recognition.
- ➔ **Bus stop formats**, where people dwell and glance repeatedly, allow for a bit more storytelling as long as the initial brand signal is clear.

What doesn't change is that you must be visually distinctive to earn the glance and brand distinctive to earn memory.

Our research reveals a critical truth:

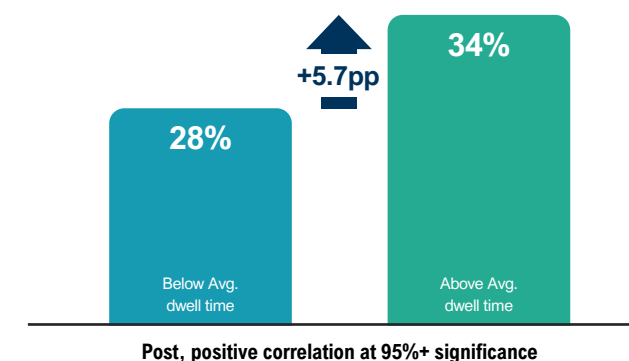
- ➔ Extra dwell time beyond 2 seconds does not meaningfully improve basic recall.
- ➔ But if you do capture sustained attention, emotional engagement rises sharply - boosting brand preference, consideration, and action taken.

To grow lasting preference and consideration in OOH you must increase viewer ad attention

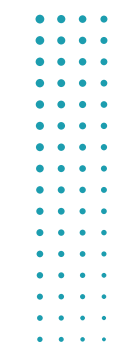


Holding attention leads to key behaviour change

Claimed behaviour change
Key action Taken



Attention alone does not change minds. Emotional engagement does. But you cannot earn emotion if you never earn attention, and distinctiveness is how you earn attention.



Emotion is what you do with it once you have it. And commercial outcomes are the result when you get both right.

What distinctive OOH looks like

Distinctiveness works on two fronts: standing out from the environment and standing out to you.

Without strong visual distinctiveness, you don't earn the first glance. Without brand-specific distinctiveness, you don't earn memory.

1

Distinctive from the environment

Your first job is to break through the visual noise. Generic visuals and muted design fade into the background. Effective OOH makes an immediate, emotional statement.

Simple creative principles make a difference:

- ➔ **Use bold colours and strong contrast:** Using vibrant colours drives higher emotional impact (+22%) and acts as a focal point of contrast between an ad and its surroundings.
- ➔ **Prioritise faces:** Faces instinctively attract attention. The use of people increases view time more than any other feature and uplifts long-term impact (Star) by 0.25.
- ➔ **Expand product images:** Larger products attract more attention and hold it for longer. Doubling product size increases average view time by a whopping 86%.
- ➔ **Show something surprising, joyful, or unusual:** Emotional salience holds attention beyond the initial glance.



95

Fluency rating:
Exceptional





5.2

Star rating:
Exceptional



1.42

Spike rating:
Exceptional



89

Fluency rating:
Exceptional







3.8

Star rating:
Good



1.65

Spike rating:
Exceptional



81

Fluency rating:
Exceptional





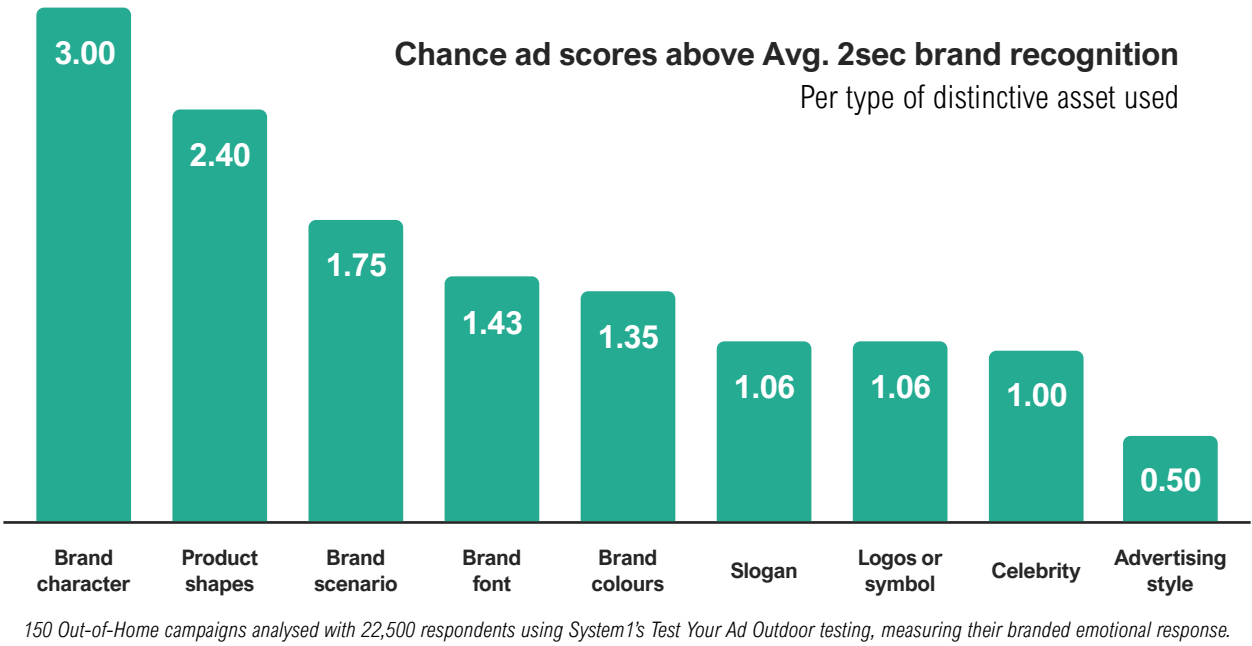
2

Distinctively you

Earning attention is not enough. You must turn it into fast, fluent brand memory. Distinctive brand assets (DBAs) are your friend here.

However, our research shows not all brand assets perform equally. Fluent brand characters and product shapes are the most powerful memory short cuts.

Creative realities of OOH - Not all brand assets are equal



What the data tells us:

- ➔ **Fluent brand characters** (like mascots) drive a 3x higher chance of above-average 2-second brand recognition.
- ➔ **Product or packaging shapes** deliver 2x higher recognition.
- ➔ **Fluent brand scenarios and fonts** also help, but celebrities and advertising style are weaker triggers in OOH for fast brand recognition.





91

Fluency rating:
Exceptional



Characters and product shapes succeed because they are exclusive, ownable memory structures. They don't just aid recognition; they create instant emotional connections that no competitor can easily copy. We see characters having more impact than celebrities, reinforcing the idea that you don't need a famous face to make an impact. In a chaotic OOH environment, owning a clear, fluent memory short cut is a commercial advantage.

A note on execution:

While fluent characters and shapes perform best on average, the real power comes from consistent, visible use. Any well-built asset, used boldly and consistently, can become a powerful short cut to brand memory.

In short: whatever distinctive assets you have built, use them well and use them proudly.

Be distinctive:

The rules that separate forgettable from effective

- ✓ Use bold colours and high contrast to break the visual noise.
- ✓ Integrate faces or emotionally interesting visuals where possible.
- ✓ Keep designs simple, clear, and striking to avoid visual clutter.
- ✓ Use 1 or 2 strong fluent assets prominently.
- ✓ Prioritise colour, shape, and character over slogans and dense copy.
- ✓ Test whether people can recognise the brand within 2 seconds.
- ✓ Build around your strongest existing brand cues.



79

Fluency rating:
Exceptional



Be consistent

Build memory through repetition

System1’s Compound Creativity research shows that consistent brands - those that use fluent, recognisable brand assets across campaigns and media - see double the profit growth compared to inconsistent brands⁹.

In OOH, where your ad has only 2 seconds to work, consistency becomes even more critical.

The more familiar your creative feels, the faster the brain processes it, and faster processing boosts emotional response and brand memory.

Consistency isn’t about repetition for its own sake. It’s about using the right assets, in the right way, across channels and executions to make memory formation easier and faster.

Why consistency matters in OOH

OOH is a frequency medium. Each exposure is brief, and no single ad must tell your full brand story. But across many exposures, a clear and consistent creative identity builds something powerful: mental availability.

Our research reveals just how important the creative bridge between media channels is:

- ➡ OOH ads consistent with TVCs see an **uplift of 14%** 2-brand recognition.
- ➡ Campaigns maintaining creative coherence across television and Out-of-Home achieve **30% higher recall**.

Consistency compounds creativity and effectiveness. A familiar, coherent brand presence across TV, OOH, online, and beyond dramatically improves recognition and emotional connection.

How to be consistent in OOH

Being consistent does not mean being boring. It means creating fresh executions that still feel unmistakably yours and building bridges between every touchpoint.

Here is what works:

- ➡ **Commit to your fluent devices:** Use the same characters, taglines, colours, logos, and style across campaigns and channels. Repetition builds recognition.
- ➡ **Extend, don’t reinvent:** Successful brands evolve within a recognisable frame. They stay fresh but they stay familiar.
- ➡ **Build the creative bridge:** Use the same core assets and emotional tone across TV, OOH, online, and more. Creative consistency across channels isn’t about cloning executions, it’s about maintaining recognisable brand cues wherever people might see you.
- ➡ **Anchor new ideas to old memories:** Even when launching something new, connect it visually or emotionally to what people already know and feel about your brand.



Consistency works because it reduces cognitive load. It lets people recognise you faster, trust you faster, and choose you faster.

⁹System1 & Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. (2024). The magic of compound creativity.



The risk of inconsistency

When brands constantly reinvent their look, feel, or tone, they throw away all equity they have built. In OOH, where you only have a couple of seconds to make a connection, inconsistency is fatal.

There is no time to reintroduce yourself. Consistency isn't a creative constraint. It's a commercial multiplier, making every dollar of media spend work harder by making your brand easier to recognise, feel, and choose.

Be consistent: The rules that separate forgettable from effective

- ✓ **Reuse fluent devices** confidently and prominently.
- ✓ **Maintain consistent brand colours**, logos, tone, and emotional feel.
- ✓ **Build a strong creative bridge** between TV, OOH, online, and more.
- ✓ **Stay fresh**, but stay recognisable.
- ✓ **Anchor new campaigns** to familiar brand memory structures.



Don't be dull

Dullness comes at an extraordinary cost

In a high-speed, high-stimulus world, dullness is fatal. And sadly, most OOH ads fall into that category.

Research from Adam Morgan, Peter Field and Jon Evans, *The Extraordinary Cost of Dull*, tested tens of thousands of real-world ads and revealed a brutal truth. Most ads today don't spark anger or delight. They don't even spark dislike. They spark nothing at all. Neutrality - a total absence of feeling - is the most common audience response to advertising, according to System1's emotional data¹⁰.

This matters because if people don't feel, they don't remember. And if they don't remember, they don't act.

Emotion is the antidote

Advertising works by moving people emotionally, not just informing them rationally.

This has been proven time and again. In 2002, *The Power of Affect: Predicting Intention* showed that emotion explained brand purchase intent twice as effectively as facts and messages.¹¹ In 2012, Orlando Wood demonstrated that emotional campaigns delivered far greater business effects than rational ones, analysing hundreds of case studies from the IPA Effectiveness Databank¹². And in this piece of research, we've confirmed that positive emotional responses (Happiness and Surprise) are directly linked to stronger brand associations and better commercial outcomes.

We remember more when we're in an emotional state. We trust more when something makes us feel good. These are fundamental mental short cuts, honed for survival, that still govern how we decide and act today.

If your ad doesn't create a feeling, it doesn't create a future customer. And, as proven in *The Extraordinary Cost of Dull*, the financial consequences are huge. Dull ads face a measurable financial penalty and the report estimates that annually, dull ads would need to spend an extra \$189 billion to match non-dull ads market share growth.

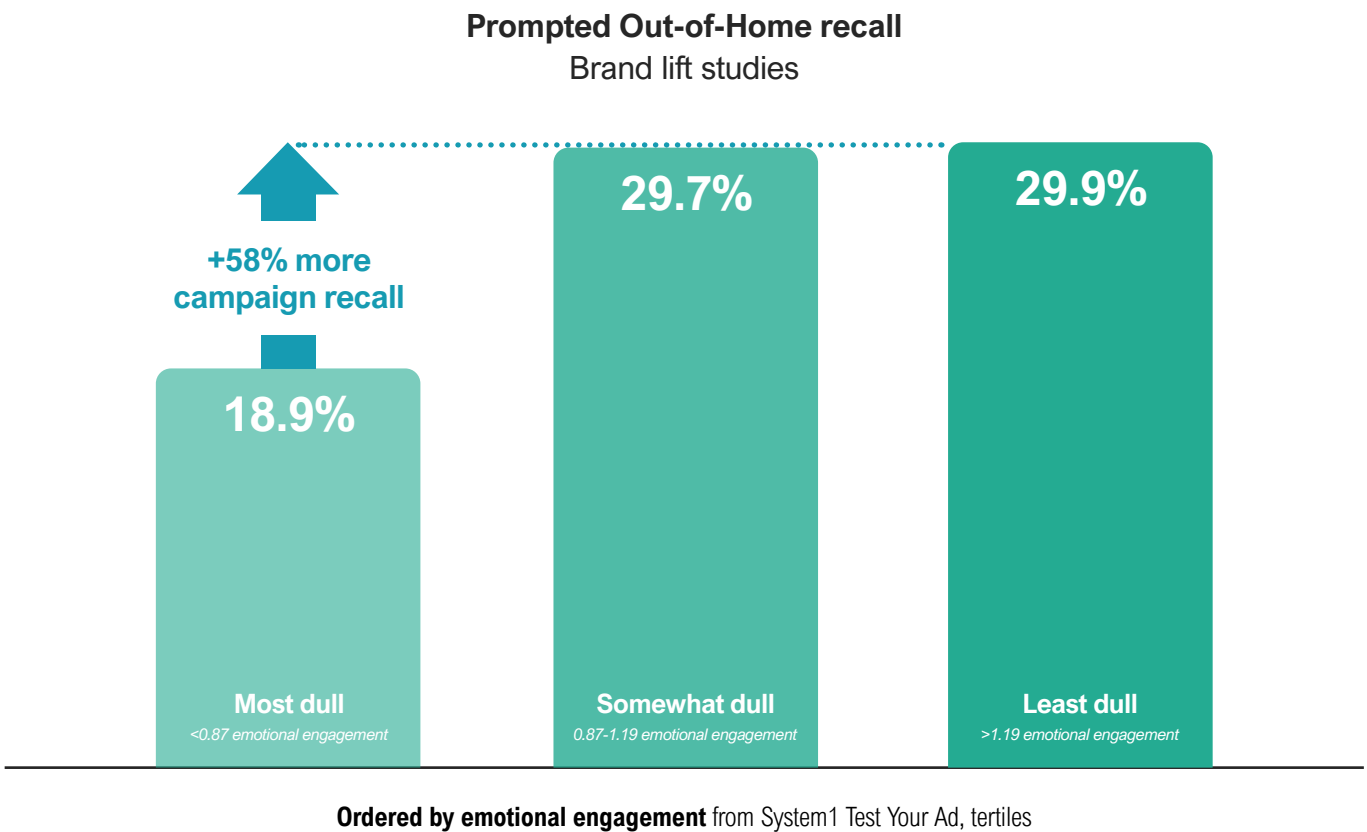
Dull creative kills campaign performance

When OOH creative fails to create emotion, it fails commercially too.

We found:

- ➔ Dull ads generate **58% lower prompted recall** than emotionally engaging ones.
- ➔ The dullest campaigns deliver barely **18.9%** recall, compared to nearly **30%** for campaigns that spark feeling.

Dull creative reduces OOH recall



73 Out-of-Home campaigns measured pre/post with 22,000 respondents. Analysed with System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor testing with 10,950 respondents, measuring their branded emotional response. Brand lift studies and System1 testing conducted separately with at least 6 months between studies.

¹⁰Field, P., Evans, J., & Morgan, A. (2023). *The extraordinary cost of being dull*.

¹¹Morris, J. D., Woo, C., Geason, J. A., & Kim, J. (2002). *The power of affect: Predicting intention*. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 42(3), 7-17.

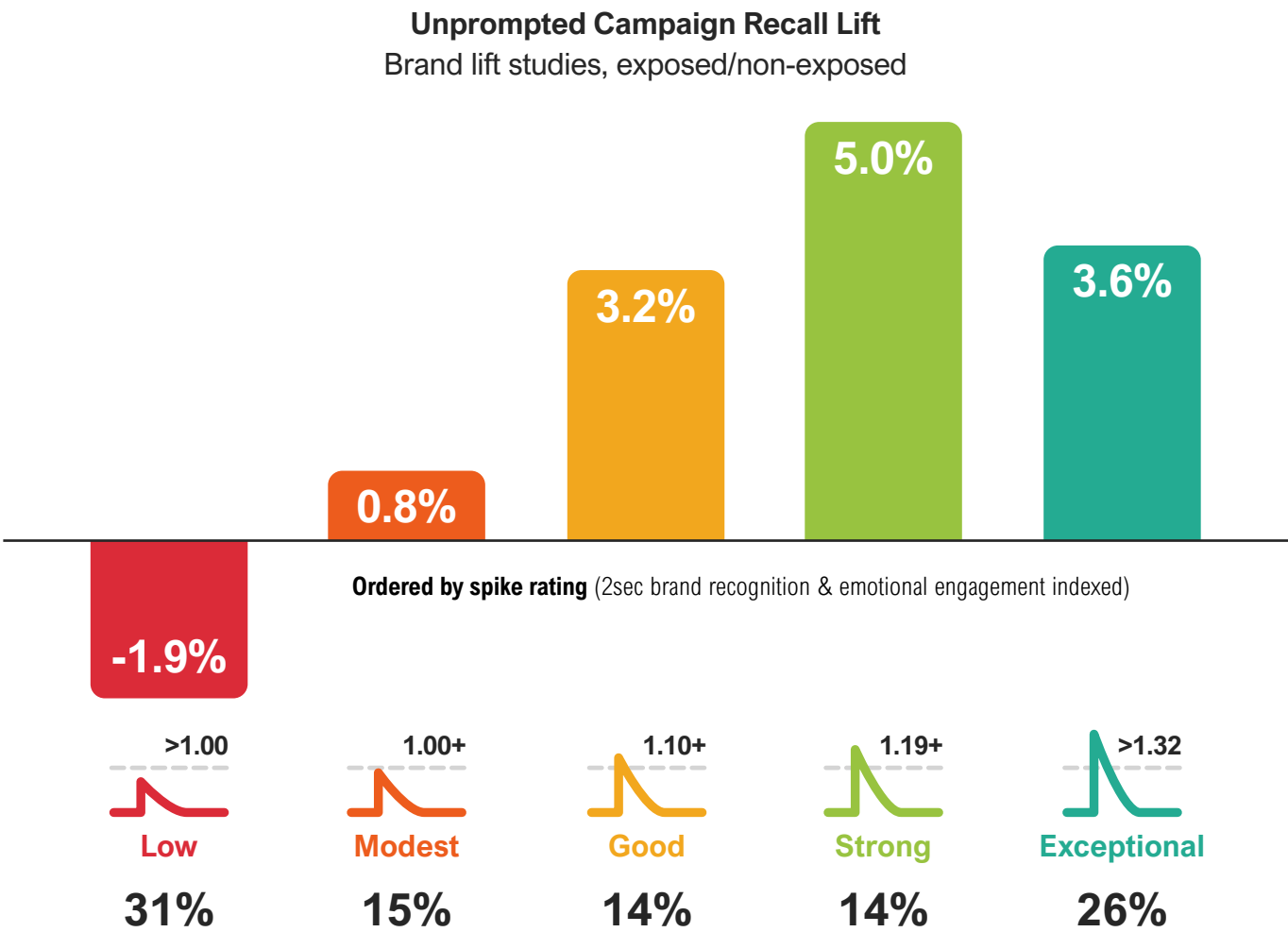
¹²Wood, O. (2012). *How emotional tugs trump rational pushes*. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 52(1), 31-39.

And it's not just about memory.

It's about being interesting enough to matter.

- ➔ 1 in 3 OOH campaigns fail to create emotional connection or distinctiveness and fail to shift brand recall at all.
- ➔ Good emotional OOH creative drives 3-5% unprompted recall uplift - a clear commercial advantage.

Brand bold and be interesting - or don't bother
1/3 of OOH campaigns don't do either and fail to increase campaign recall



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Positive emotion builds memory and momentum

Emotion doesn't just drive attention. It creates memories that drive behaviour.

Our analysis found:

- ➔ Positive emotions build 5% stronger brand associations.
- ➔ High emotional intensity (even across emotions) strengthens brand memory formation.

Emotions are key to building useful memories
High emotional arousal leads to more key brand associations being built



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And not all feelings are created equal.

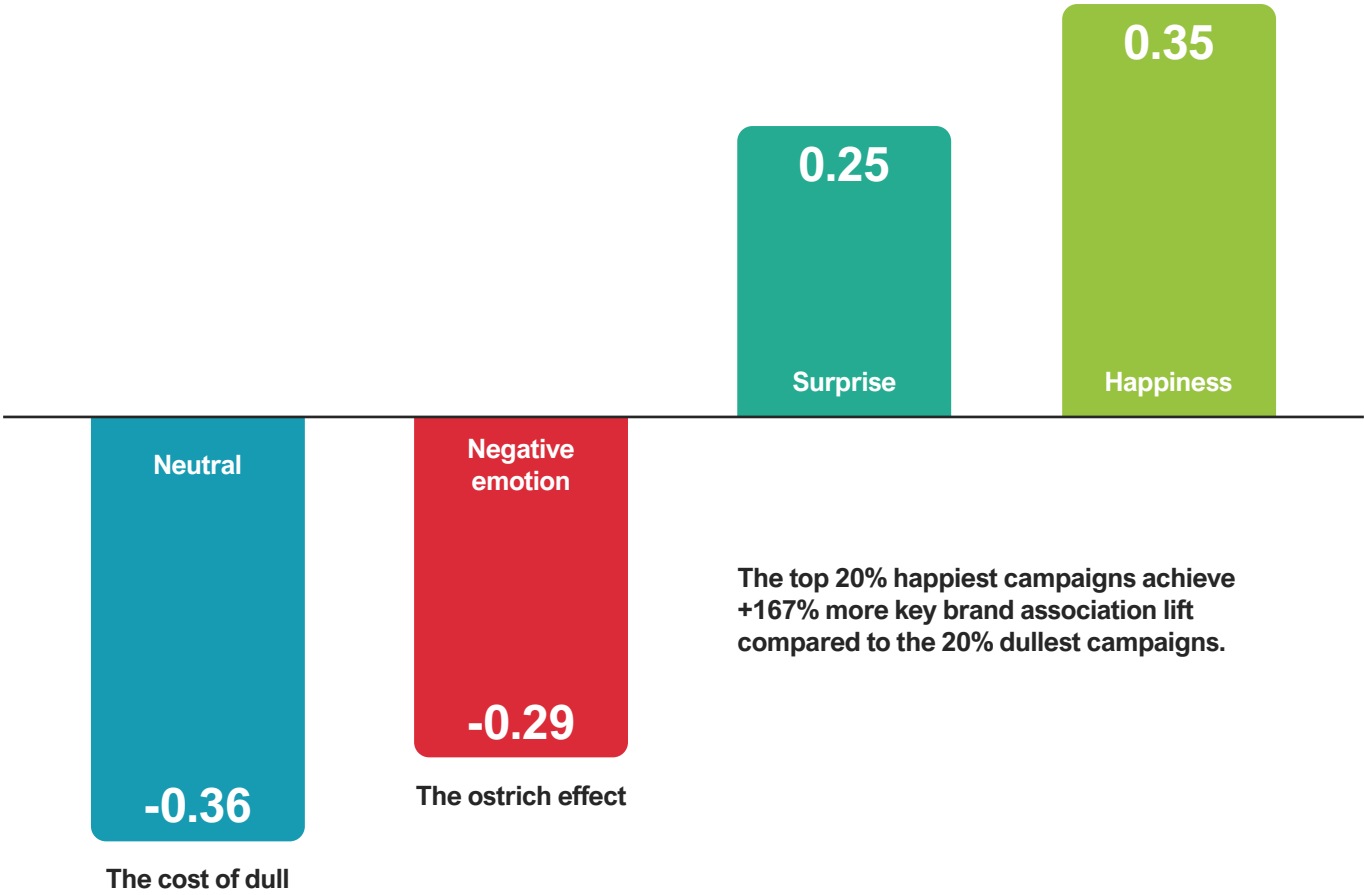
Some lift brands higher than others:

➡ **Happiness and Surprise** drive far greater memorability than Neutrality or negative feelings.

More positive emotions lead to greater stand out & memorability

Feel good and surprising work harder than negativity and dull

Association (r) with key brand association lift, per emotion



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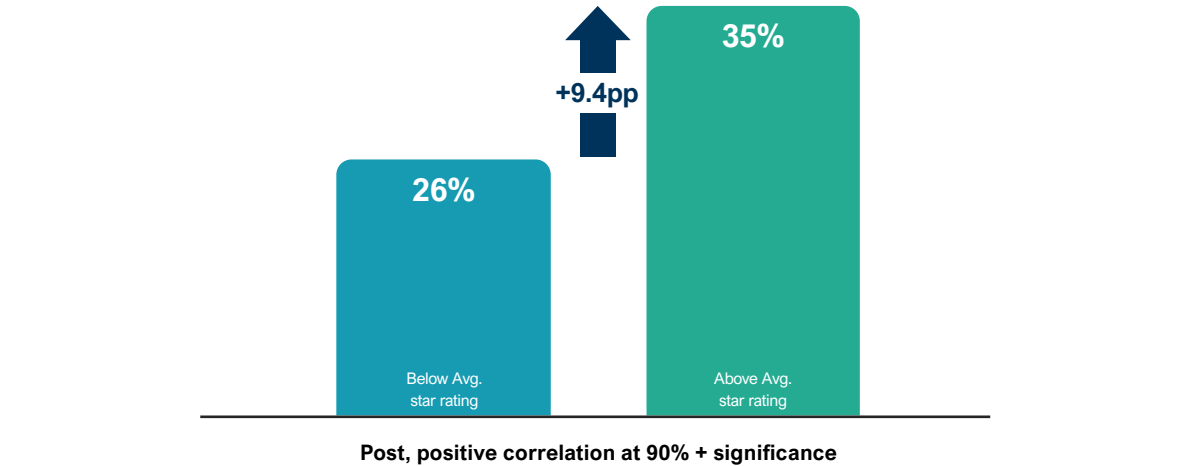
The effect goes beyond memory and shapes real behaviour change:

➡ **Happiness and Surprise** drive far greater memorability than Neutrality or negative feelings.

Creating positive emotions leads to key behaviour change

Feel good and surprising work harder than negativity and dull

Claimed behaviour change - key action taken



73 Out-of-Home campaigns measured pre/post with 22,000 respondents. Analysed with System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor testing with 10,950 respondents, measuring their branded emotional response. Brand lift studies and System1 testing conducted separately with at least 6 months between studies.

Some lift brands higher than others:

➔ Positive emotional OOH drove a **+1.7pp brand sentiment lift** and a **+0.5pp spontaneous brand awareness lift**.

OOH leaving viewers feeling positive create more brand sentiment and brand awareness lift



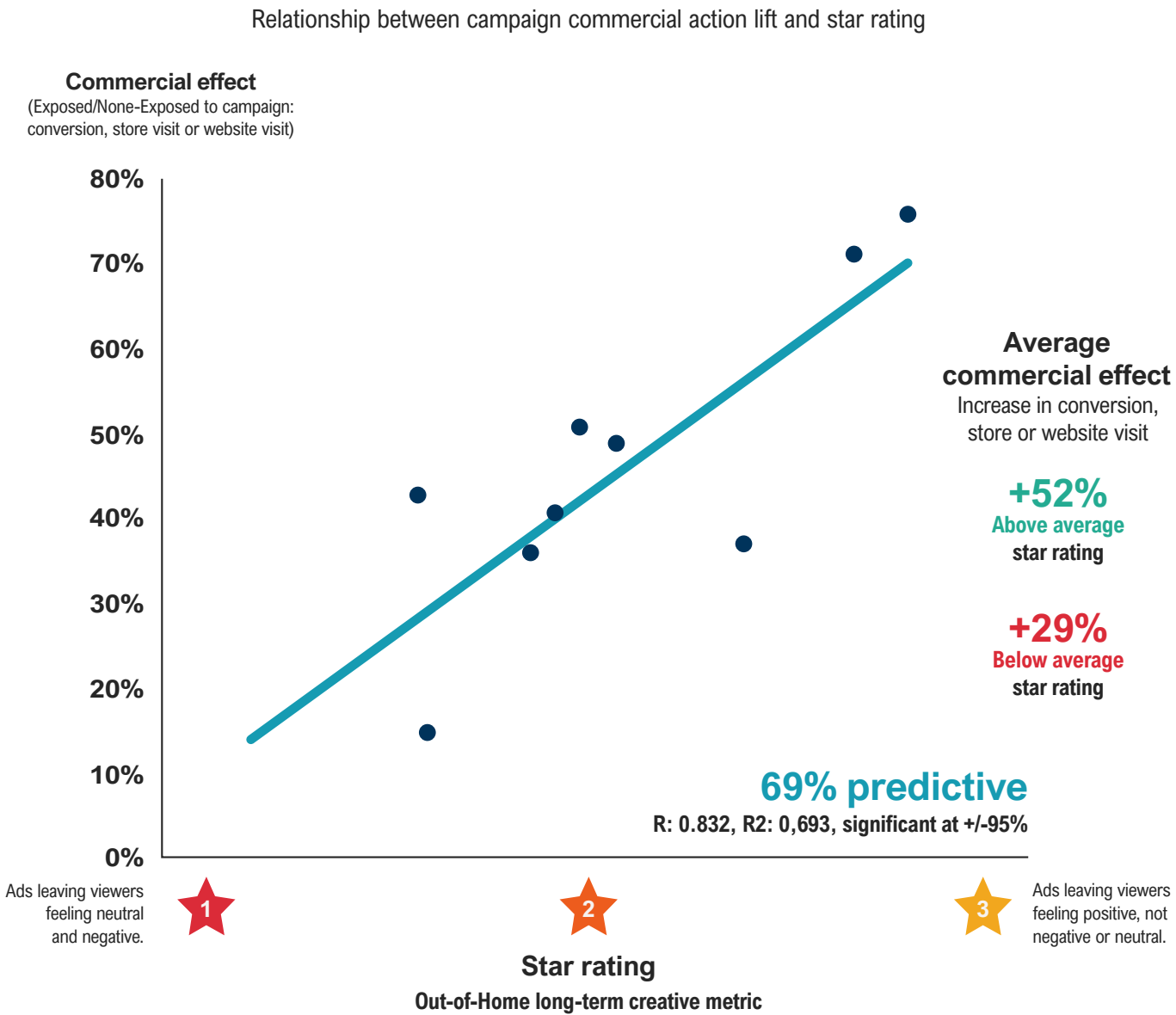
73 Out-of-Home campaigns measured pre/post with 22,000 respondents. Analysed with System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor testing with 10,950 respondents, measuring their branded emotional response. Brand lift studies and System1 testing conducted separately with at least 6 months between studies.



And this emotional strength translates directly to business results:

➔ OOH ads that leave people feeling positive drive a **+52% increase in commercial action** (conversion, store visit, website visit).

OOH leaving viewers feeling more intensely positive change more commercial outcomes



9 Out-of-Home campaigns with sales, footfall or website attribution studies. Measured exposed/non-exposed. Compared to System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor creative measurement with 1,350 respondents, measuring their branded emotional response to create our long-term predictor of ad success - Star rating

Emotion doubles commercial effectiveness

Ultimately, emotional creative isn't just "nicer", it's more profitable.

Our research shows:

- ➔ The top 20% happiest campaigns delivered **+167% higher brand association lift** than the dullest campaigns.
- ➔ Ads achieving a **3-4-Star Rating doubled the commercial effect** compared to less emotional creative.

Specifically:

- ➔ **+74%** commercial lift
- ➔ **+11%** brand sentiment lift
- ➔ **+4%** spontaneous brand awareness lift
- ➔ **+3.4%** key message recall

3-and 4-Star ads double commercial effect

	★1★2	★3★4
Commercial effect	+37%	+74%
Key message recall	+0.9%	+3.4%
Sentiment lift	+3%	+11%
Unaided awareness lift	+1.8%	+4.0%
Key action taken	30%	45%

How to avoid dullness in OOH

Not all creative features are equally good at capturing attention and driving emotion.

It can be tempting to rely on "left brain" features like logical messaging, abstract visuals, product claims, and heavy text. But this approach rarely delivers all important emotion.

Decades of research by Orlando Wood (Lemon¹³ and Look out¹⁴) building on the work of Dr. Iain McGilchrist that shows that

the left and right hemispheres of the brain attend to the world differently and that this holds true in advertising:

- ➔ The **left brain** is narrowly focused, and it responds to abstraction, text, and isolated details.
- ➔ The **right brain** is contextually aware, and it notices vitality, relationships, humour, and place.

And it is the right brain that fuels attention, emotion and memory.

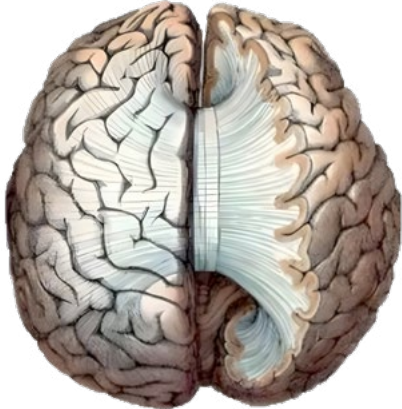
Orlando Wood first demonstrated this pattern in TV advertising, showing that right-brain creative features drive far stronger emotional response, attention, and business effects than left-brain approaches.

Now, we've proven the same is true for OOH.

OOH creative features for brand and narrow attention

Narrow

Abstracted product
Commanded action (e.g. call to action)
Flatness
Comparisons
Claims, data, & facts
Human frontality (the stare)
Forced positive feelings
Strong product focus
Split screen
Many words



Broad

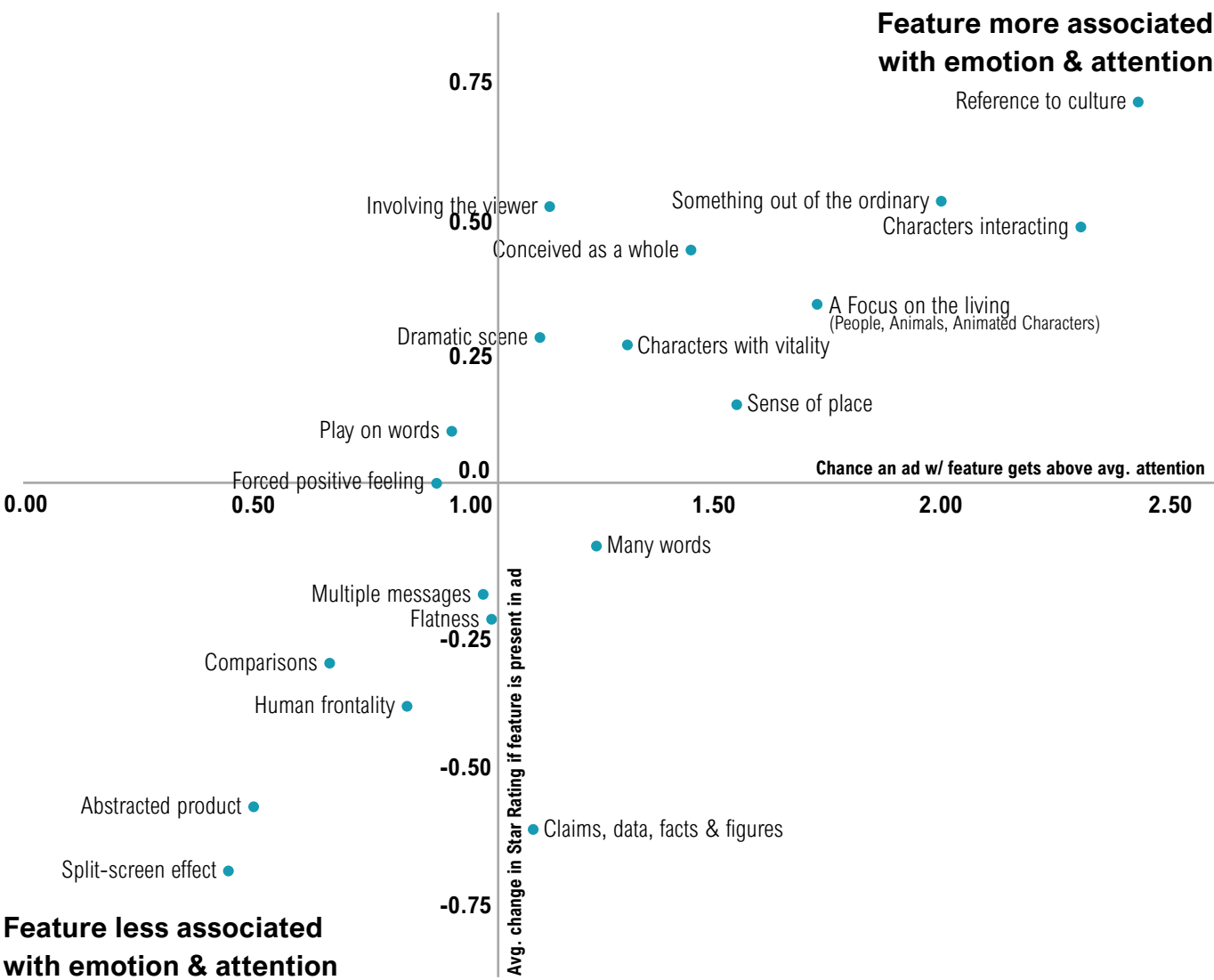
Characters with vitality
Dramatic scene
Sense of place
Reference to culture
Something out of the ordinary
Focus on the living (people, animals & animated characters)
Characters interacting
Play on words
Conceived as a whole
Involving viewer

See 'Lemon' and 'Look out' by Orlando Wood and the IPA for more.

¹³ Wood, O. (2019). Lemon: How the advertising brain turned sour. Institute of Practitioners in Advertising.
¹⁴ Wood, O. (2021). Look out. Institute of Practitioners in Advertising.

Right-brain creative features (broad) consistently outperform left-brain approaches (narrow), driving stronger emotional response and attention.

OOH must put on a show for emotion and attention

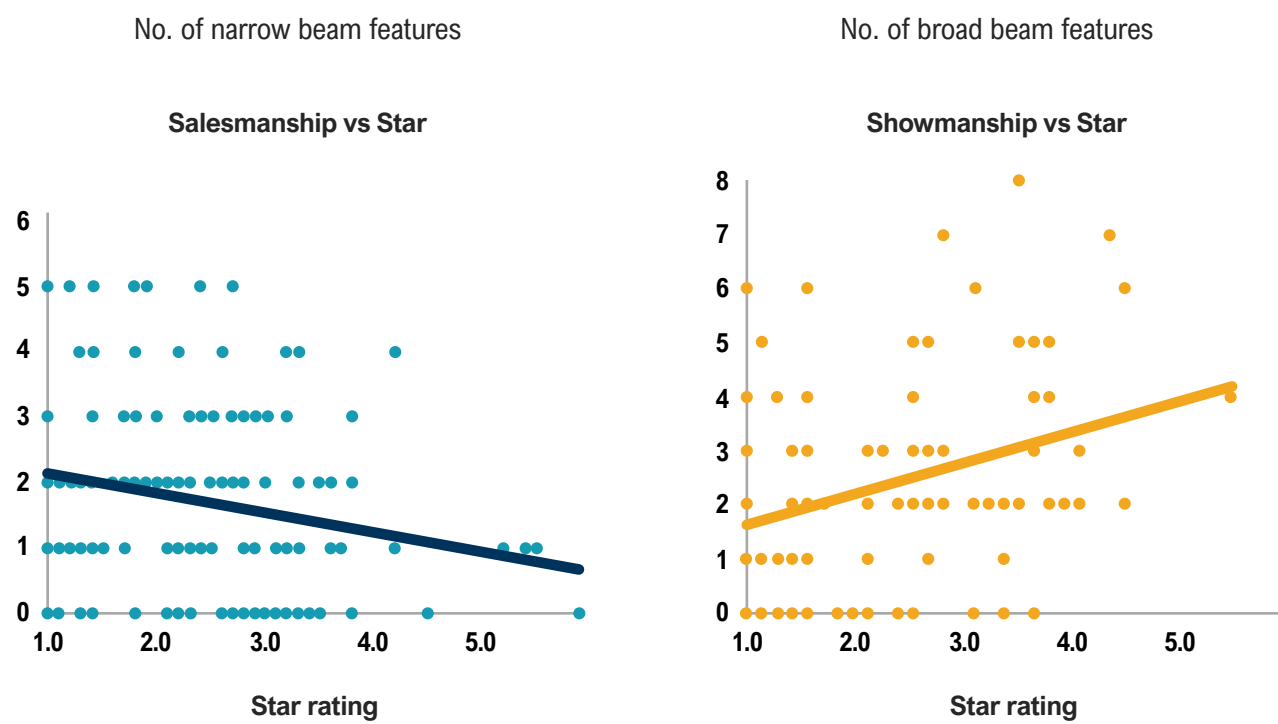


Orlando Wood calls it the difference between “salesmanship” and “showmanship”.

We see the same pattern play out in OOH:

- ➡ **Left-brain salesmanship:** facts, functional product shots, call-to-actions - feels flat and transactional.
- ➡ **Right-brain showmanship:** characters with vitality, dramatic scenes, cultural references - triggers emotion and earns attention.

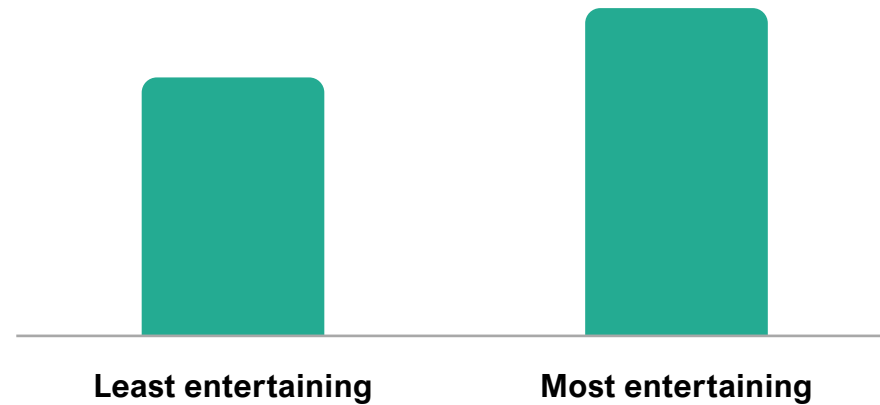
More entertaining OOH will create more commercial effects



150 Out-of-Home campaigns analysed with 22,500 respondents using System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor testing, measuring their branded emotional response.

Being more entertaining gets you +21% more attention

Attention (indexed)



150 Out-of-Home campaigns analysed with 22,500 respondents using System1's Test Your Ad Outdoor testing, measuring their branded emotional response.
Top vs bottom quartile of total right brain creative features

If you want attention and emotion, your aim should be to put on a show...even within the 2-second window of OOH.



Don't be dull:

The rules that separate forgettable from effective

- ✓ **Prioritise positive emotion:** Happiness and Surprise drive memory.
- ✓ **Use right-brain creative features:** characters, human interaction, dramatic scenes, cultural references.
- ✓ **Avoid heavy text, abstract visuals, and isolated product shots** as they weaken emotional response.
- ✓ **Test for emotional response early:** make sure your creative feels good at a glance, not just after long viewing.

Bend the rules

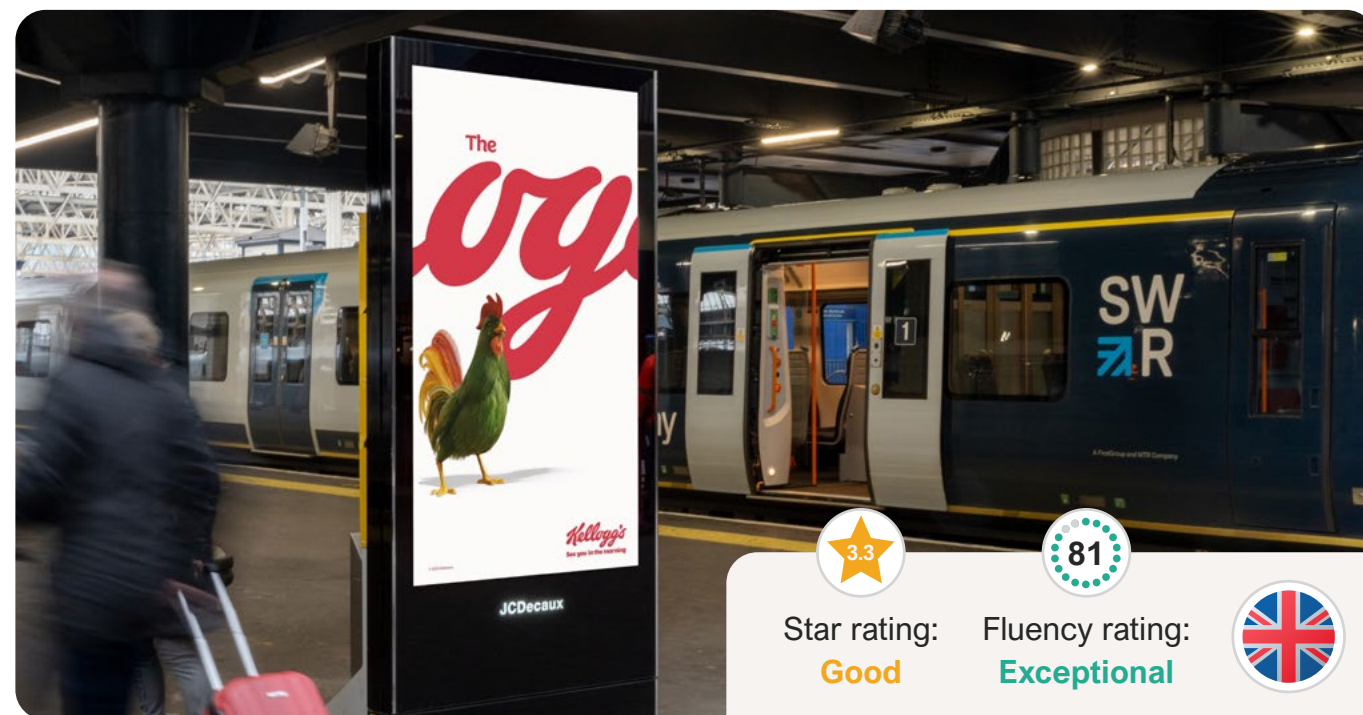
Creativity shines brightest when it plays within boundaries

OOH may look like one of the most constrained media channels, but it's those very constraints, like fast exposure, simple creative, and immediate branding that fuel the best ideas.

The most unforgettable posters don't break the rules. They bend them. They find tension between clarity and surprise. They stretch the simple truths of the medium just enough to earn a Double Take.

Our research shows that when brands work with the rules of OOH, not against them, they achieve stronger emotional impact, higher brand recognition, and better commercial outcomes. It is not about throwing the rulebook away; it's about learning how to play with it.

How to play (and win) in OOH



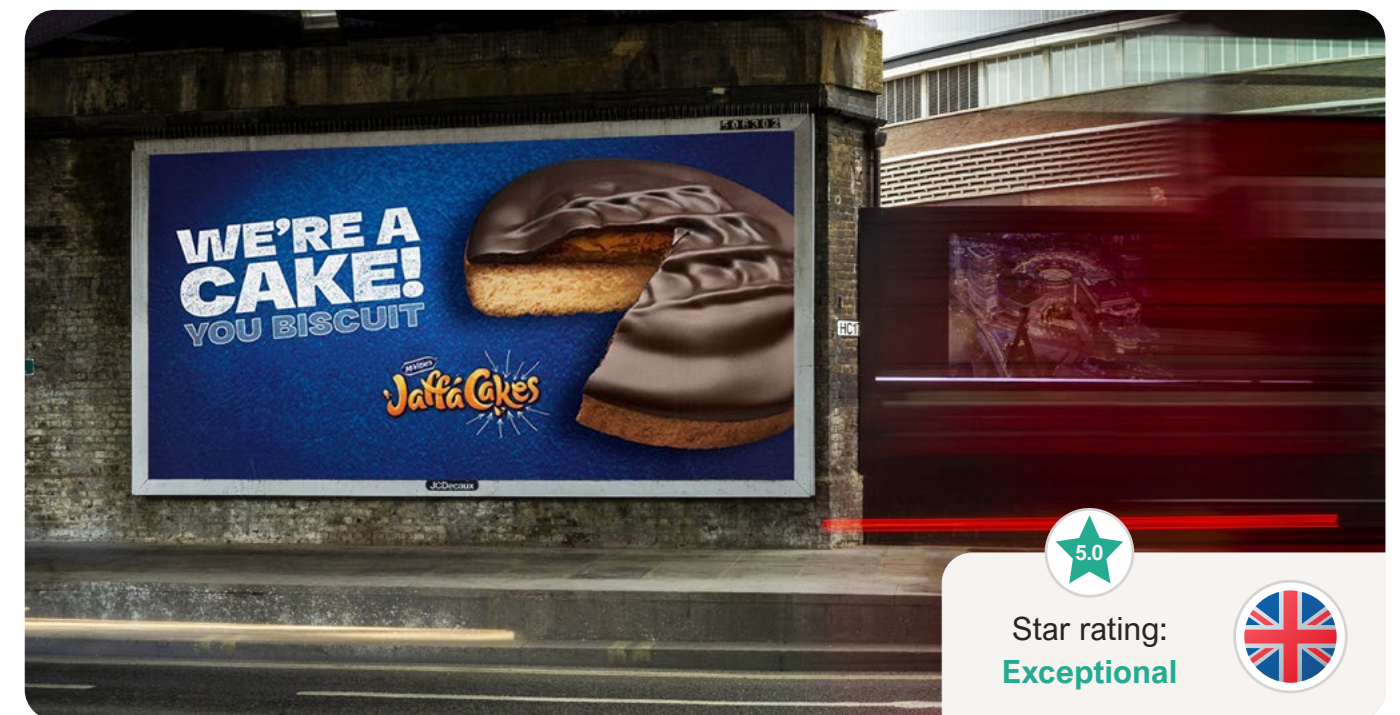
Play with distinctive assets

Your brand assets are not just labels. They are creative weapons. When brands take what people already know and love and play with it, it triggers instant recognition and emotion. Whether it is magnifying a logo, twisting a character, or exaggerating a colour palette, the best OOH campaigns turn familiarity into entertainment.



Play with context and culture

The best OOH does not float above the world. It plugs straight into it. Ads that are timed to the moment, tailored to the environment, or tied to cultural conversation drive bigger results. Context and culture lift neurological response by up to 32% and boost sales, brand recall, and time spent looking.¹⁵



Play with copy

In OOH, fewer than ten words can make you smile, laugh, or feel something that sticks. The best posters are not written. They are punched out. Great copy taps into culture, twists brand assets, or simply creates a flash of emotion that lingers longer than the exposure time. If you can be clear and clever at once, you win.

¹⁵JCDecaux UK, Clear Channel, & Posterscope. (2020). The Moments of Truth.



Play with the rules themselves

Sometimes the best OOH works because it almost breaks the rules. They flip a format, think outside the frame, or leave just enough space for the audience to connect the dots. Clever twists on the basics (without losing clarity or branding) are what make people stop, look twice, and remember.



Star rating:
Good



Spike rating:
Exceptional



Bend the rules: What matters most

- ✓ **Constraints** fuel better creativity.
- ✓ **Distinctive assets are not static.** They are raw materials.
- ✓ **Context and culture** make you feel more real, more relevant.
- ✓ **Good copy** beats cleverness.
- ✓ **Playfulness builds memory** faster than complexity.

The best OOH doesn't scream for attention. It earns it. It knows the rules, respects them, and plays with them. It keeps the message simple but makes the moment unforgettable. **The idea is clear. The feeling is immediate. The impact lasts.**

The creative constraints of OOH are not chains. They are a challenge.

If you want a Double Take, don't just break the rules. Bend them.



The five Double Take behaviours at a glance

Behaviour	What to do	Why it matters	How to apply it
Be realistic	Design for the 2-second window. Keep it simple, bold, and immediately branded.	Fast brand recognition drives memory and recall.	Place branding at the top, use fewer than seven words, focus on one clear message.
Be distinctive	Break through the environment. Use bold colours, faces, product shapes, and fluent assets.	Visual and brand distinctiveness are essential for emotional engagement.	Maximise bold colours, show faces, enlarge product shots, lean on strong brand assets.
Be consistent	Extend your fluent devices across OOH, TV, online, and beyond.	Consistency compounds and familiarity speeds recognition and strengthens brand memory.	Reuse the same logos, colours, characters, and style across all media.
Don't be dull	Trigger positive emotion fast. Use showmanship, not just salesmanship.	Emotional ads deliver twice the commercial impact of dull ones.	Use characters, storytelling, cultural references, and avoid text-heavy or abstract designs.
Bend the rules	Play within the rules. Use your assets, culture, copy, and creativity to earn a Double Take.	Creativity shines when it surprises without confusing.	Twist familiar assets, time ads to context, use clever copy, surprise without confusing.

Conclusion: Earning the Double Take

Creativity shines brightest when it plays within boundaries

The best OOH creative does not happen by chance. It happens when brands respect the realities of attention, design for emotion, and build memory with ruthless clarity.

When you step back and look at the patterns across the data, the message is simple. Creativity that works in OOH is fast, fluent, and emotionally powerful.

It stands out without confusing. It entertains without losing the brand. It earns the glance and stays in memory.

The five Double Take behaviours give marketers a proven framework to create work that is not just seen but felt and remembered.

- ➔ **Be realistic:** Respect the 2-second window.
- ➔ **Be distinctive:** Stand out from the noise and stand out as yourself.
- ➔ **Be consistent:** Make memory formation easier, faster, and stronger.
- ➔ **Don't be dull:** Trigger emotion if you want to change minds.
- ➔ **Bend the rules:** Find fresh ways to surprise while staying clear.



**The opportunity is there.
Get these behaviours
right and you double
the emotional and
commercial impact of
your OOH campaigns.**



System1 and JCDecaux have built a new way to test OOH creative, exposing people to your work as it appears in real life.

With this tool, you can measure:

- ➔ **2-second brand recognition:** Is the brand clear, fast enough?
- ➔ **Emotional response:** Does it feel good at a glance?
- ➔ **Predicted commercial impact:** Will it build memory and drive present and future sales?

The five Double Take behaviours show you what great OOH looks like. Now you can test your campaign to make sure it lives up to that standard before you spend the media money.



**Test smarter. Create stronger.
Make work that earns a Double Take.**

System1

System1 is The Creative Effectiveness Platform that harnesses the power of emotion to drive growth for the world's leading brands.

Our Test Your Ad (TYA) and Test Your Innovation (TYI) solutions quickly predict the short- and long-term commercial potential of ads and ideas, giving marketers confidence that their creative concepts will resonate with consumers and drive profitable commercial growth. Complementing TYA and TYI is Test Your Brand (TYB), which measures the impact of ads and ideas on brand health.



With a database of over 125,000 ads, System1 allows brands to compare their ads against competitors, and System1's expert guidance helps brands improve the effectiveness of ads and ideas.

System1 was founded in 2000 by Founder & President John Kearon and has operations in Europe, North America, Brazil, Singapore, and Australia.

Learn more:

system1group.com

Get in touch:

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JCDecaux

Incorporated in France in 1964, **JCDecaux** is the number one Out-of-Home media company worldwide, with over 1 million advertising panels across more than 80 countries. Our unrivalled portfolio spans airports, rail, transit (bus and tram), small format, and large format billboards, both digital and classic.

With a deep appreciation for data, technology, and design, JCDecaux delivers high-quality, architecturally integrated advertising solutions that create meaningful brand experiences in public spaces.



We reach the right people, in the right place, at the right time, making brands part of the everyday fabric of life.

Guided by a commitment to integrity, sustainability, and excellence in service, JCDecaux works to enhance urban environments while offering dynamic opportunities for brands to connect with audiences around the world.

Learn more:

jcdecaux.co.uk

Get in touch:

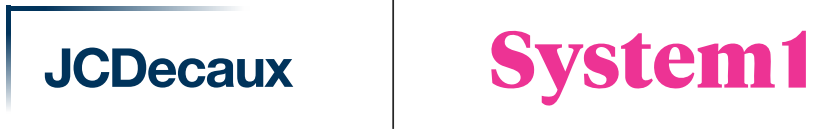
JCDecaux Data Solutions
uk.data-solutions@jcdecaux.com

Double Take

How creative quality doubles the commercial impact of Out-of-Home advertising

Double Take is the first global study to connect creative quality in Out-of-Home advertising with real commercial impact at scale. Drawing on System1’s predictive testing of over **1,000 real-world OOH ads** with more than **180,000 people globally**, and for the first time linking that with **JCDecaux’s in-market effectiveness data**, this landmark publication reveals how emotion and branding drive real-world results in one of the world’s most powerful media channels.

This report lays out the five creative behaviors that separate the forgettable from the unforgettable, giving marketers a practical roadmap to make their OOH campaigns work harder, faster, and smarter.



Double Take



How creative quality doubles
the commercial impact of
Out-of-Home advertising

