The Rules of Attention

Five key rules for boosting ad attention online

July 2019
Background
Why we did the study

- Previous studies show there is a positive relationship between attention and brand recall and between attention and sales
- The aim of this study is to understand more about the factors that determine the amount of attention online ads receive
- Specifically, IAB UK have tested the following:
  - Quality of environment
  - Location of the ad
  - Device-appropriate ad units
  - The impact of targeting
  - Whether clutter matters
Brand recall is shown to increase with the amount of attention an ad receives:

A strong correlation can be observed between attention and brand recall, with ads that were viewed for more than two seconds showing the highest levels of prompted recall.

Prompted recall increases in line with the amount of attention the ad receives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seconds of attention that the ad receives</th>
<th>Prompted recall of brand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Viewed</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 1</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;2</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lumen norms database.
Previous research by Newsworks also shows a strong relationship between attention and short-term sales.

![Bar chart showing conversions per 000 impressions vs dwell time](https://www.newsworks.org.uk/resources/attention-sales)

Source: Attention = sales, Lumen analysis of 6 months of British Gas display activity. 2018 [https://www.newsworks.org.uk/resources/attention-sales](https://www.newsworks.org.uk/resources/attention-sales)
The first stage of the research involved **passive data collection**, while people naturally browsed the internet.

**Eye tracking** showed where participants were looking and allowed dwell time to be measured.

Three display ad formats - **MPUs**, **skyscrapers**, **leaderboards** - were analysed in order to allow like-for-like comparison across sites.

**Regression** analysis identified the different factors that influence ad attention (e.g. attention to content, clutter and placements).
Phase 1 – Categorisation of sites to allow site type analysis

The top 100 sites were grouped into three categories in order to explore the impact of environment:

**Task sites**
- Metoffice.gov.uk
- Speedtest.net
- Rightmove.co.uk
- Zoopla.co.uk
- Nationalrail.co.uk

**Content sites**
- Reddit.com
- Mashable.com
- BoredPanda.com
- ExpertReviews.co.uk
- Ladbible.com

**Premium Content sites***
- DailyMail.co.uk
- Telegraph.co.uk
- TheGuardian.com
- GoodHousekeeping.co.uk
- TodaysGolfer.co.uk

*IPSO regulated sites, plus theguardian.com
Eye tracking allows us to compare the amount of attention different sites and different ads receive

Illustrative eye tracking graph:

- **Task sites** - 4 seconds per screen
- **Content sites** - 12 seconds per screen
Phase 2 – Additional controlled tests on desktop and mobiles to understand targeting and the impact of device appropriate creative

**Desktop study**
- Controlled tests to understand impact of targeting
  - Online study with 408 nationally representative UK adults
  - Webcam eye tracking
  - Demographics, brand awareness and recall survey
  - 9 test ads
  - 11 clutter ads

**Mobile study**
- Controlled tests to understand impact of device-appropriate creative
  - Lab research with 108 UK adults
  - Glasses fitted with a webcam tracked eye movements
  - Demographics, brand awareness and recall survey
  - 9 test ads
  - 11 clutter ads

For both desktop and mobile, participants were asked to read webpages containing the test ads. This was followed with a recall and brand awareness survey.
Phase 2 - The test ads in detail

Nine brands were tested in the controlled experiments:
Phase 2 - During the mobile study, test ads were compared with ‘mobile optimised’ equivalents
Attention - How did we measure it?

• For the purpose of this study, we have used a single metric to indicate attention: Attention per 000 impressions
• Attention per 000 impressions is a combination of the percentage of impressions viewed and the amount of time spent looking at them

Our measure of attention used the following calculation:

\[
\text{Attention per 000 impressions} = \% \text{ of people looking at ads} \times \text{Average time of ads looked at (s)} \times 1000
\]

For example – 1000 people tested, 300 looked at the ad (30%). On average, they looked at the ad for 1 second = 300 seconds of attention per 1000 impressions
Results
The five rules of attention – a summary

1. **Quality environments** – content sites and premium content sites generate more attention for ads than task sites

2. **Position**
   - Ads in prominent positions get more attention
   - Ads below the fold can generate high levels of attention when interest in the content is high

1. **Clutter** - fewer ads per screen generate more attention per ad

2. **Targeting** – more relevant, targeted ads lead to higher attention

3. **Fit for purpose** – ads optimised for the platform they are shown on boost attention. Ensure the ads are made for the platform they are shown on
Phase 1 - Results
1. Quality environments
Ads on premium content sites result in nearly three times more attention than task sites

The environment in which an ad appears has a significant impact on attention it generates.

The ads on task sites yielded 62 seconds of attention, per 1000 impressions. This increased to 128 seconds for content sites, an uplift of 105%.

Attention to premium content sites resulted in three times the attention of task sites. The more people engage with the content, the more likely they are to look at the ads.

Base: Phase 1 - Lumen Desktop Panel. 768 panellists. Analysis of MPU, Leaderboard and Skyscraper impressions (44k Content, 62k Task)
2. Position
Location, location, location: Prominent positions

Where you place your ads on the page makes a big difference.

Ads that are in line with the content get almost twice the attention of ads that are served to the side of the content.

Among ads to the side, those that are ‘persistent’ get over twice the attention of ads that are not.
Ads below the fold can receive a lot of attention if people are engaged with the content.

Ads served beneath the fold get more attention than ads served above the fold.

Attention to advertising is a function of attention to content. If people scroll down below the fold, they are more likely to be deeply engaged with the content.

And because they are engaged with the content, they are more likely to engage with the advertising.

Base: Phase 1 - Lumen Desktop Panel. 768 panellists. 128k MPU, Leaderboard and Skyscraper impressions. 58k ATF, 69k BTF
3. Clutter
Analysis shows that the total number of ads on a page doesn’t influence attention – what’s important is the number of ads per screen.

The total number of ads on a page is not significant in terms of determining attention* – however, the number of ads per screen has a big impact. The study found that one or two ads per screen command more than double the attention of three plus ads.

Base: Phase 1 Lumen Desktop Panel. 768 panellists. 128k MPU, Leaderboard and Skyscraper impressions.

*Data shows that there was no relationship between the number of ads on a page and levels of attention.
How do these drivers work together?
The relative contribution of quality, position and clutter

- Quality of environment is the **single biggest** driver of attention in this study.

- Ad positioning has the next **greatest impact** towards driving attention.

- Too much clutter **reduces** the amount of attention an ad receives.
Phase 2 - Results
4. Targeting
Quality targeting boosts attention by 107%

Relevant advertising is more likely to be noticed than non-relevant advertising, and for longer, meaning that attention per 000 ads is doubled.

As a result, relevant advertising is six times more likely to be remembered than non-relevant advertising.

Dwell time per 000 impressions (s):

- Not in market or aware of brand: 660
- In market, but unaware of brand: 1171
- In market, and aware of brand: 1365

Ad recall:

- Spontaneous Recall:
  - Not in market or aware of brand: 0%
  - In market but unaware of brand: 1%
  - Aware of brand and involved in category: 17%

- Prompted Recall:
  - Not in market or aware of brand: 2%
  - In market but unaware of brand: 3%
  - Aware of brand and involved in category: 12%

Base: 408 participants. All impressions (4057), of which in market (1182) and brand aware (2509)
5. Fit for purpose
Optimising creatives to a platform led to an 89% boost in attention

Optimising ads for mobile dramatically improves the attention they receive.

Optimising ads for mobile also boosts recall.

Attention per 000 impressions (s):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not mobile optimised</th>
<th>Mobile optimised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>1443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase (%)</td>
<td>+89%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average recall across all ads:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recall Type</th>
<th>Not mobile optimised</th>
<th>Mobile optimised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous recall</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompted recall</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 408 participants. All impressions (787), of which Mobile Optimised (311)
Implications for advertisers
1. Quality environments – context is key

Ads on premium content sites result in nearly three times more attention than task sites. Ads on task sites yielded 62 seconds of attention per 1000 impressions. This increased to 128 seconds for browse sites, an uplift of 105%. The uplift between task and premium content sites was 156%.

Do: Select high quality environments
Don’t: Undervalue the contribution of engaging content to advertisers
2. The position of your ad makes a big difference to attention

There is value of searching out best placement, as ads in prominent positions get greater attention. Ads that are in line with the content get almost twice the attention of ads that are served to the side of the content. Among ads to the side, those that are ‘persistent’ get over twice the attention of ads that are not.

Ads below the fold can generate good attention when interest in the surrounding content is high.

**Do:** For maximum impact keep ads in line or use persistent formats

**Don’t:** Dismiss below the fold ad locations
3. Remove clutter - less is more if you want to drive attention

The number of ads running simultaneously on a screen impacts attention - the fewer ads per screen, the more attention each receives. Up to two ads on a screen optimises attention levels.

Do: Make sure there aren’t too many ads on the screen at any time

Don’t: Have more than two ads on a screen at any one time

4. Targeting matters – more relevant, targeted ads leads to greater attention

Not all ads are equal – ads targeted to the right people generate more attention than non-targeted ads. In market and brand aware audiences are more likely to notice relevant advertising.

Do: Use high quality first-party data to target people in market

Don’t: Ignore opportunities to improve targeting
5. Be fit for purpose – ensure ads are made for the platform they are shown on

Placing mobile optimised ads on mobile sites almost doubles attention, compared to non-optimised equivalents. This results in an uplift of 36% for prompted ad recall.  

Do: Invest time in made-for-device creative  
Don’t: Overlook how different devices work, just because you buy them in the same way
Generating more attention by following the Rules of Attention is...

Better for advertisers
Ads that generate more attention are more effective

Better for publishers
Ads in a premium content environment generate more attention

Better for people
Fewer ads per screen generate increased attention and provide a better user experience
Thanks

Questions? Research@iabuk.com