Improving Brand Linkage and Advertising ROI Through Better Campaign Planning

John Wanamaker, the astute retailer of the late 19th century who is often considered the father of modern advertising, once said that he knew half of his advertising dollars were wasted – he just didn't know which half. Today, most advertisers would fully agree that some significant portion of their investment in advertising is wasted. Sadly, there are many ways to waste your advertising dollars, and it's very possible that you may be wasting even more than half!

Our database of campaign results, derived from measuring over $30 billion worth of advertising in the past 25 years, indicates that a large proportion of the waste is attributable to weak brand linkage. You pay for exposure opportunities, and if your campaign is engaging many within your target will notice and remember your executions. But, in terms of impact on your brand, those who did not link your advertising to the brand might just as well never have had exposure opportunities or engagement.

Copy testing has traditionally evaluated brand linkage as one of the four key components of successful TV commercials. More recently, as in-market tracking systems have developed better ways of cueing ad recall (e.g., visual cues as opposed to the old brand-aided questions), many advertisers have developed concrete proof of the extent to which this problem is affecting the performance of their campaigns.

However, in both copy testing and typical ad tracking, the focus is on the performance of the individual execution. Many researchers provide advice on executional characteristics that will improve the odds that a commercial or ad will be successful in registering the brand among those who see it– with perhaps the most-often quoted piece of advice being to "show the brand early and often."

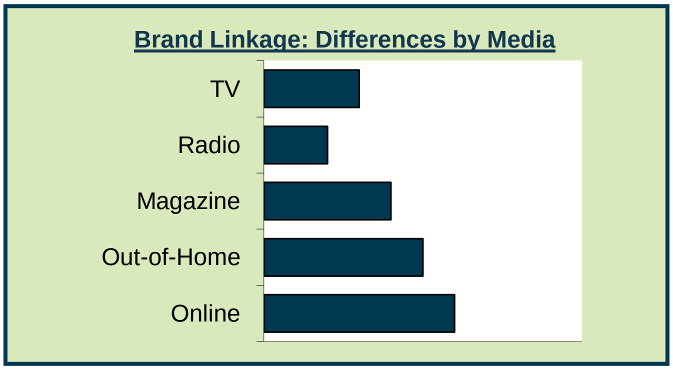
While it is certainly important to optimize specific ad executions, this is only half the battle. A broader examination of how *campaigns* work to build brand linkage provides strong indicators of how to leverage your way into better brand linkage. In fact, the solution lies as much with the campaign as with the individual ad execution. With a well-constructed multi-media campaign, we see how ads, within and across media, can actually help each other with brand identification.

Dimensionalizing the Problem

How big of a problem is brand misidentification in advertising? What are the differences by media type?

Let's start with TV– the most expensive advertising medium, and the cornerstone of most multimedia campaigns. If successful, TV commercials can significantly boost recognition for your campaign and your brand. But, if done poorly, they can be a nearly complete waste of money. For the average television commercial, 48% of those who engage with and remember the commercial are unable to link it with the correct brand. However, there is tremendous variation between the best and worst TV executions, with the best commercials achieving correct brand linkage of around 85% to 95% and the weakest getting only about 3% to 10% correct brand identification.

This wide range of brand identification also holds true across media types. Typically, broadcast media (TV and radio) have more difficulty achieving correct brand linkage than do other media. Online ads like banners and out-of-home ads such as billboards have the best chance of success at brand linkage, while magazine ads fall somewhere in between.



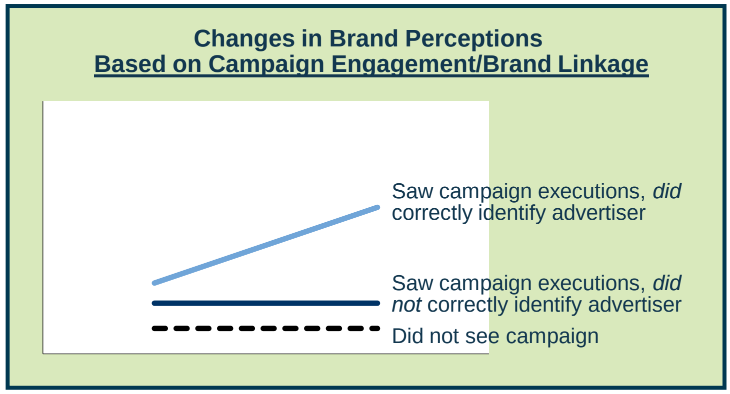
These differences make intuitive sense. TV commercials, and even more so radio commercials, are often structured in such a way that the identity of the advertiser is not obvious throughout the experience of engagement with the execution. Online banner ads and outdoor ads are designed to communicate quickly, and thus are most likely to display the brand in a prominent position. Many advertisers believe that consumers spend more time with magazine ads, and thus while the medium is– like outdoor– a static display with the brand present throughout, the brand is often not as dominant an element within the more cluttered visual composition of a magazine ad.

While overall norms suggest a wide range of performance, brand identification tends not to be a function of advertising spending. In fact, many low spending campaigns do well, and many high spending campaigns do poorly. The key is not in dollars spent, but in the structure of the individual commercials and ads, and the cohesiveness of the campaign as a whole– having multiple executions play off of each other to enhance brand recognition.

But does brand linkage really matter, anyway?
Is it possible that people who have engaged with an ad do actually gain meaningful communications about the brand, even if they can't remember the brand later?

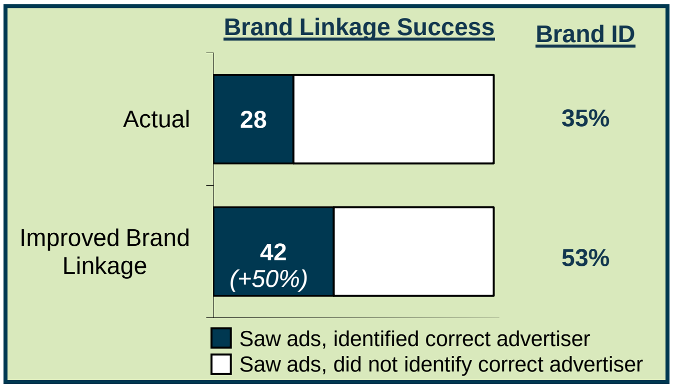
The Communicus system, which uses a longitudinal design to isolate the impact of advertising on a brand by interviewing subjects both before and after exposure to a campaign, proves otherwise. With our unique measurement approach, we can examine changes over time in attitudes and behavior exhibited by three groups of people:

a. Those who didn't see the campaign
b. Those who saw executions within the campaign, but are unable to name the brand being advertised
c. Those who saw executions within the campaign, and can correctly identify the brand



As illustrated in the example above, changes in brand perceptions and behavior among those in the second group (those who have non-branded advertising memories) usually mirror those in the first (no campaign engagement). Impact on brand dimensions typically only occurs among those with branded advertising memories. This clearly illustrates the importance of brand identification: If consumers don't associate the brand with your campaign, they might as well not have seen it at all.

Success at brand linkage can provide great leverage in achieving a positive return on your advertising investment. As shown in the accompanying chart, imagine you're an advertiser whose campaign is highly attention-getting, and that you've engaged 80% of your target, but only 35% of those who have seen it know it's yours; this translates to branded engagement of 28%. If you could improve the brand identification by fifty percent (to 53%), the result would be branded engagement of 42%. So, you'd be increasing the group among which you have a real chance of changing behavior by 50%– that's nearly 15% of your target, with no increase in ad spending.



The Multi-Level Solution

1. The Individual Commercial

Traditionally, advertisers place the most emphasis on improving individual executions to strengthen brand identification. Without doubt, each commercial needs to be strong in order to achieve success. Many research-ers, and others, have developed advice and counsel to help advertisers build brand linkage for individual, stand-alone executions.

As for us, our best advice is to weave the commercial inextricably around the brand– at no point should there be any doubt that the commercial is about your brand, and, ideally, no other brand could plausibly be sponsoring this commercial.

Some of the strategies that *don't tend* to work, and should be in general avoided, include the following:

- *Saving the brand for a 'reveal' at the end:* Unless you have a well-established campaign or campaign equity, or a brand benefit that you clearly own (from the consumer perspective), this is a high-risk strat-egy. Most of the time, consumers won't care enough about your commercial to wait to see what brand is sponsoring the message, nor will their long-term memory do the work necessary to attach the brand to the episodic commercial memory that may have already been formed within the first 25 seconds of the commercial.
- *A donut in the center of the commercial that features the brand*, but is disconnected from the story. Again, it's too much work for the consumer to go back and attach two otherwise unconnected memories–the story of your (presumably) highly entertaining commercial and the brand that has no real reason to be connected to that story.
- *Relying on a tagline* –these are much more meaningful to you and your ad agency than to the consumer. While there are a few taglines that we all remember, the vast majority never get beyond the good intentions of the advertiser.

2. The Overall Pool of Commercials

A surer way to success is to look beyond the individual commercial and to build brand-linked equities into your TV campaign as a whole. For example, equity can be built around a standard format, look, feel, character, musical theme, announcer, use of color, running joke, etc. When consumers see these easily recognizable elements, they immediately think,
"This must be another one of those commercials from Brand X."

Examples of TV campaigns that have built this kind of equity include the Apple iPod campaign in which each commercial and ad contains similar musical elements and graphic formats; the Verizon campaign with the 'Verizon people'; Clydesdales for Budweiser; the Geico gecko; singing mops and brooms for Swiffer; Brand Managers for Coke Zero.

We call this the BLE, or brand-linkage equity of a campaign. The creation of strong BLEs requires a significant investment in time, money and consistency. However, when you work to build your campaign's BLE, you are creating an asset that you'll be able to rely on for years to come. No longer will each new creative execution be starting from zero from a brand linkage standpoint; instead, each time you introduce a new execution, your target audience will immediately know that your brand is the sponsor.

3. The Multimedia Campaign

Optimizing individual executions is only part of the brand identification battle; and creating BLE across your TV campaign will still only get you partway there. The larger dynamic involves how the entire multimedia campaign is crafted. Because copy testing generally focuses on individual ads, and most in-market advertising tracking systems also do not examine entire multimedia campaigns, there is generally a more limited understanding of how different media can optimally work together to build strong BLE (brand linkage equity) for the campaign as a whole. In fact, how the overall multi-media campaign is crafted– with each medium supporting the others– can provide the key to success in brand linkage.

Imagine that you are starting with a single TV commercial that is launching a new campaign. Utilizing this one TV commercial without the support of any other TV executions or other media is likely to produce brand ID levels that are below norm, by about 10%. Then, hold media dollars constant, but instead use those dollars across two media, for example television and print. If the creative approach is consistent across the two media, you have the opportunity to significantly increase the overall branded engagement for your campaign.

In one typical example, brand linkage for the TV commercial was 35% among those within the target audience who saw just the TV commercial; however, among those who saw the TV commercial and at least one print ad within the campaign, brand linkage for the TV commercial jumped to 55%.

What happened? The print ad had stronger brand linkage than the TV commercial (as print often does). Among those who had seen and brand-linked the print, they were– upon seeing the TV commercial– more likely to associate the commercial with the correct brand, having 'learned' from the print ad that this was a campaign for that particular brand.

This happens all the time, with campaigns that have sufficiently strong BLE elements across media to actually remind consumers of an execution in one medium when they see an execution in another.

In general, the executions or media with stronger brand identification will help those that, on their own, have weaker ID. Based on the norms, this suggests that in a typical campaign– among those with cross-media engagement:

- Magazine, out-of-home, and online will help to support brand ID for *TV*
- TV and non-broadcast media (such as magazine, out of home and online), will help to support brand ID for *radio*
- Out-of-home and online ads will help to support brand ID for *magazine*

However, these positive effects will only occur if your campaign is created with strong cross-media synergies, or BLE potential. If your television and your print ads are shaped from the same strategic platforms but do not share creative elements, or if all that is shared is a tagline, your BLE potential is low, and you are unlikely to realize these benefits.

Some strategies that will help build BLE across media include the following:

- Use common creative devices of any sort across multiple media;
- Make sure the print/out-of-home/online executions are strong and are creatively aligned with the television executions;
- Produce multiple executions within the television campaign to facilitate the dynamic of: "I've seen a couple other TV commercials like this; I guess this one must be for Brand X too."

Some techniques that are less likely to produce successful cross-media BLE:

- Relying on the tagline as the only common link between executions
- Having a common strategy or message, but no creative elements that carry across media
- Simply lifting visuals from your TV commercial to use in your print/OOH/online ads, unless the specific visuals are associated with the BLE focus of the campaign

Identifying the BLE Potential of New Campaigns

You know you want to create strong BLE, but what if you have an entirely new campaign? Do you have a campaign strategy in which your BLE will build quickly, or are you going to still be struggling with brand ID several years or campaign cycles down the road?

Communicus studies have repeatedly shown how early predictions can identify the branding potential of new creative approaches, within as little as 30 days after campaign launch.

A Rapidly Building BLE for a New Consumer Package Goods Launch

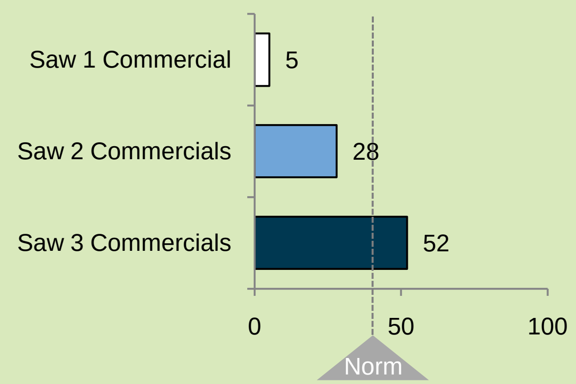
For one client introducing a completely new CPG brand, Communicus implemented a commALERT study to provide early feedback on the advertising, and to identify signs of whether the campaign had the BLE potential that the advertiser hoped for.

The initial pool included three commercials; while the advertiser also used magazine advertising, the same creative approach was not utilized in print. Communicus research provided an evaluation of the success of the three TV executions, and the print campaign, in relation to the media investment to date.

All three TV executions demonstrated strong engagement in relation to spending to-date. Brand linkage was, though, significantly below norm, even for a new product. With this information, the advertiser might have concluded that the campaign needed to be revised or scrapped.

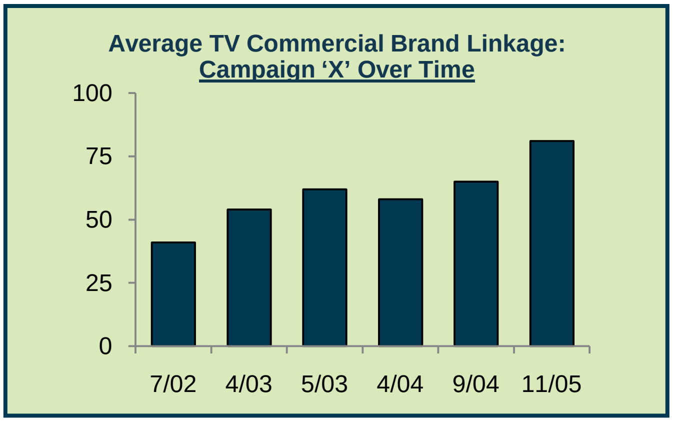
However, an additional Communicus analytic component– a hallmark of the commALERT analysis for new campaign– provided key information that challenged what would have been an incorrect conclusion. Specifically, among those within the target who had engaged with multiple TV executions, brand linkage was significantly stronger than among those who had, to date, engaged with only a single execution. In fact, among the small percentage of the target who had already seen all three TV executions, brand linkage was significantly above norm, characteristic of a campaign that would rapidly build BLE as more executions received more exposure.

Average Correct Brand ID Level by Number of Executions Seen: Brand X Launch Campaign



With this information, the advertiser continued the TV campaign, and revised the print component to incorporate key elements from the TV. Later, when the campaign was expanded to online and other non-traditional media, these executions also incorporated the elements from the TV that had been identified as the primary drivers of BLE.

By the end of the first year, all of the TV and print ads within the campaign were achieving brand linkage at significantly above normative levels. Six years later, this campaign has become a long-running success for the brand, with the character, the line and the creative approach achieving iconic status. Without the under $100,000 investment in the initial commALERT study, and the additional analysis that was provided by the experienced Communicus team, the campaign might have never made it beyond its first few months.



The Weakest Link in a Financial Services Campaign

As a second example, a financial services advertiser launched a new multimedia campaign including television, magazine, and online media. All executions shared a tagline, and all focused on safety and security as the key benefit. The magazine and online ads all shared a common creative approach, using a common look and similar recognizable headlines, whereas the television campaign involved stories in which the brand was revealed within the final seconds as the 'hero.'

Brand linkage for television was below norm, increasing slightly (but not to normative levels) among those who had seen all three TV executions. The magazine and online campaigns both had strong brand linkage, with each supporting the other. While there was strong overlap between people who saw/engaged with the magazine or online ads and the television commercials, neither magazine nor online built brand linkage for television among those with cross-media engagement.

The implication: given the investment in TV, it was critical to make some changes that would improve brand ID for this medium. Time and money alone would not build the BLE that this campaign required to generate a successful return on investment for the advertiser. At the very least, the TV needed stronger internal BLE, across executions. However, the best chance of success was to find ways to capitalize on the strong brand linkage of the magazine and online media to support brand linkage in TV.

Armed with this knowledge, the advertiser was able to modify the TV creative to be more strongly aligned with the media that had demonstrated stronger brand linkage. Ultimately, the campaign proved to be a long-running success, with those within the target audience immediately recognizing new executions as a part of the advertising campaign that they had come to know. The advertiser now owns the kind of BLE that generates real increases in ROI for the brand.

In summary, to improve the brand linkage of your advertising, don't just concentrate on the usual ways to strengthen individual commercials and ads. What you really need is BLE–brand linkage equities that will become true brand assets to help your advertising produce better return on investment for years to come. To build BLE, look beyond the individual execution, beyond each individual medium, all the way to the development of cohesive multimedia campaign in which all media work together to create unmistakable brand linkage for each execution.

With over fifty years of experience providing the most accurate and actionable feedback on multimedia advertising campaigns, Communicus can help identify and predict future BLE, thereby helping to ensure successful ROI from your media investment.

How is your advertising working?