



# Creativity is the Business Growth Engine

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Creative isn't a department — it's a discipline. Which means everyone at a company needs to know how to harness it as a tool for unlocking growth.

But until the CEO (and the board) recognises it as the connective tissue that must support the entire company, you will never see step-change disruption. Until, of course, you yourself get disrupted.

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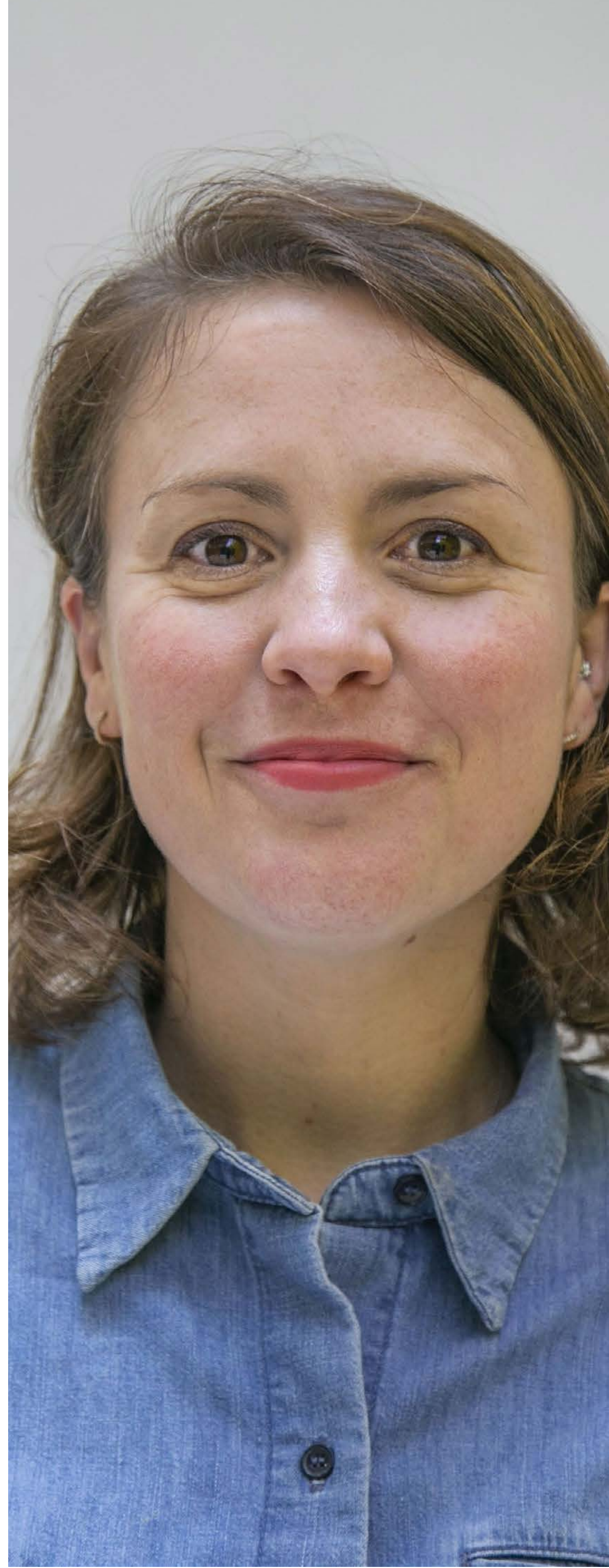
Andréa Mallard  
Chief Marketing Officer, Pinterest



# Introduction

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By Charlotte Williams  
VP Content, Cannes Lions



There is a brilliant quote later on in this report, in which creativity is described as a bit “woo-woo”. We all know what this means because we’ve been there – banging our heads against the wall as we try to impress upon senior managers and budget-holders that what we do drives the success of the businesses we all work for.

Without creativity, we are just a product. Without creativity, that product can't succeed.

The first in our series of original reports explores creativity as an engine for business growth. We look at the what, the why and the how of growth-driving creativity, framed by input from all corners of the global branded communications community.

# Why we believe that creativity is the business growth engine

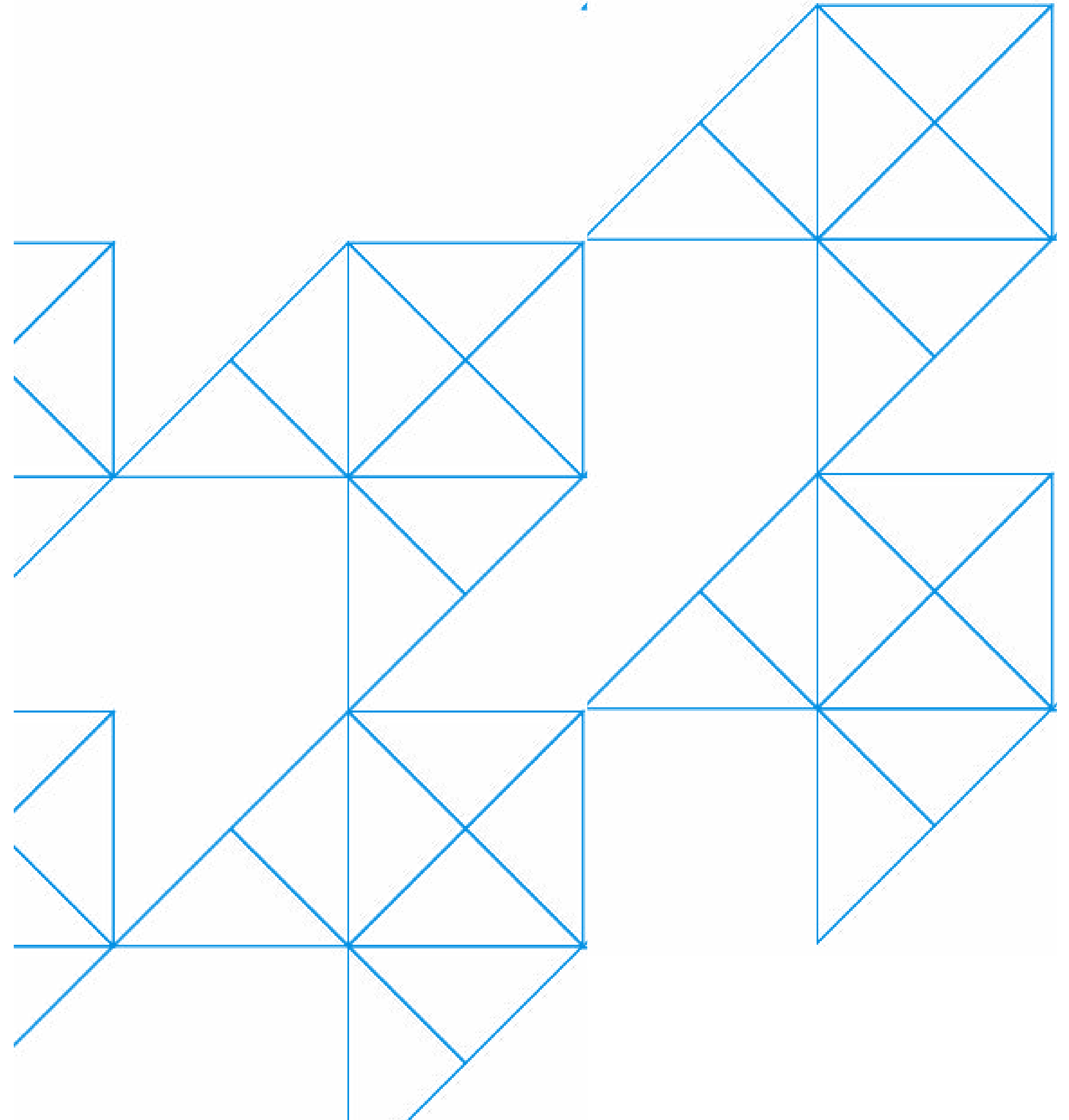
With global budget constraints and increasing justification required for every penny that a business spends, the concept that **Creativity is the Business Growth Engine** is pretty compelling.

Here at Cannes Lions, we believe wholeheartedly that creativity is the only way to drive non-incremental growth.

So many of you told us that we're in a sea of sameness. But that's not true of the brands that we love and respect: they do things a little differently.

Here's just one example of how their creative approach equates to business growth.

**Shortly after winning the Creative Brand of the Year Award at Cannes Lions 2019, Fernando Machado released [this tweet](#), accompanied by a photo headline of Burger King's incredible +9.8% stock price rise in Q2'19.**





While we were delighted to see this creative growth story, we weren't surprised. Back in 2017, we worked with McKinsey to examine the link between creativity and business performance.

They developed the **Awards Creativity Score (ACS)** for us, based closely on Lion-winning work. The ACS is backed up by some pretty complex analytics and has proved a great way to assess the breadth and consistency of individual entrants when it comes to creative performance.

Of those organisations whose ACS scores were in the top quartile, **67%** had above-average organic revenue growth and **70%** had above-average total return to shareholders (TRS).

That's probably worth another read, because it shows that high-performing creativity frequently results in bigger returns.

Despite clear evidence that creative initiatives drive growth, “some **23% of CEOs** do not feel that marketing is delivering on the growth agenda and **40% of CFOs** don't think marketing investments should be protected during a downturn” (McKinsey, 2019).



So – why the disconnect between what the data shows and what the CEOs and CFOs perceive? Our interviews highlighted three barriers:

### **1 – The language we use**

As one CMO we spoke to said, “Creativity can be seen as a bit woo-woo”. As most of you know, “woo-woo” doesn’t go down well in the boardroom. In order to build confidence and collaboration with the CEO and CFO, we need to use a vocabulary that is simple, consistent, impactful and resolutely aligned with business goals.

### **2 – The metrics we select**

To state the obvious, we can’t manage what we don’t measure. There’s no denying it: performance marketing produces immediate results. It’s easy to measure and, because of that, it’s seductive. Yes, we need these short-term results, but never to the detriment of long-term brand health. If your metrics are only about short-term sales uplift, impressions or clicks, then you’re missing a trick.

### **3 – The culture we create**

The value of creativity is obviously not lost on agencies, but in the wider business world it has some catching up to do. How can those department heads who buy creative work better embrace creative bravery, take mitigated risks and be made to see how great creative work can drive growth? We need a culture of creativity woven into the fabric of the businesses for whom we create campaigns.

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The ROI needs to be clearly evidenced. The question to be answered is, “What ranks as best?”. This is unlikely to be a single dimension, it will need to be a composite. If tied solely to one indicator, which may or may not be right, then it can limit creativity and the role for original thinking.

“We focus too closely on the data at the risk of ignoring the role for creative intuition, which might not find, immediately, the requisite research or statistical insight to support the intuition.”

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Ian Max Ewart  
Chief Marketing Officer, Acin

# What kind of creativity drives growth?

To answer this, we need look no further than the Cannes Lions Creative Effectiveness Lion, which recognises work that demonstrates creativity that drives business results.

All three of the winners featured in the following case studies have enjoyed non-incremental growth.

“  
Only a fool  
thinks a  
growing  
business isn't  
bathed in  
creativity.  
”

Dana Anderson  
Chief Transformation  
Officer, MediaLink



## Carrefour's Black Supermarket won the prestigious Grand Prix.

In a highly purpose-driven piece of work, the supermarket raised awareness of how European legislation meant that it was illegal for farmers to grow 97% of the world's cereals, vegetables and fruits.

Lobbying the EU to change the law, **Carrefour** gained huge support from the public and sourced "illegal" produce to sell in store ("Black Supermarket" being a play on "black market").

### So, what were the results?

- The public bought the illegal goods en masse (all **70 tons** that Carrefour could get hold of was sold).
- Instore traffic increased by **15%**.
- **83,000** people signed the petition. On April 19 2018, the EU ratified new regulation on organic agriculture, reauthorising sale and cultivation of farmers' seeds after **40 years** of prohibition.
- Brand love grew by **8%**.



## South American brand takes on the big-hitters

**Noblex**, an Argentine TV manufacturer, won a Gold in 2019 for **All-In Promo** which ran during the World Cup in 2018. The piece of work, which sought to achieve direct sales of at least 1,000 on 4K HD 55" TVs and to create a strong demand from retailers, used the emotional power of football to galvanise the nation.

The campaign offered those who bought a Noblex 4K TV a full refund in the event of Argentina not qualifying for the World Cup. It was an instant hit, with online TV stock selling out in hours. More than this, the conversation lasted four weeks – all from a piece of work that featured just two paid tweets.

### And the results?

- The campaign generated **US\$11 million** in turnover for **5,000 TVs** sold online.
- The inventory of B2B Noblex TVs for Q1 2018 sold out. (As a reference, in 2016 40% of the inventory had been sold).
- Retailer demand of Noblex products increased by **18%** after the campaign.
- The ROI was **US\$12** for every **US\$1** invested in advertising.
- Manufacturer (Grupo Newsan) hit a new sales record: **one million TV units** sold as of the campaign, reaching a market share of **25%**. (VS 12% of previous year).



## Detergent brand 'owns' every ad

**Tide**, the detergent brand owned by P&G, went off-piste at the 2018 Super Bowl, where brands invest crazy amounts each year. Tide wanted to stand out from all the other advertisers, so they set out to 'own' the other ads. Working with Saatchi & Saatchi, Tide found something all ads have in common: clean clothes.

If the characters in an ad are wearing clean clothes, then that, they reasoned, must make it a Tide ad. After first setting up the idea by using Stranger Things actor David Harbour to invite the TV audience to keep their eyes open for the next #TideAd, the brand stole the moment. Even two years on, Tide is still reaping the rewards.

### What were the results?

- Sales of Tide Ultra Oxi, the product featured, increased 35% in the two weeks after the game.
- In a year, household penetration of just this one Tide product increased from **virtually nothing to 5%**, which is almost as big as some of its competitors.
- **It's a Tide Ad** became part of culture. It has spawned thousands of memes, countless tweets, and perhaps most tellingly, it hasn't been forgotten. During Super Bowl LIII, #TideAd was used by the media and consumers, even though Tide did not run a commercial during the game.

Expert Commentary:  
Brand Leader

# How Creativity is the Business Growth Engine



Gael de Talhouet  
Vice President  
Brand Building at  
Essity

## Marketing is Gardening

There is one major commonality: growth. If your garden is beautiful but does not grow, it will wither. If your trees bear fruit but do not grow, the harvest will diminish.

Growth is what keeps brands alive. As much as a gardener will not thrive in reducing watering to be more efficient, no company will prosper in cost-saving. I am not saying we should not be mindful of resources, I am just showing that life comes first and efficiency second.

As in gardening, if you want to grow your business, options are limited: you need a bigger garden (if you can extend the size), you need more trees (if they have room to grow), you need bigger fruits (if the trees hold) or fruits more often (if you find a way).

There you go: there is no such thing as “natural” growth. There is no such thing as “easy” growth. It needs a vision, expert knowledge, hard work, patience and experimentation. Reducing water will reduce growth; adding chemicals creates an illusion of short-term yield in neither a sustainable nor a healthy way.

This is more than a growth mindset, this is a growth obsession. It is a constant attention to go beyond “I need to finish my project”, “I need to prepare my meeting”, “I need to look at SG&A”. Every company in the world completes projects, has successful meetings and saves costs. This will lead you nowhere and certainly nowhere better than your competitors.

Growth requires a continuous mindset change at all levels of the organisation. I had a concrete example recently: one of our digital managers told me that she was experimenting with new online retailers to grow sales. The total generated sales were about 800 euros. Then she was told by her manager to stop because the action was not profitable.

She should have been told: “Nice job, thanks for having tried something new. What can you do to drive it to 8,000 euros then to 80,000 euros sales? Then and only then, start thinking about how to improve profitability when the business reaches 800,000 euros.” We plant a twig and expect a pumpkin in two weeks.



Another example: over the past three years, Essity has been collecting creative awards at Cannes Lions, thanks to the great teamwork of our marketing teams, communication agency AMV BBDO and media agency Zenith Optimedia. In three years, we have evolved from a low-profile company with a new name into a benchmark for great brand-building and creative communication, becoming a client and employer of choice.

Talented people want to join Essity, work on our accounts and contribute to growth. Some of the world's most famous companies invite our teams to speak and share our recipe for success. Other brands' teams wake up every morning thriving to do the same ("if they can do it, so can I").

I bumped into one of our senior executives during a fire drill (yes, fire drills can also be networking opportunities), and after sharing all of the above, the question I got was: "Yes, but the only thing I want to know is our return on investment!".

OK, Mr Bean, thanks for questioning my inherent capability as a marketer to figure out that eventually a company needs to be profitable. Thanks also for the lame and over-usage of the corporate disqualifier, "Show me the business case".

I have created my own company. I have worked in start-ups. I have worked with incubators, VCs and Business Angels. If I have learnt anything in the entrepreneur world, it's this: no one wins with a business case. No company has succeeded because they had a great business case.

Companies succeed because they start doing things in a way that others do not (a creative way), then make it grow (scale), then they make it profitable. The only obsession that leads to success is, "What can I do that my competitors do not?" and, "How big can I grow it?".

In nature like in business, growth is life. The only way to grow is to build an organisation which is capable of doing what competitors cannot do. This is called creativity. Every minute spent on other topics is a minute spent doing what everyone else is already doing.

Superior growth comes from doing what others do not do. Superior growth comes from having all marketers become Growth Officers, another name for Courageous and Creative Gardeners.





"The CMO agenda is the business growth agenda. Which means we need to drive impact, top line acceleration and return on investment."

Debora Koyama  
Chief Marketing Officer,  
Europe, Mondelez  
International

Expert Commentary:  
The Consumer Viewpoint

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# Creativity Investment Drives Growth



Joe McDonnell,  
Head of Insight, WGSN

WGSN is the world's trend forecasting authority, decoding the future to define what's next so that people can make smarter decisions, today.

It's well known that the retail landscape is increasingly fragmented.

Under attack from direct-to-consumer brands and the emergence of the 'recommerce market' – which is now the fastest-growing category in fashion retail – the retail sector also has to contend with the consumer embracing 'the end of more' trend, which is deterring them from purchasing new products. No wonder veteran retailers are wondering which products to invest in.

In a sea of buzzwords and far-fetched tech deployments, brands that are successfully future-proofing themselves against a shifting consumer base are leveraging creativity to look beyond traditional brand identity, packaging and comms, and instead are capitalising on the entire customer experience and looking for ways to connect with consumers at every stage of the journey.

**Pioneering brands are moving beyond prioritising path-to-purchase and are instead leveraging the flexibility and creativity of UX design to create unique digital narratives, creating a path-to-people.**

They are allowing consumers to control their own purchase journey, focusing on unique user experience rather than speed.

Gucci, for example, built an animated microsite filled with poetry and snakes for the launch of its Zumi bag. Maison Cleo has taken things a step further by only opening its ecommerce shop every Wednesday to keep the mother and daughter duo who run the shop stress-free. Spotify used its wealth of listening data to create a bespoke webpage for each user displaying simple personalised listening statistics in a beautifully-designed but novel way. This stimulating use of data saw 'My Year in Spotify' shares proliferate in December with socially optimised downloadable assets.

Creativity doesn't have to revolve around digital innovation. London-based streetwear retailer Palace adopts a unique tone of voice that criticises shoppers for

even being interested in products. This contrary marketing strategy sees fans turn scathing product descriptions into memes, extending the life of a traditional product page.

Disruption will continue across every sector, and as consumer mindsets begin to adapt to a post-purchase, 'end of more' mentality, brands must leverage creativity to build a connection when price, speed and convenience are no longer consumers' only consideration.

The path-to-people and emotional stakeholders will make the difference between growth and stagnation. Creativity is the engine that will propel both forward – it's time to step on the gas.

Expert Commentary:  
The Strategy

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# Why is it So Hard to Sell in Creativity?



**Lucy Aitken**  
Managing Editor –  
Case Studies, WARC

WARC is the global authority on marketing effectiveness, enabling marketers to make decisions through evidence-based insight and inspiration.

## Creativity is big business

So why is creativity so hard to sell in a marketing context?

Anyone who follows the research – as we at WARC do – will have seen study after study show the power of creativity in advertising. A landmark study from Data2Decisions found that creativity was the second biggest driver of advertising profitability, and the top driver that advertisers could actually control (the biggest influence being the size of the brand and the market it is in).

And why is that? Because creativity can get attention. It can get people talking and create fame. It can drive emotional response, build memory structures and create what has been termed ‘mental availability’. These are some of the fundamentals of building a brand that can command a price premium.

But creativity has not been a priority for many brands over the past decade. Big data, ad tech, martech, UX, CX – the marketing world has been distracted by whole new disciplines and opportunities. Creativity – and the case for investment in it – has arguably taken a back seat.

Perhaps in 2020 we’re seeing a change of emphasis. In WARC’s Marketer’s Toolkit 2020 survey, 52% of the clients and agency executives we polled agreed that marketers had over-invested in tech at the expense of creativity. Just 24% disagreed.

That backs up research by Forrester in 2019 which suggested the marketing industry needed to move \$19 billion out of technology and into creativity to spark growth.

One of the reasons for this shift was articulated by Brent Smart, CMO of Australian insurance group IAG, last year. Tech, he told a conference, was no longer a differentiator. When everyone is using the same group of CX and martech platforms, he said, the best way to stand out is to be creative.

So, can we expect a new era of creativity? Not necessarily. Several challenges remain:

### **1. Applying the 'right' creativity**

We're starting to have a much better idea of what creativity needs to deliver if it is to drive growth. Fundamentally, creativity needs to be in market long enough to have an impact. Studies suggest the timeframe is about six months. But a shift toward short-term strategies has, according to researchers like Peter Field, led to a rise of 'disposable creativity' not in market long enough to really work.

Second, marketers need to plan for recognition – in other words, if you assume you will only gain a small degree of attention, how can you maximise the chances of a consumer associating an ad with your brand?

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Have we forgotten concepts such as 'distinctive brand assets' (recognisable signs, symbols or motifs) or 'fluent devices' (recognisable characters, storylines, constructs)? Research group System 1, which coined the term 'fluent device', argues that this type of advertising is in decline.

### **2. Applying creativity to all marketing, not just advertising**

Burger King has arguably pioneered a new model. Its series of highly creative PR stunts have shown how creativity can deliver new experiences (think 'Whopper Detour'), new products (think 'McWhopper') or find new media opportunities (think 'Google Home of the Whopper').

It's undoubtedly eye-catching, and according to Burger King it's driving growth. Not everyone agrees this is the best approach – the big question is whether there is enough consistency between them to meet the 'long-term creativity'. Watch this debate in 2020, as it's key to the future of commercial creativity.

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### **3. Turning creativity into the language of finance**

As effectiveness expert Les Binet recently told WARC: "We have to help CFOs to understand that some marketing activity gives you an immediate short-term delivery of sales, while other activity increases the ability to sell through all channels and increases the long-term flow of money into the company. Once you reframe it in that language, then I think you can start to have a grown-up conversation."

Creativity is the Business Growth Engine

## The Takeaways

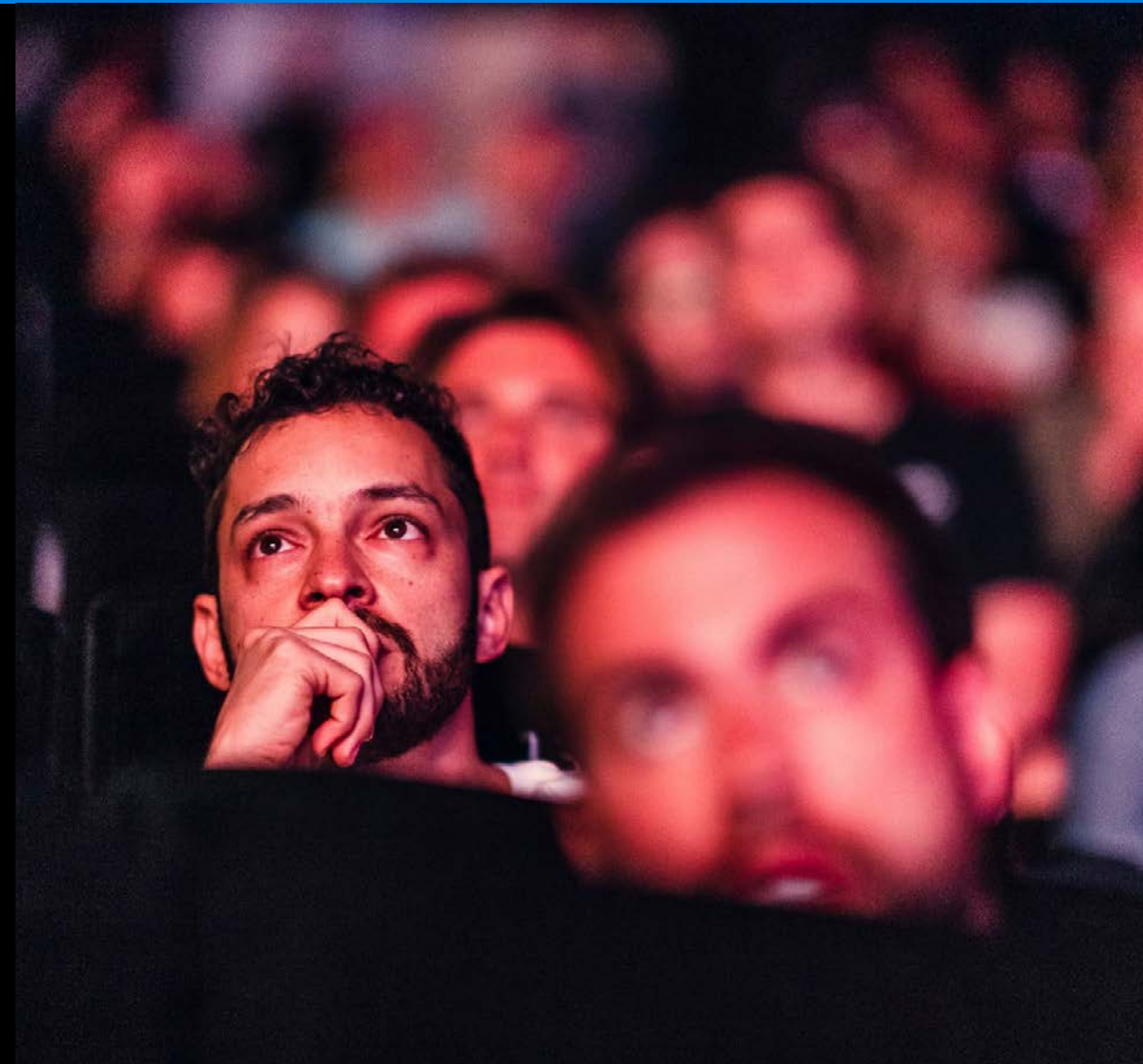


02

Growth increasingly comes from differentiation: of product, service, design, communications and experience

01

Marketers must be obsessed with delivering enterprise-wide growth



03

Creativity is a powerful driver of differentiation – attention-grabbing, risk-taking creativity

04

To be really be effective, consistency and reiteration (fluent devices) are key

05

As people adopt an 'end of more' mentality (where price, speed and convenience matter less), interactions must act as a 'path-to-people' and must demonstrate personality beyond product



06

Creativity requires time in market (longer than six months) to allow for fluent devices to imbed in memory



07

When creativity is applied in this way, it improves brand loyalty which in turn allows for greater pricing power

08

Marketers **must** describe the impact of creativity on long and short-term growth in language used at board-level