

Second Edition, 2023

Burger King

The Creative Debrief

Insights, intelligence, Cannes Lions talks, data and commentary into this multi-Lion-winning brand

 **LIONS** | **THE WORK**



The Whopper DAY 35

THE BEAUTY OF NO ARTIFICIAL PRESERVATIVES



From a kingdom to a fandom

Lessons in creativity and effectiveness from the three-time recipient of Cannes Lions Creative Brand of the Year

YOUR WAY, WAY BETTER | BURGER KING

2021



JONES KNOWLES RITCHIE, NEW YORK

GOLD DESIGN LIONS

Burger King has been Cannes Lions Creative Brand of the Year since 2019. The fast food brand has won an impressive 194 Lions since 2014, including ten Grands Prix, two Titanium Lions and 39 Gold Lions.

Driven by a culture of creativity that promotes bravery, humility and a willingness to adapt, Burger King has excelled in producing bold work that wins attention, drives footfall and steals market share from rival fast food brands. Over the years, the challenger brand has, in its own words, become less of a kingdom and more of a fandom, connecting with its audience through participation and playfulness.

Creativity at Burger King extends beyond advertising into areas such as packaging, staff uniforms and restaurant design. In 2021, it rebranded to reflect its preservative-free products, with the aim of uncovering the essence of the brand and translating it into every design element. Its stripped-down new identity earned 1.1 billion impressions in the first five days and Burger King's parent company claims its stock price jumped by 7.8%.

This report showcases exclusive data from Lions, as well as multi-Lion-winning ideas that break category convention. Learn how to cut through with authentic, unfiltered craft. Discover how risk can reap reward within gaming environments. Use a challenger status as an opportunity to flaunt your personality. And invest in sharable creative ideas.



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JONES KNOWLES RITCHIE, NEW YORK

GOLD DESIGN LIONS

“There’s a value to simplicity and trying to take away the layers and complexities that feel like they’re speaking to a trend or to the category. A big part of this exercise was stripping things away to get back to our essence.”

Sara Hyman

Chief Growth Officer, Jones Knowles Ritchie, New York

Watch the Cannes Lions talk: [HOW TO BE YOURSELF \(BUT WAY BETTER\)](#)

Lessons from Burger King



Four takeaways from this Creative Debrief

1

Keep it real

Raw, unpolished visuals have marked Burger King's pivot to a 'clean' and preservative-free menu. Learn how authentic, honest craft can help your brand relate to consumers.

2

Engage gamers

Hijacks, hacks and high jinks are Burger King's speciality when appealing to gamers. Consider how you can integrate within gaming environments and find smart ways to connect back to your brand.

3

Be a bold challenger

Not the biggest player in your sector? Learn from Burger King about how to use your challenger status to your advantage. Recognise how far to push it, and what tone to take.

4

Multiply impact

Burger King multiplies its impact by creating work that can dominate social media and generate PR. Embed assets that can be easily shared into your campaigns to kick-start them and organically lengthen their duration.



1

Keep it real

A return to rawness



In recent years, Burger King has committed to removing all artificial colours, flavours and preservatives from its menus. This pivot has been reflected in raw, unfiltered marketing materials that break from category convention.

For instance, Burger King promoted its first preservative-free Whopper with unrefined images of a decaying hamburger. [‘The Moldy Whopper’](#) took 9 Lions, including the 2021 Grand Prix in Outdoor. It returned in 2022 to take Gold in the Creative Effectiveness Lions.

And in Mexico, Burger King hired photographers to capture its consumers in a way that matched the purity of its new menu. Candid black and white photographs of real people enjoying Burger King food sparked a sales increase of 36.7% and took three Gold Lions.

Nils Leonard, Founder, Uncommon Studio, and Jury President of the Industry Craft Lions 2022, said: “This completely reinvents the category. It had a Warhol-esque truth to it.”

NONARTIFICIAL MEXICO

NONARTIFICIAL MEXICO | BURGER KING

2022



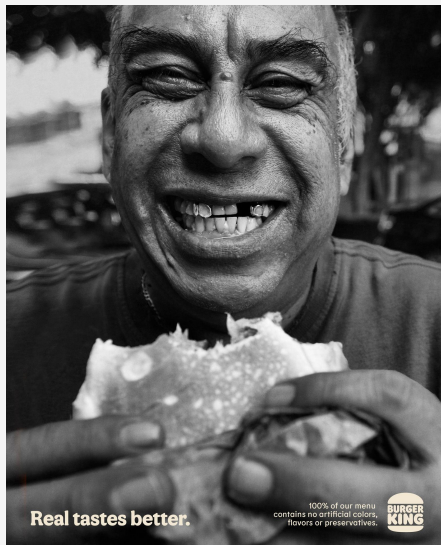
WE BELIEVERS, NEW YORK

GOLD INDUSTRY CRAFT LIONS

‘Nonartificial Mexico’: “Some people even stole the posters”

NONARTIFICIAL MEXICO | BURGER KING

2022



WE BELIEVERS, NEW YORK

GOLD INDUSTRY CRAFT LIONS

Gustavo Lauria, CCO & Co-Founder, We Believers, explains how pure, lo-fi black and white images captured the true spirit of Mexico City



What was the brief?

The clean menu is a core brief for Burger King. It's cleaning the whole menu of artificial ingredients, in every market. After 'Moldy Whopper,' it was more challenging to come up with ideas as we'd set the bar so high.

What sparked this idea?

We decided to move the focus from the product to the people. Most brands don't reflect people as they are. If we could connect with people in a real way, they would see that Burger King is an honest brand and might be more open to our messaging. Instead of doing a global, product-centric campaign that worked in every market, we did the opposite; create something tailor-made for Mexicans that could impact sales in Mexico.

How did you ensure that the images were authentic?

This was more of an experiment than a typical advertising campaign. We chose photographers who had never worked in advertising; photojournalists who don't pre-produce their work or cast people. Given the freedom to do what they wanted, they went to small neighbourhoods that were unchartered by brands.

We ended up with an insane amount of material, all of it authentic. There were pictures of men smiling with one tooth and dirty hands from working. No fast food brand would ever show their burger next to dirty hands. But that's how real people live and consume.

How It Got Made

‘Nonartificial Mexico’: “Some people even stole the posters”

How did people react to the images?

We exhibited the pictures in The Museum Archive of Photography in Mexico City. People of all ages and social levels visited the exhibition, every day of the week. Some people were in tears because they related to the pictures. And some people even stole the posters, which is good proof that they resonated.

What lesson would you take from this?

All work should be this authentic. This brand is about real people; we’re the challengers. Burger King should continue to add this level of realism, nuanced for different markets.



NONARTIFICIAL MEXICO | BURGER KING

2022



WE BELIEVERS, NEW YORK

GOLD INDUSTRY CRAFT LIONS

NONARTIFICIAL MEXICO

'The Moldy Whopper': A creative curveball



Burger King took a product benefit – an absence of artificial preservatives – and proved it to the world in all its blue, decomposing glory.

Images of pristine burgers were replaced with photos of a gradually rotting Whopper, boosting sales by 14% and increasing awareness of Burger King's clean ingredients by 26%.

TAKEAWAY: Go against airbrushed category convention with a striking visual. This radically raw representation made Burger King's non-artificial ingredients difficult to ignore.

THE MOLDYWHOPPER

THE MOLDY WHOPPER | BURGER KING

2020



BURGER KING, MIAMI

GRAND PRIX OUTDOOR LIONS



“Great brands own visuals in a manner which gives them an advantage and reinforces why people come to them in the first place. And ‘Moldy Whopper’ will create a memory structure. I don’t think you can unsee it.”

Sameer Satpathy

Divisional Chief Executive – Personal Care, ITC

Juror, Creative Effectiveness Lions, 2022



2

Engage gamers



Hack it with humour

Gaming will be worth \$321bn by 2026, according to PwC, with 75% of that being social or casual gamers. Gaming is bigger than Hollywood and the music industry combined, with top games generating more revenue than the biggest blockbuster movies.

Burger King was the biggest adopter of gaming in all 2022 Lion entrants, with 47 gaming-related submissions. Many of these involved hacks and hijacks, helping the brand to integrate into virtual worlds.

For instance, Burger King integrated with the hotly anticipated game Red Dead Redemption 2 by encouraging players to hunt down the ingredients for a Whopper. It used image recognition to unlock coupons and earned 863m media impressions.

CRAFT A WESTERN WHOPPER

CRAFT A WESTERN WHOPPER | BURGER KING

2019



INGO, STOCKHOLM

BRONZE DIRECT LIONS

'Stevenage Challenge': Underdogs unite



By sponsoring Stevenage FC, an underdog UK football team at the bottom of the league, Burger King was able to infiltrate video game FIFA 20. Within the game, it encouraged fans to sign up superstar footballers including Lionel Messi in return for real-world coupons.

With time and trust in the gaming community to get behind the idea, it paid dividends, as Burger King logos graced Stevenage shirts in real life and in FIFA 20. It achieved more than 2.5m in earned media and more than 250,000 global impressions.

TAKEAWAY: Play with the boundary between real and virtual worlds. Burger King identified a hack, using real-life sponsorship to create a virtual impact. In turn, it delivered value back to fans via digital couponing for use in-store.

STEVENAGE CHALLENGE | BURGER KING

2020



DAVID, MADRID

GRAND PRIX DIRECT LIONS

STEVENAGE CHALLENGE

‘Stevenage Challenge’: “We stopped giving away free burgers or fries after two weeks, but people kept playing”

STEVENAGE CHALLENGE | BURGER KING

2020



DAVID, MADRID

GRAND PRIX DIRECT LIONS

Pancho Cassis, Global Chief Creative Officer & Partner, DAVID, reveals how a loophole was critical to the craft of triple Grand Prix winner ‘Stevenage Challenge’



How did you come up with the idea?

It was part of an ongoing brief with Burger King about making relevant work for the gaming community. Sponsoring games and in-game advertising is super expensive, but the team found a loophole: most of these games recreate reality to the last detail. So if you change something in reality, it will also change in the game.

What was special about this underdog team?

We had a connection with Stevenage. There’s actually a Burger King just down the road from the Stevenage stadium where people go before or after the game.

How did you balance the real and virtual worlds?

We only did the campaign in the real world. We gave people challenges on social media and they caught on immediately. I think brands and agencies underestimate the ability of people to get complicated ideas.

Why do you think this worked?

The brand was not invasive. We just showed our underdog side, and when people got it they loved it. Part of being fun is laughing at ourselves, and there’s a self-deprecation in many of our ideas that people connect with.

What did you learn?

To have patience. Gaming ideas develop at a different pace and you need to be patient to reach people. But the ideas last longer because people keep playing the games and they keep coming back. It’s not about the promotion anymore; we stopped giving away free burgers or fries after two weeks. But people kept playing, sharing and using the team.

'Burger Glitch': Multi-channel mischief



Burger King in Brazil hid glitches in its mobile app, billboards and even inside real burgers. Users could earn discounts by identifying these defects, leading to a record number of app downloads in Brazil.

By turning a pain point into a positive for gamers, Burger King found a memorable way to show that it understands its audience. It earned 144m impressions and generated 60,000 sales with glitched coupons.

TAKEAWAY: Share a joke. 'Burger Glitch' used humour to relate to the gaming community, while embedding rewards across multiple channels.

BURGER GLITCH

BURGER GLITCH | BURGER KING

2022



DAVID, SÃO PAULO

GOLD MEDIA LIONS



'The King of Stream': Experiment for exposure

Every time donors send money to a streamer on Twitch, a bot can voice a message for them during gameplay.

Burger King masterminded a clever hack, donating the precise amount of its promotions with a few enticing words. By letting the bots advertise on its behalf, it reached 400,000 with a spend of just \$309.

TAKEAWAY: Do your research. This low-cost hijack shows the benefit of spending time on new platforms to identify an appropriate way for your brand to turn up.

THE KING OF STREAM

THE KING OF STREAM | BURGER KING

2021



DAVID, MADRID

SILVER RADIO & AUDIO LIONS



3

Be a bold challenger



YOUR WAY, WAY BETTER | BURGER KING

2021



JONES KNOWLES RITCHIE, NEW YORK

GOLD DESIGN LIONS

“We created four design principles: Mouthwatering, Playfully Irreverent, Big & Bold, and Authentically True. Burger King has the permission to have a lot of swagger and be more playful than some of its competitors. Because it's a challenger brand, it can have this audacity and gravitas.”

Lisa Smith

Executive Creative Director, Jones Knowles Ritchie

Watch the Cannes Lions talk: [HOW TO BE YOURSELF \(BUT WAY BETTER\)](#)

Burger King: The bold challenger



Wear your challenger status with confidence – and use it your advantage

While McDonald's is one of the largest and most well-known fast-food chains in the world, with more than 40,000 restaurants, Burger King is one of its closest competitors, with more than 19,000. Many of Burger King's most successful pieces of work have leaned into its challenger status, often showing a playful irreverence towards McDonald's. The key to this success is a thorough understanding of and confidence in its brand DNA.

Challenger brands often lack the same level of resources their competitors enjoy, meaning they can often risk having a smaller share of voice. But what they lack in resources, they often make up for in community outreach.

By deploying app-based promotions and engaging with social media comments, Burger King has been able to collect direct feedback that helps it make consumer-centric decisions. For instance, ['The Impossible Combo'](#), a hack that married a Burger King Whopper with McDonald's fries, was a consumer-led idea, born out of social media engagement.

THE IMPOSSIBLE COMBO | BURGER KING

2022



DAVID, SÃO PAULO

SILVER MEDIA LIONS

'The Whopper Detour': Disrupt the customer journey



Burger King wanted to drive mobile app downloads despite being heavily outspent by market leader McDonald's. This initiative geo-fenced outlets of McDonald's, rewarding customers who downloaded the Burger King app and ordered from outside these stores.

It achieved a redemption rate of 33%, with 75% of people redeeming the promotion having never used the app before. The app rose to number one on both IOS and Android.

TAKEAWAY: Play on your competitors' strengths. Burger King leveraged the ubiquity of McDonald's restaurants by using geo-fencing technology in an unexpected way.

THE WHOPPER DETOUR | BURGER KING

2021



FCB, NEW YORK

GOLD CREATIVE EFFECTIVENESS LIONS

Watch the talk: [BEHIND THE WHOPPER DETOUR BY BURGER KING](#)



THE WHOPPER DETOUR | BURGER KING

2021



FCB, NEW YORK

GOLD CREATIVE EFFECTIVENESS LIONS

“Burger King has a personality rooted in the challenger mentality. And it’s not only about challenging the competition but knowing who it is; it’s very comfortable in its own skin. This is a smart use of technology as an enabler.”

Isaac Mizrahi
Co-President, CEO, Alma, United States
Juror, Creative Effectiveness Lions, 2021

Clown vs Crown



These four pieces of work show how Burger King's rivalry with McDonald's plays out in creative, audacious work that pokes fun at its biggest competitor.

2018

LOLA MULLENLOWE, MADRID



GOLD DIRECT LIONS

In a nod to the McDonald's mascot, Burger King enjoys capitalising on the creepiness of clowns. Here, it invited people to turn up as clowns on Halloween to claim a free Whopper in-store. More than 110,000 clowns spooked the store, leading to a sales increase of 15%.

[Scary Clown Night](#)

2019

DAVID, SÃO PAULO



GOLD DIRECT LIONS

What do you do when your competitor outpends you in media 4:1? Hack its ads. An AR feature on the Burger King app flame-grilled every McDonald's ad and changed it into one for Burger King. Each time, it generated a coupon for a free Whopper, helping to achieve a 56.4% in-app sales increase.

[Burn That Ad](#)

2022

DAVID, SÃO PAULO



SILVER MEDIA LIONS

For years, Burger King had been fielding the same comment: that a BK Whopper with a side of McFries would be the ultimate combination. Rather than trying to convince its customers otherwise, it made the order possible by partnering with delivery app Rappi. The Impossible Whopper sold out in just 27 minutes.

[The Impossible Combo](#)

2022

PUBLICIS, MONTREAL



BRONZE OUTDOOR LIONS

Subtle but effective, this piece repurposed iconic McDonald's imagery using 3D illustration. Its message? Burger King food is so good, even its competitors are ordering it for home delivery.

[Burger King - Home Delivery](#)



4

The multiplier effect



Rule social and PR

Burger King reaches its audience through work that relies heavily on social and PR. It invests in powerful ideas such as [‘Google Home of the Whopper’](#) that trigger conversation and multiply a media plan.

Participation also enables Burger King to extend its reach. Since 2012, almost **one-fifth** of Burger King’s Lions have been awarded in the **Direct Lions**, which celebrate targeted and response-driven creativity.

For example, innovative eCommerce activations, such as [‘Duet Delivery’](#), allow consumers to place an order through direct engagement with the brand on social media. This interactive experience used TikTok’s Duet feature to reinvent the path to purchase, earning Burger King 521,000 new TikTok followers.

HOME OF THE WHOPPER | BURGER KING

2017



DAVID, MIAMI

GRAND PRIX DIRECT LIONS

DUET DELIVERY | BURGER KING

2022



DAVID, SÃO PAULO

BRONZE DIRECT LIONS

'Google Home of the Whopper': Voice-activated views



Burger King spotted an emerging behaviour – people keeping Google Home devices near TVs – and brought a hackable stunt into viewers' living rooms. It aired a TV spot that ended with the question: "Ok Google, what is in the Whopper Burger?" triggering thousands of devices to start listing ingredients from the Whopper's Wikipedia page.

Within 48 hours, the spot had attracted 10m organic online views, earned 9.3bn global impressions and triggered a 500% increase in brand mentions.

TAKEOUT: Keep tabs on how new technological devices and platforms are integrating with existing channels. That integration could reveal a new way for your brand to communicate with its audience.

[GOOGLE HOME OF THE WHOPPER](#)

GOOGLE HOME OF THE WHOPPER | BURGER KING

2017



DAVID, MIAMI

GRAND PRIX DIRECT LIONS

'Burjer Kinj or Burgher Kingh?': Speak the local language



To help assert its brand among intensifying local competitors, Burger King in Saudi Arabia seized on a talking point around its brand: how to pronounce the word 'King' in a language that lacked the letter 'G'.

Turning this linguistic challenge into an opportunity for engagement, it proposed a new Arabic letter to settle the dispute, integrating the addition into its logo.

TAKEOUT: **Joining the conversation with humility and a sense of humour pays off.** This social-first initiative lifted Burger King followers by 25% and helped to boost in-store sales by 4.2%.

[BURJER KINJ OR BURGHER KINGH?](#)

BURJER KINJ OR BURGHER KINGH? | BURGER KING

2020



WUNDERMAN THOMPSON, RIYADH

SILVER SOCIAL & INFLUENCER LIONS

Even faster food



Online food delivery revenue is worth \$150bn, according to McKinsey. This collection shows how Burger King has used social channels to reinvent the path to purchase.

2018

Emoji Whopper

Amidst debate around which tech firm had the best burger emoji, Burger King found an opportunity to stress its 'Have it Your Way' messaging. It invited Instagrammers to upload a Story with their icon of choice and receive a coupon to redeem a real version in-store. The initiative achieved a social reach of 4.3m.

DAVID, MIAMI



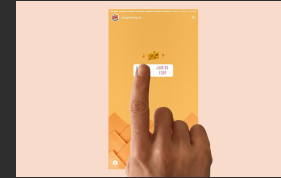
BRONZE MOBILE LIONS

2018

Stories Ordering

By swiping through polls on Burger King's Instagram Stories, people could customise a Whopper and receive a code to collect their free creation. This personalised approach led to 30,000 Whopper orders while prompting 270,000 brand interactions and boosting Burger King's followers by 10%.

LOLA MULLENLOWE, MADRID



SHORTLISTED MOBILE LIONS

2022

Duet Delivery

TikTok's Duet feature was at the heart of this interactive experience, which enabled users to place an order by dueting with a Burger King server. Buyers then received a private message from the fast food chain to proceed, leading to more than 500 orders per hour.

DAVID, SÃO PAULO

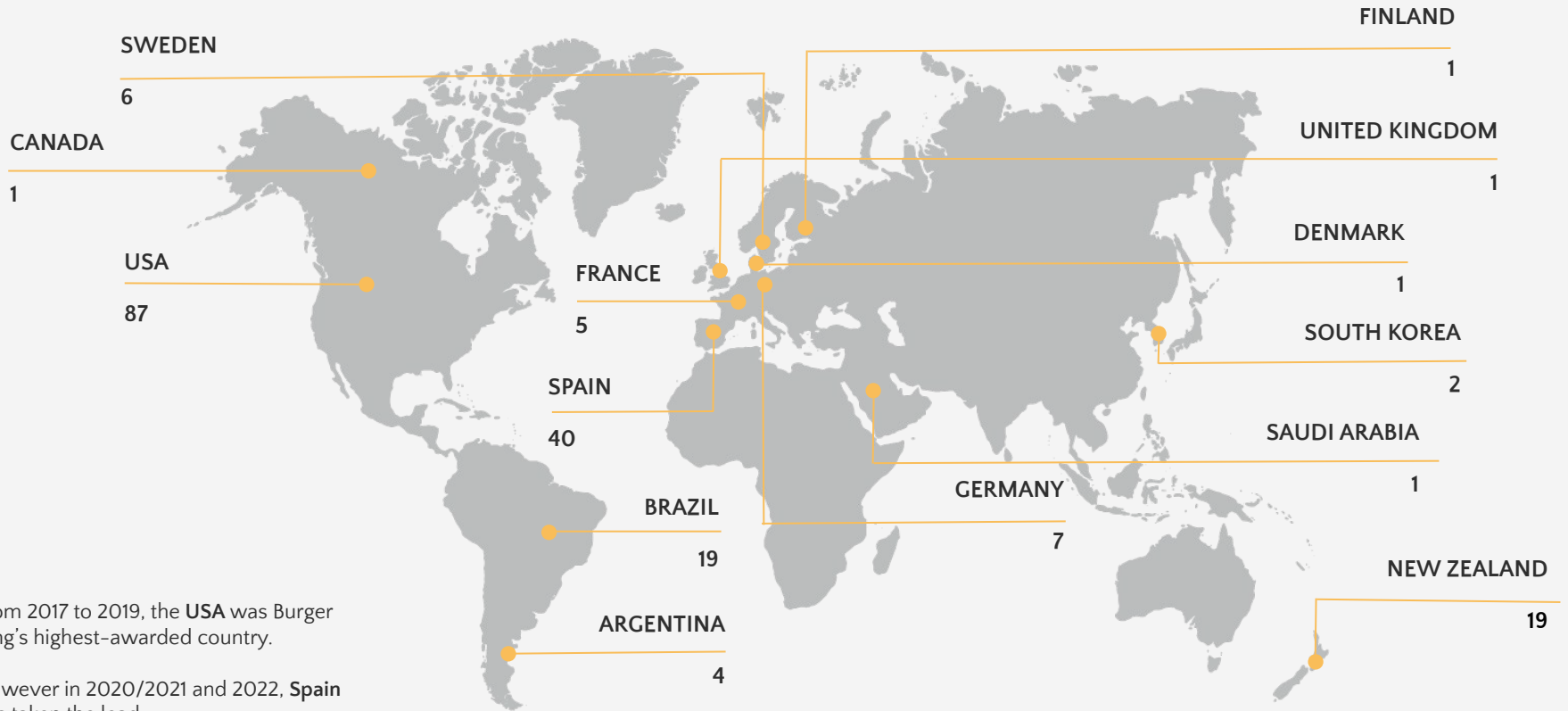


BRONZE DIRECT LIONS



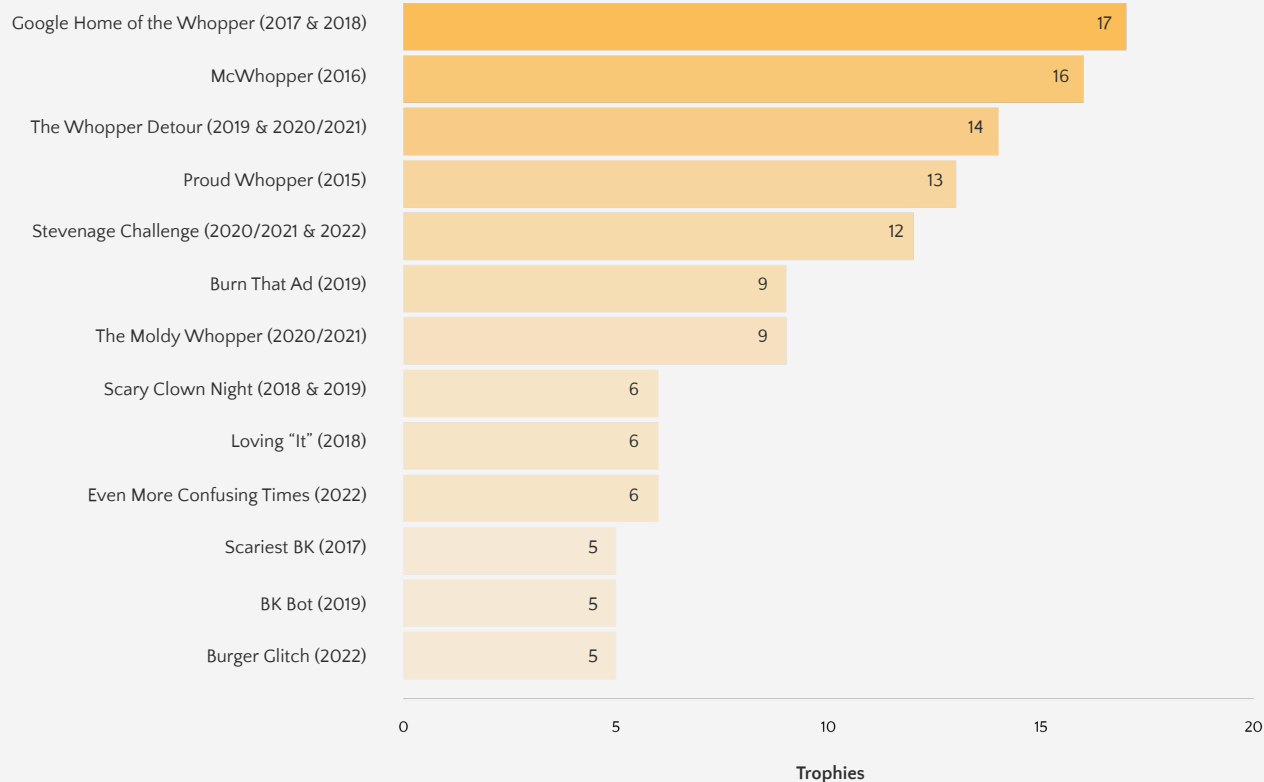
Data

Lion wins by country, 2012-2022



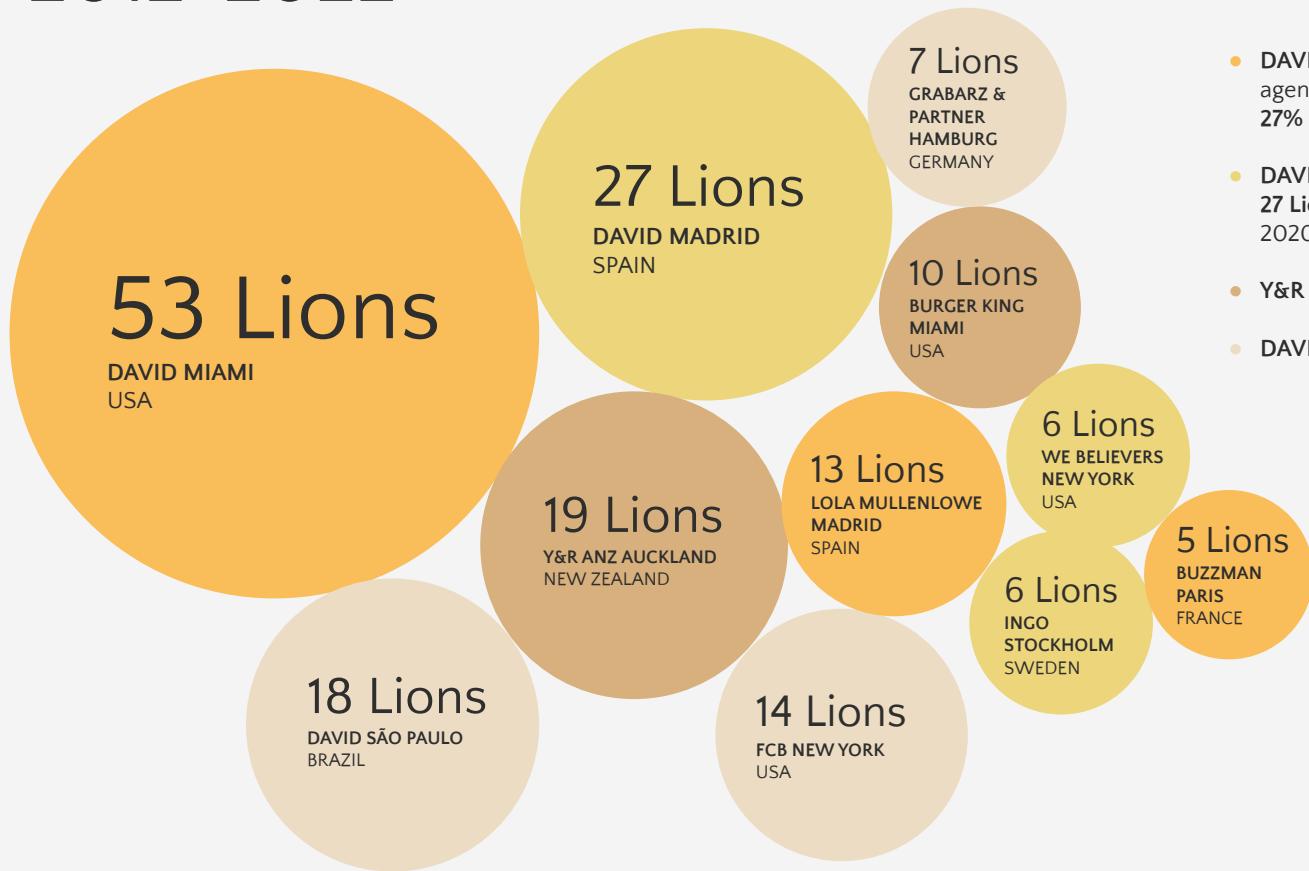
- From 2017 to 2019, the **USA** was Burger King's highest-awarded country.
- However in 2020/2021 and 2022, **Spain** has taken the lead.

Most-awarded work, 2012–2022



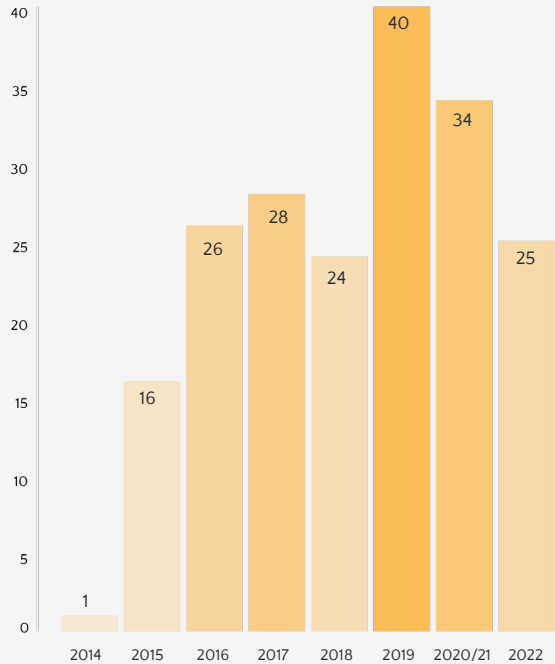
- Burger King's highest-awarded piece of work is '**Google Home of the Whopper**' through DAVID Miami, receiving **14 Awards** in **2017** and **three Awards** in **2018**.
- 2016's '**McWhopper**' has won Burger King its highest number of Lions within a single year, with **16 Awards**.
- Other highly-awarded pieces of work include '**Proud Whopper**', winner of **13 Lions**, and '**Stevenage Challenge**', with a total of **12 Lions**.

Best-performing companies, 2012-2022

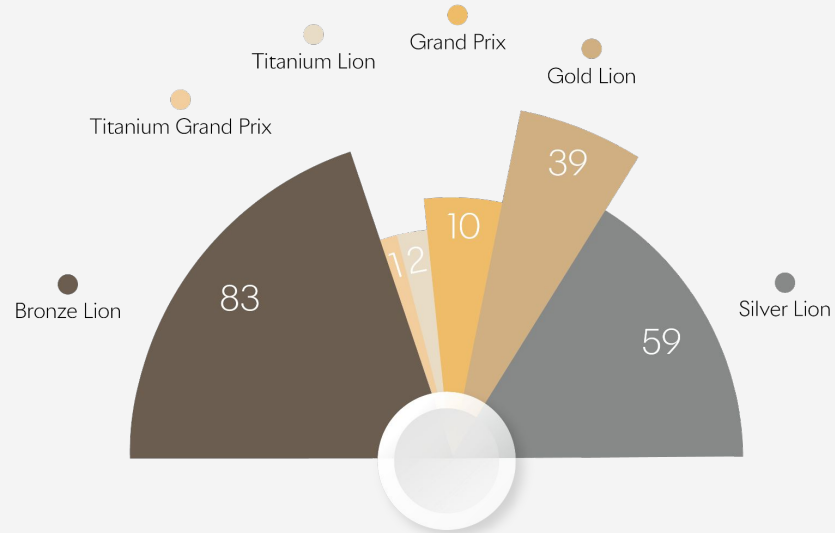


- **DAVID Miami** is Burger King's best-performing agency, responsible for **53 Lions**. This accounts for **27%** of Burger King's **194 Awards**.
- **DAVID Madrid** takes the second spot, with a total of **27 Lions**, all of which the agency received in 2020/2021 and 2022.
- **Y&R ANZ Auckland** has taken home **19 Awards**.
- **DAVID São Paulo's** Award count stands at **18 Lions**.

Awards by year & trophy, 2012–2022



● **2019** was Burger King's highest-awarded year, with **40 Lions**.



● **2020/2021** was Burger King's highest year for Grands Prix. It received **four Grands Prix** – three of which were for **'Stevenage Challenge'**.

Note: Burger King did not receive any Awards in 2012 or 2013

Awards by Lion, 2012–2022

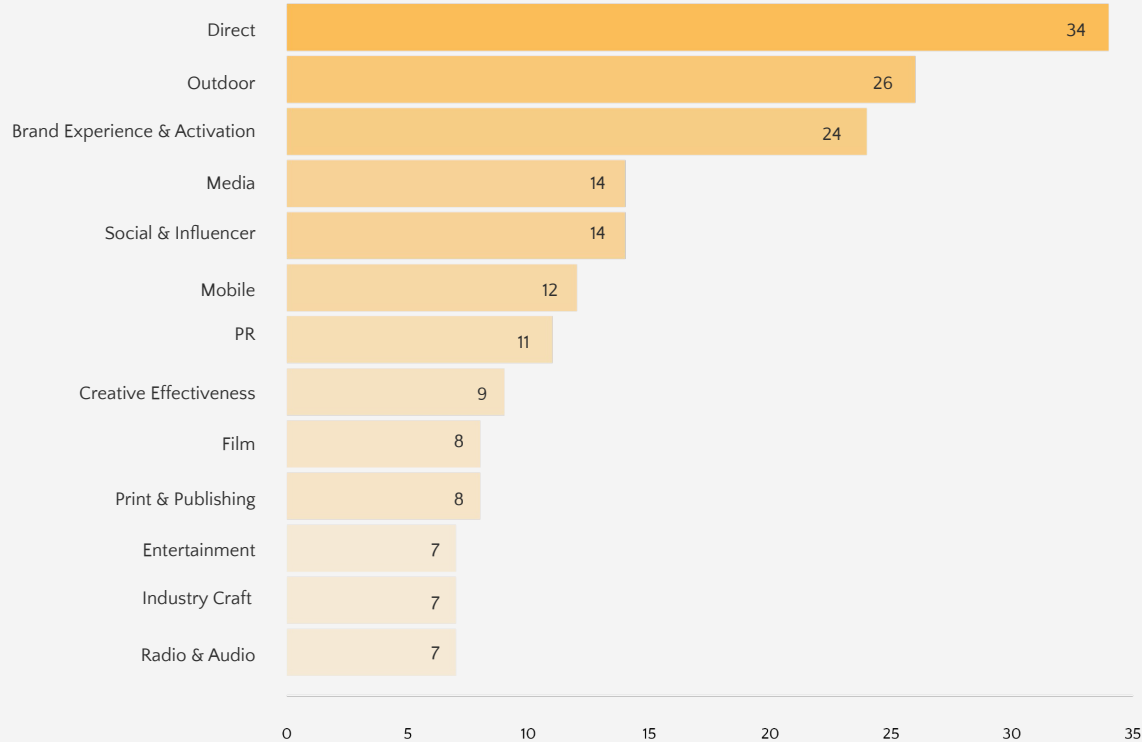


Chart shows Lions with 5 or more Awards

- Burger King has won the most Lions for **Direct (34)**, with almost **one fifth (18%)** of all of Burger King's 194 Awards coming through this Lion.
- Burger King's top three most-awarded Lions, **Direct, Outdoor and Brand Experience & Activation**, account for **almost half (43%)** of all of Burger King's Awards.

- **THE WORK**

The Work

More than 250,000 pieces of work featuring how they were conceived and crafted

The Creative Debrief

Quick-reads giving you the skinny on Lion-winning brands and what you can learn from them

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The next edition of The Creative Debrief, on AB InBev, will be published in June

If you are interested in hearing more about specific creative trends or in benchmarking your organisation's creative work, please contact lionsadvisory@canneslions.com