

Google Display Advertising: Project Re: Brief

Source: Cannes Creative Lions, Shortlisted, Creative Effectiveness Lions, 2013

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This campaign for Google, the search engine giant, aimed to change perceptions of its Display advertising platform among the advertising industry and alert them to the untapped potential of the medium. This was achieved through asking the creatives behind four of the USA's greatest ads to re-imagine their work for the web. The process was also recorded as a documentary film to capitalise on the cultural obsession with old-era advertising. All four brands that participated in the experiment became advocates of the campaign and the display advertising platform, and the individual ad executions were huge successes in themselves, far exceeding average interaction rates for Display. Google saw an increase of 35% in display ad sales and following on from the success of the project, created its own internal division, Advertising Arts, specifically dedicated to working directly with brands on their own digital innovations.

Johannes Leonardo New York

Advertiser: Google

Brand: Google Display Advertising

Country: USA

Objectives

The first banner ad was created 18 years ago and said 'Find out more. Click here'. But while technology evolved at a rapid pace over the last two decades, display advertising was left behind. Despite almost two decades of digital innovation, display advertising is still seen by the industry as an afterthought; a medium too small and too restrictive to entertain and engage audiences like other traditional mediums.

Google asked us to create a campaign for their Display platform that would help to shift the perception of the advertising industry - the people that create display ads - and wake them up to the untapped potential of the medium and technology under their noses.

The campaign would need to cut through the typical B2B clutter and make a skeptical industry take a second look at display advertising, while giving Google a tool to arm their salesforce with to inspire new and existing clients.

Strategy

This year, display advertising turns 18 years old. And yet despite almost two decades of innovation online, display advertising is still seen by the industry as a periphery medium; too small and too restrictive to entertain and engage audiences like other mediums. However, this couldn't be further from the truth. Anything you can do online, you can do in a display ad.

How do you get the attention of a skeptical industry and convince them that advertising's biggest ideas can fit in advertising's smallest spaces?

1. Create Inspiring Examples

The industry didn't need another B2B campaign talking about the possibilities. They needed examples. So we decided to put display advertising to the ultimate test. We took four of America's greatest ads and asked the legendary creatives behind them to come back and re-imagine their iconic work for a medium they knew nothing about: the web.

2. Ignite a conversation

But beyond creating examples of great work, we needed to create a bigger conversation between clients, agencies, production partners and Google. By partnering with these real 'Mad Men (and woman)' we were able to tap into the cultural obsession with old-era advertising. Then we enlisted the help of Emmy-winning documentary filmmaker Doug Pray ('*Art & Copy*') to help document their journey, the process and the technology and turn it into engaging content.

3. Build a powerful case study

Ultimately, the aim was that these pieces would work together to form a powerful and engaging case study - not only for our client but the industry as a whole - that would demonstrate the technology, educate the industry about the new creative process and most importantly, provide inspiring examples for a new generation of creative minds.

Creative approach

For Project Re: Brief, we created a body of work designed to showcase the capabilities of display advertising, inspire the industry and make them rethink the creative potential of the medium.

1. The Re-imagined Ads

For the content itself, Google partnered with four global brands and the advertising legends behind four of America's greatest advertisements to re-imagine them for the digital age.

Coca-Cola: 'Hilltop' (1971)

With legendary creative Harvey Gabor, we delivered on Coca-Cola's 40-year old promise and enabled people to actually 'buy the world a Coke', by using display technology to connect our ads to specially designed vending machines placed around the world.

Avis: 'We Try Harder' (1962)

In the spirit of "We try harder," we created a totally new way for Avis to collect real customer feedback. We incentivized customer feedback online by creating a way to turn millions of rental stories into unique, animated films on the spot. Using Display technology, we produced an ad that can create 200 quintillion different stories, complete with over 10,000 unique animations and voice-overs.

Alka-Seltzer: 'I Can't Believe I Ate the Whole Thing' (1972)

For this execution, we went back to 1972 to tell the story of the day leading up to that iconic moment with Ralph on the bed, and we used display technology to give America a whole new way to connect with a character it loved. In a series of interactive films, we used dynamic cues to turn this character into a friend and used new technology to allow them to connect with him like never before. Users called Ralph from their cell phone, distracted him as he cooks dinner and woke him up with prods and pushes before his wife got home.

Volvo: "Drive It Like You Hate It" (1962)

We told the unique story of Irv Gordon - a man with nearly 3 million miles on his 1966 P1800S and allowed the viewer to become a part of his record-breaking journey in real-time. Viewers were able to follow every world record mile in real time as 3 million miles of stories were realized in a timeline of short films, demonstrating that content is truly what matters and that digital ads are every bit as powerful a medium of storytelling as traditional channels.

2. The Documentary

With the help of Emmy-winning¹ documentary filmmaker Doug Pray (Art & Copy), we captured the journey of the five icons as they learnt about new technology, new devices and new ways of approaching their old ideas. The resulting content was four short films and one 60 minute documentary that premiered in New York, and played to a full house at the Cannes Advertising Festival.

3. The Website

No experiment is complete without its logbook. The website, projectrebrief.com, was the central hub for the entire campaign and the center of the case study we created. Here people could interact with the re-imagined ads in real time, watch the films and learn about the experiment. The site also doubled as an educational tool for Google to use with staff, clients and brands, allowing users to dive deeper into the technology and process behind each display ad.

4. Festivals and Events

With zero dollars spent on paid media, we leveraged only Google properties to bring the campaign to life online and then let the industry fuel the conversation for us at key industry events. The campaign kicked off with a preview event held in association with The New Museum in New York City. A testament to the industry's appetite for the idea and the icons, we were then invited to launch the campaign to the world at SXSW Interactive and at last year's Cannes International Advertising Festival.

Effects

Project Re: Brief was created with the aim of educating and inspiring a skeptical industry to take another look at a medium it had forgotten: display advertising. With one big idea and no paid media, we ignited a conversation that still continues and shifted the perception of creatives, clients and the wider industry.

Effect on the Advertising Industry

After a preview event at The New Museum in New York City, the idea captured the attention of the industry and Project Re: Brief was invited to launch at SXSW Interactive 2012 in front of a packed mainstage audience. Over two days in Austin, the creative and tech communities listened to talks on the work, played with live demos and watched test screenings of the films.

With the campaign already generating discussion, the online launch of the campaign saw immediate coverage in almost every major trade publication at launch (*AdAge*, *The New York Times*², *Creativity Online*, *Fast Company*³, *Mashable*, *PC Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Contagious*, and *Shots*), with coverage spanning across media (print, digital, tv). What began as a campaign to get the industry to rethink the power of display, transformed into a global conversation on the power of digital storytelling and the future of the industry.

Then in an ending we could never have written, 86 year old Harvey Gabor took to the stage at the Cannes Advertising Festival in front of an international audience to receive the inaugural Grand Prix for Mobile Advertising for his new Coca-Cola ad. This, along with the 6 other Cannes Lions the campaign won, fueled further discussion about the future of advertising online and helped to extend the campaign's reach and impact to its core audience.

Effect on the Four Brands

All four brands that participated in the experiment became advocates of the campaign and the display advertising platform, helping us to shift perception inside some of the country's biggest brands. The Coca-Cola Company facilitated a global conversation around the campaign with its 62MM+ fans on Facebook and 690K Twitter followers, taking the work beyond the industry and into the world. Similarly, Volvo created its own social channels and continues to work with Irv Gordon on his journey to 3MM miles and Alka-Seltzer is now using its iconic "Plop Plop Fizz Fizz" jingle across its current communications.

The Campaign Continues

Importantly, the effect of Project Re: Brief continues to be realized. The demand from Google's brand partners for innovative display advertising our campaign birthed a brand new division within Google, focusing exclusively on servicing this need, with the campaign serving as its primary tool.

The evolution of our campaign, called Art, Copy & Code, was announced in early March 2013 and a new wave of re-imagined ads debuted at SXSW 2013. This ongoing initiative serves as a cross-industry, cross-agency collaboration for digital storytelling using display advertising, and new partners include top global brands such as Adidas, Burberry and Volkswagen.

Key metrics

- Overall, Project Re: Brief garnered more than 150 million earned media impressions globally⁴, with an additional 35.7 million estimated impressions on Twitter from 7,214 mentions by 5,804 users⁵ -- with 98.2% of the sentiment confirmed as positive/neutral in the initial six months of launch⁶. These online conversations were led by industry influencers⁷ - our ideal audience - as exhibited by the reach we achieved in comparison to the amount of shares.
- The individual ad executions were a huge success in highlighting the potential of display advertising for the world to see. With the average interaction rate for rich media ads in the US at 2.3% - all four executions exceeded this figure by a staggering amount. The Avis execution had interaction rates 26x above the average, Volvo 13x, Alka-Seltzer 13x, and Coca-Cola at 5x the industry norm⁸.
- The Coca-Cola ad also averaged almost 9 minutes of engagement per individual interaction with over 7,000 Cokes and messages of thanks shared in multiple languages, across 57 countries⁹, proving that great stories and experiences translate directly to results in digital advertising.
- The Re: Brief site itself received 480,000 unique visitors, with 1.1M total pageviews despite no paid media driving to it - all visits were pro-active. As a truly global campaign, we saw reach from 100+ countries, with site visits concentrated in digitally-evolved locations such as the US, Western European countries, Japan, India, and Brazil - ideal for reaching an actionable audience. Overall, 61% of visitors were from the US, with the other 39% from places all over the world¹⁰.

Other factors

The conversation we instigated across the industry was due solely to the Project Re: Brief effort. Thought leaders and influencers among brand teams, creative and media agencies cited Project Re: Brief as an example of how the industry needed to evolve its overall approach to digital and display.

Re: Brief played an invaluable role in reframing the conversation, arming the internal sales team with case studies and toolkits, and generating further demand for Google's display offering. This was the largest B2B effort by Google in 2012, and lauded internally as one of their most successful case studies for marketing to the advertising industry.

Google's success in growing display revenue is due to a number of critical factors. Such as innovation in product offering, further integration and resulting synergies, and wider industry trends increasing digital as a proportion of media spend. While Project Re: Brief became an internal and industry rallying cry, this only further galvanized important efforts critical to driving the display business.

Commercial results

The commercial gain for Google was multi-faceted. Firstly, the most tangible metric post- Re: Brief was a quantifiable lift in Google display sales; Google saw an increase of 35% (from \$1.67B to \$2.26B) in display ad sales in the year 2012, solidifying Google as the overall leader in display advertising in terms of sales *and* share over Facebook¹¹. Google is now projected to have a \$2 billion margin lead in display ad sales and an 8.4% share lead over Facebook by 2015¹².

Secondly, the success of project Re: Brief led to the creation of an internal division, Advertising Arts, specifically

dedicated to working directly with brands to create their own digital innovations (Art, Copy, Code). But perhaps most importantly, Project Re: Brief was yet another strong example of Google's ability to lead innovation in communication online; bolstering both the overall brand perception and industry awareness of the capabilities of the tools that Google is providing to deliver results via creativity.

Creative effectiveness

Project Re: Brief serves as an example of how creativity can be used to create a global conversation, and shift the perception of even the most skeptical of audiences. In particular, there are two learnings that further help us to build the case for creativity.

Less talk, more examples

For the last two decades, the advertising industry has been bombarded with B2B campaigns talking about display technology and the incredible potential of this tiny medium. But with no pieces of great display work to hold high, the industry needed more than talk - it needed examples. After all, how do you speak about the possibilities, if you don't know what is possible yourself? Project Re: Brief has become a case study and the four display ads have become the key tools in the ongoing perception shift of the industry. Not only have the four pieces been recognised by the industry's top award shows; they have been used by agencies and clients as proof of the powerful potential that lies in display, and they continue to be used by Google to push the category forward.

The Idea is Still King

Despite the rapid change our industry is undergoing, Project Re: Brief only re enforces the importance of the creative idea, no matter the medium. All four display ads featured in Project Re: Brief are examples of what can happen when the latest technology is used in service of a bigger idea, not instead of one. Like the last twenty years, technology will only continue to amaze us and change the mediums we used to connect with our audience. But as our toolkit continues to get bigger and more mind-blowing - it's still just that: a toolkit.

Media used

Type of Media	Date of Implementation	Budget / Media Spend	Percentage of overall budget
Experiential Display Ads - 8 Total <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Desktop / 4 Mobile 	13 April 2013	NA - No Media Spend	NA
Short Format Documentary Films - 4 Total	13 April 2013	NA - No Media Spend	NA
Long Format Feature Documentary - 1 Total	18 April 2013	NA - No Media Spend	NA
Campaign Website - 1 Total	13 April 2013	NA - No Media Spend	NA
Press Launch Event at New Museum NYC	12 December 2012	NA - No Media Spend	NA
SXSW Interactive Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event Space Dedicated to Product Demos and Presentations + Keynote Speech at Convention Center 	10 - 11 March 2012	NA - No Media Spend	NA
4As Annual Conference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainstage Panel Discussion and Product Demos 	28 March 2012	NA - No Media Spend	NA

Columbia Business School Panel Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel Discussion Around Building Brands with Digital Media 	4 April 2012	NA - No Media Spend	NA
AdAge Digital Conference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main Stage Panel Presentation, Product Demos and Film Premier 	17 - 18 April 2012	NA - No Media Spend	NA
YouTube Upfront Event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product Demos, Presentation 	3 May 2012	NA - No Media Spend	NA
DoubleClick CAB Event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product Demos, Presentation 	5 - 6 May 2012	NA - No Media Spend	NA
Cannes Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master Class, Global Creative Council, Product Demos / Presentations at Google Sandbox, Mainstage Panel and Film Premier at Palais 	20- 22 June 2012	NA - No Media Spend	NA

Footnotes

1. Creativity, "Ad Documentary 'Art & Copy' Wins Emmy for Arts & Culture Programming; [PBS.org](http://www.pbs.org) Art & Copy 2011 Emmy Award – Outstanding Arts and Culture Programming
2. **The New York Times** " Google Remixes Old Campaigns, Adding a Dash of Digital Tools"
3. Fast Company, "GOOGLE RECRUITS AD LEGENDS TO UPDATE CLASSIC AD CAMPAIGNS"
4. Various Sources
5. Sysomos Media Analysis Report: Project Re: Brief (Twitter Reach)
6. Sysomos Media Analysis Report: Project Re: Brief (Twitter Sentiment)
7. See: Rebrief Sentiment Screenshots
8. eMarketer Newsroom, "Google to Become US Display Ad Leader"

9. eMarketer Newsroom, "Google, Facebook Continue to Lead in Digital Display Earnings"
10. Google Analytics & Double Click (internal Google Stats)
11. <http://www.emarketer.com/newsroom/index.php/google-display-ad-leader/>
12. <http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Google-Facebook-Continue-Lead-Digital-Display-Earnings/1009769>

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