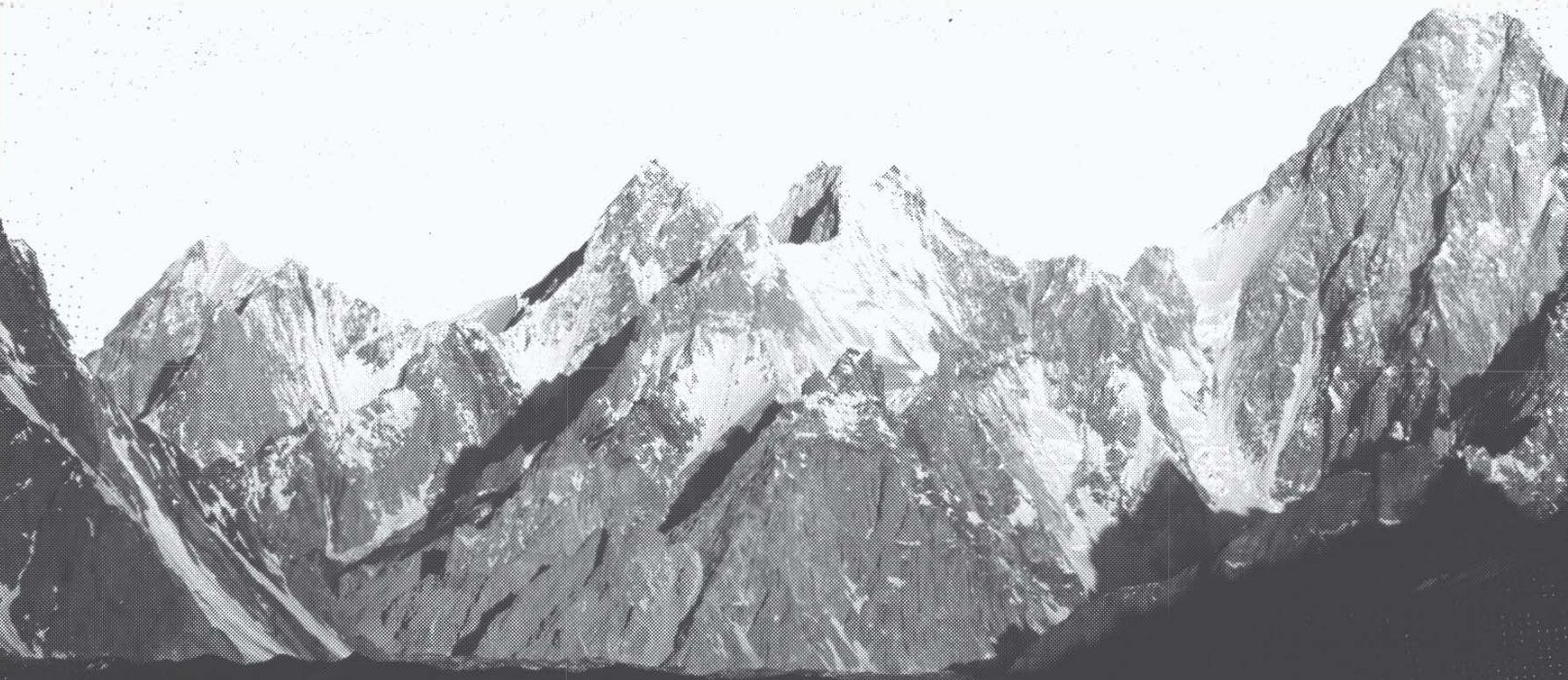


# The Redirect Method



A Blueprint For  
Bypassing Extremism

# The Redirect Method

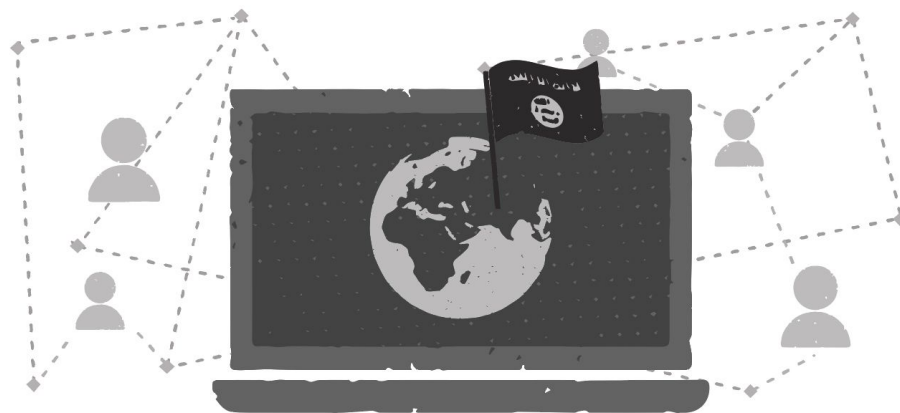
Jigsaw's been experimenting since its inception with how to use tech to tackle violent extremism. Over the past year we've incubated what we think is a promising new approach that we want to share with the broader community in the hopes of scaling it.

**The Redirect Method** uses Adwords targeting tools and curated YouTube videos uploaded by people all around the world to confront online radicalization. It focuses on the slice of ISIS' audience that is most susceptible to its messaging, and redirects them towards curated YouTube videos debunking ISIS recruiting themes. This open methodology was developed from interviews with ISIS defectors, respects users' privacy and can be deployed to tackle other types of violent recruiting discourses online.

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## About the Method

*The Redirect Method tackles violent extremism by connecting people to authentic voices online.*



**The Redirect Method** uses Adwords targeting tools and curated YouTube videos uploaded by people all around the world to confront online radicalization. It focuses on the slice of ISIS' audience that is most susceptible to its messaging, and redirects them towards curated YouTube videos debunking ISIS recruiting themes. This open methodology was developed from interviews with ISIS defectors, respects users' privacy and can be deployed to tackle other types of violent recruiting discourses online.

## The Challenge

The so-called Islamic State (ISIS) is the **first terrorist group to have “secured territory” in both the physical and digital spheres**. It has set up central media outlets—including Al-Furqan, Al-I'tisam, Al-Hayat, and Ajnad—to craft its messaging. They have been able to produce a steady stream of leadership statements, documentaries, and videos of hostages and battlefields. ISIS also benefits from crowd-sourced efforts: loyalists serving as ISIS poster-children in the news (e.g., “[Jihadi John](#)”, [Sally Jones](#)), remote sympathisers posting supportive messages on social media (such as [Shami Witness](#)), and dedicated disseminators sharing links between content-hosting websites. All of this forms a complex, reinforcing network of content and actors whose goal is to leverage the power of the Internet to recruit new adherents.

ISIS wouldn't be deploying such efforts online if they didn't think people were actively looking for content. And sadly there are too many doing so. We've built the Redirect Method to add to the arsenal of tools available to address this reality, to ensure that those browsing the Internet with precise questions around violent extremism and the Caliphate get answers from the many voices debunking ISIS recruitment narratives.

## What makes The Redirect Method different?

The Redirect Method is a **4-step approach that employs readily available online resources — existing online videos and targeted advertising tools** — to counter ISIS recruitment efforts online. Three key decisions have shaped this project and differentiate it from most other initiatives underway:



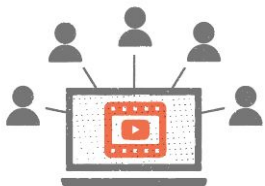
### 1. Our target audience: those most susceptible to ISIS' messaging online.

We focused solely on reaching the slice of ISIS' audience that was most susceptible to its message and actively seeking to engage with ISIS-produced content. We based the Redirect Method on insights from speaking directly to those who had been recruited and convinced by ISIS rhetoric — both young girls who had aspired to be so-called ISIS-brides, and former ISIS fighters who had defected.



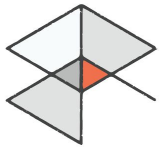
### 2. Our targeting & design strategy: meeting our audience where they are.

To reach our target audience, we used the same tools used by a million advertisers every day to find their target audience: online advertising.



### 3. Our content: credible content that's already out there.

Online videos of citizen testimonies, on-the-ground reports, and religious debates comprised the content portfolio. We avoided government-produced content and newly or custom created material, using only existing and compelling YouTube content.



For this experiment, we've relied on a diverse set of skills, perspectives and talents. Surely, we still have blind spots. We are releasing the story of our experiment, the data we have on how it performed, and blueprint of how to replicate the project. We leave it to others to continue the conversation, and improve this approach.

## The Team

This Pilot project was carried out via a global collaboration. Here's our *credits* section:

- **Moonshot CVE** coordinated the English-language campaign in close collaboration with Jigsaw; this involved the translation of research into coded databases, design and production of advertising content, creating advertising campaigns, developing targeting keywords, day-to-day campaign management and analysis of campaign results. [Learn more about Moonshot CVE](#)
- **Quantum Communications** coordinated the Arabic-language campaign in close collaboration with Jigsaw; this involved the translation of research into coded databases, design and production of advertising content, creating advertising campaigns, developing targeting keywords, day-to-day campaign management and analysis of campaign results. [Learn more about Quantum Communications](#)
- A team of researchers including **Valens Global & Nadia Oweidat** laid the groundwork looking at existing online content relevant to the project. They conducted the analytic effort to identify and categorize the most powerful existing online videos that refute important parts of ISIS's message, and organized this material to make it readily deployable for the pilot campaigns. [Learn more about Valens Global](#)
- Finally, **Jigsaw** provided the initial vision, recruited the partners, and incubated the project. [Learn more about Jigsaw](#)

This Pilot has involved four researcher partners, videos from 83 different content creators (33 in English and 50 in Arabic), two lead partners, one market research firm and one technology incubator. We believe this collaborative model is particularly powerful. We're grateful to the many advisors who provided input and advice at every stage of this process.





## The Pilot Experiment

*The Redirect Method: a case study.*

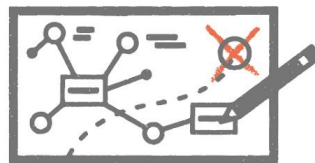
We tested the Redirect Method in an ISIS-focused campaign in Arabic and English. Over the course of 8 weeks, 320,000 individuals watched over half a million minutes of the 116 videos we selected to refute ISIS's recruiting themes. The Redirect Method is open for any institution to use in their work - Read on to learn about how we've used it in this campaign.

### 1 Research

*Which online videos effectively discredit ISIS, and violent Islamism more generally, to an audience of potential sympathizers?*

#### What did we do?

Between August and September 2015, we worked with several research partners with knowledge of ISIS's worldview and online materials in order to:



- Interview ISIS defectors and once-aspiring 'jihadi brides' to glean insights into our audience's online behaviors.
- Map the major narratives used by ISIS in their media to draw people in and mobilize them to action.
- Survey YouTube for existing and authentic videos that are effective at countering those narratives. Our final list had videos sourced from 83 different YouTube creators.



## What did we learn?

- **We identified 5 ISIS recruitment narratives** recurring in ISIS's official media. We described them as:



- “*Good Governance*”, in which ISIS showcased not only its bureaucratic structure and provision of social services, but also its harsh implementation of *sharia*.



- “*Military might*”, a narrative where ISIS's battlefield victories portray it as an unstoppable force. The group depicts itself as possessing continuous momentum, and its message to its enemies is that they face capture, torture, humiliation, and death.



- “*Religious legitimacy*”, where ISIS depicts its interpretation of Islam as the only authentic manifestation of the faith, and argues that its alleged re-establishment of the caliphate makes all competing states and organizations null and void under God's law.



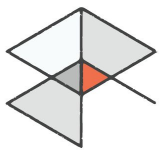
- “*Call to jihad*”, where the emphasis is on the individual duty to either emigrate to the “caliphate” or carry out local terrorist attacks in ISIS's name. This messaging portrays ISIS fighters as heroes, their days as packed with action, camaraderie, and glory.



- “*Victimhood of the umma*” (the umma is the worldwide body of Muslims). This narrative depicts outside powers conspiring to harm, subjugate, and disempower Muslims throughout the globe.

- **Content that effectively undermines ISIS does not always overtly attack ISIS.**

We focused our survey on videos that were objective in appearance rather than materials that appeared specifically designed to counter ISIS. We used keyword searches to identify “hidden” counter-argument content -- that is, videos that are not necessarily well known, and often not designed explicitly to refute ISIS. The following major categories contain credible, authentic voices:



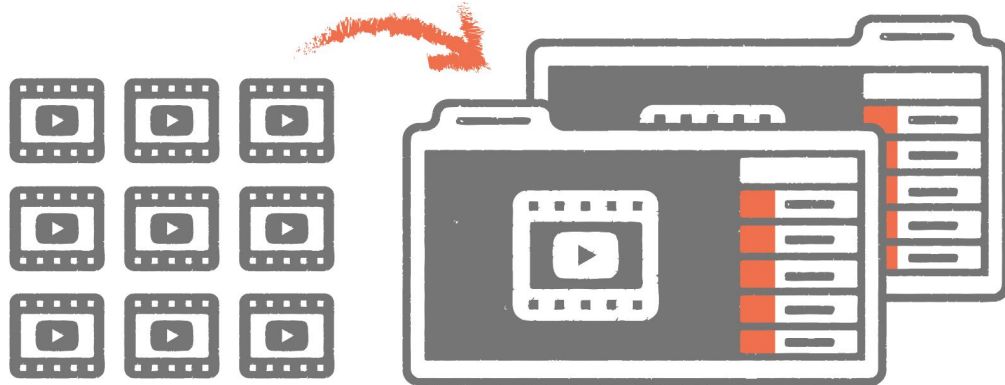
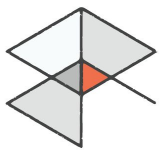
- *Citizen journalism and documentary footage.* News content created by members of the general population, documentarians and journalists. This includes videos by those who reside in ISIS-controlled territory who document ISIS's atrocities toward civilians and failed governance efforts. They portray the world as the creators found it.
  - [Here](#) a bystander captures the moment a suffering elderly lady living in Syria confronts two ISIS fighters.
  - [Here](#) long food lines are evidence of a failing social welfare system in the so-called caliphate.
  - [This](#) report describes the failing healthcare system provided for those living under ISIS's rule.
- *Religious debate.* Videos featuring clerics and other religious figures who refute violent extremist narratives, and seek to undercut ISIS's religious legitimacy.
  - [This video](#), produced by the iLovUAllah YouTube channel, features a UK-based imam denouncing violent extremist groups claiming to act in the name of Islam.
  - In [this video](#), Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, a Pakistan-born Canadian politician and Islamic scholar of Sufism, explains that there is no real evidence in Quran or Sunna (the traditional portion of Muslim law based on Muhammad's words or acts, accepted — together with the Koran — as authoritative by Sunni Muslims) that support the idea of re-establishing the caliphate.
  - In [this video](#) Khaled Al Mulla, a prominent Iraqi Sunni Scholar, criticizes ISIS' excessive violence, beheading of Sunni scholars who oppose them, and the killing of thousands of ordinary sunnis in Iraq who refuse to follow them.
- *ISIS defectors.* Videos highlighting the testimonies of ISIS defectors whose actual experiences undercut ISIS's recruitment narratives, and reveal the group's shortcomings and hypocrisy.
  - [This](#) defector talks of the wanton violence he witnessed, and the sense of betrayal he now feels.
  - [Here](#) an ISIS defector describes the excessive violence, unjustified killing, and a senseless takfiri mindset (as he describes it), which he witnessed when he among ISIS troops.

*The above categories are not alone in contradicting ISIS's message. These voices became our focus because they seem to be the most credible to the specific audience segment we want to reach. For example, one genre we did not include in our Pilot was parody. Satire appeals to those predisposed to seeing ISIS as an object of ridicule, but not to our target audience.*



- **All information sources do not carry equal weight.**  
We learned from interviews with ISIS defectors and failed aspirants — men, women and children — that all information sources do not carry equal weight. For example, one British teenager recounted her first memory of ISIS: “It was on the BBC, and I can’t trust the BBC. If the BBC are saying this about them, I thought that it must be the opposite.” Media created by governments or Western news outlets can be rejected on face value for a perception of promoting an anti-Muslim agenda.
- **Campaigns to confront online extremism don’t necessitate new content creation.** The best part of the research—beyond identifying ISIS’s recruiting narratives and the content categories most likely to debunk them—was that it surfaced hundreds of online videos in English and Arabic that were *already* uploaded to YouTube, and that would not be rejected outright by our target audience. On the “military might” narrative for instance, the organization [Truth About ISIS](#), proved to be a good source of videos highlighting ISIS’s military setbacks.





## 2 Curation

*How can we organize and showcase the most engaging videos refuting ISIS recruitment narratives?*

### What did we do?

- Moonshot CVE & Quantum Communications created two YouTube channels, one in English, one in Arabic, to host themed playlists featuring a selection of the videos debunking ISIS recruiting narratives.
  - A "[playlist](#)" in YouTube is a list, or group, of videos that plays in order, one video after the other. When one video finishes playing, the next starts automatically so you don't have to click or search to start playing a new video. Playlists can be created using your own videos, other videos, or a combination of both. YouTube playlists allow you to organize videos into groups or themes. In the case of the Pilot, the playlist themes related to the five major ISIS recruitment narratives.
  - A "[channel](#)" on YouTube is the home page for an account, a place for videos to be uploaded, and for playlists to live. In the case of the Pilot, there were two channels — one for the English-language and one for the Arabic-language campaigns.
- They sent a message through the platform to all the YouTube creators whose content was curated within a playlist to provide high level context about the Pilot and ensured that the ordering of the videos within each playlist made for a compelling storyline. For example:
  - In the playlist refuting the '[Good Governance](#)' narrative, we started with a video depicting the general failure of ISIS governance, then built a flow by covering, food shortage, education, then healthcare -- so by the end of the playlist the user would get a 360 view of the hypocrisy of this branch of the ISIS messaging campaign.
  - In the playlist refuting the '[Military Strength](#)' narrative, we start with a couple of videos depicting the general losses of ISIS, then the second half of the playlist shows videos of the particular forces winning against ISIS; the Kurds, Iraqi Army, and Coalition forces.



### [Upvotely YouTube Channel](#)

The Upvotely visual design and naming was inspired by news aggregation channels that encourage engagement by way of marking the videos with a “thumbs up” or a “thumbs down.”

Sample playlist [here](#).

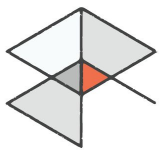


### [Aswad Abyad YouTube Channel](#)

Sample playlist [here](#).

## What did we learn?

- We found plenty of authentic, credible, powerful and relevant video content to curate. Our campaigns resulted in the 116 videos used in the playlist being watched for 500,070 minutes (347,195 minutes in Arabic playlists, and 152,875 minutes in English playlists).
- During the course of the campaign, we tweaked the playlists' composition to glean some insights about engaging content. We observed that:
  - Some playlists were particularly successful - the Arabic-language [Answering the Call](#) playlist, for example, had an average watch time of over 8 minutes.
  - Defectors testimonies proved to be engaging material. Out of all the 65 videos curated for the Arabic pilot, the second and third most engaging videos — according to avg. view duration — were [defector testimonies](#).
  - Videos need not to have a high production value: some of the [low-budget, user-generated videos](#) were amongst the highest performing of the campaign.

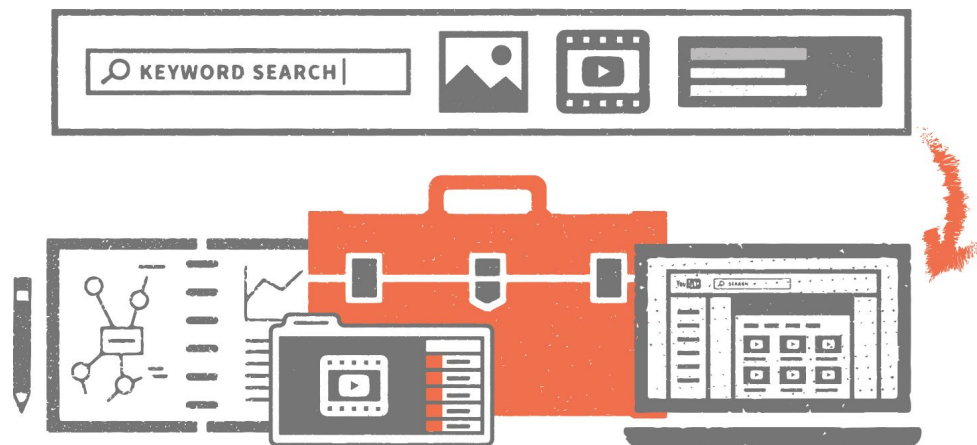


### 3 Targeting

*How can we design ads and target keywords so that our campaign reaches individuals who are to some degree already sympathetic to ISIS?*

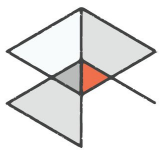
#### What did we do?

Both partners created an elaborate targeting framework that was continually refined throughout the 8-week pilot. For the Arabic campaigns, Quantum created 60 ad campaigns comprising 150 unique ads and over 1,500 keywords. For the English campaign, Moonshot CVE created 30 ad campaigns comprising 95 unique ads and over 1,000 keywords. The keyword generation was focused on terms suggesting positive sentiment towards ISIS.

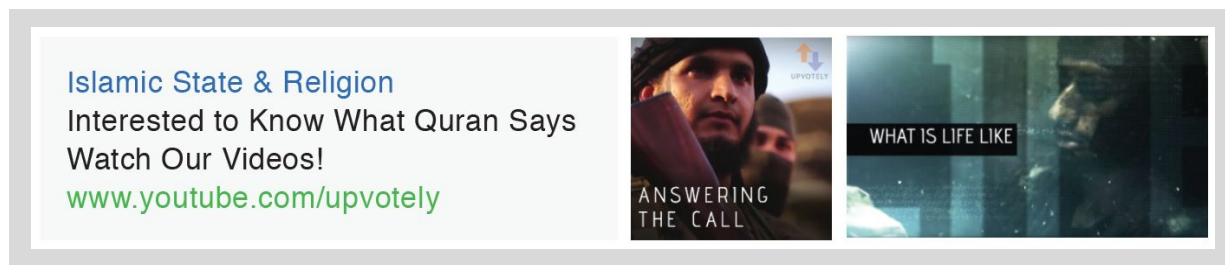


#### How can we design ads and target keywords so that our campaign reaches individuals who are, to some degree, already sympathetic to ISIS?

- Moonshot CVE and Quantum Communications each created an [AdWords](#) advertising account in English and Arabic to house our ads and targeting criteria. The objective with the ads design was to anticipate and reflect the interests of the target audience.
- The designers involved in this campaign reviewed ISIS media material in order to understand its distinctive look and feel, and the two design teams (Arabic and English) decided on different approaches and themes in order to mirror the visual aesthetic in our own ad design.
  - Quantum created ads with a look and feel that was in line with ISIS's creative content. The design was to feel familiar to a target audience likely already encountering ISIS material. The design challenge was to develop a "look and feel" for the ads that was compelling and also within YouTube's policy guidelines. To achieve this, the ad text had a neutral tone, featuring a message that was relevant and invited the audience to click to watch the playlist.



- Moonshot CVE selected the most striking images from the playlist and overlaid statements and questions that captured the essence of the playlists. We found that questions, rather than statements, were more helpful in driving users to our ads. We also added the channels' logos to the ads.
- The ad campaign comprised three *formats*:
  - [Text Ads](#)
  - [Image Ads](#)
  - [Skippable Video Ads](#)



## How did we develop the keywords?

Our targeting strategy relied entirely on selecting a robust set of keywords that would allow us to reach our audience and mirror the content curated on the playlists. To generate the initial keywords (“seed keywords”) we worked with former violent extremists, researchers and online advertising specialists.

The keyword generation was focused on terms suggesting positive sentiment towards ISIS, for instance:

- **Supporter slogans** (e.g. *Baqiyah wa Tatamadad; Remaining & Expanding*); deferential terms to describe ISIS (e.g. *Al Dawla Al Islameyah* vs. *Daesh*). We prioritized terms free of prejudice against ISIS — these terms are less likely to be used by the general public.
- **Interest in ISIS-related news with a desire to read from ISIS’s official media outlets.** For this, we used the names of media sources with formal ties to ISIS e.g. Al-Furqan, Al-I’tisam, Al-Hayat, Amaq news agency, and Ajnad.
- **Research into how to enlist in the terrorist group or into granular aspects of life under ISIS rule** (e.g. building names in ISIS-controlled provinces known to host joiners and commanders, such as *Ninawa Hotel*).
- We ensured that the keywords we selected were relevant to the content in our playlists: we used keywords that mirrored the content curated on the playlists. For example, the word



'fatwa' (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority) was used as a targeted search term, and lead to a [playlist](#) containing fatwa content.

- Our keyword creation process combined qualitative human input with AdWords automated tools. The [Keyword Planner](#) tool was used to expand seed keyword lists, by allowing it to suggest synonyms, and additional keywords from the same cohort. For instance, the seed keyword “Al Furqan Foundation” led to suggestions like “Furqan Media Agency”, and “Al Itisam Media”.

## How did we evolve during the campaign?

- After the Pilot went live, the focus shifted to optimization. Targeting was improved by prioritizing keywords that indicated a nuanced understanding of ISIS narratives. For example, the phrase “What is jihad?” was supplemented with phrases such as “Fatwa for jihad in Syria”, “Mohamad Hassan Jihad Fatwa.”, “Ibn Taymiyah Fatwa”.
- Additions to the keyword lists reflected new developments in the conflict surrounding ISIS — for example, “Amaq News” was included as a keyword in March, 2016, when ISIS used the outlet to claim responsibility for the Brussels attacks.
- The keyword lists also changed in response to ad-hoc changes in the video playlists’ composition: for instance, mid-campaigns we added a video about education conditions under ISIS, and mirrored this by adding “Schools in ISIS” as a keyword. Similarly, when adding content about healthcare conditions in ISIS, we also added keywords about “hospitals in ISIS”.

## What did we learn?

- We ran the ads on both web platforms that Google owns (Google.com, YouTube.com, and the local domain equivalents) and non-owned properties that Google helps monetize for others (the [Google Display Network](#)). During the pilot, some third parties responded to the “look and feel” of our advertisements with concerns that they could be in fact supporting ISIS. Once this concern was raised, we restricted the platforms for Pilot ads to Google and YouTube. Publishers that are sensitive to this type of advertising however do have the option to exclude ads that are of a sensitive nature or cover political content in their AdSense account.
- As a general rule, when running such a campaign, we recommend to ensure that all parties that will be directly or indirectly exposed to this effort (former violent extremists, content creators, playlist aggregators, websites that might be exposed to the ads) have an opportunity to discuss the project and opt-out of participating in the campaign.



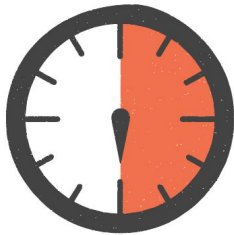


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## Results

*How can we measure the performance of the campaign? What does data tell us about which bits and pieces were most effective?*

### What did we do?



**500,070**

**Total minutes watched of video**



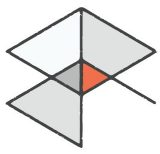
**320,906**

**Total individuals reached  
during the 8 week pilot**

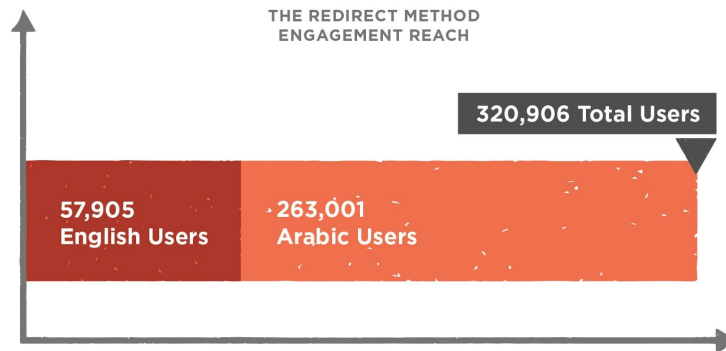
Analytics and measurement help us gauge the performance of the campaigns, and their impact on users. We chose to track metrics that will tell us how many people our campaigns reached, if our content successfully engaged the target audience, and what were the most and least successful elements of our experiment. There aren't a lot of similar metrics that we can compare and contrast our data with: by sharing our results, we aim to encourage others to also do so, and create best practices and benchmarks that can be used to evaluate similar efforts in this space.

#### **About the data we used**

*Our main requirement for measurement was to only use readily available metrics that did not infringe on users' privacy, and that others could easily collect when running similar campaigns: we hope that this will lead to others sharing similar data, building benchmarks, and sharing best practices to optimize campaigns. We used campaign metrics provided by [AdWords](#), and [Youtube Analytics](#), along with third party research vendor [Tubular Labs](#) who offered methodologies to measure impact by looking at the public comments under the YouTube videos included in the campaign.*

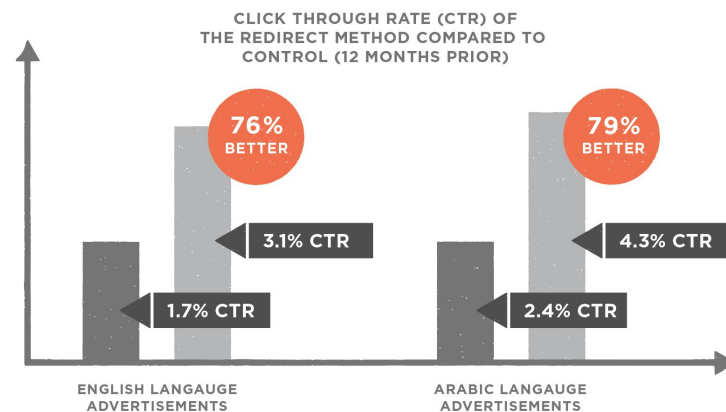


## What did we learn?



## REACH

The reach of most awareness campaigns is gauged by the number of unique users who ‘saw’ the ads. Because in this pilot our goal was not just awareness, but actual engagement, we chose to measure the reach of our campaigns by the number of unique users who ‘clicked’ on the ads, not just ‘saw’ them.



## ENGAGEMENT

Click Through Rate is one of the most widely used online advertising metrics to gauge campaigns’ engagement. It’s a ratio showing how often people who see an ad end up clicking it.

*Average CTRs vary widely according to the industry of campaign, type of ad, precision of targeting, overall campaign objectives, and many other factors. The average Search CTR of all ads that ran against similar search terms in the 12 months prior to pilot launch was 2.41% for Arabic-language, and 1.73% for English language: these metrics can serve as a potential benchmark to evaluate our Search CTR.*



## What did this data teach us about our methodology?

- **We reached our target audience.**
  - Some of the comments our video ads received showed that we reached users who harbour strong positive sentiment towards ISIS.
- **Targeting using keywords works.**
  - We compared the Click-Through-Rates of our keywords to establish which ones were the most relevant for our audience. The highest rates of engagement with our ads came from users searching for official ISIS content in both English and Arabic (eg. Dabiq magazine, Furqan Media, Hayat Media, Amaq news..etc).

## Q&A

### *Frequently Asked Questions*

#### **What is the research you conducted?**

We know that young people around the world are interacting with extremist content online, and we wanted to conduct an experiment to see if we could marry that demand with pre-existing online material that serves as a counter-weight against ISIS's recruiting efforts. This pilot project tested the efficacy of using targeted advertising to connect people interested in extremist content with videos that undermine extremists' recruiting efforts.

#### **How is this different from previous attempts?**

Many previous efforts to push back against extremist propaganda involve creating new content -- writing, videos, etc -- to dispel extremist narratives. Our method uses pre-existing content, including content that wasn't created expressly for the purpose of counter-messaging, to push back against extremist propaganda using authentic content that effectively reaches its target audience. Additionally, the sophistication of the targeted advertising framework is without precedent.

#### **How does the method work?**

We begin by working with partners to curate pre-existing online content that in some way undermines extremist group's recruiting efforts and propaganda. In this case, we were focused on ISIS and the ways that they spread their messages online and recruit new members. As you might expect, there is already a huge amount of video and written content online that directly confronts many of ISIS's claims (for example, the real experience of living in the caliphate). We work with partners to create curated playlists and collections of the best, authentic content that challenges ISIS's narrative.

Once we have this content in place, we create targeted advertising campaigns that serve this content directly to people who are searching for information about ISIS and the caliphate, as well as people who are trying to view extremist content online. We serve these ads the same way that businesses have been doing for years—we serve advertising against certain keywords that people tend to use when they're looking for jihadist content online.

#### **What did you learn from the research?**

We saw that the demand for online material created by ISIS presents an opportunity to reach individuals most vulnerable to their messaging, and that this opportunity can be seized through sophisticated online advertising. We also learned that people interested in extremist content engage with alternative messaging from the credible voices that already exist online (e.g. citizens living in the caliphate, defectors, documentarians, religious figures).

#### **Was the method effective?**

Yes. We were pleased by how many people we reached, and how deeply engaged people were with the content. An estimated 320,906 unique users clicked on the ReDirect Method's pilot ads. To evaluate how

engaging our ads were for these users, we compared the "click through rate" (the ratio of people who click on the ad vs. people who see the ad) with the CTR of all ads that ran against similar search terms in the 12 months prior to our Pilot launch. From this comparison, we learn that on average our Arabic ads did 79% better in CTR than others similar ads in this space, and that our English ads did 76% better.

### **How will you apply your insights?**

We're starting by sharing our insights with the community of people and organizations who are working on stemming the tide of violent extremism. We plan to continue our research exploring new ways to undermine extremist recruiting and propaganda online.

### **So you're tracking people's behavior online? Isn't that what law enforcement is supposed to do?**

No. We are using the same tactics that businesses use to advertise. The term "targeted advertising" just refers to serving content against certain keywords—the same way a shoe company might serve ads against the keywords "running" or "jogging"—that indicate an interest in extremist content. While this method fuels a trillion-dollar ecommerce sector, it's hardly been used as a tool to provide alternative messages to people who are looking for extremist content online.

### **Aren't you discriminating against people with a certain opinion? Shouldn't people be able to access content without Google interfering?**

This research doesn't discriminate in any way. We aren't blocking anyone's access to anything or preventing anyone from expressing an opinion. What we're doing is trying to identify the keywords that people use to search for extremist content online and serving curated content against those keywords. This is the same tactic that businesses use to advertise to consumers.

### **How will you imagine other organizations using this method?**

We hope that people will be inspired by this research and realize that all sorts of non-governmental organizations can contribute to the struggle against violent extremism.

There have been several online campaigns that have aimed to undermine the appeal of violent Islamism — but targeting the mainstream; this campaign aimed to reach people who were already seeking out ISIS content online, and to engage them with ads that would not be rejected at face value. Our aim was to design compelling ads, pick the right set of keywords, and keep on refining the campaign as we learned more.





## Engage & Collaborate

*How can others get involved? How can I submit feedback and news ideas?*

- Recruitment narratives are tailored to specific audiences and evolve quickly. We're interested in other approaches and findings into the main drivers of recruitment videos, and the counter-points that can be found in videos uploaded by others online. We're also eager to hear about relevant keywords and insights that would help others replicate the Method. If you conduct relevant research, manage YouTube channels and AdWords campaigns, want to fund other iterations of the method, or can contribute in other ways, please get in touch.



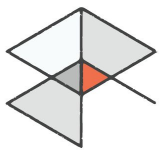
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## Follow the Blueprint

*We are hoping this document will give other interested in replicating the experiment an idea of what to expect in terms of planning, timeline, skills and resources. We're also hoping others will "fork" and modify this set of instructions to add better, more effective steps and tips, or to adapt them to specific contexts.*

### Campaign preparation

- STEP 1** *Identify the problem you are trying to address through a campaign*  
As a starting point, identify the problem you are confronting, and its key characteristics. During the pilot, the problem we identified was ISIS's ability to recruit and spread propaganda through dissemination of particular myths, narratives, and calls to action.
- STEP 2** *Identify what you want achieve*  
Identify what needs to change to address the problem, and ensure you have a clear understanding of how a campaign will contribute to that change. Different campaigns have different desired outcomes. You may wish to undermine the ability of a group to recruit, you may wish to change the minds of people that have already joined or you may wish to mobilise counter-activists against an extremist group. Having a clear aim is an essential component to a successful campaign.
- STEP 3** *Map the extremist content you're trying to address*  
Many campaigns fail as they are based on assumptions rather than evidence. As such it is essential to map out the online content you are seeking to counter or undermine. For example, recruitment narratives are likely to change with regions, languages, target audience, etc, so it is crucial in this step to engage experts on the type of extremism you are seeking to counter. It can be useful to begin the mapping process with pre-existing lists or databases of content online. In our case we found [Jihadology](#) a useful starting point when mapping ISIS recruitment content. For far right extremism [resources](#) maintained by the SPLC may prove helpful.
- STEP 4** *Analyze this content to map the main recruitment narratives*  
Each piece of content identified during step one should now be analysed and placed in the context of the broader extremist narratives. At this stage subject matter experts must be engaged in order to filter this content into a manageable selection of key narratives used by the extremist group. During the pilot we identified five key ISIS narratives. We found that engaging former extremists, defectors and security service personnel is a useful addition to engaging with academic experts in the field. The [Against Violent Extremism](#) network allows organisations to connect with former extremists.



## STEP 5

### *Gather content that counters the key narratives you've identified*

Using your key narratives, start to gather video content that counters these narratives. In order to do this, use simple snowball sampling by searching for content countering your key narratives on Google and exploring available content. In addition to having researchers search for counter-content based on the key narratives, community activists and others should be engaged to make recommendations around effective content which may not be indexed accurately.

## STEP 6

### *Create a database of your counter-arguments*

Draw your counter-content into a database. Code this database by theme, content creator, video length, probable resonance with your target audience, production quality and any other factors which may be useful in the decision making process. As in previous steps, community activists and others should be engaged to make recommendations around the most effective content in this database.

## STEP 7

### *Select the videos you will use, start making possible playlists*

Pick the best videos in your database and send a heads up email, or YouTube message to the content owners to notify them that you'll use their videos. Sort them into possible playlists, with each playlist corresponding to a theme you have identified in step #2. It may not be the case that your channel benefits from being too closely associated with your subject matter. During the pilot we deliberately built a channel that appeared to be a generic content aggregation channel.

## STEP 8

### *Arrange your videos within each playlist to tell a story*

For each playlist, attempt to develop a narrative arc, bringing together the content so that each video flows naturally from one to the other. Each playlist should now have roughly ten videos within it. If possible, ensure that the first video is striking and draws the user in. When creating a playlist around the 'Victimhood of the Ummah' for example, we told a story which began by showing the reality of daily life for Muslims living in the west and slowly moved the viewer towards the negative reality of life under ISIS. This took the user on a narrative journey even though the content was uploaded by different creators.

## STEP 9

### *Develop trailers for your playlists*

If you're planning to use video advertising in your campaign, then Each you could use your video ad as the playlist to draw users in. These trailers should be of high quality and, where creative capacity does not exist in house, should be developed by trusted professional film makers. The trailers should draw on the content for the playlist which they are promoting and broadly address the key narrative of the playlist it is promoting. Trailers should be: Short, engaging and ambiguous enough so users committed to extremist beliefs will not immediately recognize that the content of the playlist conflicts with their worldview. See [here](#)



for example.

## STEP 10

### *Pick an identity for your YouTube channel*

Decide on an overarching identity for your channel, and design appropriate logos and cover photos to match. It may not be the case that your channel benefits from being too closely associated with your subject matter. During the pilot we deliberately built a channel that appeared to be a generic content aggregation channel.

## STEP 11

### *Set up your YouTube channel, upload your designs on it*

Create your channel and upload your channel logo, cover photo and description. For help see [here](#).

## STEP 12

### *Upload your trailers*

Upload your trailers to your channel, for help see [here](#). For now, keep these trailers unlisted. This way you can add them to playlists and ads but they will be undiscoverable until you are ready for your campaign to go live.

## STEP 13

### *Create your playlists*

Now it's time to create your playlists! For help see [here](#). As with the trailers, it may be best to keep these playlists unlisted for now to ensure that YouTube users do not stumble across them until your campaign is fully ready.

## STEP 14

### *Set up your adwords account*

Good news, you are now ready to [set up your AdWords account](#)! When setting up an account you will be asked for credit card details and the details of your first campaign, adverts and target group.

## STEP 15

### *Create a Media Plan*

Depending on the advertising budget you are planning to use for this project, and the advertising channels (Search, Display, and Video) that you decide to use, work on a media plan to estimate the amount of media you'll be able to run with this budget. Tools such as the Keyword Planner, and Display Planner are a great resource to gain an indication on the estimated cost of each metric. Otherwise, if available, consult an online advertising strategist.

## STEP 16

### *Decide which messages you'll use in your banner ads*

Working with subject matter experts, decide on the type of messaging you wish to use in your banner ads. The message of your ads may directly refute the beliefs you are attempting to counter, or alternatively, they may more subtly speaking to the primary themes you are



addressing in an attempt to draw your audience in.

## STEP 17

### *Source graphic design support*

Banner ads, see [here](#), will take longer to create than text ads and are harder to adjust later on, so they should be designed before text ads. In order to complete these to a high standard, high quality graphic designers should be sourced. If quality graphic design capability is not available in house, outside graphic designers should be engaged.

## STEP 18

### *Design your visual banner ads.*

Work with your designers to begin to design your visual [banner ads](#). The text used in the banner ad should directly correspond with the name of the playlist you are directing people towards. For example, in the pilot, “The Soldier’s Perspective” was text used in the banner ad for a playlist countering the notion of ISIS’ military supremacy.

- Ads should attempt to draw on the visual style used by the groups you are countering.
- Constructive ambiguity: Ads should be descriptive of the content that users can expect to reach if they click, but not completely overt about their purpose. Including questions in the text of the ad, which leave the viewer curious, are particularly useful for this.
- Make sure all ads follow [AdWords Advertising Policies](#)
- Once unique images have been selected for the banner ads associated with each playlist, designers must now ensure that banners are created to match each possible size required in adwords.

## STEP 19

### *Create keyword longlist*

For each narrative you are seeking to counter, brainstorm long lists of [keywords](#) your target audience might be searching for. These are the keywords you will be advertising against. Don't just think about the exact narratives you are countering, think about particular phrases, in-group terms, and references which are unique to the group you are targeting.

## STEP 20

### *Eliminate false positives*

Once you have captured your ideas for possible keywords to advertise against, review the list with someone that was not in the original brainstorming session and attempt to remove false positives. For example, if the group you are seeking to target is often in the news, simply advertising against the group name alone may reach many people simply looking for news items, rather than reaching those at risk of falling into the orbit of a violent group. In addition, beware of search terms that may be commonly searched for by history students, for example certain commonly used in-group terms (such as 'crusader army' in the case of Jihadists) or historical references (such as 'Joseph Goebbels' in the case of neo-Nazis) may also be searched for regularly by students.





- STEP 21** *Prioritise most important keywords*  
Within each list, chose certain keywords that you believe to be crucial to the success of your campaign, for example because they reach the highest risk individuals. In the pilot, we prioritised keywords that indicate violent intent.
- STEP 22** *Draft initial text ads*  
Now it's time to start thinking about your text ads. Text ads can be changed and adjusted mid campaign with ease, so feel free to try out a number of options! To begin think about which ad message best corresponds to the keyword lists you plan to use for targeting, additionally it's preferable if create text ads which are relevant to the banner ads you have already created. If you have an ad which asks a question, create a text ad to match - simple! Just make sure to bear [character restrictions](#) in mind while drafting. Draft at least one text ad per campaign, and don't worry, we'll be drafting more later. Similar to banner ads, make sure all ads follow [AdWords Advertising Policies](#).
- STEP 23** *Create display campaign*  
Now that you have one search campaign ready! It's time to create your Display campaign. In the ad space window you will see the option to +Campaign. Once you click this you should select 'Display' as the campaign type. Proceed to select your target location and keywords as normal, then upload your banners. See [here](#) for instructions.
- STEP 24** *Create in display video campaign*  
Next you must create a YouTube campaign, but don't worry, this can also be done via Adwords! As above, click on +Campaign button, but this time select 'Video' as your campaign type. You will again need to input your keywords and your target location. Following this, you must select the link to the playlist which you are attempting to guide users towards and decide if you want to create [an 'In Display' or an 'In Stream' campaign](#). You will then have the option to select an auto generated thumbnail or upload your own. Once you have followed these steps your 'In display' campaign will be ready to go.
- STEP 25** *Create in stream video campaign*  
In order to create an 'In Stream' campaign simply follow the same steps as above, but select 'In Stream' when given the option. This time you won't even have to pick a thumbnail - couldn't be easier!
- STEP 26** *Complete remaining campaigns*  
Once the above steps have all been completed for one of your key themes, repeat as required until you have created Search, Display, and Video campaigns matching each theme



and playlist.

## STEP 27

### *Add additional text ads*

For each of your Search campaigns, consider adding more text ads in order to maximise the possibility of reaching your target audience. Ads which closely match the keywords of searches are more likely to have a higher engagement rate (CTR). So look to your keyword list for inspiration, remember those PRIORITY key words (see step #20), and see if you can work these into the text of your ads. Repeat the above process across all search campaigns until you have between ten to twenty ads per Search campaign. For example, if 'Dabiq' is a priority keyword, make sure that you have created multiple ads with that word in it. This makes it more likely that your ad will be shown, and makes it [more likely that your target audience will click](#) on your ad once shown. Again, it's important to make sure all ads follow [AdWords Advertising Policies](#)

## STEP 28

### *Decide on your key campaign metrics*

Now that you have familiarized yourself with Adwords through the creation of the campaigns, it's time to decide on your key campaign metrics! Ensure that you refer back to the aims of your campaign (step #2), and identify metrics that can help you assess your Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Perhaps measuring the [click through rate](#) on your ads, the overall viewing figures within your playlist, the Impression Share across the campaign, or a mix of all of the above. Whatever you decide your KPIs are, it's crucial that you agree on and track these and they are linked to the overall outcomes you are attempting to achieve. For tips on how to evaluate ad performance see [here](#).

## STEP 29

### *Create a metrics tracker*

Create a tracker to capture your metrics. This should be easy to fill in and capture the key [metrics](#) you can gather from AdWords and your YouTube analytics.

## STEP 30

### *Publish the playlists*

[Publish](#) your playlists.



## Campaign Management

- STEP 31**      *Ensure that payment systems are live*  
Ensure that your method of payment is approved and able to cope with your advertising budget. If possible, it may be a good idea to register a backup payment method on Adwords to ensure that your bases are covered. Checking the 'Billing' section of Adwords should be carried out daily.
- STEP 32**      *Hit go!*  
To start your campaigns, [unpause](#) them. Congratulations, you're now live!
- STEP 33**      *Check approval status.*  
Ensure none of your ads have been disapproved, and adjust where necessary. This task needs to be carried out daily. Ads can be disapproved even after they have initially been approved, especially ones related to sensitive content.
- STEP 34**      *Maintain search terms hygiene*  
Maintain [search term hygiene](#) by checking your search term report and adding negative keywords where necessary. This task needs to be carried out daily.
- STEP 35**      *Monitor videos comments*  
Monitor any videos you have uploaded (trailer for example) for negative or hateful comments. Depending on your campaign aims you may wish to remove these comments or respond to them. One of your KPIs may include reaction of your target audience, so it may be essential to capture this data before removing it. This task needs to be carried out daily.
- STEP 36**      *Capture Adwords data*  
Download data on key metrics (identified during step #27) from AdWords and input into tracker created during step #28. This task must be carried out on a weekly basis.
- STEP 37**      *Capture YouTube data*  
Download data on key metrics from YouTube and input into tracker. This task must be carried out on a weekly basis.
- STEP 38**      *Update key stakeholders*  
Share metrics tracker with any key stakeholders on a regular basis. KPIs must be monitored closely and adjustments made where the campaign is failing to meet one of its objectives. This task must be carried out on a weekly basis.
- STEP 39**      *Adjust bids*  
Adjust bids across campaigns and maximum Cost Per Click (CPC) for priority keywords depending on the relative success, as measured against key indicators. This task must be carried out on a weekly basis.



## STEP 40

### *Create new ads based on trends*

Check the CTR on each of your text ads to assess any patterns, and learn from ads that are outperforming others. For example, within one of your campaigns you may find that your audience is responding better to ads which pose a question. Draft new text ads that match the style and tone that seems to be resonating with your audience.

## STEP 41

### *Adjust playlist order*

From time to time, you should assess the average time your audience is spending in each playlist and attempt to identify patterns. If one of your playlists is outperforming the others on a regular basis, consider re-ordering your videos in other playlists and measuring whether or not this increases average time in playlist.

## *Post-Campaign*

## STEP 42

### *End all campaigns*

Once your budget has run out, pause all campaigns to ensure they stop running. Important to remember this step, because otherwise your campaigns will continue charging you on your registered payment method!

## STEP 43

### *Share findings*

Share your findings and suggestions.

## STEP 44

### *Update method*

Update the Redirect Method blueprint on Github.