

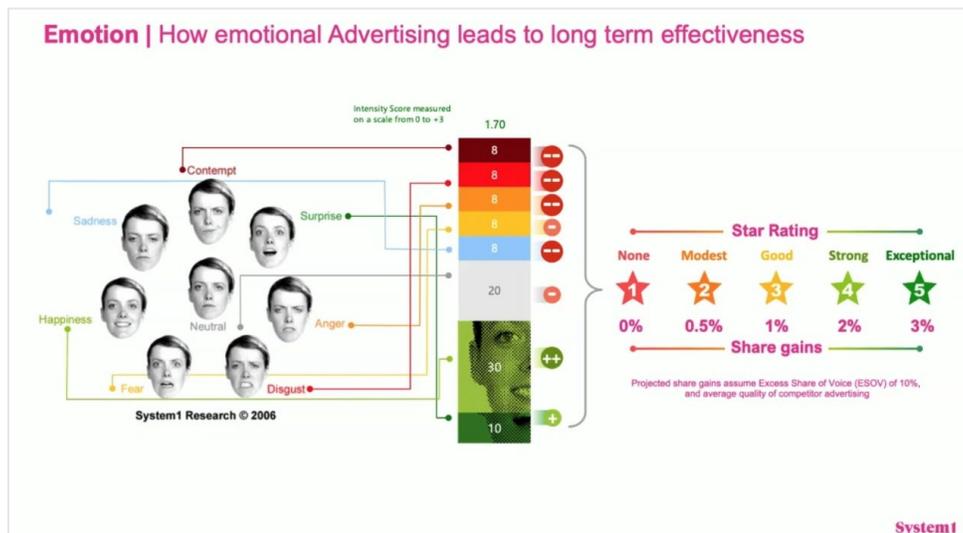
Inside the science and creative secrets of Canada's Top-Rated Ads 2021

An athlete whose performance is transformed by the guidance of an outstanding coach. A young girl's dreamlike journey through the skies on a floating bed. A woman who falls in love with . . . her freshly cleaned towel?

The variety of characters, settings and storylines in Canada's Top-Rated Ads 2021 is seemingly endless, but as our recent webinar with Jon Evans of System1 demonstrated, they all share some common best practices.

Unlike most marketing awards – judged by the industry, for the industry - Canada's Top-Rated Ads is consumer-focused, based on research that identifies the creative that resonates most with viewers. Which ads were tested? We focused our research on ads based on their gross rating point (GRP) levels – the ads that were most familiar to Canadians - a list developed with our friends at NLogic.

System1 Group put all the ads through their ad testing software, which tests ads on measures that predict long-term brand growth (Star Rating, between one and five stars) and short-term sales growth (Spike Rating). Around 50% of ads achieve a one star rating – which isn't great – with anything above a 2.5 star rating considered a good result and above average.



System1's research shows that their star ratings are a reliable predictor of future sales: A great ad can make a material difference to the bottom line. Behind the stars and spikes, however, what System1 is really measuring are seven different kinds of emotional responses to an ad.

That's because, essentially, the better we feel about an ad, the more likely we are to remember – and buy - that brand.

“Our emotions are a better predictor of our action than what we might say and what we might think,” Evans said, adding that System1 recently introduced “neutrality” to “happiness,” “distrust” and the other emotional states on its list because “It’s quite possible to create an ad that elicits no emotions at all.”

Another important element in evaluating the top ads is what Evans called fluency — the degree to which consumers will remember the brand behind the creative. This can be more difficult in a spot where a brand is promoting multiple products at the same time, or when the creative only reveals the advertiser later in the spot.

Perhaps not surprisingly, happiness is the best emotion to increase an ad’s effectiveness. The results tend to be even better when the creative also includes an element of surprise. If negative scenarios are included in an ad, they need to be resolved by the end of the spot or the response to the ad will be negatively impacted.

“How you feel at the end represents how you feel overall,” Evans noted.

Some of the other trends that tended to land advertisers in the top 10 list included:

Families, connection and togetherness:

Many of the top ads didn’t rely on humour or celebrities, but told positive stories about family and togetherness. In fact the top food delivery ad, from Hello Fresh, showed a family happily enjoying an easily-prepared dinner together, beating out other star-studded ads in the category that included Elton John, Jon Hamm, and the characters from Wayne’s World (although UberEats’ Wayne’s World was close!).



Don’t be afraid to put product in the foreground: Although emotion sells, several ads were also sure to include bold branding within their spots. “These companies haven’t been afraid to put their logo and web site address in the ad,” Evans said. “When you want to be remembered, make sure your advertising is well-branded.” This is especially important for new brands; System1 research has found it can take an average of four years for new advertisers to achieve the same results as more established brands.

Right brain techniques work: Although it didn't make the top 10, Evans pointed to an ad from Auto Trader that provided a useful case study in appealing to consumers' creative side. What begins with a typical couple strolling through a car dealership turns into a take-off of "Dirty Dancing," creating a noticeable boost in surprise, happiness and confidence for prospective car buyers. "It really shows the power of music and dance to hold attention and drive emotion," he said.

Inclusivity: At a time when brands are becoming more conscious than ever before about consumer values around diversity, equity and inclusion, Evans noted that eight out of the top 10 ads featured actors from underrepresented backgrounds, many in the lead role. Evans shared that research they've done in the UK and the US show that actor diversity improves the effectiveness of an ad - it's good for business.



For more creative effectiveness tips and to see who made it into the top 10 list of Canada's Top-Rated Ads 2021, watch the [on-demand webinar](#).

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