



CREATIVE TESTING AT TOLUNA



This guide is a resource for brands who want to understand the role of creative testing through all stages of development.

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The definitive guide to creative testing



How do you get the most out of pre-testing?
It's not just about speed or value for money – it's about the big picture learnings and connecting the dots across metrics and stages of the creative testing cycle. That's what ultimately allows you to create better ads for less money.

CREATIVE TESTING E-GUIDE

Coming up with a creative concept is one thing. Executing it in such a way that the ad breaks through the clutter, triggers emotions, fits the brand's world and conveys a sticky message is an entirely different beast



that we develop ads based on concepts that work. That's why organizations should build spaces and processes where ideas can merge with data-grounded inquiry to deliver impact. Think of a laboratory where creativity is studied and refined so that it truly shines on release.

a bank of knowledge, you have a larger working budget than less efficient brands. What do we mean by that? Your working budget is what you spend on consumer-facing activities (for example paid media spend or in-store activation). Your budget for creating materials (production costs, content development, agency fees, etc.) is considered "non-working" because it is spent before any output reaches your consumer.

Assessing creative work isn't a straightforward or easy job, especially in today's ever-evolving landscape. Marketers are

creating more content at faster speeds, for more platforms, and in a growing number of formats. The pressure to be original is on. Marketers are challenged to create content for more screens than ever, targeted at an audience with a shorter attention span. Addressable TV, OTT and programmatic will grow to enable brands to deliver the level of precision in terms of targeting that the digital ecosystem has promised. You need to breakthrough when it matters, by screen and by format.

Consistency, continuity and coherence in creative work are more important than ever, and your content and advertising testing program should evolve to match. But with more data on the table, decision making hasn't become any easier. The complexity and uncertainty nudges organizations towards false interpretations of test results which then takes away the appeal of investing in building large-scale testing programs. But that's a mistake: This causes advertisers to invest in productions that are perhaps not viable, or to miss out on opportunities to uncover insights that would yield even better results.

Creative testing can yield high return on investments, when you invest in a program where the results build on themselves to elevate your content to higher and higher levels with each test. The end goal is to make fewer mistakes

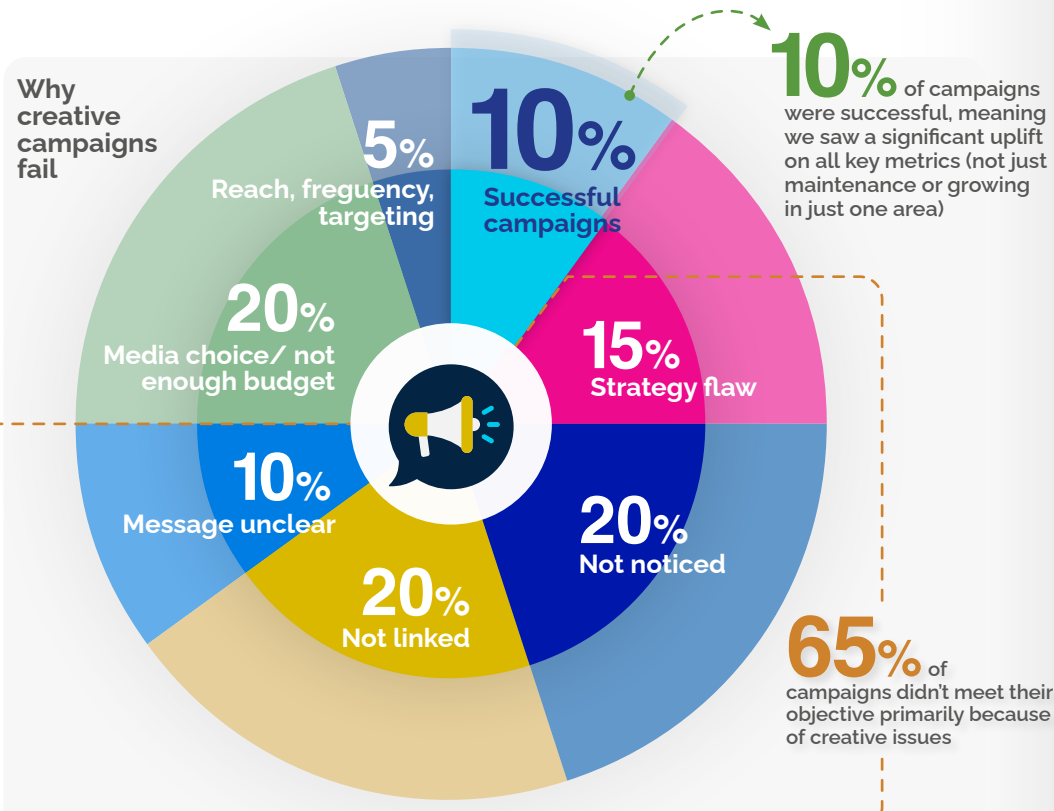
and create better ads for the same budget – or less. And in doing so, outperform the competition.

Up to 65% of campaigns don't meet objectives due to problems with the creative

We've seen that in up to 65% of campaigns that don't meet objectives, the failure is a result of creative issues – including challenges with breakthrough. Most creative issues relate back to the concept or the idea behind the communication strategy. This

highlights the need for strong, original and impactful communication concepts in order to realize advertising and brand impact with the final creative executions.

Coming up with a creative concept is one thing. Executing it in such a way that the ad breaks through the clutter, triggers emotions, fits the brand's world and conveys a sticky message is an entirely different beast. And that's why creative testing is relevant now more than ever.



The creative testing lab: A modern blend of art and science

This is where we have an opportunity to leverage data to make decisions on creative work. By evaluating the specific task of each ad, we learn how to optimize campaign ideas before going into production – and ensure

Improve your creative development process to fuel a bigger working budget

In the end, testing programs help you create better ads for less money. When you have

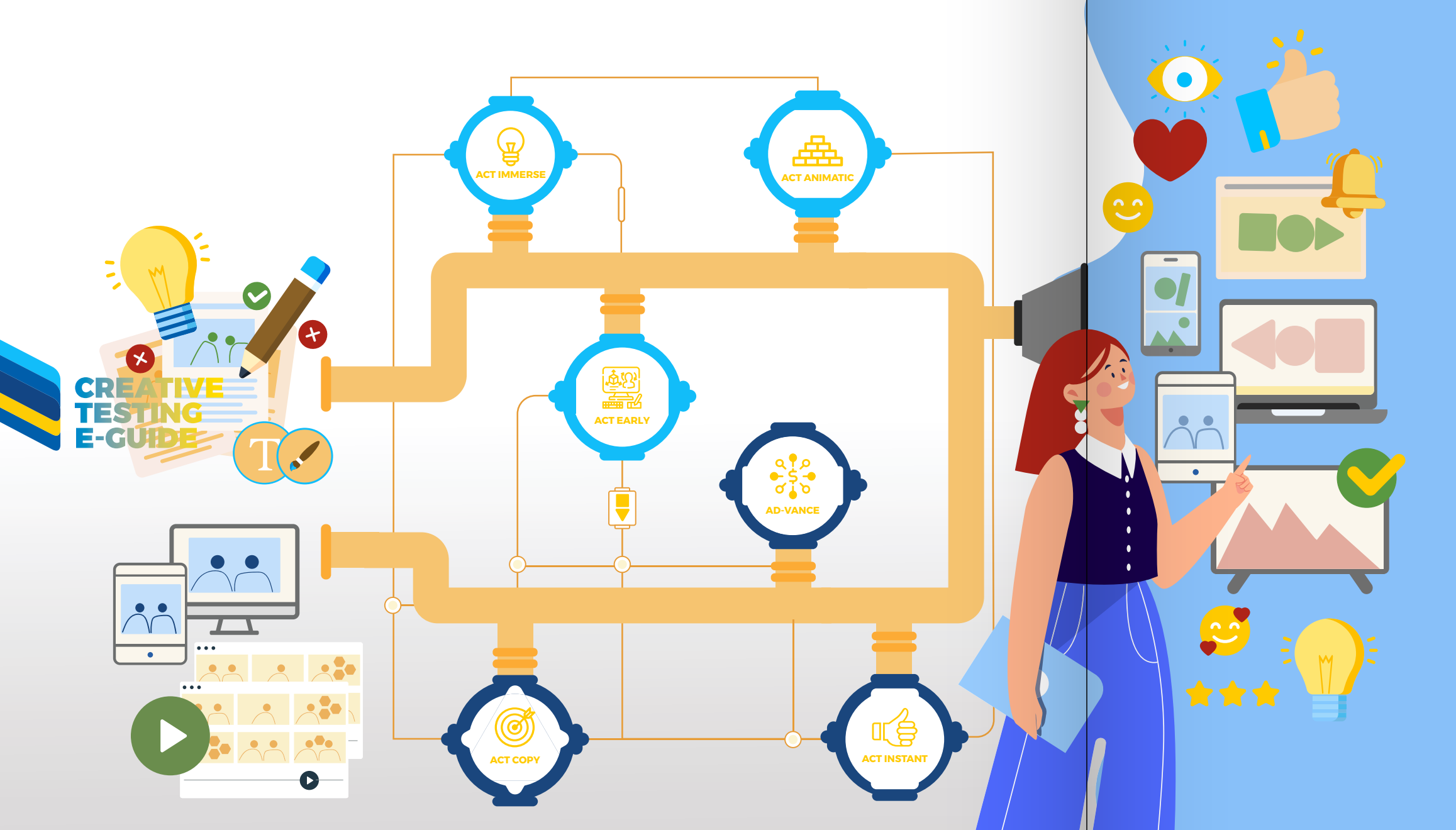
When you optimize your production and development activities with big-picture, research-driven learnings, you streamline development so that you have more of your non-working budget to funnel to consumer-facing activities. ▶



There are a few **key ingredients** you need to build a **successful creative testing program.**

- 1 Testing mentality**
Create. Test. Air. Repeat. The secret to success is a mindset that allows for experimentation and optimization. When you test creative assets early and often, you support an agile way of working that ensures added value and efficiency gains.
- 2 Curious experts**
Your teams should challenge the status quo of advertising in order to stand out – and work with partners who see the testing mentality as a path to constant improvement. From creative professionals to brand and marketing teams to insights consultancy, you'll want to build a top team who is passionate about learning and growing together.
- 3 Smart use of technology**
There's a mountain of technical innovations out there, but effective creative testing doesn't require running after the next shiny tool. Find and use technology that enables the human experts to do what they do best – and that enables you to get the most out of your data. The best results are powered by the speed and scale afforded by technology and automation, but with the "human touch" of the depth and context brought on by expert storytelling.
- 4 Big picture learnings that pave the way for future success**
What is the role of emotion in your brand's communications? How do you strike the right balance of functional to emotional messages? When do you focus on transactional advertising vs brand equity building? And how do you make your ads stand out in a constantly evolving digital landscape?

Your creative testing program should build in its own big picture learnings fueled by performance metrics, so you can easily develop best practice guidelines. Produce a creative playbook or establish category-wide creative guidelines so that you can connect the dots and benefit from what works.



Testing at every stage of the creative cycle

Choosing the right approach

The stage of creative material combined with business needs will match you with the right testing solution. Here's what you need to consider depending on where your ads are in the development process.

I. Early ideas

The only thing that matters in the initial stages of development is supporting the go-no go decision for bringing the concept into production.

A wide range of ad concepts can be tested at the concept stage. This works for enduring campaign concept ideas that go beyond a single campaign, where the central concept may run for years. It also works across formats from TV commercial concepts to those for digital platforms, OOH or activations. Regardless of the stimulus, early-stage concept testing evaluates whether a central idea speaks to consumers, or whether the storyline helps the brand and message stick in consumers' memories.

The most important thing is that whatever stimulus we show best represents the intended creative concept.

II. (Almost) finished assets

By now you've already invested a lot of time, resources and creative energy into the development of your material or campaign idea. The finish line is near, but you're not there just yet. Once your creative goes live, there's still a complex playing field ahead – different ad formats, a variety of consumer devices and screens, and above all, your message has to be heard by consumers.

At this stage your brand teams need an in-depth understanding of how your ad works, in order to make an informed go-no go decision to support the ad with media

investment at stake.

When you test a later stage ad, you first need to make sure that your ad is at the right level of "finished" – that is, does it have all the right elements that will help it stand out against the competition. Next, consider the right audience, so that outcome of the test is predictive of in-market performance with the same audience. We usually advise testing with the media-target, which is the same target as that of your (future) campaign. At this stage, don't be shy to test multiple variants either – variation in duration, different endings, etc. helps you explore the opportunities at a fraction of the costs of A/B-testing the same hypotheses when your campaign is already live.

Test any ad, at any stage of development with Toluna's suite of solutions ▶

How to get the most out of a test?

Follow these guidelines to make sure you're testing your early-stage creative as effectively as possible:

Do:

- Make sure the duration of animatic is close to that of future finished ad
- Use language that fits well with your target audience
- Make sure that editing and storytelling represent the executional style of the future finished ad
- Make sure to emphasize crucial emotions, interactions and facial expressions that are central to the execution and pivotal to the storyline
- Include audio effects in the style of the future finished ad, eg. voiceover, character's speech, sound effects, (stock) music
- Apply visual elements like supertext, subtitling or visual effects

Don't:

- Avoid too much explanation and background information – it inhibits consumers' spontaneous System 1 reactions
- Avoid using marketing jargon. Don't explain abbreviations, certification marks etc., unless you intend to do so in the finished ad
- Don't show a video in black and white where only the logo and package appear in color (unless the finished film will use the exact same style)
- Don't test with music that will not be used in the final version (if you don't have the rights for a popular piece of music, then don't use it in the test)

When choosing a creative testing solution, think about what you want to get out of each test. Are you exploring motivations and looking for in-depth understanding? Or are you looking for validation of multiple concepts to enable discussion on which concept has the most potential to be developed into a real ad?

- Don't show a final scene (often with product/logo/brand/slogan) for longer than it will feature in the finished ad – this won't be representative for gauging memorization of the brand

Toluna's creative testing tool kit

Early ideas | Delivers deep insights for ideas early in development. Our AI-powered platform for digital qualitative insights uses stimuli like text, visuals, storyboards, video or audio to get real-time feedback.



Rough production | Early stage online quant creative test for storyboards or basic animatics. Delivers guidance on optimizing assets before going to production and key comparisons against norms.



For high quality animatics | Optimal testing of breakthrough from unforced exposure in a reel. With benchmarked results and recommendations on next steps in production.



Finished ad guidance | A rich pre-testing solution for finished/near finished assets, probably TV or video. We deliver a complete diagnostic of your ad's performance versus norms with strong guidance on optimization.



Streamlined results | A streamlined and fast pre-test with simple, standard scorecard deliverables, comparing results against norms with pointers on optimization.



Same day learning | The quickest possible solution to test & optimize finished creative. ACT Instant delivers results in as little as 2hrs without interviewing respondents, using AI-powered algorithms and meta-learning.



UNFINISHED STIM → (ALMOST) FINISHED ASSETS

III. The Toluna difference: Actionable next steps for your brand team

The first question we usually get after walking brands through the creative testing cycle is, "Now that we have the results, what do we do next?"

Helping to interpret test results, put them into context for your brand and make sure your team has actionable steps to move forward is daily business for our advertising experts. From a suggestion to change the text of a voiceover to switching the order of scenes, reviewing distinctive assets and/or providing ways to improve viewer attention or memorization, we supply learnings and recommendations that your marketing teams and creative agencies can implement so that you see results.

Our analysis is tailored to benchmarks, markets, ad format and device, which means that you get the results you need.

There's plenty of proof that early testing is beneficial for developing stronger ads. In fact, we can even show that it yields in-market performance.

Take this example from a brand who leveraged institutional advertising IQ via a series of meta-learnings from two years of creative testing:

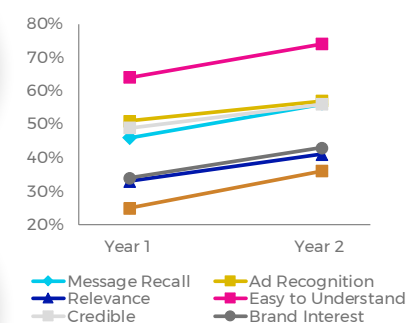
This brand had a demonstrable performance lift on seven key metrics thanks to the improvements afforded by systematic testing. That means improved message recall, understandability, ad recognition, credibility and relevance, leading to greater purchase intent and brand interest.

Another in-market analysis of 36 campaigns shows that pre-tested ads drive incremental lift over non pre-tested ads, with a 168% improvement on ad recall, 60% better aided brand awareness and a 33.6% uptick in purchase intent, for example.

Follow these guidelines to make sure you're testing your early-stage creative as effectively as possible:

Meta analysis drives our client's institutional advertising IQ

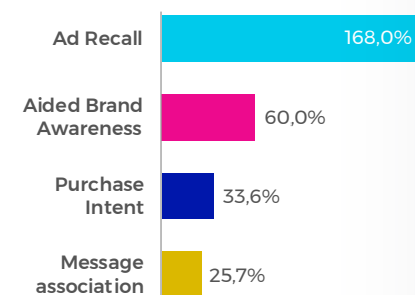
Client A Example n=181 ads



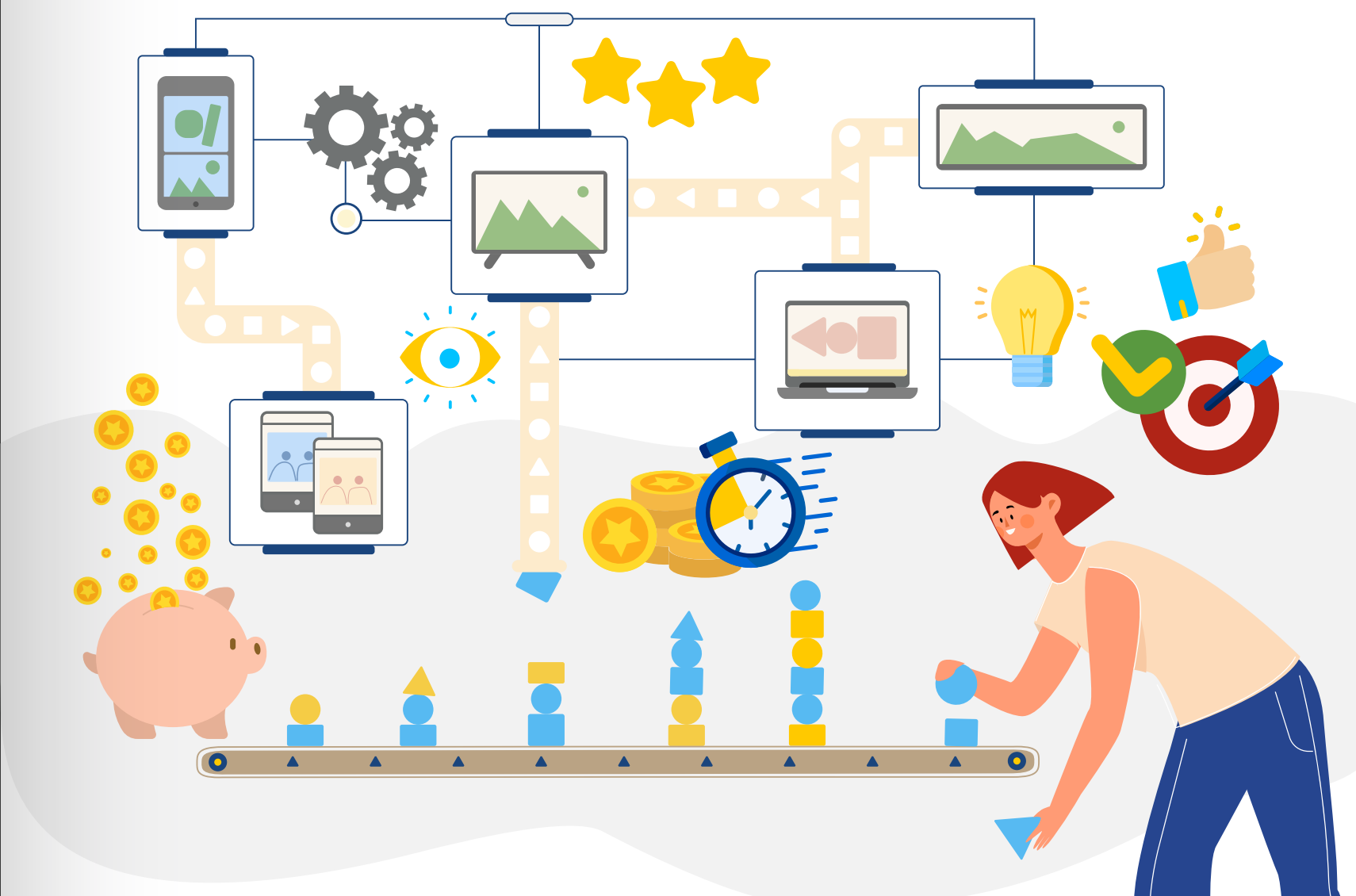
Reference: 181 ads for the same client tested over a 2yr period & benefit in Yr2 from meta learnings

Validation of pretesting metrics to in-market brand lift results

Brand Impact: Pretested vs. Non-pretested



Reference: Analysis of 36 Campaigns In Market
Pre-tested ads drive incremental lift over non pre-tested ads



Create. Test. Air. Repeat.

Build your own creative testing lab with Toluna.

Whether you're a single or multi-brand team, you can get more from your investment in marketing comms and research by setting up programs that foster a systematic testing and learning mentality. With Toluna, this might look like:

- Warehousing creative performance metrics in an interactive visual library, so you can easily develop best practice guidelines. Eg. What is the role of emotion? How to balance of functional to emotional messages? Transactional advertising vs Brand equity building?
- Producing a creative playbook, establishing category-wide creative guidelines
- Connecting insights across brand tracking, campaign effectiveness and creative testing with an integrated offering for brand and comms testing

At the end of the day, it's the synergy of single projects and insights that fuel your business forward. That's how you start working more efficiently, successfully and creatively - and ultimately produce better ads for less.

How can our teams help yours develop your own creative testing lab and take your brand to the next level?
Reach out and let's get started together.

Want to know more?

- Contact one of our experts
- Learn more about our solutions