



# Welcome to the Attention Economy

How to align your media-buying  
strategy with consumer attention  
for higher brand recall and ROI



LU'EN

campaign

# *“I don’t look at the ads”*

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Who among the readers of *Campaign* hasn’t heard that one before?

We’ve all met the punter in the pub who confidently claims that they are totally and utterly immune to advertising because they never see the stuff. “Honestly, I just screen them out.”

And who among us hasn’t said to themselves: “If only you knew.” We shake our heads at his naivety: a person like this will be exposed to thousands of ads every day, and while they might not look at them all, some of them will get through. We understand that people cannot recall the impact of each ad, and in isolation this does not inherently mean that this person was not exposed – or that the ad has no effect at all.

But how many ads do, in fact, get through? And what do people actually engage with when they look at ads? What is the reality of attention to advertising? Perhaps it isn’t a case of the person in the pub being naïve. Perhaps it’s us.



## THE REALITY OF ATTENTION

People are, as a rule, very good at ignoring things. We have to be. We can only concentrate on important things by ignoring other, less important things. We developed this selective attention for very good evolutionary reasons. If, as cavemen, we had lavished our attention on everything, rather than say, listening out for lions, we would have soon ended up as lion lunch. Instead, we have developed the ability to concentrate on one thing by turning down the volume for everything else.

Advertising is just one of many things that we are very good at ignoring. Even when we can see something, this doesn’t mean that we will see it. Just because an ad is viewable does not mean that it will definitely be viewed. So how much do we, in fact, see?



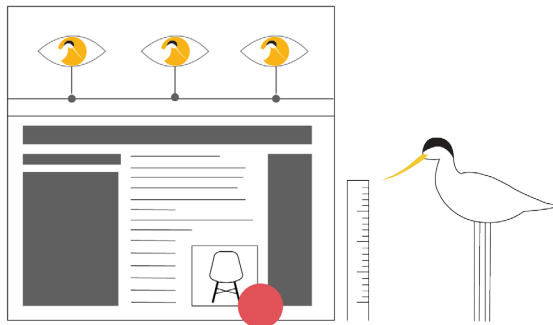
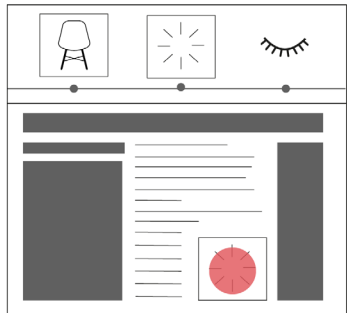
### MEASURING ATTENTION

For the past two years, we have been running the world's largest continuous eye-tracking study: 500 households across the UK, all equipped with sensitive eye-tracking cameras that passively monitor what people actually look at when they go online – and what they ignore. This data set gives us a unique insight into the reality of attention to advertising.

On the surface, the picture isn't pretty. Our data shows only 18% of viewable digital ads actually get looked at. This banner blindness is on top of viewability issues: around half of all UK digital ads are served beneath the fold, or don't load in time

to be viewable by a user. This means only around 9% of UK digital advertising ever gets looked at by a human being. Our person in the pub was wrong. But they weren't that wrong.

We are also able to measure how long people tend to look at advertising. The answer is: not long. The average engagement with a digital ad is only 1.2 seconds, across both static and video formats. This is closer to how people engage with posters than TV ads. And while there is a great deal of variation in how different people engage with different ads, by far the majority of attention with advertising is fleeting. Only around 5% of all viewable ads get more than one second of attention.



*“Only 18% of viewable digital ads actually get looked at”*

*“The average engagement with a digital ad is only 1.2 seconds, across both static and video formats”*



## AVERAGES HIDE AS MUCH AS THEY REVEAL

Within the thousands of sites that we have been tracking, some publishers and formats perform far more strongly. All things being equal, people are significantly more likely to notice a big ad, or a video ad, or an ad that is viewable for 20 seconds than they are to look at a small ad, or a static ad, or an ad in which 50% of the pixels are viewable for one second (what is currently considered, somewhat arbitrarily, to be the minimum viewability standard). An ad on *The Times* or *The Guardian* is far more likely to get noticed than the same ad - viewable for the same time - on another, lesser site.

And attention matters. It seems almost trivial to have to say it, but you are more likely to remember an ad that you actually look at than one that you don't. While we have some evidence of the impact of peripheral vision on brand recall, there is a clear connection between looking at advertising and remembering it. And, as you might expect, the longer you look at an ad, the more likely you are to remember it (see Fig 1).

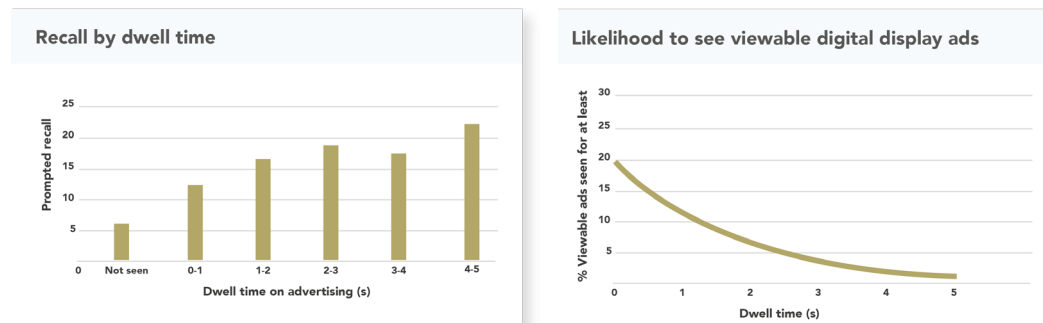


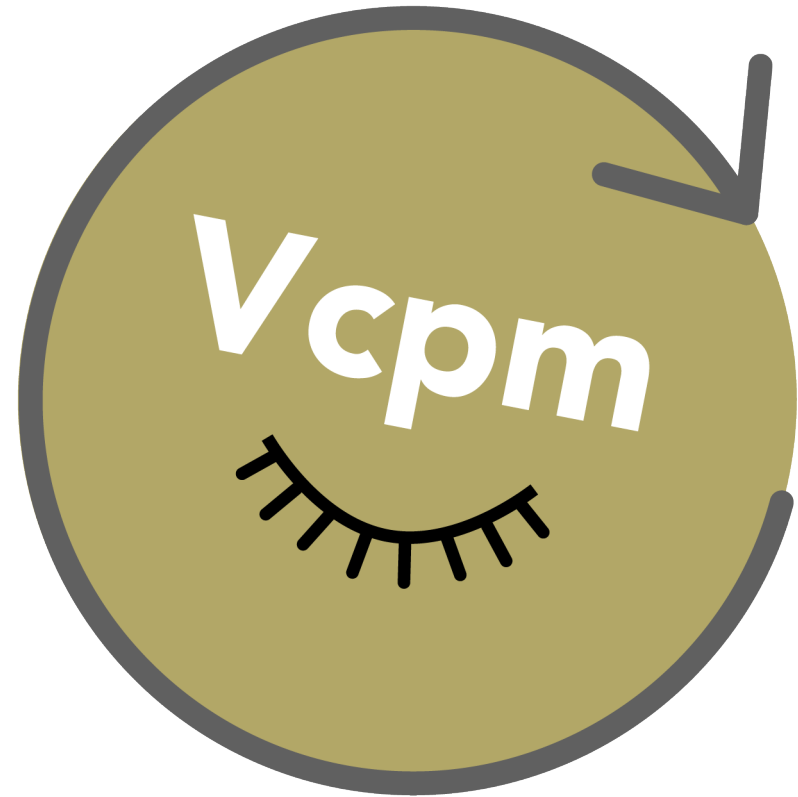
Fig 1: Eye-tracking heat map from Lumen Research

### PAYING ATTENTION

Most importantly, attention turns into sales. Advertisers frequently conduct campaign analyses to understand which ads and sites are driving the most sales. Up until now, the best that they could do has been to measure all the viewable ad exposures that a particular shopper could have seen, and then see how this correlates to sales. The results have not always been conclusive, leading some to question the efficacy of digital advertising as a whole.

But now we know why these attribution models have been so shaky. Just because people can see the ads, doesn't mean that they will see them: only 18% of viewable ads get noticed. As a modern-day Lord Leverhulme might say: "I know that 82% of my digital advertising is wasted; I just don't know which 82%."

*"I know that 82% of my digital advertising is wasted; I just don't know which 82%"*



### ATTENTION PREDICTIONS

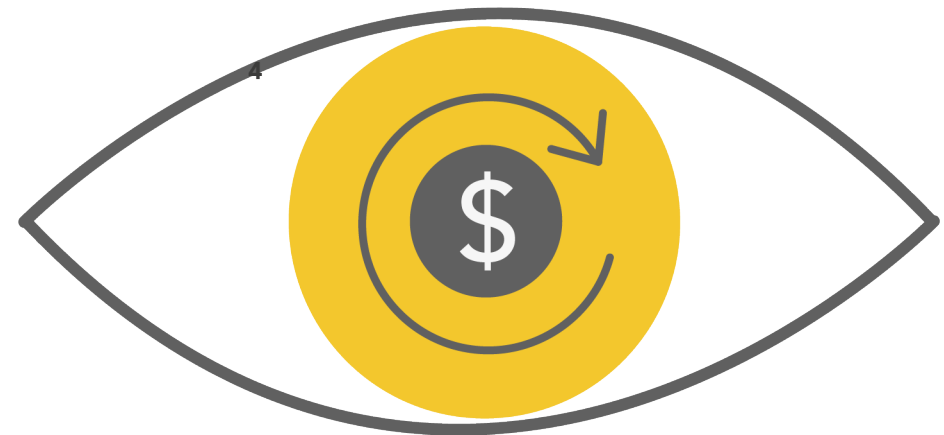
Help is at hand. We have been able to model our attention data and turn it into 'attention predictions', giving a likelihood for a particular ad on a particular site to be seen – and for how long. We can then apply these predictions to impression-level campaign data to give an estimate of, for example, how likely it is for a particular shopper to actually look at a given ad placement.

And guess what? Attention pays.

#### CASE STUDY

**Avocet and Lumen Research conducted a study across hundreds of brands and more than 10,000 domains to examine the relationship between brand recall versus the standard display performance metrics (post-view conversions/clicks) and challenger performance metrics (incrementality and viewable post-view conversions).**

**The results of the analysis showed brand recall correlates strongly to performance metrics that account for viewability or directly measure impact (clicks, incremental conversions and viewable conversions). However, brand recall has little or no connection to standard post-view conversions. That finding powerfully indicates that post-view conversions have little connection to the real world as they fail to correlate with brand recall.**



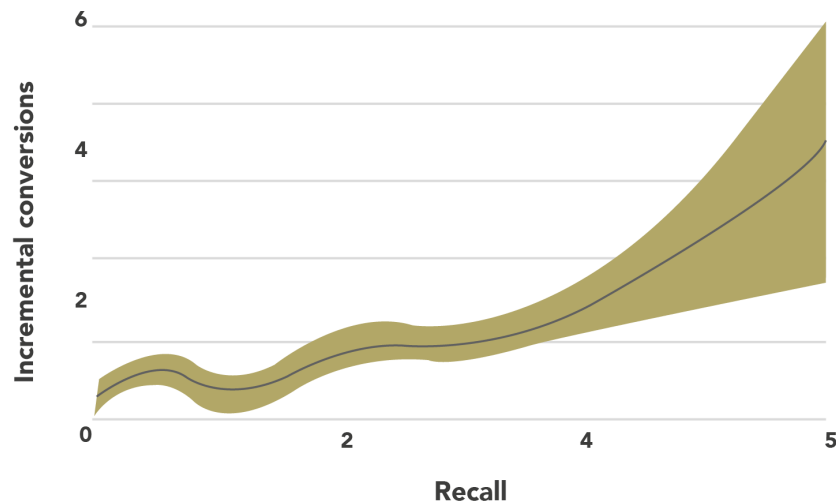
## INTERPRETING THE DATA

The vertical axis for each graph shows a normalised measure of performance, e.g. 1 is average, 2 is twice the average, 0.5 is half the average. The horizontal axis shows the brand recall – again normalised, so 1 is the average.

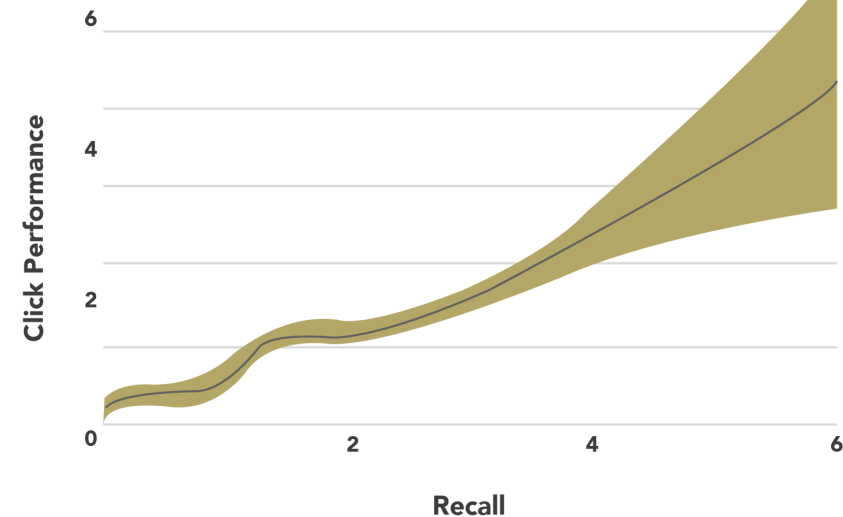
Each graph contains a line of best fit surrounded by coloured space indicating the 95% confidence interval.

The correlation between these two factors shows that higher click levels reinforce the brand message, as more clicks equate to higher recall – with results being viewed up to six times longer than the average ad analysed.

### Incremental conversions by Recall



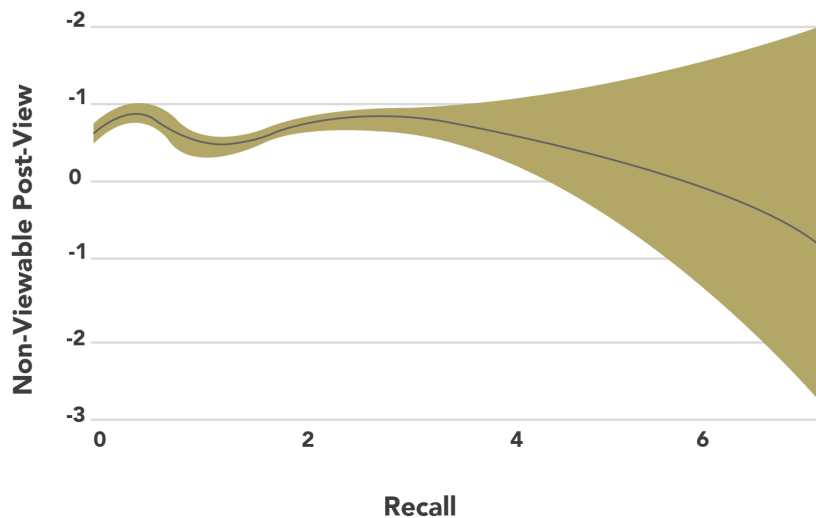
### Click performance by Recall



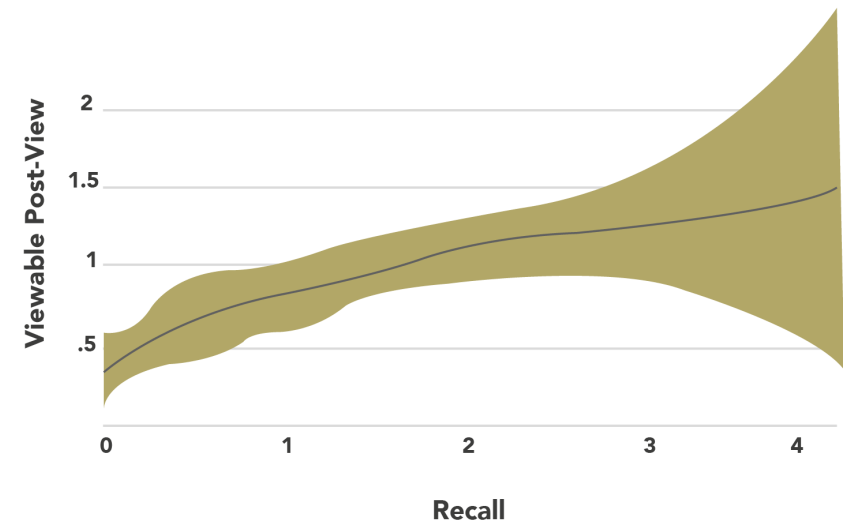
This negative correlation between non-viewable post view ad formats and recall proves that ad which aren't viewed have no impact in the real world – ie PV figures look like success in their high numbers, however this volume does not translate into the same level of recall or customer actions.

Optimising to only viewable/in-view placements has a positive impact on brand recall in terms of both awareness and actions (whether sales, data capture or enquiries).

## Non-Viewable Post-View by Recall



## Viewable Post-View by Recall



### Winning the battle for attention

*What can advertisers do to take advantage of this situation?*

Firstly, they can start by shifting their spend towards high-attention domains and away from low-attention domains. Without naming names, there's a lot of dross out there, and utilising valuable impression level attention prediction data will help you avoid it.

Secondly, they can start taking time more seriously. Some sites and some formats generate a lot more viewable time than others. In general, more viewable time equates to more attention. Attention correlates with sales. You do the maths.

Finally, advertisers must invest more time into creativity as an attention-driving – and therefore business-driving – tool. If our data shows anything, it is that no-one has to look at your advertising. More often than not, they don't. You have to earn their attention, by developing elegant, engaging ads that are worth your customers' time.

We find that simple, yet thoughtful ads get more attention and generate more sales, verses cluttered and complicated ones. A perfectly personalised message won't be as effective as a simple ad that is designed to succeed in a second. Creatively, digital advertisers should take their cue from the out-of-home industry, not the direct marketing industry.



### Welcome to the attention economy

We are told that we now live in an attention economy. A recent history of advertising was titled *The Attention Merchants*. This image is not as new as some like to think. Back in 1976, Herbert Simon, Nobel Laureate and father of behavioural economics, noted that: "In an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else... What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention..."

We often talk of ads earning people's attention, being worth someone's time. Conversely, customers pay attention, or spend time with you. There is wisdom in the words we use, if only we had eyes to see.

For us, this is more than a colourful analogy. We believe that we are on the cusp of a true attention economy, where advertisers and publishers will buy and sell attention for real. Attention is finite, and rare, and valuable to the bottom-line of every business. Our person in the pub was closer to the truth than many of us imagine, or care to admit. There are incremental changes that advertisers and agencies can make today to future-proof their digital communications and messaging to be compelling to consumers as part of a long-term strategy.

*See overleaf for our pull-out top tips to increase consumer attention across your digital advertising.*



Please contact: [ezra@avocet.io](mailto:ezra@avocet.io) | [mike.follett@lumen-research.com](mailto:mike.follett@lumen-research.com)



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## Creative checklist top tips



### Design for time

As dwell times are usually short, ensure that your call-to-action and value exchange for the user (whether the clear benefit that your product/service provides, or a price promotion/offer that simply cannot be missed) is clear from the first frame.



### Looking, not reading

Given short dwell times, few people have time to read large amounts of text. Maintain a balance of text and image in the design to attract the cognitive and emotional aspects of comprehension and keep your message concise.



### Think like a poster

Digital advertising needs to compete for attention in a busy visual environment, just like posters. Think of your ads in this way to refine the look, feel and message for higher receptivity versus your competitive set.



### Believe in branding

Strong, unambiguous branding from the start gives digital ads the best chance of adding value. Ensure your brand logo is clear and included in every frame so there is no chance of confusing your offering to that of a competitor.



### Ditch the “Big Reveal”

Viewers are unlikely to watch your ad from first to last frame in order to receive your brand message. To ensure that the purpose of your advertising is met, front-load your design and pique interest from the start.

