

Lessons in advertising: Christmas 2025



Introduction

Every year as we approach the winter holidays, the airwaves are filled with festive storytelling. Christmas advertising has become as much a part of the season as lights on a tree or songs on the radio.

That's because the run up to Christmas, or "golden quarter" spanning October to December, is one of the most profitable periods for brands and retailers. It's such a critical period for sales that it's essential for companies to nail their holiday advertising.

Yet the best ads aren't those that feel overly promotional. The most successful are the campaigns that tap into emotion — the feelings of nostalgia, togetherness and the magical feeling of the holidays. They remind us what the holidays mean, while also ensuring the brands come to mind powerfully and positively during the next few critical shopping months.

This year we looked at some of the best ads from the UK and the US.

Some brands are known for their great Christmas ads year after year, while others less so. Some brands relied on their traditional (and successful) formulas — delivering consistency in a fresh way — while others took some risks and did something unexpected.

We'll go through the results and then share our tips on how you can make a great Christmas ad next year.



Kim Malcolm
**Head of advertising
research**



Methodology

We analyzed all the ads with consumer feedback from people using **Zappi Amplify Advertising System**, a modern research system that fuels agile, iterative ad development with continuous consumer feedback.

Developed in partnership with leading global brands, **Zappi Amplify Advertising System** combines the best of advertising research approaches to **predict how well an ad will deliver ROI**, via both short-term sales and long-term brand equity, so you can learn what works and what doesn't to optimize ads at every step of the creation process.

The metrics used

We looked at five metrics:

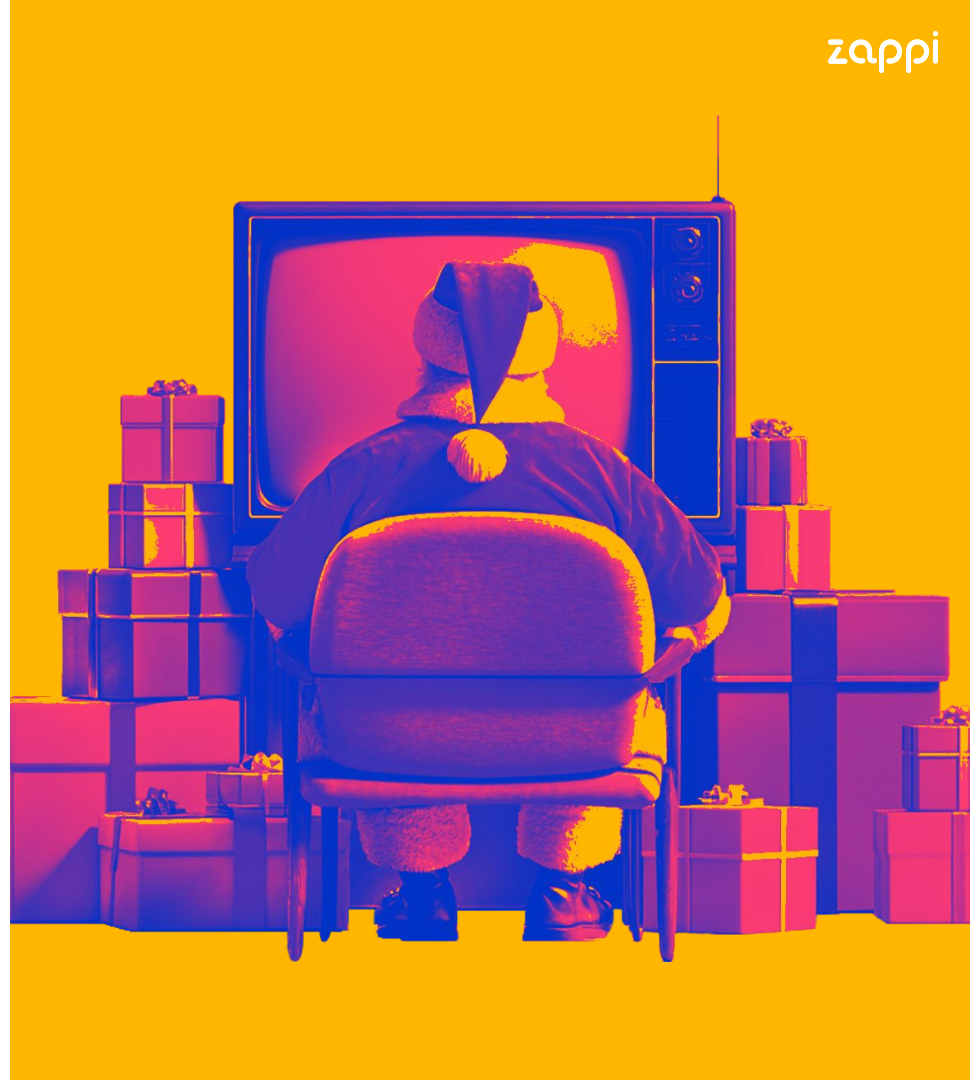
Sales Impact: How likely is the ad to deliver ROI via short-term sales uplift?

Brand Impact: How likely is the ad to build the brand and drive sales into the future?

Ad Distinctiveness: Is the ad different from other ads viewers have seen?

Top Scoring Emotion: What emotion did the ad make viewers feel most?

Brand Recall: Did viewers spontaneously recall seeing an ad for the brand?



Why these metrics matter

You can never look at a single advertising metric in isolation, because there are many elements required for successful advertising.

Christmas ads aren't simply a source of entertainment and a way for audiences to get into the holiday spirit — they must **drive sales** and **build the brand** into the longer term.

It's essential for any Christmas ad be **distinctive**, because it has to stand out to be noticed amid all the other Christmas ads.

And because the holidays are a time of emotional connection, Christmas ads are known for their **emotional appeal**, primarily love. That's what makes them memorable and deeply resonant.

And finally, viewers must **remember the brand** in the ad, otherwise the brand doesn't get the benefits!



Themes from the ads this year

Before we get into individual ad performance, here's a look at some of the overarching themes we saw.



1. Great music

An ad's music choice can play a pivotal role in grabbing attention, setting the scene, evoking emotions and ultimately creating a more immersive experience for the audience. By adding to the overall experience, **music helps make the ad more memorable.**

So it's no surprise that many of the great Christmas ads had a great soundtrack.

Many ads used recognizable Christmas tunes to establish the festive vibes, like "March" from "The Nutcracker" in Planters' "Nuts About the Holidays." And Asda used a completely rewritten version of "Let It Snow" to tell the whole story of "A Very Merry Grinchmas"!

Many used instrumental music to underscore the action, like Sainsbury's use of upbeat music or Ocean Spray's dramatic music throughout the whole ad.

And others used classic songs — but not Christmas songs — to set the tone and establish that feeling of nostalgia, like John Lewis' use of "Where Love Lives" by Alison Limerick or Starbucks' use of The Proclaimers' "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)."



2. Compelling stories

30, 60 or 90 seconds isn't much time, but some of the best ads this year used their time effectively to tell an engaging story.

Sainsbury's "Unexpected Guest" is like a short movie with a protagonist and antagonist, where the good guys save the day and the bad guy is caught and Christmas is saved.

John Lewis' "Where Love Lives" tells a quiet story about a father and teenage son brought closer with a thoughtful gift.

Starbucks' "Drawn Together" depicts two drawings on Starbucks cups finding their way back each other.

Each one tells a unique story that **audiences are eager to see resolved in a satisfying way.**



3. Love

People tend to love the festive season, and Christmas ads tap into that love by **dialing up the emotional connection and delivering heartwarming stories.**

This year's Christmas ads did just that — nearly every ad we looked at evoked more love than the average UK or US ad by a considerable margin.

That doesn't mean that all the ads were tearjerkers, many of them had some very funny moments! But with the combination of recognizable characters, nostalgic references, great music choices and compelling stories, love wins the day.

In fact, some of these compelling stories were more like mini movies, resulting in a lot of peaks of different emotions. We're always impressed with how much emotion Christmas ads can pack into a short time!



4. Nostalgia

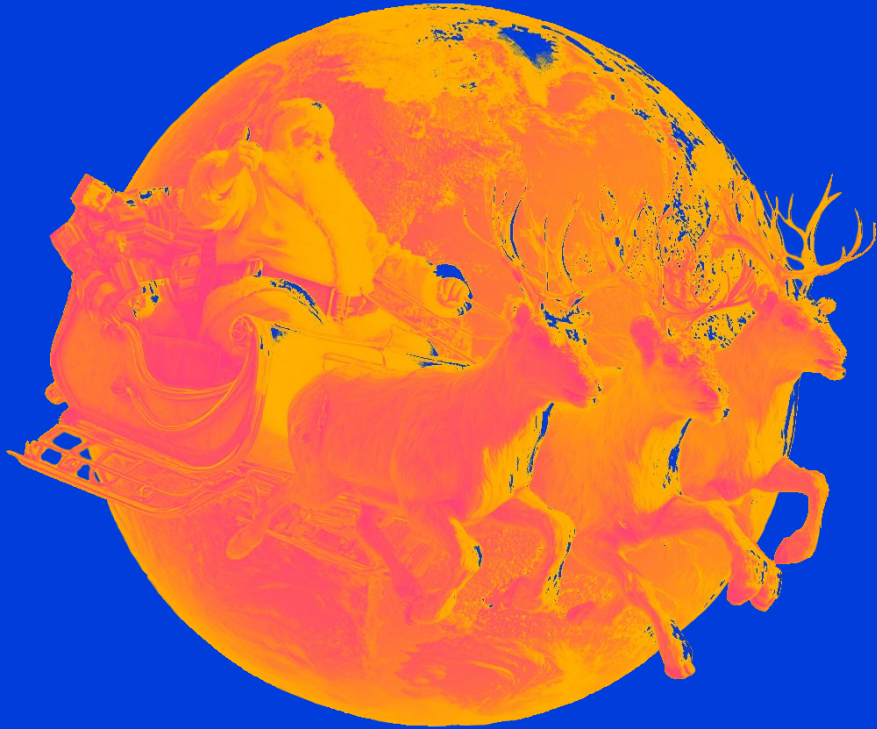
Each year we see Christmas ads tugging at our heartstrings by **reminding us of our childhoods or Christmases of the past.**

And this year was no different, as nostalgia was a key element of so many of the best ads this year.

Many ads sparked nostalgia by bringing in classic, familiar characters like the BFG, Puss in Boots and fairytale characters like Cinderella and Snow White.

John Lewis evoked 90's nostalgia with a song from the era and a flashback to the 90's club scene. Coca-Cola used two different forms of nostalgia — nostalgia for its classic “Holidays Are Coming” ad and nostalgia for traditional family moments of our past. LEGO reminded us of the magic of playing as a child. And so many more examples!

In fact, it's hard to find an example of any Christmas ad that *didn't* rely on nostalgia in some way!



5. Classic characters

We saw several classic characters across ads this year!

Asda used the Grinch and Walmart had the Whos — both from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Coca-Cola featured Santa. And Ocean Spray used Krampus — St. Nicholas' dark counterpart who punishes naughty children.

But we saw even more brands use classic characters not associated with the holidays. Sainsbury brought back the BFG, Boots used Puss in Boots and many fairy tale characters and LEGO used some familiar characters in LEGO form like Darth Vader, Batman and Glinda and Elphaba.

And finally, we saw many classic brand characters. Kevin the Carrot, Trevor & Connie, the M&S fairy and Mr. Peanut to name a few!

All these characters serve to **help audiences connect with the story and feel stronger emotions.**



United Kingdom

zappi | win with consumers



What we saw in the UK this year

The ads we looked at are from brands that are well known for their Christmas ads.

The industry and the general public look forward to seeing what these brands release for Christmas each year and have specific expectations for each brand.

And **they did not disappoint this year**. We saw some great ads, most scoring high across all the metrics we looked at — with notably high scores in brand recall and emotional response.

Some ads made us laugh, some made us cry and most made us feel uplifted and put us in the Christmas spirit.

There were a few surprises this year. Aldi split its ad into three parts released over several weeks. Waitrose released a four-minute film and ran 30 and 60 second “trailers” for that film. And Tesco focused on a more grounded (and less magical and optimistic) approach to Christmas.

Read on for more detail on each ad.



Argos: “Thought We Were Just for Toys?”

ABOUT THE AD

Argos’ mascots Trevor (a toy dinosaur) and Connie (a doll) take Simon Bird hostage [this Christmas](#)! At first, they’re menacing and Simon Bird is panicked. But soon it’s revealed that they’re just trying to introduce him to the idea that “There’s more to Argos”! The toys help him find gifts for his family — because Argos has more than toys — and his sister is surprised with his newfound taste.

WHAT WORKED

This ad is funny, lighthearted and has a bit of a twist, and audiences love it! It’s also exceptionally well-branded, resulting in a high brand recall score, thanks to the presence of Connie and Trevor and the specific shade of Argos red. What a fun and engaging way to expand on the messaging platform Argos has been using for over two years, told in a fresh way for Christmas!



I like how the toys started off stern and then became friendly when they meet their goal. It’s bright and shows a wide variety of stuff they sell (not just toys).

I liked the actor and the humour in it, it was funny and I like that kind of ad so much better than the sad/emotional ones some brands bring out at Christmas.



Sales impact

98

Brand impact

94

Ad distinctiveness

3.9

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

36%

Norm
22%

Unaided brand recall

89%

Norm
73%

Sainsbury's: "An Unexpected Guest"

ABOUT THE AD

The BFG is back in [Sainsbury's Christmas ad](#) this year, and the ad delivers all the feelings of love and nostalgia of the brand's ad last year — with a fun new story. This time, a greedy giant is stealing Christmas meals, while BFG and Annie (a real Sainsbury's employee) replace what's been stolen with food from Sainsbury's. After defeating the greedy giant, Annie invites BFG for Christmas lunch, saying that she can make room for him on Christmas. The ad concludes with the message: "Want to be ready for anything this Christmas? Ask Sainsbury's."

WHAT WORKED

This ad is a masterclass in storytelling! It feels like a mini movie with incredible music, an antagonist to be overcome and a clear beginning, middle and end. It ends on a high note that puts people in the mood for Christmas! Audiences love the ad, the BFG and all the feelings of togetherness and kindness at Christmas.



I like how the advert showed good winning over and kindness being at the forefront of the advert with the BFG being invited to Christmas dinner. A lovely advert.

I felt nostalgic about the BFG as I used to read the books when I was younger.



Sales impact



Brand impact



Ad distinctiveness



Love 🥰



Unaided brand recall



Waitrose: “The Perfect Gift”

ABOUT THE AD

This year, Waitrose produced a [4-minute romcom](#)! It features one regular guy (Joe Wilkinson as Phil) and one Keira Knightley falling in love. They meet at Waitrose when they both pick the same cheese and they bond through a montage of silly moments and lots of food at Christmastime. Featuring a traditional romcom moment of misunderstanding that leaves Phil questioning the relationship, the ad ends with a romantic gesture and a sweet declaration of love. Supporting the film are 30 and 60 second “movie trailers” running across platforms. We tested the 60 second trailer.

WHAT WORKED

This trailer perfectly captures romantic comedy and Christmas vibes, it’s no wonder people love it! It takes audiences on an incredible emotional journey — exactly the one you would expect in any great romcom trailer (love, laughs, surprise and even some sadness). Romcoms and Christmas are a perfect pair, and this was executed perfectly!



I like the humour, the romance and the cosiness of the festive season. It has a premium feel to it.

It's one of my favourite of the crop this Christmas. Lovely storyline and feel good atmosphere.



Sales impact



Brand impact



Ad distinctiveness

4.0

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

43%

Norm
22%

Unaided brand recall

84%

Norm
73%

Asda: “A Very Merry Grinchmas”

ABOUT THE AD

Concerns about the cost of Christmas celebrations are high this year, and Asda perfectly conveyed that feeling with the well-known Christmas character, the Grinch. In a reworked version of “Let It Snow,” a family’s dad is shown as the Grinch, saying “no” to all holiday cheer because it’s too expensive. That is, until he starts shopping at Asda and discovers the reasonable prices. With the help of festive cheer and low Asda prices, he’s turned back into himself. The ad concludes with Asda’s traditional line: “That’s Asda price.”

WHAT WORKED

The relatable insight that Christmas can cause money anxieties was brought to life in a festive and fun way in this ad! The Grinch was the perfect character to convey this sentiment, and Asda’s message about how its reasonable prices can put any Grinch’s mind at ease shone through. Plus, the Grinch was Asda green! What great branding.



What I liked about that advert was how relatable it felt. It shows the stress everyone feels around Christmas, seeing all the pricey stuff and worrying about money.

I liked that the advert was fun and festive, using the Grinch in a creative way to show Asda’s cheerful holiday spirit and great value.



Sales impact

93

Brand impact

93

Ad distinctiveness

3.9

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

35%

Norm
22%

Unaided brand recall

83%

Norm
73%

Boots: “Gift Happily Ever After”

ABOUT THE AD

Puss in Boots is [on a perilous journey to find the right gifts](#) this year, and the magic mirror on the wall directs him to Boots, of course! He is pleased with all the choices Boots has to offer, and a cheerful sales associate helps him find the best gifts for his fairy tale friends. Even the snow queen is pleased with his gift! They all enjoy the ball while dancing to “Girls on Film,” and the ad concludes with “Gift Happily Ever After.”

WHAT WORKED

People love Puss in Boots! They laugh at a few of his key funny moments and love when he delivers all the gifts to his friends. They also love the brief snippet of “Girls on Film” at the end. The ad stands out and the key role for Boots in the ad — plus the tie-in with the name of the character Puss in Boots — make the Boots brand very easy to spot!



It was a fun pun on the Puss in Boots character shopping in Boots — a fun, happy Christmas story.

I liked all of the ad. It made me smile. Especially at the end when “Girls on Film” starts playing and they all dance.



Sales impact

93

Brand impact

92

Ad distinctiveness

4.0

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

33%

Norm
22%

Unaided brand recall

82%

Norm
73%

John Lewis: “Where Love Lives”

ABOUT THE AD

This [two-minute ad](#) depicts a son gifting his father a record with the song “Where Love Lives” by Alison Limerick. Upon hearing the song, the father is instantly transported back to the 90’s with memories of his younger years dancing with friends. He also remembers his experiences with his son while he was a baby and a toddler. In the present day, the dad hugs his son and thanks him for the gift. The ad ends with “If you can’t find the words, find the gift.”

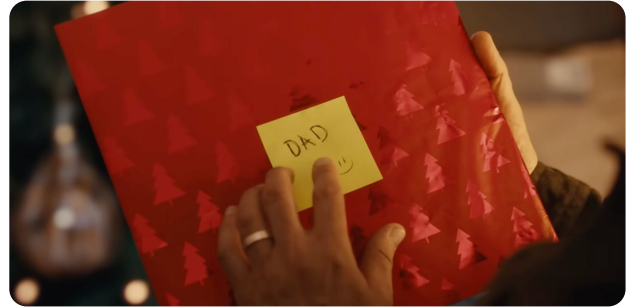
WHAT WORKED

This beautiful, emotionally resonant story perfectly captures what it feels like as your children grow up. The ad brings this relatable and profound insight to life with fantastic emotional storytelling. And the idea that “when you cannot find words, you can find a gift” truly connects with people.



I loved that it tapped into the distancing of parents and teens. It was beautifully done.

Having young kids you realise how quickly they grow and how special every moment is with them, especially holidays like Christmas so it is an advert that really hits home and made me emotional.



Sales impact

93

Brand impact

75

Ad distinctiveness

4.1

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

44%

Norm
22%

Unaided brand recall

73%

Norm
73%

Aldi: “Kevin the Carrot’s Big Day”

ABOUT THE AD

After 10 years of Kevin the Carrot, this year’s Aldi’s Christmas ad goes big with three installments released through the holiday season. [Part 1](#) shows Kevin proposing to his long-time girlfriend Katie and [Part 2](#) shows their separate stag and hen do celebrations. Katie is having a relaxing time at the spa while Kevin is experiencing his typical wacky hijinks. Will Kevin find a way to make it to the altar on time?

WHAT WORKED

It’s another great Christmas with Kevin the Carrot! People love it when Kevin first shows up and proposes to Katie and they laugh at all the jokes and silly moments in the ad, particularly “I can see you down under!” But what people love most is the wedding scene with all the delicious looking food! We can’t wait to see how the story ends!



I love Kevin so I'm excited to have a new story to follow. The animation was good and the food looked delicious.

The “to be continued” ending was a great hook that makes me want to see the next ad.



Sales impact

86

Brand impact

74

Ad distinctiveness

3.9

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

33%

Norm
22%

Unaided brand recall

74%

Norm
73%

M&S: “Traffic Jamming”

ABOUT THE AD

M&S brought back Dawn French this year for [its Christmas ad](#), and this year she’s stuck in a traffic jam on the way to celebrate Christmas. Just when she’s starting to lose it, the M&S fairy — also voiced by Dawn French for the 5th year in a row — joins her and turns an M&S truck into a beautiful Christmas party! On the fairy’s urging, Dawn includes all the other people stuck in traffic, offering them a delicious spread of M&S food. There’s even a quick cameo from chef Tom Kerridge! The ad ends with: “This is not just food, it’s M&S Christmas food.”

WHAT WORKED

Bringing back the M&S fairy and Dawn French helps the M&S brand stand out in this ad. But the food is still the star of the show! While people laugh at all the key moments from Dawn, we see the highest spike of love occur when she starts passing out the food. What a great example of a festive and fun ad that keeps the product at the center!



I like the partnership between Dawn and the fairy. Dawn’s reaction to having to share the food is quite funny. The tables of food look very inviting.

I like everything about the ad, especially the part where everyone was happy because it was Christmas season and were eager to eat the food.



Sales impact

84

Brand impact

89

Ad distinctiveness

3.8

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

34%

Norm
22%

Unaided brand recall

83%

Norm
73%

Tesco: “That’s What Makes It Christmas”

ABOUT THE AD

Tesco’s Christmas campaign takes a more grounded, down-to-earth view of families at Christmas. From two adult brothers fighting over which one mum loves more, to a family with young children struggling to take just one decent Christmas picture, this ad reminds us that Christmas isn’t perfect, but “That’s what makes it Christmas.” The campaign includes a series of short scenes broken into 10, 20 and 30 second ads, as well as a 1-minute compilation that we tested here.

WHAT WORKED

Looking at the overall audience, this ad scores about average on most metrics — falling in the top half of UK ads. People see it as relevant to their lives (Relevance: 3.6 vs. 3.4 norm), so Tesco tapped into an insight that resonates. And the Tesco brand stands out and is remembered in the ad. But while it’s relatable and real, it isn’t what everyone wants. A few describe it as gloomy, downbeat or not festive enough.



It showed the real side of Christmas rather than everything being wonderful.

I like that it is being real and saying that the Christmas season is not perfect but it is still amazing by bringing our closest family and friends together for it.



Sales impact

51

Brand impact

56

Ad distinctiveness

3.6

Norm
3.7

Love 🍷

27%

Norm
22%

Unaided brand recall

83%

Norm
73%

More on “That’s What Makes It Christmas”

DIGGING DEEPER

Older audiences in particular find the realism less enticing, as perhaps they want greater positivity, nostalgia and magic to encourage their families to come home for Christmas.

But when we look closer at just younger audiences — those under 45 — we see a different picture. The ad **falls in the top 20% of UK ads for this group**. Younger audiences enjoy the ad more, find it more relevant and it makes them feel good about the Tesco brand (Brand Appeal: 4.1 vs. 3.9 norm).

But more importantly, they **feel stronger emotions** when watching it. They laugh more at some of the funnier moments, including the dogs running down the stairs and the brothers fighting, and they feel a lot **more love** for the final line at the end, “Christmas isn’t perfect, but that’s what makes it Christmas.”

So while this approach may not feel like a traditional Christmas ad, that doesn’t mean it’s unsuccessful.

The ad feels relatable, and works well with audiences under 45. We applaud the bold direction!



Sales impact

81

Brand impact

88

Ad distinctiveness

3.9

Norm
3.8

Love 🥰

39%

Norm
28%

Unaided brand recall

76%

Norm
65%

Adults under 45

United States



What we saw in the US this year

While the Christmas season can be considered the “Super Bowl” of UK advertising, there’s a bit less audience attention on US holiday ads. There are fewer expectations for what these brands will release. But it’s still critical for US brands to get their holiday advertising right.

We looked at some of the biggest and most buzzworthy US ads from retailers and brands this year.

There were high levels of love for most of these ads, and many were very distinctive. But we did see lower levels of brand recall for many of the US ads. The brands that outscored the norm were those that made their brand the clear hero of the story (like Walmart) or used their very recognizable distinctive brand assets (like Starbucks, Coca-Cola and LEGO).

There were a few surprises here too. Ocean Spray’s tone was different than the others, opting for more laughter and less love. Coca-Cola released two very different ads — one AI-generated version of its classic “Holidays Are Coming” and another more personal story of a woman and her family Christmas memories.

Read on for more detail on each ad.



Planters: “Nuts About the Holidays”

ABOUT THE AD

Tchaikovsky’s “March” from “The Nutcracker” — a classic Christmas-themed ballet — sets the Christmas tone [in this ad](#). While the music plays, we enter a Planters factory and see Mr. Peanut set Planters nuts in motion through machinery. In time with the music, the nuts are cracked by nutcrackers, transported by conveyor belts, toasted in the fire and even swirled around in a snow globe. They end their journey in Planters packaging and the ad reminds us to “Open the Magic.”

WHAT WORKED

What a simple, festive ad that gets people in the holiday spirit! “Nuts About the Holidays” really stands out, and people loved the combination of holiday music paired with engaging visuals. In fact, love is the dominant emotion from start to finish. It’s an ad we can watch over and over again — it could easily become a holiday classic!



I liked the festive holiday vibe of the ad. Love the nutcrackers spitting out the nuts. And the Planters nut guy inspecting the nuts.

I love seeing the nutcrackers and gave me Christmas vibes.

I love all the holiday colors. I love how the nutcrackers go with the music.



Sales impact



Brand impact



Ad distinctiveness



Love 🥰



Unaided brand recall



Coca-Cola: “Holidays Are Coming”

ABOUT THE AD

Coca-Cola used AI to recreate its classic “[Holidays Are Coming](#)” for the second time this year. This version features Santa Claus opening a bottle of Coca-Cola and setting a toy Coca-Cola truck down in a toy town. As the classic “Holidays Are Coming” song plays, the truck travels through various scenes of different animals — polar bears, pandas, bunnies — looking on in awe as everything lights up around them.

WHAT WORKED

People love this ad! It has the highest love score of any of the US ads we looked at. They love the music, the cute animals, the Coca-Cola trucks and Santa. The ad is incredibly distinctive and very well branded — there’s no mistaking that this ad is for any brand but Coca-Cola. There might have been some controversy in the industry about the use of AI, but audiences love it. And who can blame them, the “Holidays Are Coming” song gets everyone in the festive mood!



I loved the scenes with the cute animals popping out of hiding places, excited to see the Coca-Cola trucks going by because it means the holidays are coming.

It felt like a '90s Coca-Cola Christmas commercial, it felt nostalgic.



Sales impact

94

Brand impact

94

Ad distinctiveness

4.4

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

55%

Norm
27%

Unaided brand recall

83%

Norm
70%

Diving deeper: To use AI or not to use AI



Coca-Cola's use of AI for this holiday ad was controversial — particularly in marketing and advertising circles.

But what we have to remember is that what the industry talks about isn't always what the audience cares about. And the reality is that audiences loved it.

Coca-Cola has been using red trucks, Santa, lights and the "Holidays Are Coming" song in their holiday advertising for decades — so all of that history is built into those brand assets. Audiences see those things and love the ad. It all evokes feelings of nostalgia and anticipation for the holidays and immediately cues the brand, especially among older audiences who have more years of experience with these brand assets.

What we've found is that when an ad tells a good story and makes people feel something, most don't care (or notice) that AI was used somewhere in the process.

However, it's worth noting that for the first time in our research, we saw a vocal few recognizing and reacting to the AI in the ad. Not enough to affect the success of this ad, but something to keep an eye on as time goes on.

In the future, AI in advertising will become a lot more common, so it's worth it to start experimenting now. Then test the outcomes with real consumers. **You never know how audiences will react.**

[READ MORE](#)

About this topic in our
[State of Creative Effectiveness report](#)

Crayola: “Blue Christmas”

ABOUT THE AD

Crayola brings us the story of a little girl who discovers that dogs can't see the colors red or green, which means her dog can't see any of the household's holiday decorations! She enlists the help of her family — and her Crayola crayons — to create new holiday decorations completely in blue. Once she's done, her dog can enjoy the holidays too! The ad ends with “It's not what you give, it's what you create.”

WHAT WORKED

What a sweet story centered on the love a child feels for her dog! People love it from the second the ad begins, and their love only grows as the story unfolds — ending on an incredible high note. Audiences find the story heartwarming and sweet and they appreciate the feelings of togetherness and inclusion at Christmas. It's a touching family moment of love and kindness that especially resonates this time of year.



I thought it was adorable how the little girl wanted her dog to be able to experience Christmas too and she decided to change the decorations so he could see the colors. I thought it was very heartwarming.

I liked it because it shows an Asian girl and Asian mom. Being Asian and feeling underrepresented by the media this is refreshing to see.



Sales impact

94

Brand impact

91

Ad distinctiveness

4.3

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

54%

Norm
27%

Unaided brand recall

67%

Norm
70%

Dunkin': "The Little Holiday Munchkin"

ABOUT THE AD

"[The Little Holiday Munchkin](#)" is both a 1-minute ad and a new children's book this holiday season! It tells the story of a little munchkin — the discarded part of a donut — that is forgotten until a small child picks it up and deems it "the best bite of all." Narrated in rhyming couplets by Mindy Kaling, the ad reminds us to find joy in the little things, ending with "Sometimes the smallest part is the best part."

WHAT WORKED

A cute little story about a cute little munchkin! This ad takes people through a journey of emotions — surprise, sadness, laughter and love. People really appreciate the animation style and rhyming narration, which help the ad stand out, and they love the family enjoying munchkins together at the end. The ad is festive, heartwarming and sweet, and totally Dunkin'!



I loved everything about this ad. Brings back such nostalgic memories. Love the colors. Love how they show making the munchkins. Love munchkins for the holidays.

I liked the animation. The donut holes were particularly cute. I liked the overall feeling of joy the entire ad portrayed.



Sales impact

89

Brand impact

88

Ad distinctiveness

4.2

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

48%

Norm
27%

Unaided brand recall

80%

Norm
70%

L.L.Bean: “Invited to the Holidays Since 1912”

ABOUT THE AD

This ad is dripping in nostalgia and tradition, reminding us of the role L.L.Bean’s flannels have played in our holidays over the years. The ad features real found video footage and images from decades of family Christmases — ending with the reminder that L.L.Bean has been “Invited to the Holidays Since 1912.”

WHAT WORKED

While many holiday ads go big, L.L.Bean keeps it simple. The brand has been a part of our lives for over 100 years, and what better way to show it than actual footage of real people wearing L.L.Bean flannels during their holiday celebrations? Audiences love the warm and homey feelings in the ad and say it reminds them of their own families. It’s a simple idea, executed beautifully and authentically.



I like that it had a homey feel to it, kind of like an old fashioned Christmas ad. The whole family was included in the ad. It made me think about Christmas morning.

It was a great ad. A blend of fashion and heritage. Fashion for every age group. Great music. Loved it.



Sales impact

88

Brand impact

79

Ad distinctiveness

3.8

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

38%

Norm
27%

Unaided brand recall

74%

Norm
70%

LEGO: “Is It Play You’re Looking For?”

ABOUT THE AD

[LEGO's global holiday campaign](#) features a 12 year old boy who has abandoned play and prefers to spend time alone in his room. His sister, with the help of a massive chorus of recognizable LEGO minifigures from Star Wars, Marvel, Wicked, etc., bring him back to play. The minifigures sing a reworked version of Lionel Richie's “Hello,” with the lyrics changed to fit the characters and situations. The ad reminds us to keep playtime alive with our families this holiday season.

WHAT WORKED

We all need a reminder that it's important to play, and what better time than the holiday season! People love the song and the singing LEGOs, and they found it sweet and heartwarming to see a family come together to play — especially at Christmas. And thanks to the LEGO minifigures, this ad really stands out and is very well-branded.



I liked the song it made me laugh. I liked that the toy was interactive and stretches a person's imagination to create rather than playing video games. I like the family aspect of the brother sister creating together.

I liked how it showed both kids and adults enjoying LEGOs together — it felt inclusive and heartwarming.



Sales impact

81

Brand impact

96

Ad distinctiveness

4.3

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

48%

Norm
27%

Unaided brand recall

80%

Norm
70%

Starbucks: “Drawn Together”

ABOUT THE AD

With The Proclaimers’ “I’m Gonna Be (500 Miles)” as the soundtrack, [this ad](#) follows the wordless journey of two animated people drawn onto Starbucks red holiday cups by a barista — seeking their way back to each other. At the end, they are reunited on a cup at a table where two real people are connecting, reminding us that “Together is the best place to be.”

WHAT WORKED

People love this cute little love story! We see love levels start rising as soon as both characters set out to reach each other, and love spikes dramatically as soon as they do! Audiences love watching the journey and seeing the payoff of the resolution. Plus, the ad is incredibly well-branded — taking place in a Starbucks cafe and featuring the brand’s iconic red cups.



I love seeing all of the different holiday drinks in the iconic holiday cups. I also really liked the music.

I really enjoyed the animation part. It was very clever and cute. I also liked the message as a whole about being together.



Sales impact

80

Brand impact

69

Ad distinctiveness

4.1

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

44%

Norm
27%

Unaided brand recall

83%

Norm
70%

Walmart: “WhoKnewVille”

ABOUT THE AD

This year Walmart introduced its “Who Knew?” platform based on the idea that Walmart offers a wider range of products than most people realize. For Christmas, the retailer turned Whoville, town from beloved Christmas story *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, into “WhoKnewVille” to extend this idea! With beautiful visuals and Dr. Seuss’ classic rhyming narration, the Whos scramble to find their Christmas gifts. Mindy Lou Who saves the day by introducing the town to all the gifts they can get at Walmart.

WHAT WORKED

People love the Christmassy vibes and striking visuals of this ad, which help the ad stand out. Audiences loved the entire ad — and laughed at some of the funny moments with the Whos in the beginning. As the hero of the story, the Walmart brand stands out and audiences took away the important message that Walmart has what you need for holiday gifts.



The town of Whoville brought back memories.

It was a feel good Christmas story that showed everyone happy knowing they could shop for everything at Walmart.



Sales impact



Brand impact



Ad distinctiveness



Love 🥰



Unaided brand recall



Coca-Cola: “A Holiday Memory”

ABOUT THE AD

Aiming to encourage must-deserved breaks among the people who work behind the scenes to make the holidays happen, Coca-Cola’s “[A Holiday Memory](#)” features a woman decorating her tree for Christmas and taking a break with a bottle of Coca-Cola. She finds a snow globe in a box and is immediately reminded of a sweet holiday memory where her family was all together singing “Feliz Navidad.” It airs in North America as well as Latin America and Asia South-Pacific markets this holiday season.

WHAT WORKED

This ad perfectly sets the tone of togetherness, family and nostalgia for the past that holiday ads are known for. Audiences love it from the moment the snow globe is featured and all throughout the family memory. The music in particular was a big hit — helping to convey those holiday vibes and nostalgic feelings.



I love that this one shows the importance of family, especially around the holidays.

I can relate to pulling out Christmas decor, and feeling particularly nostalgic, as memories flood my emotions.



Sales impact

77

Brand impact

75

Ad distinctiveness

4.0

Norm
3.7

Love 🥰

44%

Norm
27%

Unaided brand recall

74%

Norm
70%

Ocean Spray: “Just Add Cran, Beware of Cranpus”

ABOUT THE AD

October to December is the highest period of cranberry consumption of the year, so it's a critical period for Ocean Spray. The brand turned St. Nicholas' counterpart Krampus into “Cranpus” [in this ad](#), appropriately using Bryan Cranston (get it?!) to portray him. The ad features Cranpus in hilarious situations causing seasonal mischief — all while showcasing a variety of Ocean Spray's products and showing what happens when the cranberries aren't there.

WHAT WORKED

Audiences loved Bryan Cranston, and his presence made the intentionally irritating Cranpus character enjoyable to watch. People found it very funny, but the ad's biggest strength was its distinctiveness — when holiday ads are often about nostalgia, joy and the feeling of togetherness, Cranpus is the complete opposite!



I liked how funny and unexpected the ad was, especially Bryan Cranston as the 'Cranpus.' I liked how it highlighted cranberries in a playful way.

I love the fact that this ad used actor Bryan Cranston in it to show us how delicious the product is and how far you will go to keep it away from people.



Sales impact

76

Brand impact

75

Ad distinctiveness

4.3

Norm
3.7

Laughter 😄

23%

Norm
7%

Unaided brand recall

69%

Norm
70%

Takeaways for making great holiday ads

What have we learned about what it takes to make a great holiday ad?



Bring out the festive visuals to look like Christmas

Let's start with the obvious: Your ad has to look like a holiday ad.

This is where you tap into some of the classic symbols and visual elements of the holiday season: Christmas trees, wreaths, garland, holly, mistletoe, stockings, lights, stars, bells, candy canes, snow and snowmen, gingerbread men and houses, gifts, wrapping paper and bows, nutcrackers, hot cocoa, and of course, the colors red, green and gold.

There are also many recognizable characters to consider like Santa, Mrs. Claus, elves, reindeer (including Santa's reindeer like Rudolph), the Grinch and Cindy Lou Who, Ebenezer Scrooge and the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future, Frosty the Snowman, Buddy the Elf and the list goes on!

You don't need ALL of these, but you need to **establish the visual look that associates your ad with the holiday season.**

Because if it doesn't look like a Christmas ad, can you call it a Christmas ad?



Dial up the emotions to *feel* like Christmas

But there's more than just the specific look of Christmas, there's also the *feeling* of Christmas.

The festive season is a time of connection. It's a celebratory occasion that people spend with their loved ones. And they often participate in traditions that date back to their childhoods.

Often the best Christmas ads make people feel uplifted, fill them with joy or take them on an emotional journey. And it's that emotional connection — the feeling of love and warmth — that makes it feel like Christmas.

There's a reason that the John Lewis brand is synonymous with Christmas advertising. The brand hits us with deeply emotional stories year after year — and those stories evoke classic Christmas feelings.

There's no single way to pack an emotional punch, though we'll touch on a few things in the next few pages that can help establish that emotional tone.



Incorporate elements of tradition, nostalgia or even magic

When you're a child, Christmas is a magical time. We lose a bit of that sense of wonder as we get older, but any references to Christmas magic — or really anything that makes people remember their childhoods — are likely to **evoke that sense of magic and make anyone feel like a kid again.**

Sainsbury's has done this well for the last two years by using the BFG — a character we don't associate with Christmas but do remember fondly from our childhoods.

The M&S fairy always brings a little Christmas magic with her, like this year when she turned an M&S truck into a beautiful Christmas party.

We also liked L.L.Bean's approach to nostalgia. The ad used found footage of real families' Christmases to remind us that L.L.Bean has been a part of Christmas for over 100 years. No actual magic, but a sense of nostalgia and tradition for sure.

Nostalgia is a key trend in advertising these days, but it's **always a part of Christmas advertising because of how deeply it connects to the Christmas season!**



Use great storytelling

Many successful Christmas ads feel like short movies, complete with a strong story arc and Christmassy feel. While the emotions evoked throughout each ad may range from laughter to sadness, they always conclude with a happy ending — sometimes an unexpected one.

Sainsbury's and Waitrose are great examples of that this year. They are complete stories that end on a high note and remind people of what the festive season is all about.

To execute this well, **think of your ad as a short movie** and take inspiration from any great story you've ever seen: Start with a hook, establish the setting, characters and scenario, introduce a conflict or struggle and build on the tension until it reaches a climax — with a satisfying resolution that leaves people on a good feeling.



Bring in the right music

Music sets the tone of your ad and helps bring out the right emotions. And it's particularly important for Christmas ads because we've seen in our research that ads with **more prominent music are more likely to generate higher levels of love** than those with less prominent music.

That doesn't mean you *need* music to set the tone in your ad, but it can certainly help enhance the emotional impact and Christmas vibes.

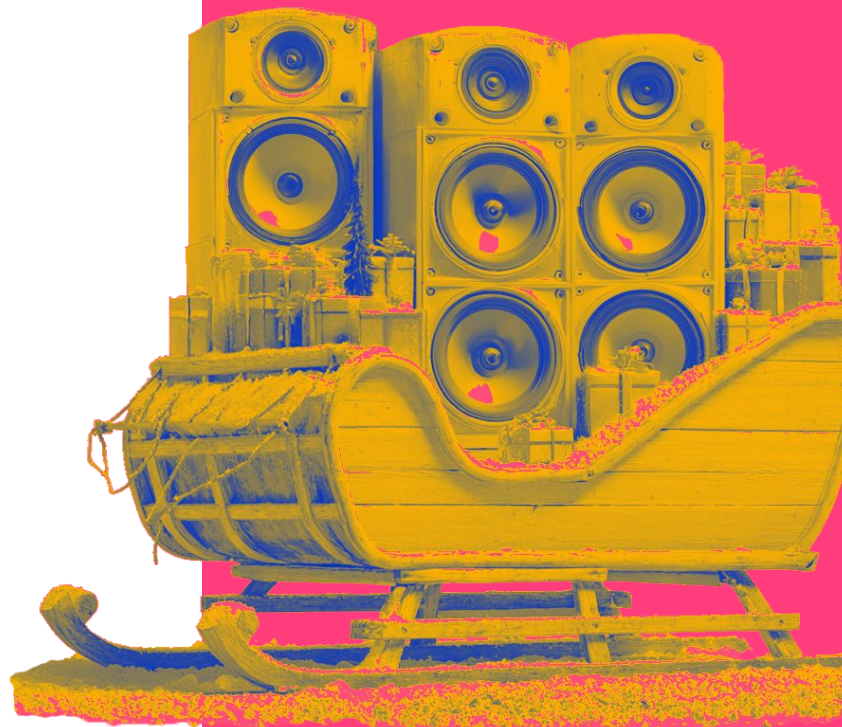
This year, Asda's reworked version of "Let It Snow" set the upbeat tone of the ad and told the story through the lyrics.

"Where Love Lives" from John Lewis used the 90s classic dance song to evoke nostalgia and help audiences understand the memories the main character was experiencing in the ad — with very little spoken dialogue.

Argos' ad has a fun twist: You think the main character is in danger until you discover he's being taken shopping. To help sell that sudden tonal shift halfway through, the ad abruptly cuts to "Jingle Bells."

And of course, Coca-Cola's "Holidays Are Coming" uses its classic song of the same name to make us feel excitement and anticipation for the holidays.

Lots of great music choices this year!



Give your brand a role

When advertising around a holiday like Christmas, you run the risk of the seasonal elements in the ad overshadowing your brand. The last thing you want is for audiences to love the ad, but just remember it as “that great Christmas ad” rather than *your brand’s* Christmas ad.

People tend to remember an overall summary of an ad. **If your brand or product isn’t a part of that summary, it probably won’t get credit for the ad.**

Walmart did a good job giving their brand a role this year. The setting and characters were new to the brand’s advertising, but the Walmart brand still shone through as the hero of the story. The story can’t be played back without talking about how the Whos discovered they could do all their holiday shopping at Walmart.

This is even easier with distinctive brand assets (DBAs). DBAs are a branding shortcut that can help people identify your brand — even if the brand itself doesn’t have as prominent a role in the narrative.

Aldi has done this very well by establishing a DBA in Kevin the Carrot. After 10 years using the character, neither Aldi food nor the supermarket itself need to play a big role in the ad for everyone to recognize it as an Aldi ad!

Pay close attention to the role of your brand in your ad to make sure you get credit for your investment.



Be authentic & consistent

The holidays are a critical time of the year for advertising, but your Christmas ads don't stand alone. They are part of the bigger picture of your brand identity. Your Christmas ad must feel like your brand and **connect to how your brand shows up through the rest of the year.**

Many UK brands do this very well every year.

Aldi's typical tone is often funny, playful and a bit cheeky. Asda is also lighthearted, but with a focus on value and affordability. M&S is more about sophistication and incredible food. You only need to scroll through each of their social media accounts to see this! And each of their Christmas ads are consistent with these values.

Avoid thinking about your Christmas ad in isolation. Rather, think about it as the continuation of the work you do all year long, but with a fun seasonal theme!



Stay grounded in the jobs to be done

It may be easy to get caught up in the festive vibes of your Christmas ad, but **don't forget that your ad is there to serve a purpose.**

That purpose could be as simple as creating the right feeling or warmth that you want associated with your brand at this time of year. It could be reminding people what your brand offers that really matters at Christmas.

Or it could be changing the public perception of your brand — which should be part of your broader advertising strategy through the year (public perception isn't going to change dramatically thanks to one Christmas ad!).

Argos has been working toward changing the public perception of the brand (it's not just a toy store!) for several years. This year's Christmas ad builds on the work that has come before — and uses the brand's existing mascots to do it.

M&S' Christmas ad conveyed the idea that the brand's high quality food is perfect for Christmas. Starbucks' ad expressed that togetherness is important during the holidays — and Starbucks offers a place to connect.

Each of these jobs to be done are quite different — **but it's clear the ads play a key role in each brand's overall strategy.**

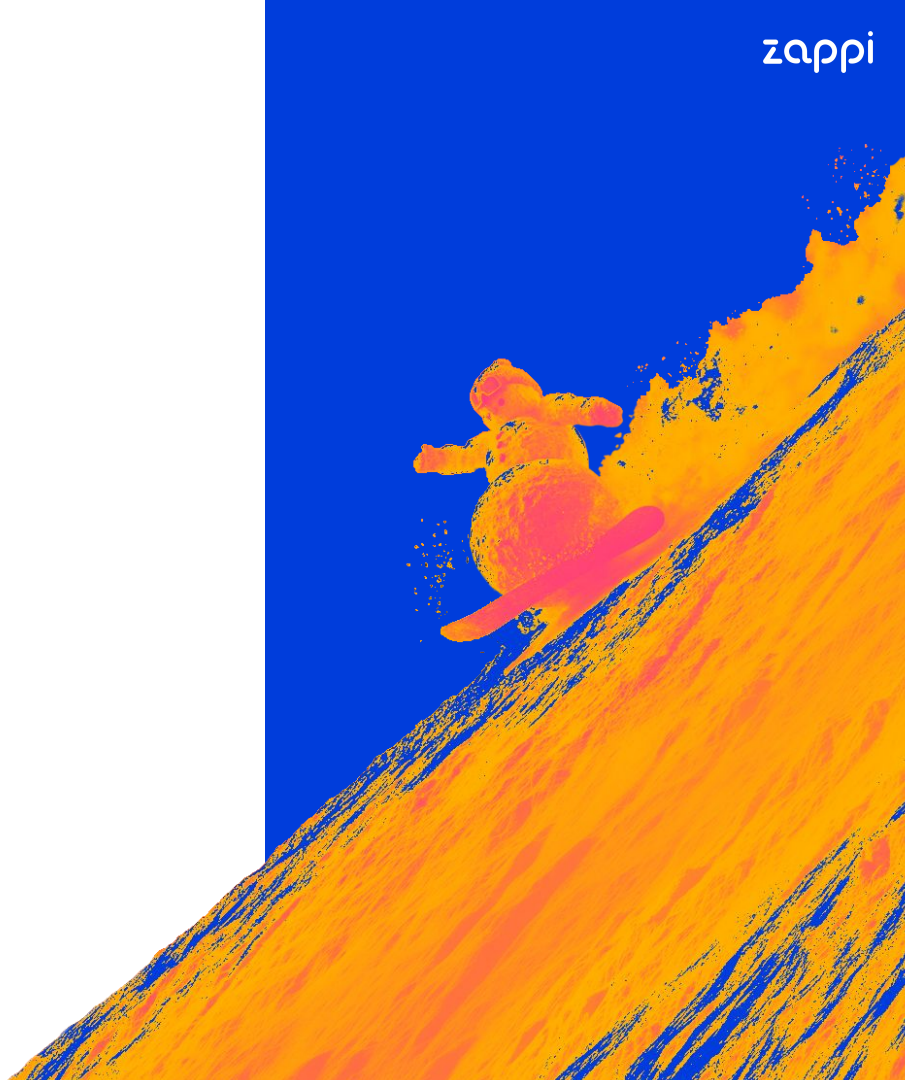


Keep it simple

And finally, don't try to do too much. It can be tempting to throw everything at your Christmas ad to make it as Christmassy as possible. To include a celebrity or two to stand out. To use a recognizable Christmas song just because.

But **you risk losing your audience if there's too much going on**. Or worse, losing your brand in the spectacle.

Instead, include only what needs to be there to tell the story you want to tell and evoke the emotion you want to convey.



Optimize with consumer feedback

With all of the advice in this report, you might be a bit overwhelmed. Be festive. Make an emotional connection. Give your brand a role. Tell a story. Be authentic and consistent. Focus on tradition and nostalgia. Don't forget the jobs to be done. But don't do too much! Remember to keep it simple.

How can anyone be creative with all that to think about?

That's where consumer feedback comes in.

Professional comedians don't come out on a big stage and riff about whatever they're thinking about that day. They try out new jokes with smaller audiences over time to land on the best material told in the way that gets the most laughs. Then they take what they've learned to the big stage.

The same applies to your Christmas advertising. **The day your ad airs for the first time shouldn't be the first time any consumer is seeing it.**

Instead, consumers should be brought into the process early and often to help you pick your direction, shape your story and optimize the final campaign.

With a deep understanding of what works with consumers, you'll be able to create effective ads that drives sales during the Christmas season and build your brand into the long term.

You can create holiday advertising you feel confident in.



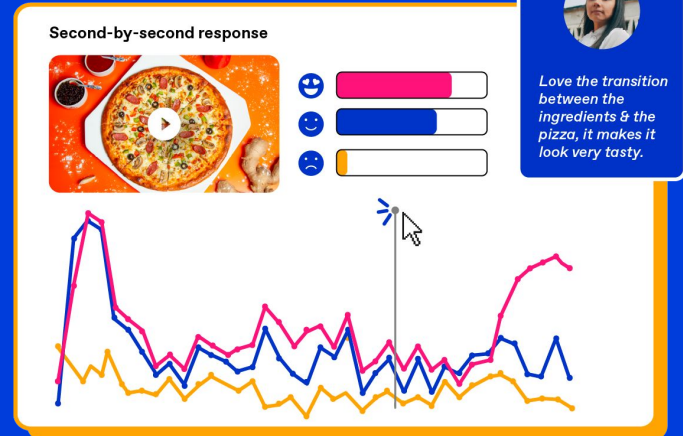
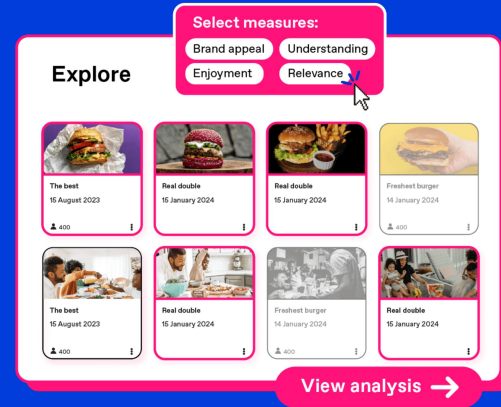
Create winning ads with connected insights

To create a winning holiday ad, you need consumer feedback.

The Zappi Amplify Advertising System is a modern research system that gives you quick, accurate consumer feedback — powered by data and supercharged with AI.

With Amplify, you get:

- An ongoing learning loop for better, data-driven advertising
- Quality consumer research you can run fast, early and often
- AI reporting to get from data to insights in one click
- Comprehensive metrics and diagnostics for confident decisions
- All your research data in one comprehensive platform, so you can connect insights over time and learn from every win
- Insights backed by the most actionable and predictive research methodology



See how Zappi can help you
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