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SPECIAL THANKS TO . . .
Advertiser Perceptions for its co-sponsorship of the survey among members of the creative and strategy communities

Belle Frank, for her promotion of the survey within the agency community
Abstract

In an effort to help bridge the gap between the research/data and creative/strategy communities within the advertising industry, the ARF Creative Council conducted a quantitative and qualitative research project to better understand the differences between and within those communities in the ways they perceive the value of research and data in the creative process. The results of that research suggest that all communities value research and data in the creative process, but they tend to differ on the kinds of research and data that are valued, how they are communicated, and how they are applied. This report describes three key sets of issues identified in this research that lie at the root of the differences between researchers and creatives/strategists — language, trust, and systems. It also recommends concrete steps to overcome those issues through developing a baseline understanding, aligning on goals and processes and improving communication.
Our advertising industry is in a state of transition: consumer behavior is fragmented, channels have multiplied, and we’re living in an information golden age where data abounds. Yet, despite the plethora of data and research at our fingertips, driving growth from advertising with breakthrough creative remains a challenge. To achieve growth, research has shown that creative quality must be a priority; to get more growth from advertising, better creative is vital. And better creative depends on strong, trusted, and well-communicated data, research, and insights.

One might expect the recent data explosion to yield greater and deeper insights, empowering collaboration between researchers and creatives. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. We often hear that the use of research and data in the creative process causes creative teams to feel disenfranchised, breeding tension between creatives, researchers, marketers, and strategic planners. And when research does not offer true insights — when it is not used effectively — researchers’ efforts and creative quality do not reach their full potential.

To be more effective and impactful as an industry, we must identify and correct some of the problems around how we use data and research to inform the creative process. That’s why the ARF’s Creative Council came together to interview and survey marketers, creatives, researchers, and strategic planners on their attitudes toward and experience with data and research in the creative process.

Our findings suggest that the biggest barriers to the effective use of insights revolve around language, trust and system issues. Read on for a deep dive on these issues, plus recommendations you can pilot in your own organizations to bridge silos, improve collaboration between teams, and fuel more powerful creative.
NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Most of the analysis presented here is based on comparisons between three groups — researchers, creatives/strategic planners, and others. These groups are defined as follows:

CREATIVES
Work in creative roles at agencies and brands, primarily at non-ARF member companies.

STRATEGIC PLANNERS
Work in strategic planning roles at agencies and brands at both ARF-member companies and non-ARF member companies.

RESEARCHERS
Are those who work in research, insights, and data science roles primarily at ARF member companies.

OTHERS
Include those who do not work in research, insights, data science, creative, or strategic planning roles. Most of them are employed in marketing, sales, account management, and corporate management roles at research and analytics companies and agencies.
Whew! At Least We All Agree: Insights Are Really Important

There is one thing players across the advertising industry can agree on — research, data, and insights are critical to getting to great creative. Across marketers, creatives, researchers, and strategic planners, our survey results demonstrate research and data are valuable to all industry groups, with at least 65 percent of respondents across all cohorts finding research and data to be important in the creative process.

“THE BEST CREATIVE COMES FROM THE BEST INSIGHTS.” — Creative

“FROM DATA COMES TRUTHS, FROM TRUTHS CAN COME GREAT CREATIVE.” — Creative

“INSIGHTS ARE LIKE GOLD. GOOD INSIGHTS LEAD TO GREAT CREATIVE, WHICH LEADS TO GREAT RESULTS. IT’S THE MOST VALUABLE WORK WE CAN HAVE.” — Creative

“OVERALL, WE WANT TO PUSH OUR CREATIVE TO WORK HARDER THAN EVER BEFORE, AND THAT MEANS HAVING STRATEGIES LED BY RESEARCH AND DATA.” — Researcher

Creatives and researchers alike agree that understanding and feeling connected to a target audience and to a brand’s perceived position in the marketplace are crucial to creation. However, the process by which we use data, research and insights in creative development is problematic. The following are three primary challenges we’ve identified in our interviews and surveys, which we believe can be addressed through improving communication between partners.
These challenges become more apparent when comparing the value placed on research and data across different groups in the advertising community. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the survey findings show that researchers place greater importance on research and data in the creative process than do creatives and strategists: 85 percent of researchers found research and data to be important in the creative process, compared to 65 percent of creatives and strategic planners.

How do members of the advertising community even define research, data, and insights? Our interviews suggested a need for alignment on what these terms mean and room for improvement in how they are employed in creative development.

### How Important Do You Think Research and Data Should Be in the Creative Process?

(TOP 2 BOX 6-POINT SCALE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative/Strategic Planner</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR Firm</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-MR Firm</td>
<td>84%</td>
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</table>
One pattern that arose in our interviews and surveys is the absence of agreement on the use of research terms. Certain definitions of insights are broader than others, for example, while some practitioners use the terms “data” and “insights” interchangeably.

**Say What?! We’re NOT Speaking the Same Language Here**

“THE WORD ‘INSIGHT’ IS VERY MISUSED AND MISUNDERSTOOD. THERE ARE LOTS OF OBSERVATIONS DRESSED UP AS INSIGHTS.” — Strategic Planner

“INSIGHTS’ ARE TOO GENERIC, AND NOT POINTED ENOUGH TO PROVOKE PROVOCATIVE CREATIVE.” — Creative

Copy testing also came up as a term with differing interpretations, corresponding to the diverging ways it is used.

“SOME THINK OF COPY TESTING AS PROOF THAT YOU CAN CASH THAT CHECK, TO MAKE SURE THAT THE CREATIVE DOESN’T BOMB. ON THE OTHER EXTREME, SOME REGARD IT AS A TOOL FOR EXPLAINING ‘THE WHY’ OR USE IT TO INFORM THEIR NEXT CAMPAIGN. AND SOME DO IN-MARKET TESTING AND CALL IT COPY TESTING.” — Researcher

“SOMETIMES CREATIVES ARE IN THE ROOM WHEN COPY TESTING IS DISCUSSED, BUT THERE ARE ALSO CLIENTS WHO USE IT AS A REPORT CARD.” — Researcher
There were major discrepancies between creatives/strategic planners and researchers in perceptions of the helpfulness of copy testing, in developing core creative concepts and assets, with researchers placing far greater value in copy testing than their creative counterparts.

This discrepancy may relate to the lack of agreement across the industry on the use of copy testing. Is it a diagnostic tool, a development tool, or a decision-making tool?

**HOW VALUABLE WOULD YOU SAY COPY TESTING IS IN HELPING TO DEVELOP ...**

**(TOP 2 BOX 6-POINT SCALE)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Actual creative assets</th>
<th>Core creative concepts of an ad campaign</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESEARCHER</strong></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER</strong></td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CREATIVE/STRATEGIC PLANNER</strong></td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
We now have a creative process that is so focused on the back end, we’ve lost sight of how insights are the foundation of everything we do and are truly business critical. Our interviews also suggest the meaning of copy testing, as well as other research terms, has eroded. To combat this opacity, we recommend aligning internally and developing standards around key research terms that inform the creative process.

**DATA IS:**
raw information used as a basis for analysis or developing insights. Data alone is not the insight.

**DATA SCIENCE IS:**
the collection and application of techniques to data, usually very large volumes of data, to provide meaningful insights or understanding in industry, research, and life contexts. Data Science can include techniques which utilize various forms of machine learning, advanced statistical models and, in the case of qualitative data, natural language processing.

**RESEARCH IS:**
a process of investigation or experimentation undertaken to discover facts about consumers’ attributes, attitudes, experiences, and behavior and the relationships between these phenomena. Research is not the discovery or insight itself, but the process that leads to the discovery or insight.

**AN INSIGHT IS:**
a person or group’s understanding of individuals’ motivations that drive their actions and understanding of relationships, often cause and effect relationships, between consumers’ attributes, attitudes, experiences, and behavior. An insight is not data or an observation but often comes from the analysis of data or observations.

Below are some examples of commonly accepted uses of these terms:
COPY TESTING IS:
a research approach used to gather consumer feedback during the development of an ad, undertaken in order to help determine how creative can be optimized to be more effective. It should inform strategy throughout the creative process. It should not be used only at the end of the creative process as a pass/fail test to simply validate creative. The process of copy testing may include techniques such as neuroscience and biometrics, eye-tracking and even traditional measures, such as ad recall and purchase intent.

The key is to use copy testing as a developmental tool to make improvements to creative in a manner that helps drive the creative development process, rather than as a purely diagnostic tool that “grades” creative against benchmarks or “kills” an idea. When conducting copy testing to support decisions about selecting or prioritizing creative ideas, it is best practice to keep the human element in the process in order to allow for exceptions for early concepts that haven’t fully evolved.
One theme that rang loud in our surveys and interviews was the belief that research, data and insights are often used as a stick, breeding fear and mistrust among creatives. This has bred tension between researchers and agencies, agencies and marketers, planners and creatives — deterring trust and collaboration within and across organizations at every step. In many cases, such adverse experiences have contributed to an erosion of trust throughout the entire ecosystem.

“We’ve Got Some Trust Issues

“OFTEN TIMES RESEARCH HAS DETERMINED FINAL DECISIONS FOR CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT. I BELIEVE THAT RESEARCH SHOULD BE USED AS A FORM OF REFERENCE. IT SHOULD BE INFORMATIVE RATHER THAN THE FINAL SAY. THE FINAL DECISION SHOULD BE MADE FACTORING IN ALL ASPECTS.”

— Creative

“NO ONE LIKES TO SHARE WITH THE CREATIVES. THEY HOLD THE DATA AS SACRED AND RARELY SHARE THEIR FINDINGS.”

— Creative

“[CLIENTS CAN] WIELD THEIR DATA AS A WEAPON.”

— Strategic Planner

These sentiments may explain the divergence among members of the advertising community in the value placed on different research methods in developing the core creative concepts and creative assets of an ad campaign. Our survey research found copy testing to be viewed much more favorably among researchers and others than it was among creatives and strategic planners, while the divergence was not as great for A/B testing. This suggests that creatives value measurement when perceived as additive and transparent (A/B testing) vs. black box (copy testing).
It is also notable that there are several research methods that creatives and strategic planners regard as more helpful than do researchers in developing core creative concepts and creative assets.

**Ethnography, social listening, and online communities** stand out as favorite methods among creatives, indicative of the value this group places on deeply understanding their target audiences.

**HOW VALUABLE WOULD YOU SAY EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE IN HELPING TO DEVELOP THE CORE CREATIVE CONCEPTS OF AN AD CAMPAIGN? (TOP 2 BOX 6-POINT SCALE)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Creative/Strategic Planner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copy Testing</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Digital Media Response</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A/B Testing</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In-context Testing Within Platforms</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Research</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus Groups/IDI’s</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Listening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis of Syndicated Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Communities</td>
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<td>Implicit Association Tests</td>
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<th>Method</th>
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<td>Analysis of Syndicated Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implicit Association Tests</td>
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Our in-depth interviews provided some clarity behind the preference for ethnography over copy testing for creatives and strategic planners. While these cohorts appreciate ethnographies for getting closer to human understanding, copy testing often gets a bad rap for its black box effect.

“IN THE WORLD OF DIGITAL DATA, THE BIGGEST MISPERCEPTION IS THAT WE ASSUME ALL THE DATA WE SEE IS TRUE. AND WE GIVE TOO MUCH CREDIT WHEN SOME OF IT ISN’T HUMAN DATA. THE BEST TYPE OF DATA TO HELP ME DO MY JOB WOULD BE ETHNOGRAPHIES ON STEROIDS: APPLYING DATA TO REALLY IMMERSING YOURSELF IN THE DAY-TO-DAY WORLD OF A HUMAN BEING, HOW THEY MAKE DECISIONS, AND WHAT DRIVES THEM.”
— Strategic Planner

“CREATIVES DON’T WANT TO SEE THEIR WORK JUDGED BY A BLACK BOX OR ANY KIND OF ARBITRARY ASSESSMENT, AND THAT’S WHAT OFTEN OCCURS WITH COPY TESTING.” — Creative

We also observed a disconnect in ownership of the research process: Creatives and strategic planners tend to think the creative agency should be responsible, while researchers and others tend to think the marketer/advertiser or market research firm should manage it. This indicates a desire to oversee research and insights. It also suggests that everyone in the ecosystem could benefit from shared ownership and accountability of insights, as opposed to having them controlled by only one discipline.
WHO DO YOU THINK SHOULD “OWN” (BE RESPONSIBLE FOR) THE RESEARCH PROCESS WHEN DEVELOPING CREATIVE?

- **MARKETER/ADVERTISER**
  - Researcher: 38%
  - Other: 17%
  - Creative/Strategic Planner: 50%

- **MARKET RESEARCH PARTNER**
  - Researcher: 13%
  - Other: 10%
  - Creative/Strategic Planner: 38%

- **CREATIVE AGENCY**
  - Researcher: 13%
  - Other: 20%
  - Creative/Strategic Planner: 38%

- **MEDIA AGENCY**
  - Researcher: 5%
  - Other: 3%
  - Creative/Strategic Planner: 7%

- **DIGITAL AGENCY**
  - Researcher: 1%
  - Other: 8%
  - Creative/Strategic Planner: 4%
FINDING 2 RECOMMENDATION

USE RESEARCH TO INSPIRE, NOT AS A STICK

To overcome barriers of trust between cross-functional teams, we must use research and data for inspiration, refinement and improvement throughout the creative process — not just for validation.

ENSURE DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCE:
We can achieve trust through inclusivity. Bringing together a diversity of experiences and stakeholders in each advertising initiative allows different constituents to have access to data and research, and to share their perspectives throughout the process. Empowering everyone in the creative process with ownership over insight tools will fuel their production. One of the ways to bring this diversity to life is through a scrum framework.

CONSIDER A SCRUM:
To break down silos and help build trust, some teams have found success in establishing a scrum framework that includes representatives across the different groups of the creative ecosystem in regular communication. Having a dedicated team with a shared mission of creating the best work possible, that is accountable for insights sharing and implementation in current projects, has helped these companies provide greater access to insights across all stakeholders.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE:
Creatives and strategists are looking for a more qualitative feel in their research. At the same time, researchers must be mindful of how to transform their numbers into a useful and usable narrative for this audience.

In this way, the researcher’s job is less about reporting, and more about informing and influencing an audience of strategic planners and creatives. Researchers must “market” the data and know what type of output will affect the creative and strategic audience they’re trying to influence.

“WHILE PLANNERS, STRATEGISTS AND CREATIVES LIVE IN A PERPETUAL ATMOSPHERE OF NEGOTIATION — AND HAVE TO USE DIFFERENT LEVERS TO LISTEN, INITIATE, PERSUADE, PUSH BACK OR ABSORB AND ‘PIVOT’ ... RESEARCHERS ... ARE USUALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF THE ONE THING — AND ARE LIKELY TO PLACE AN UNDUE WEIGHT OF EMPHASIS ON IT.”
— Strategic Planner/Reviewer
Our research has highlighted the misalignment of goals between different groups in the industry, the practice of gatekeeping, and the creation of silos. We’ve observed gaps in how and when research is used in the creative process and communicated to creatives.

**FINDING 3**

**All Systems Are (NOT) a Go**

“QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS ARE NOT FLOWING FROM ORGANIZATIONS TO THE CREATIVE AGENCIES. THERE IS A DISCONNECT IN ORGANIZATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE DEVELOPING INSIGHTS AND ‘HISTORICAL INTERNAL CLIENTS,’ EVEN AMONG INTERNAL ANALYSTS AT BRANDS. I’VE HEARD MARKETERS TELL THE AGENCY ‘THESE ARE THE INSIGHTS WE ARE ALLOWED TO SHARE WITH YOU.’”

— Researcher

“A LOT OF TIMES I’VE FOUND RESEARCH IS USED TO AWARD BONUSES, WHICH DOESN’T HELP MAKE AN EFFECTIVE CREATIVE PRODUCT THAT WORKS ... JUST ONE THAT WORKS TO PASS THE TEST.” — Strategic Planner

“ADVERTISERS HAVE BECOME VERY SAVVY WITH THEIR OWN DATA, ESPECIALLY IN QUANTIFYING THE OPPORTUNITIES. HOWEVER, IT’S NOT IDEAL IF THEY ARE TOO DATA RELIANT. WE WANT TO BE CONFIDENT AND DATA-INFORMED, BUT NOT DATA-DRIVEN. SOMETIMES WE GET TOO MANY IRRELEVANT DATA.”

— Strategic Planner
Much of this misalignment stems from the role that research, data and insights play in the validation of creative. While researchers, non-researchers, creatives and strategic planners all agree that research and data are most important in the optimization step of the creative campaign, creatives find research and data less important in the validation and exploration process.

"INSIGHTS ARE BETTER EARLIER IN THE PROCESS, AS IT SETS CREATIVE IN MOTION. INSIGHTS AFTER ARE BAD BECAUSE MANY GOOD CREATIVES ARE RUINED AFTER ONE PERSON IN A FOCUS GROUP DOESN’T LIKE IT."
— Creative

**WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLE FOR RESEARCH AND DATA IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Creative/Strategic Planner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OPTIMIZATION</strong></td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXPLORATION</strong></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VALIDATION</strong></td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Specifically, there is a disconnect between creatives and strategic planners and the rest of the advertising community in the helpfulness of research, data and insights in deciding on the final creative to roll out with: creatives and strategic planners do not find research and data as helpful at this step, while researchers and those in non-research and non-creative/planning roles believe research and data to be the most helpful at this juncture. This hints at why copy testing is not loved by the creative community — that it is seen as providing a report card on their work after completion.

“MARKETERS USE RESEARCH TO DETERMINE WHAT THEIR END CREATIVE PRODUCT SHOULD BE (VALIDATION) INSTEAD OF USING IT AS AN AID TO OPTIMIZE WORK. CREATIVE IS DEVELOPED TO BEAT A CERTAIN SCORE INSTEAD OF WHAT COULD ULTIMATELY GROW A BUSINESS.” — Creative

At steps of the creative process where researchers place less value in the helpfulness of research and data (review of prior creative, defining campaign objectives, and channel planning), creatives and strategists tend to find research and data to be the most important. This once again indicates that creative teams do find insights beneficial — when used much earlier in the process to inform creative development, rather than to approve or reject final creative.

“RESEARCH HAS BECOME PRESCRIPTIVE AND IS NOT USED TO OPTIMIZE. IT Dictates IDEAS, SCRIPTS, AND CREATIVE CONTENT INSTEAD OF HELPING IT. WE ARE CONSTANTLY MADE TO INCORPORATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ONE OR TWO CONSUMERS. CLIENTS TREAT IT TOO MUCH LIKE AN EXACT SCIENCE AND USE RESEARCH AS A TOOL TO CREATE A FORMULA FOR CREATIVE. RESEARCH HINDERS THE CREATIVE PROCESS.” — Creative
### IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STEPS IN THE CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS DO YOU THINK RESEARCH AND DATA ARE MOST HELPFUL?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Researcher (%)</th>
<th>Other (%)</th>
<th>Creative/Strategic Planner (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deciding on final creative to roll out with</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining alternative creative approaches</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel planning</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the creative campaign objectives</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of prior creative</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To improve collaboration, we must improve the system and create common workflows that leverage data, research, and insights throughout the campaign process — from ideation to validation, and at as many stages as possible in between. This includes...

**START EARLY:**
To help alleviate the black box effect, it is important that teams collaborate on insights **earlier in the process**, with creative teams at the table.

**ALIGN ON GOALS:**
High-performing teams are **aligned on goals and common evaluation metrics**. Having the same goals, incentives and responsibilities can help reconcile the divides across different groups. Teams can also benefit from greater transparency and agreement on how to use research, data, and insights throughout the exploration, optimization, and validation steps of the research process.

“**THE VERY BEST CREATIVE RESULTS FROM THE MARKETER/RESEARCH TEAM AT THE CLIENTS PARTNERING WITH THE CREATIVE AGENCY AND THE STRATEGISTS. WHEN WE APPROACH ASSIGNMENTS WITH COMPLETE CANDOR AND THE RICHEST INSIGHTS, WE UNITE AROUND POWERFUL IDEAS AND SEE THEM THROUGH.**”
— Strategic Planner

“**IT’S IMPORTANT THAT THE BRAND AND AGENCY ALIGN ON WHO THE BRAND IS, WHAT IT STANDS FOR, AND WHAT IT REALLY HAS TO OFFER CONSUMERS GIVEN THEIR NEEDS AND WANTS. IF BRANDS AND AGENCIES CAN ALIGN ON THAT SWEET SPOT BEFORE THEY GO INTO RESEARCH, THEIR RESEARCH OUTCOMES WILL BE BETTER. WHY? BECAUSE YOU’RE NOT GOING INTO RESEARCH SEARCHING FOR IT. YOU’RE GOING INTO RESEARCH TRYING TO LEARN WHAT MIGHT BE THE BEST FEELING OR TONE OF THE “IT.”**”
— Strategic Planner/Reviewer
AUDIT GAPS:
It is also best practice for marketers and agencies to perform data/research/insights audits, to understand where gaps may exist or where critical insights are not readily available to all teams.

DOCUMENT LEARNINGS:
Finally, there must be documentation and sharing during — and at the conclusion — of an advertising project. Learnings from creative should be collected for continuous improvement and scaled for future programs. Since someone needs to own this documentation, one possible owner could be the scrum team, which can help the organization stay accountable for continuous learning and knowledge sharing. These learnings can also serve as the foundation of an agreed-upon strategy for testing and experimentation that all teams can follow moving forward.
The ARF Creative Council — comprised of researchers, marketers, creatives, and strategic planners — explored the three issues of language, trust, and workflow in our creative ecosystem, and have provided recommendations on how to address these challenges in each of the above sections. We’ve compiled these findings into a series of diagnostic questions that you can use to assess where there may be room for improvement in your own organization and the actions you can pilot to drive stronger communication and collaboration.

YOUR GPS TO BETTER INSIGHTS/ BETTER CREATIVE

Not sure where to start? Like all good research, let’s start by asking the right questions. Use these diagnostic questions to get started:

**LANGUAGE**

- Have your cross-functional teams agreed on how to use critical tools such as copy testing, insights, A/B testing etc.?
- Can your teams differentiate between data, research, and data science vs. true insights?
- When performing copy testing, do you protect early concepts that haven’t fully evolved from being killed too early?

**TRUST**

- Do you have a diversity of experiences and stakeholders in each advertising initiative?
- Do all stakeholders have access to data and research throughout the creative process?
- Do you have a scrum with a shared mission of creating the best work possible, that is accountable for insights sharing?

**PROCESS/SYSTEM**

- Do your teams agree on which types of insights belong in which parts of the creative process?
- Do all teams on a project collaborate on data, research, and insights at the beginning of the creative process?
- Is your full team (marketer, agency, researcher, creative) aligned on common goals?
- Does your organization have an agreed-upon strategy for testing and experimentation that all teams buy into and follow?
- Are you all using the same evaluation metrics?
- Have you performed a data/research/insights audit to understand where critical insights information is not readily available to all team members?
- Does your organization document learnings throughout the creative process?
In our world of big data, companies are investing in data and research infrastructure to make smarter advertising decisions. But if this data isn’t transformed into meaningful insights, both quantitative and qualitative, to inform creatives throughout all phases of the advertising development process — then these insights aren’t used to their full potential. Research and data — when used correctly — can inspire, unlock, and amplify creative thinking. Marketers, researchers, strategic planners, creatives — we all have an opportunity to do better. We hope you’ll use this paper and the diagnostic tool it provides to begin dialogues and generate micro shifts at your own companies.

LET’S BRIDGE THE GAPS BETWEEN OUR INDUSTRY SILOS, AND SHIFT FROM USING DATA AS A STICK, TO EMPOWERING TEAMS AND DRIVING CREATIVE WITH BETTER INSIGHTS.
Methodology

1. The ARF Creative Council Steering Committee developed a questionnaire on the uses of data and research in the creative process. The ARF distributed this questionnaire to all of its advertiser, agency, and research company members in February and March 2018. A total of 217 individuals from member companies responded to the survey, of whom 127 completed it. The initial results of this survey were reported at the ARF’s 2018 CONSUMERxSCIENCE conference.

2. The ARF then conducted the same survey with creatives and strategists. It partnered with the 4As to distribute the survey to individuals in their database in creative roles and with Advertiser Perceptions to expand the sample further. In addition, members of the Creative Council Steering Committee distributed the survey to creatives and strategists in their networks. Altogether, a total of 82 creatives and strategists responded from both ARF member companies non-ARF member companies.

3. There were 82 researchers who completed the survey, and 40 in “other” roles who did so. Due to the nature of the sampling, the data presented in this report should be considered directional rather than projectable.

4. The data shown here on “MR firms” (N=57) and “non-MR firms” (N=70) are subsets of the ARF sample.

5. The ARF Creative Council also conducted 16 in-depth interviews with creatives and strategic planners who had responded to the survey or who were invited to participate by ARF executives or Council Steering Committee members. These took place from October 2018 through February 2019.
LEARN MORE
For questions about the paper or a consultation on its topics, contact us. If you’re interested in contributing to similar research projects in the future, enroll in the ARF Creative Council.

ABOUT THE ARF
Since 1936, the Advertising Research Foundation has been the standard-bearer for unbiased quality in research on advertising, media and marketing. Its powerful knowledge, unifying standards and best practices have benefited its 400+ member companies many times over. Only the ARF brings together advertisers, agencies, media companies, research companies and ad tech into one conversation about how to be better at what we do.

ABOUT THE ARF CREATIVE COUNCIL
This paper and research were authored by the ARF Creative Council, whose mission is to increase the understanding of the impact of research on creativity from a variety of viewpoints and in multiple organizations.

ABOUT ADVERTISER PERCEPTIONS
Advertiser Perceptions is the global leader in research-based business intelligence for the advertising, marketing, and ad technology industries. It delivers an unbiased, research-based view of the advertising market with analysis and solutions tailored to a company’s specific KPIs and business objectives. These insights provide clients with the confidence to make the very best organizational, sales, and / or marketing decisions.