



# What Makes an “Ad Worth Spreading”?

WRITTEN BY  
*TED*

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## THE RUNDOWN

Each year, YouTube joins TED in celebrating 10 incredible ads that elevate the craft of advertising, blending creativity and innovation to make something that is worth spreading. The selected ads across six categories — Social Good, Talk, Education, Brand Bravery, Cultural Compass and Creative Wonder — show that ads can be elevated to great, shareable content that engage audiences on a whole new level.

## WHAT CAN <SERVICE/PRODUCT HERE> DO FOR ME?

What does advertising do? To say that it exists to sell *stuff* only captures part of its evolving role. Today's brands need to be more than product sellers, they have to stand for something. We live in a participation age where marketing is no longer a one-way message from brand to consumer. Today's connected consumers expect conversations from brands. So more than ever, brands need something meaningful to say to convince consumers they are part of the same community. Brands strive to connect themselves to something intangible, yet powerful: Coke is about happiness; Ram Trucks embody resilience; Expedia offers personal journeys. It's about relatable moments that engage audiences on an emotional level and activate something deep inside.

TED's Ads Worth Spreading challenge rewards advertising that takes a stand. Each year, TED conducts an exhaustive search to find ten pieces of incredibly compelling work from around the world. The ads are selected by TED speakers and up-and-coming creatives as reference points that not only reflect the best of advertising today, but also inspire others to raise their game. The challenge, now in its third year, puts a spotlight on campaigns that tap into the intuitive power of visual storytelling to express ideas, and in doing so, engage audiences in meaningful ways.

This year's challenge celebrated ads in six categories: Social Good, Talk, Education, Brand Bravery, Cultural Compass and Creative Wonder. Though different in scope and mission, each ad engages the viewer on a fundamental level. "It's all the stuff that makes the world go around: human moments, human myths, transcending our limits, transcending our prejudices, rediscovering ourselves, laughing at ourselves, and believing in our dreams," explains Eliza Esquivel, vice president of global brand strategy at Mondelēz International, one of the competition's judges.

The envelope please...

## **1. SOCIAL GOOD**

### **ABOUT THIS CATEGORY**

Digital activism can seem hollow at times, but it's proven to raise awareness. Perhaps the best example is Kony 2012, which described the atrocities of the Ugandan rebel leader Joseph Kony. It was an amazing piece of communication about a difficult and distant subject that garnered nearly 98 million views on YouTube at a recent count.

### **AND THE WINNER IS:**

The Rainforest Alliance's "Follow The Frog" was a welcome antidote to the earnest extremes of online advocacy in films like Kony 2012. Self-referential, unabashedly funny, acutely culturally aware, the campaign lovingly lampooned its target audience of aspiring do-gooders while communicating its message. The idea was to show "a runaway train of thought, this nervous extrapolation of things you shouldn't do", says Max Joseph, the spot's director, cinematographer and narrator.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iIkOi3srLo>

### **WHY IT'S WORTH SPREADING:**

The spot plays with internet culture: Rapidly appropriating, and discarding, fuzzy animal videos, cultural tropes and memes. But it does it all in the service of rainforest advocacy. The simple message, which asks only that consumers buy coffee and other products branded with The Rainforest Alliance, is tailor-made for online engagement and advocacy. "The simpler the idea, the easier it is to share," Joseph says.

## 2. TALK

### ABOUT THIS CATEGORY

Through insightful, funny and sometimes crazy talks, TED has tried to show that someone speaking can be as engaging as well-scripted drama. The numbers suggest it's working: TED recently passed 1 billion views.

The talk category celebrates direct communication with the audience, much like a TED talk. It elevates the content and context without losing the message. "What is this spot saying and why is it important now?" is the question our judges ask. Through this lens, advertising is less about cleverness and more about communicating a message. To articulate their values, brands have to speak with an authentic voice.

### AND THE WINNER IS:

In Ram Trucks' Super Bowl spot, "The Farmer," Ram takes an old speech by National Radio Hall of Famer Paul Harvey, with all the scratches, warps and seemingly eternal pauses of the original recording. The spot became the brand's declaration of solidarity with America's farmers and an embrace of the Ram's role in society, one of the judges, Tom Beckman, a principal at PRIME Stockholm explains. It was a declaration of Ram Trucks' "values proposition". This is a smart move from a business perspective. When companies take pride in who they are, consumers reward them.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=AMpZ0TGjbWE#at=28](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=AMpZ0TGjbWE#at=28)

### WHY IT'S WORTH SPREADING:

The idea sprang from an amateur YouTube tribute to farmers, set to Harvey's speech, which he delivered at a gathering of the Future Farmers of America, or FFA. The creative team at Ram Trucks' agency, The Richards Group, found the YouTube video, and proposed to the FFA that they work together on the spot. The qualities that Harvey ascribes to farmers "were the same as the characteristics of the Ram brand", says Rob Baker, a creative director at The Richards Group. The ad was a remix of a remix but also a tested concept. The original YouTube video had racked up hundreds of thousands of views. By embracing content its core audience already loved, Ram Trucks racked up 10 million views in the first five days on YouTube.

## 3. EDUCATION

### ABOUT THIS CATEGORY

Can advertising educate? What kind of ads actually complement learning instead of just selling products? Those were the provocative questions judges asked as the education category made its debut in the Ads Worth Spreading challenge. The ads picked prove that, yes, brands can be teachers. Great ones.

## AND THE WINNERS ARE:

Dell's "Annie" spot tells the story of a young girl's dream of flying and how her laptop helps her. The creative brief called for a simple back-to-school spot. "We realized that the real emotional power wasn't really what kids were doing in the classroom," says Joe Rivas, head of Global Strategy at Y&R.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjJ-F8SoGQo>

The Guardian's celebrated spot "Three Little Pigs" similarly tapped into cultural truths and relevance to engage audiences worldwide. The creatives were asked to communicate the newspaper's open journalism model through a compelling story. It was, in the words of David Kolbusz, BBH's deputy executive creative director, "a product demonstration." A current event would quickly become dated, so instead the team reached for a fairy tale classic.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDGGrfhJH1P4>

## WHY THEY'RE WORTH SPREADING:

The Annie spot tied Dell to education — she develops some real-world technical skills — but also captured a deeper cultural truth about inspiration and perseverance. The magic happens when kids are "making things, doing things and creating things with their own hands," Rivas says.

"Three Little Pigs" becomes a nuanced look at our times. The pieces of the story branch off as readers react to each revelation and propel the discussion with their comments. "I'm behind on my payments too," one sympathetic commenter notes after the pigs are revealed as underwater mortgage holders driven to insurance fraud. The spot's narrative stems from the familiarity of the tale and of the current issues of homeowners' rights, false accusations and mortgage default. Trucks' agency, The Richards Group, found the YouTube video, and proposed to the FFA that they work together on the spot. The qualities that Harvey ascribes to farmers "were the same as the characteristics of the Ram brand", says Rob Baker, a creative director at The Richards Group. The ad was a remix of a remix but also a tested concept. The original YouTube video had racked up hundreds of thousands of views. By embracing content its core audience already loved, Ram Trucks racked up 10 million views in the first five days on YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDGGrfhJH1P4>

## 4. BRAND BRAVERY

### ABOUT THIS CATEGORY

Many of the best ads take chances — and when done well, the rewards far outweigh the risks.

## AND THE WINNERS ARE:

Coca-Cola's "Security Cameras" spot approached an issue of public debate with a cheeky sense of humor. The surveillance apparatus that has risen, particularly after the 9/11 terror attacks, has raised concerns from citizens across the spectrum. However, this Coke spot by Y&R Argentina reminds us that security cameras aren't just watching out for us. They're also capturing moments of joy, wonder and the vibrancy of life.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceTBF1Hik5I&noredirect=1>

*"Most work that's spreadable is likeable and actually leaves you feeling happier than when you went into it"*

"Dumb Ways to Die" similarly turned convention on its head. Public service announcements tend to be boring. "The only real way to create a safety message that would spread and get through to young people was to embed it in very entertaining content," said John Mescall, the executive creative director at McCann Melbourne. Enter "Dumb Ways to Die," an unusual safety campaign for Metro Trains in Melbourne, Australia.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJNR2EpS0jw&noredirect=1>

## WHY THEY'RE WORTH SPREADING:

The Coke spot depicts acts of kindness, bravery and friendship being captured by security cameras and turned the idea of security on its head. The cameras were passive witnesses to citizens offering each other security.

It takes bravery to use dark comedy to address a serious issue, particularly if you wait until the last 15 seconds to unveil the message. But "Dumb Ways to Die" works because the song is so catchy that it encourages audience participation — a karaoke version is even available on iTunes. "Most work that's spreadable is likeable and actually leaves you feeling happier than when you went into it," Mescall says. The video became an international viral hit.

## 5. CULTURAL COMPASS

### ABOUT THIS CATEGORY

What defines a cultural moment? Is it "The Harlem Shake" or the debate over marriage equality? Many brands should probably have a plan for both — "The Harlem Shake" because corporations want to be part of current pop culture, and marriage equality because the discussion is so important right now.

## AND THE WINNERS ARE:

Glaxo Smith Kline's "The Crowd Is My Only Drug" carried a straightforward message that was tied to the London Olympics. GSK provided anti-doping services for the Games and wanted the Olympics to be clean. Rather than talk about what potentially could be a very clinical topic, GSK tapped into a core human emotion, highlighting the honor of preserving the spirit of the games.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hy-ch43OCDQ&noredirect=1>

Emotion was also central to Expedia's "Find Your Understanding". The online travel business is about deals and ease of use. When 180 LA set out to pitch Expedia, their aim was to put emotion back into travel. "Find Your Understanding", the real-life account of a father traveling to his same-sex daughter's wedding, explored a social issue with humanity.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThzdsnXeE28>

## WHY THEY'RE WORTH SPREADING:

Instead of vaulting into a controversial topic, TBWA's spot for GSK celebrated the human spirit, and in doing so, turned a negative topic, into an uplifting message.

Expedia's spot was a story any parent could relate to: a child makes choices that they may not understand. The piece, which used footage from the couple's actual wedding video, captured unmatched authenticity, and in doing so, captured an audience that connected with the brand.

## 6. CREATIVE WONDER

### ABOUT THIS CATEGORY

Our expectations for advertising have risen over time. The world's first TV spot was a static picture of a Bulova watch face superimposed on a crude image of the United States, with the voiceover, "America runs on Bulova time." That was it. Our best ads these days can stand next to blockbuster films in terms of craft and creativity. It's those ads that raise the bar that are the inspiration behind the Creative Wonder category.

## AND THE WINNERS ARE:

Channel 4's Paralympics ad "Meet the Super Humans" delivered that kind of excitement by celebrating athletes who push the limits of human performance. The ad amazed audiences in the United States, Australia and its home market in the United Kingdom.

Creative Wonder might be impossible to define, but you know once you've found it because the audience watches with rapt attention. TNT's "Daily Dose of Drama" grabs the audience and doesn't let go. The spot is a massive guerilla marketing stunt: When a passerby presses a giant red button in the middle of a Belgian town square they set in motion a calamitous series of robberies, shootouts and car wrecks.

## WHY THEY'RE WORTH SPREADING:

"Meet the Super Humans", which spotlighted often overlooked athletes, was highly shareable and sublimely authentic. "We kind of showed these guys for what they really, really are. It was an honest, truthful approach and that was key to the success," observes Olivia Browne, business director for Channel 4.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKTamH\\_xuQ&noredirect=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKTamH_xuQ&noredirect=1)

TNT's "Daily Dose of Drama" set out to create a real-life action experience and get authentic reactions from bystanders as mayhem unfolded around them. "They wanted an ad worth talking about," says Kristiaan Hoet, a member of the creative team, recalling TNT's brief for the spot heralding the launch of their new channel in Belgium. The spot was created with the express goal of making something people would share. "We try to think about giving people a story to tell to each other," Hoet says.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=316AzLYfAzw&noredirect=1>

## CONTENT NOT COMMERCIALS

Despite the wide-ranging and different subject matter in these ads, common qualities bring them together and make them engaging for audiences. They are authentic, entertaining, informative, culturally relevant and they connect on an emotional level. Most important, they all offer value to the audience, either because they are funny, useful, beautiful, inspiring, or perhaps, just marvelously unexpected. Rather than approach each brief as an ad, each of the creative minds behind these videos crafted them as great content first, and that's exactly how their audiences perceived them — they've collectively attracted more than 100 million views on YouTube alone.

But to truly understand what sets these ads apart, you need to experience them. The ten ads can be seen on YouTube's advertising brand channel. Check them out, hopefully you will be inspired and you might just help spread them yourself.



### TED

This is an edited and abridged version of a TED white paper. The original, full-length paper can be downloaded at <http://www.ted.com/aws>.