

YouTube Ads Leaderboard

About the leaderboard

The Year-End YouTube Ads Leaderboard showcases the most creative ads that people have chosen to watch in the UK in 2014. To be eligible for the leaderboard, videos must be marked as ads on YouTube, but must also earn significant organic views. The rankings are determined by an algorithm that factors in paid views, organic views and audience retention.

Four lessons from the UK's most viewed ads on YouTube in 2014

It used to be the case that a commercial break was just that – a break in the middle of the entertainment you'd tuned in to watch. But now we're experiencing an exciting shift; brands are making ads so good that people are seeking them out in order to watch and share. Today, the best ads out there aren't just a break from the entertainment – they are the entertainment.

The Year-End YouTube Ads Leaderboard showcases the most creative ads that people have chosen to watch in the UK in 2014. An algorithm has determined the rankings by factoring in paid views, organic views and audience retention. These top 10 ads earned a combined 330 million views. So what are brands doing to captivate us so effectively? Last year, four key themes emerged that illustrate how successful brands are producing content that people are excited to watch.

Context is king

Half of the most popular ads featured in the list were tied to cultural events and magic moments that captured the imagination of viewers. In a way, this is nothing new: brands have always used events to connect with audiences. What's changed is that any given big moment now offers hundreds of digital moments, not just during, but also before and after the event. Fans are using YouTube to extend shared experiences, which gives brands a wider opportunity to engage.

Three brands – John Lewis, Sainsbury's and Marks & Spencer – landed ads in the top 10 by conveying the magic and the beauty of Christmas. Nike's collaboration with creative agency Wieden+Kennedy and media agency Mindshare meanwhile saw two World Cup ads make the list through the brand's association with one of the most popular sporting events on the planet. In 2015, expect brands to leverage global cultural moments (such as the Rugby World Cup), as well as unique local moments (like the second royal baby, due at the end of April) to stimulate and celebrate the excitement of the public.

YouTube UK Ads Leaderboard 2014

1. Sainsbury's Christmas Ad
2. John Lewis Christmas Ad
#MontyThePenguin
3. Nike Football: Winner Stays
4. Nike Football: The Last Game
5. Always #LikeAGirl
6. Three #SingItKitty
7. Marks & Spencer Christmas Ad
#FollowTheFairies
8. Save the Children: Most Shocking
Second a Day
9. Guinness Sapeurs
10. Pepsi Max: Unbelievable #LiveForNow



Nike Football: Winner Stays

"The most popular ideas are those where brands are thinking like publishers, not advertisers. They are mashing together the skills of documentary, music video and advertising to create amazing, shareable content."

— **Graham Bednash, Director of Consumer Marketing, Google**

Fresh is best

It's the end of the repurposed TV ad. Today, the most popular ads on YouTube are made specifically for YouTube, featuring long formats and topics designed to spark conversation. In the past, brands had to be brief – a 30-second segment was the norm in the context of interruption that once defined advertising. Not so anymore; YouTube ads embrace the absence of limitation when it comes to length.

That's because when viewers *choose* to watch an ad, they'll give brands much more than 30 seconds out of their day. Adverts appearing in the 2014 leaderboard averaged 2:35 in length. At 5:28, Nike's "The Last Game" video was the longest in the list, and still managed to attract over 74 million viewers and grab the No. 4 spot. With advertising's shift towards consumer choice, brands like Nike can get more time in front of audiences than ever – up to 11 times the duration of a traditional TV ad spot.

Together with its creative agency AMV BBDO and media agency PHD, Sainsbury's created a tailwind of PR and social mentions to ensure that viewers would seek out its Christmas film – which went on to take the top spot in the leaderboard. "YouTube was crucial in enabling us to generate audiences for the film much more efficiently than in the past," explains Craig Mawdsley, Chief Strategy Officer at AMV BBDO. "In fact, without YouTube, filmmaking of this ambition would be very hard to justify, as the cost of reaching enough people for a film that takes over three minutes to tell its story would be too great. When we showed the film in research groups a few days after its TV debut, one of our respondents summed it up well by saying, 'Oh, I haven't seen this on TV yet, but I've heard about it, so I was going to watch it on YouTube.'"

Targeting hearts, not wallets

While ads once existed to sell, most of those in the 2014 leaderboard emphasise emotion over product insight. Advertisers are targeting our hearts, not our wallets – which creates a real connection that can form the foundation of a more meaningful brand relationship. "The most popular ideas are those where brands are thinking like publishers, not advertisers," explains Google's Director of Consumer Marketing, Graham Bednash. "They're mashing together the skills of documentary, music video and advertising to create amazing, shareable content."

Instead of describing a product in a technical way, using price as a central point or putting the brand front and centre, examples from Save the Children and Sainsbury's tap into human feelings to convey their message. "Real buzz

"Real buzz was generated around Sainsbury's Christmas film. It was the most viewed piece of content the day after launch as well as the top trending search term on Google. Since launch, it has generated over 15 million views, 10,000 comments and an additional £500,000 for the Royal British Legion."

— **Charlotte Wells, Media Director at Sainsbury's media agency PHD**



Sainsbury's Christmas Ad

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— Craig Mawdsley, Chief Strategy Officer at Sainsbury's creative agency AMV BBDO

was generated around Sainsbury's Christmas film," affirms Charlotte Wells, Media Director at PHD. "On launch night alone, over 1 million people viewed the ad on YouTube. It was the most viewed piece of content the day after launch as well as the top trending search term on Google." The film, which tells the story of the 1914 Christmas truce, has generated over 16 million views and raised £500,000 for the Royal British Legion.

In place of pure information, brands that appear in the top 10 have understood the web's capacity to create pure entertainment. Many of the ads assume the role of the modern-day music video. Three's #SingItKitty is a great example of utilising the power of music as a way to create connections between people and communicate emotion.

Joining forces: collaboration and sharing

Many brands are collaborating with celebrities to draw upon the stars' existing fan bases and to boost the entertainment value of adverts – think James Corden's work with Cadburys and appearances from the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney in Nike's top-ranking videos.

Brands in the leaderboard have embraced the idea that creative and entertaining content demands to be shared. Although friends might be physically separated, through sharing they can watch "together". Social engagement is increasingly important: five ads that appear in the leaderboard included a hashtag in their titles, encouraging people to share, helping brands track social engagement around the content and facilitating the creation of communities of like-minded people.

In 2015, smart brands will aim to produce content that drives fans to share their ads (like in John Lewis' #MontyThePenguin video), contribute to a cause (as in the case of Save the Children) or start a movement around a message (like Always' #LikeAGirl campaign). When a brand's content parallels their passions, sheds light on their frustrations or gives voice to their emotions, the YouTube audience is eager to seek out the ad and take action.