

# Delivering Creative Effectiveness

Success Pillars that Raise  
the Value of Creative

Ad-Lib.io



## Hello readers,

**Here's the story behind this piece.** I spent four years at Google watching the developing complexity in the creative space and pondering why agencies, brands and Googlers felt it was all just too tricky to innovate digitally. At the time, it seemed that data, programmatic and the industry as a whole were maturing, that the creative agencies were still evolving their models and that, within the near-term, digital creative would prevail.

After leading this crusade for four more years at Ad-Lib.io, it still feels stuck. Keeping in mind that digital media spend is forecasted to grow to \$646 billion USD by 2024 according to eMarketer, you might expect that, by now, more attention and budget would be allocated to what the online user actually experiences...but you would be wrong.

**Why?** The challenge isn't one of education or complexity but really one of the industry rigidity and outdated commercial models. I've also realized that the fundamentals are not in place—things like a common language and an overarching

measurement framework—or indeed any idea of what good looks like. The competition in this space has focussed on ad servers, intelligence or bulk production efficiencies which are only pieces of the puzzle. When these things are combined, you get to a very special place.

This guide, based on a decade of experience, suggests a new framework and some common themes to guide advertisers as they address the challenges of melding creative and digital to fundamentally make the user's experience of a brand's advertisements useful, usable and, more than occasionally, delightful.

**Oli Marlow Thomas**  
Founder  
**Ad-Lib.io**



# Introduction

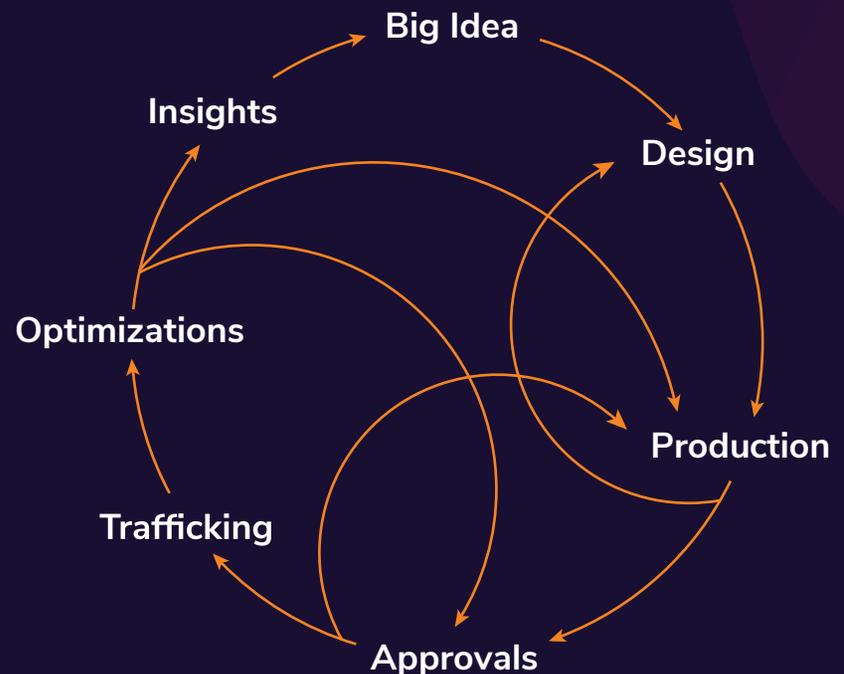
In the digital advertising business, media and technology have had a decades-long affair. Always rocky, never settled, but very productive for all the offspring (i.e. ad tech vendors) it has produced. Ironically, with all the investment going to media, the most important driver of success—the creative asset—has been left on the sidelines. What is the ad you remember most in digital media? Probably not the best ad, but more likely the one backed by the most programmatic spend so that it could chase you to all corners of the web, driving the memory of nuisance rather than relevance.

As the industry deals with media's abundant optimization in the face of privacy-related issues like cookie depreciation, creativity is rising in the minds of CMOs, not just from a quality standpoint but also from a performance-driving perspective. Unlike media, however, there has been little done to measure and monitor performance of discrete creative elements until now.

How do you put metrics behind ad creative? What image works, or why does a color resonate with consumers? More importantly, how does the creative process need to change in a metrics-driven marketing world?

The framework and workflow that marketers need to answer these questions is complex and requires real-time

collaboration across teams and companies. We have some answers here, to highlight the ways in which ad creative can be proven to impact the top and bottom line. This guide explores the five pillars for creative effectiveness—governance, scale, relevance, agility, and intelligence—and explains how marketers can leverage them to capitalize on creative as a performance lever.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

# In this guide, we'll discuss:

**Creative—Why Now?** Page 4

### **Effectiveness Pillars & Success Stories**

① **Creative Governance** Page 5

② **Creative Scale** Page 6

③ **Creative Relevance** Page 7

④ **Creative Agility** Page 8

⑤ **Creative Intelligence** Page 9

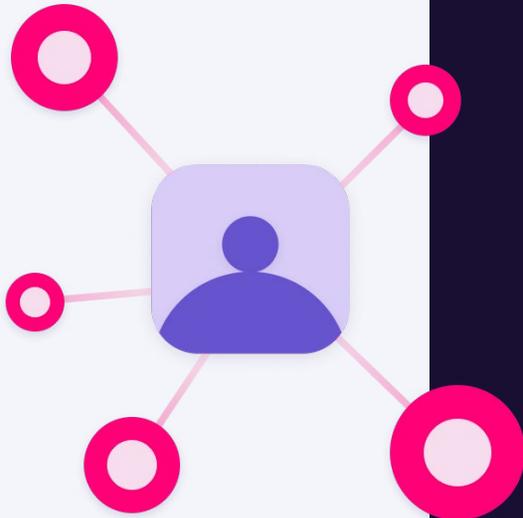
**How to Power Creative Effectiveness** Page 10



## CREATIVE— WHY NOW?

### Consumers' expectations of quality ads is changing

The complexity of the creative opportunity has been compounded by rapidly evolving consumer expectations:



- **Content needs to be more visually appealing.** The quality of digital ads is hard for brands to guarantee. Digital content should be governed and shouldn't be an afterthought with all that investment into digital media.
- **Online behavior is changing.** Media consumption has been impacted by the explosion of digital channels, each with their own style, dynamics and form factors. Marketers have not been able to keep pace.
- **Attention spans are short.** The perennial challenge for marketers is how to cut through with a relevant message. But when creative and media teams don't collaborate, the message is muddy. Aligning creative and media makes ads stand out and appear relevant to each consumer.
- **The on-demand economy has caught up with brands.** Consumers expect brands to be agile with messaging updates and want it now. COVID-19 changed everything! Brands that are not clearly recognizing individuals are not resonating. According to Harvard Business Review, when customers receive transparent ads based on their activity on a site, the revenue of the product grows by 38%.

How do digital marketers bring creative back into the picture while maintaining speed and agility? *Let's dig into the five focus areas that need attention.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

## Creative Governance

There is something disheartening about the discovery by Nielsen that 70% of marketers are unhappy with the creative they use in campaigns. This is also a surprise since they attribute 47% of sales contribution to creative quality and messaging. Marketers need to balance speed and scale with relevance and storytelling in each ad unit—a nearly insurmountable task when approached from a traditional marketing mindset. You need proper creative governance to ensure that your creative ideas are correctly executed across all platforms. Throughout the enterprise, approvals and accountability are key to ad quality being consistent with brand expectations. This is especially true in regulated industries like health and finance.

### How to improve Creative Governance

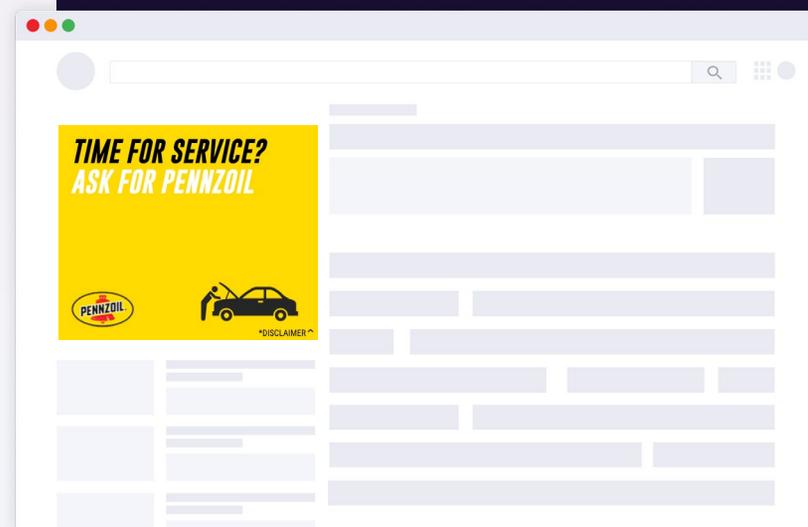
The traditional, in-person method of printing and presenting every ad variant to all constituents slows down the process, leads to significant rework, and lowers the sales impact from too many cooks in the kitchen. What's needed is a persistent template system, established at the start, that allows teams to send, review, modify and sign off on creative output. Within those templates are fixed assets and flexible placeholders, allowing the brand, creative and media teams to adjust creative for the needs of specific audiences. Combined with a workflow that facilitates approvals and governance, the “fix and flex” construction of templates ensures brand and creative consistency. At its best, governance also includes building and testing

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universal design elements for quality and reusability so the approval process leverages a set of predetermined guidelines and creative assessment scores. The result is a better indication as to when ads are ready—for faster execution and sign off—rather than belaboring each individual ad.



**AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESS.** Creative and media have to work together to deliver campaigns quickly and efficiently. Pennzoil's goal was to offer oil change coupons as efficiently as possible while still delivering the right message at the right moment. By combining advanced dynamic templates with automatically ingested audience data, Pennzoil instantly assigned creative strategy directly against the appropriate audience segments. By building templates to a pre-set quality, all parties collaborated upfront on how key brand elements would be governed so that less ads would be rejected by the buying platforms. The result was a tightly aligned campaign delivered within 10 days of the initial creative brief. [Read the case study.](#)



- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

## Creative Scale

Digital marketing options have exploded. While the IAB “standard” display formats are still widely used, the number of additional formats for custom placements, mobile versus desktop, static versus dynamic, and video, is quickly rising. Additionally, social platforms have custom sizes of their own—ranging from content-boosting ads on Facebook to vertical video on TikTok. On top of that, activation across multiple markets also requires the actual content of the ad to change based on algorithms, cultural norms, and language or dialect considerations. In order to scale to accommodate this customization - requiring dozens, if not hundreds, of unique formats for any one campaign—automation is needed.

### How to achieve Creative Scale

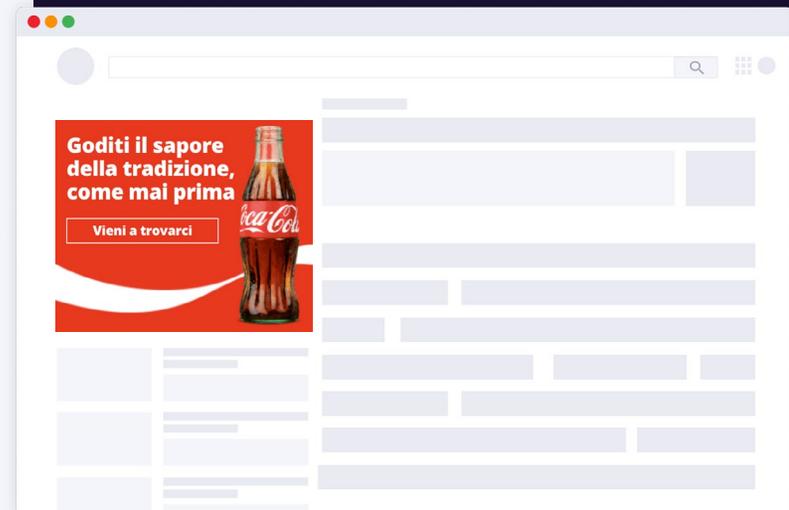
In fact, many of the campaign variants can be created using automation, to further support a rapid review process. Because ads need to be consistent across desktop and mobile, banners and video, and social & contextual

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sites, intelligent automation is required to put the right assets into the right container, from pre-roll video to native social ads. Recommended brand guidelines, fonts, and other reusable assets and resources should all be easily available at the start. Finally, data and pre-set guidelines to support customization for language and cultural differences across markets helps to automate extensive multi-market reach.



**AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESS.** As countries started coming out of COVID lockdowns, Coca-Cola launched its new platform “Open Like Never Before”. The goal was to offer multiple means of support to Hotel, Restaurant and Café partners who needed marketing assistance during a reopening phase. This included targeted support for business owners to reopen safely, build resilience, and promote their businesses by reminding people of special moments that they have experienced in their favorite local establishments. Leveraging campaign automation to tailor ads to multiple country markets, Coca-Cola successfully activated at scale across 11 markets with 14,000 ads created in total. [Read the case study.](#)



- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

## Creative Relevance

According to Epsilon, 80% of consumers are more likely to make a purchase when brands offer personalized experiences. But aligning the right message is hard when creative resources and media teams are not collaborating on the intent and execution of a campaign. At best, they agree on the initial brief; at worst, the agendas of the two teams—internal or external—are not consistent. When the brief is developed by the marketing or brand team, it is typically handed to the media team who considers the audiences to target. Once they lock in on the audience, the creative team takes over to build the big idea. But when these teams operate in a one-directional linear fashion, the ability to work together iteratively—to review assets and messages to ensure alignment with customer needs—is missing.

### How to promote Creative Relevance

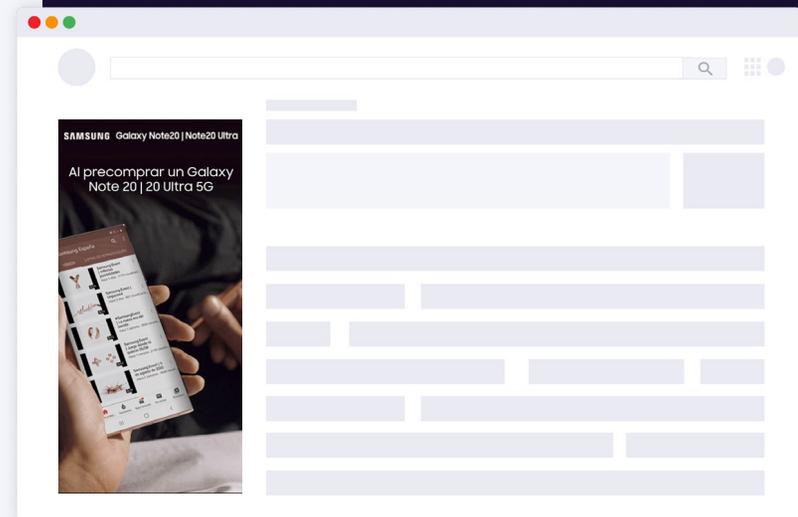
What is needed is a workflow environment that ensures that both teams are involved throughout the process of ad development. Facilitated by the consolidation of media buying, the audiences being targeted by the media plan can be easily visualized for appropriate message building. Then, by

**Similar to how productivity tools have become collaborative, so too can the creative process.**

sharing in the development of the brief, the drafting of ads, and visibility into the output as it develops, media and creative teams can work together more effectively to build the best story for each audience. Similar to how productivity tools (slides, documents and spreadsheets) have become collaborative, so too can the creative process. The result is a greater likelihood of hitting the target on first try, instead of a significant redo of the entire process after campaign results come in.

## SAMSUNG

**AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESS.** How obsessed are you with remaining battery life on your phone? Turns out that is a strong value proposition for consumers to upgrade their device. Samsung and their agency were able to bring the media teams' ideas together with a creative output that captured the remaining battery life on the viewer's phone to deliver video ads based on forecasts of battery deterioration. They were able to increase ROAS by 173% with highly relevant ad content to every single viewer without privacy violations. [Read the case study.](#)



- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

## Creative Agility

If the start of the third decade of the 21st century has taught us anything, it's that being agile is not just the domain of software developers. Has anyone ever been pulled in multiple directions as much as marketers were in Q2 of 2020? As we enter a post-pandemic world, the one thing marketers are more permanently on guard for is unexpected change. And that change—both on the upside and downside—requires more agile thinking and reacting by marketing teams.

The process of activating a campaign is typically driven by changes to the creative. Ordinarily, this incurs the cost and time of designing, launching, trafficking, QA, campaign buildout on the DSP, and more. Instead of starting this process from scratch for each modification, campaigns should be “always on” with a lever in place for creative to effect changes.

### How to exercise Creative Agility

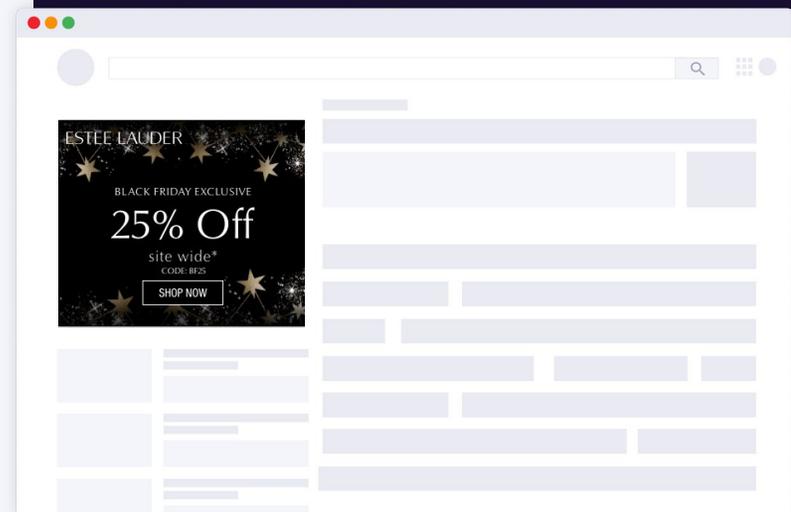
The best way to be agile is to allow creatives to be more creative, planners to do more planning, and let technology bridge the gap between these two very specialized activities. The ability to see and act on cross-media strategies in one place, use AI-based cropping to choose the right image

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for every size and format, and code variants for every platform and market in minutes are examples of agility-driven capability that free up time for the experts to do what they enjoy most.

## ESTÉE LAUDER

**AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESS.** The holidays are a difficult time to make changes to campaigns, but performance data would indicate that it's the time to be the most responsive. Estée Lauder was willing to find out what real-time change making would mean for their UK flagship brand over the holidays in 2020. During a four week holiday window, creative drove a series of nine changes based on real-time performance data. The result was a 69% improvement in conversions and a solid confirmation that they could achieve the best results by being more agile and using technology to do so. [Read the case study.](#)



- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

## Creative Intelligence

A common meme in the 2010's was that "data was the new oil" in terms of a commodity power. Converting that oil into fuel, products or plastics was how the real value was ultimately delivered to consumers and businesses. The same is true of data - it is the intelligence based on said data that turns the commodity into something of value. In the case of creative effectiveness, that intelligence is derived via many paths, including data capture of auto-tagged imagery, easy-to-follow reporting across channels, and predictive algorithms to prevent creative fatigue.

### How to harness Creative Intelligence

All elements of an ad creative—images, colors, logo placement, words—should be tagged to collect a statistically-significant creative data set. With that data, can you track performance variant-by-variant, identify the strongest and weakest of the versions running, and notify users when and how to refresh ads. In addition, with that history of creative and media data recorded, your data team can probabilistically map future performance outcomes. Along with accumulating data comes the need to surface the insights from the noise—through grouping, simplifying, filtering, interpreting and visualization—in order to present understandable

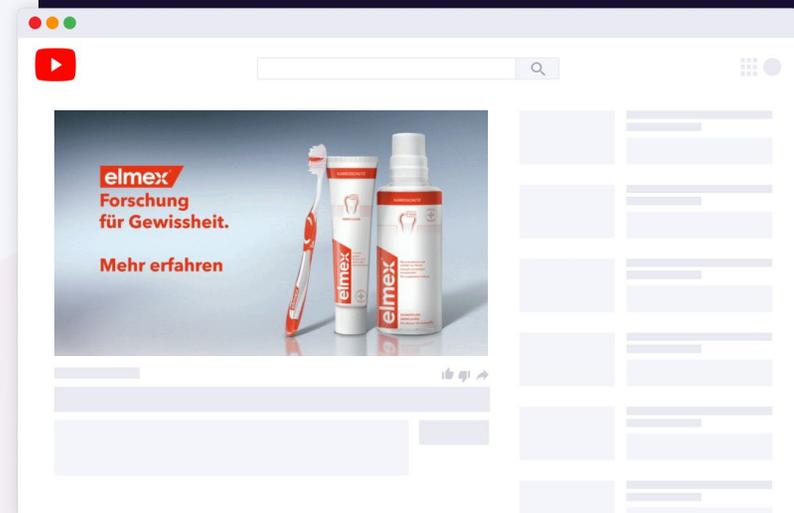
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results with clear attribution. The ultimate goal would be the ability to easily oversee automated, AI-driven changes that optimize campaign performance in flight and build an intelligence repository that improves creative over time.

**Colgate**

**AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESS.** Colgate's elmex brand wanted to shape oral health routines within the German market on YouTube across four key elmex audiences at different life stages. Following the launch of 25 dynamic ads aligned to Ad Group IDs, Colgate leveraged real-time performance data to determine which creative elements were driving campaign performance. These insights supported in-flight creative optimization resulting in a 24.7% lift in ad recall (versus a 20% benchmark), and ultimately a post-campaign bank of creative learnings.

[Read the case study.](#)



## CONCLUSION

# How do you power creative effectiveness?

Marketers must leverage all five pillars for creative success in order to design, deliver, and optimize effective creative.



### Creative governance sets you on a path towards creative quality and reusability

Across the enterprise, approvals and accountability are key to ad quality being and remaining consistent with brand expectations. Yet according to Nielsen, marketers admit that their digital creative is sub-par. Better production and approval workflows should be applied to the effort to ensure digital-first standards and prevent unnecessary reworks of creative. Pre-flight evaluations and reusable assets also mean more and better creative gets in front of consumers more often and you can make more of your existing assets.



### Creative scale is enabled by automation.

Cross-channel relevance is a key component of the value of digital advertising, yet over 95% of campaigns have not been made relevant due to cost and effort. The volume of placements and variants required in order for a campaign to be successful in front of audiences in all channels has exploded. What was once the central message crafted for a TV commercial is now an abundance of display, social, mobile and video messages and formats that need to be created at low cost and high speed. Automation can turn one idea into dozens or hundreds of ad variants, reduce production costs and save time, resulting in stronger top and bottom line results.



### Creative relevance emerges from better creative and media alignment.

Lack of relevance to the customer costs companies as much as \$1 trillion in lost revenues, yet being relevant is something that teams have to work to achieve through collaboration, not silos. When the media team and the creative folks work together from the start, messages are more relevant to the intended target audiences, resulting in ads that exceed performance benchmarks set by both orgs. When do you know you are succeeding? When performance using relevant ad creative is clearly distinguished from broadly applicable campaigns.



### Creative agility means more time in front of buyers.

Speed to market—how many days it takes from idea to campaign launch, or how many additional days a campaign ran because creative assets were ready in advance—is a key driver of success for advertisers that is often ignored. This “cost of delay” can be expensive in terms of idle resources, lost revenue and shortened campaign cycles. Brands need to think in terms of “always-on” agility in order to maximize returns. The sooner your campaigns are in market, the more revenue your organization can generate.



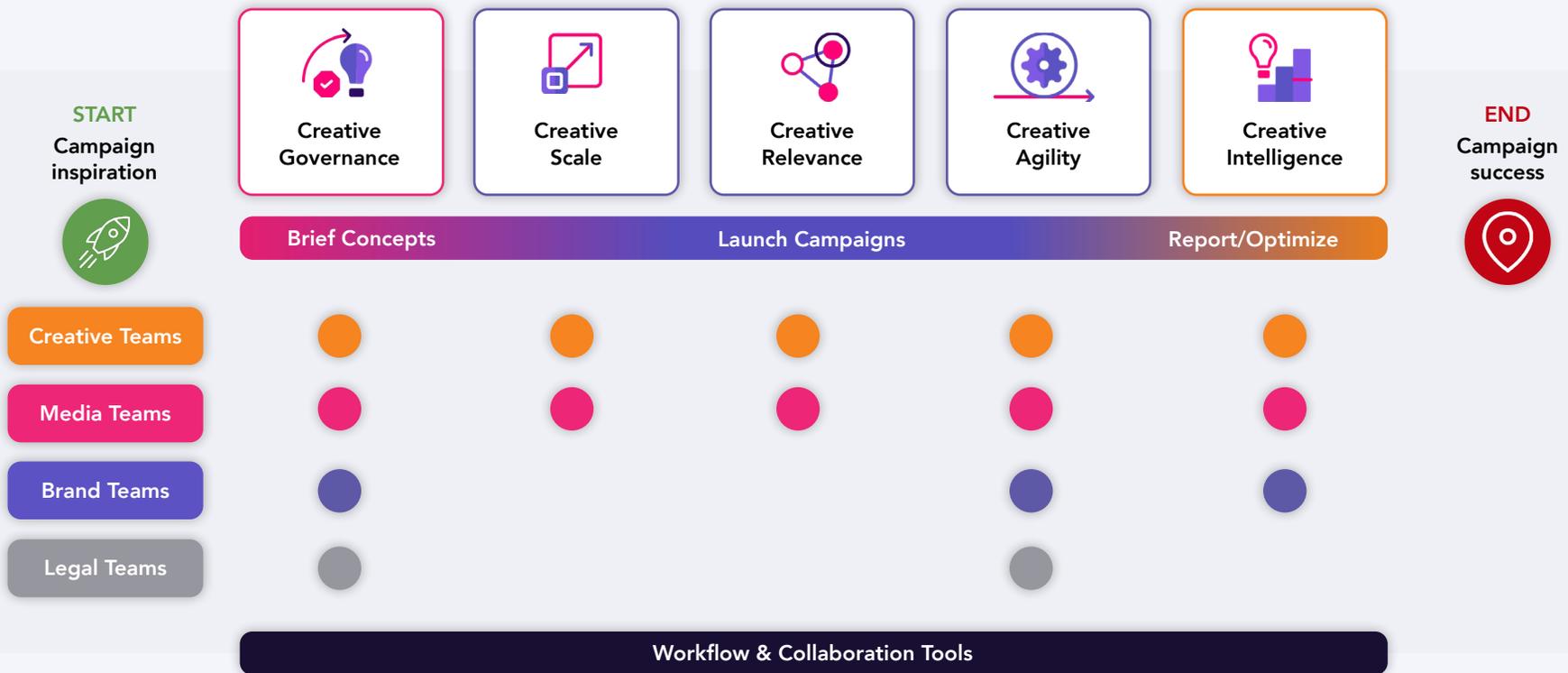
### Creative intelligence provides unequivocal data and feedback for improvement.

What learnings and optimization can be executed for your campaign, and in what time frame? The more input on the elements that work, and the more insight into what is working and what is lagging, the faster a campaign can reach its optimal success. According to our clients' performance on our platform, data related to the performance of creative can drive media efficiencies of 15%. It's clear real-time optimizations minimize ad fatigue and maximize click through and conversion rates.

## CONCLUSION

# How does Ad-Lib.io power creative effectiveness?

Your teams need one seamless platform to harness these creative success pillars and go from big idea to campaign launch with ease.



# About **Ad-Lib.io**

Ad-Lib.io provides the leading next-generation Creative Management Platform for marketers at the world's largest brands to enable them to scale their digital creative.

Ad-Lib.io connects creative and media workflows using intelligent automation, making it easy and fast to produce and optimize relevant ad creative across all digital channels. These ads are 60% more cost-efficient to produce, according to Ad-Lib.io's customers which include 10 of the top 30 global brands.

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[Contact Us](#)

The venture-backed company—recognized as the 2021 Start Up of the Year by Campaign Magazine—was founded by former Google executives who understood the need to close the wide gap between creative concepts and digital media execution.

Ad-Lib.io is headquartered in London, UK with offices in North America, Asia, Australia, Europe and the Middle East.



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