

# The riskiest thing you can do is be ignorable

When last did you willingly watch an 18-minute ad? My guess is probably never.

By Johannes Keiper and Kabelo Ma, issued by M+C Saatchi Abel 12 May 2026



And yet, look at the Marty Supreme promo run or GAP's full-length denim films, and it becomes clear that brands don't have an attention problem – they have an interest problem. Great work entertains, provokes & seduces its audience. Somewhere along the line, we've lost our way.

In today's world it feels like brands are begging us to pay attention. When has that ever worked? In life or otherwise? People want to be seduced, charmed into submission – they want a grand gesture. They want to obsess about things.

But today, no one cares. So, what's the solve?

## 1. Being an entertainment brand, that happens to sell a product or service:

Here's the brutal equation: what a brand gives, minus what a brand takes, equals brand love. Every ad post, product, DM experience or piece of packaging is either a deposit or a withdrawal in your audience's mind. Entertain them, surprise them, make them feel something and you're making great deposits. Waste their time or interrupt them with nothing to say and you're making withdrawals.

Most brands still get this wrong. They think that brand love comes from the product or service alone. Red Bull doesn't win because their drink tastes better. They win because they give more.

More meaning. More energy. More theatre. More store story. More reasons to care.

Do that for long enough and it compounds into something far more valuable than attention. It becomes obsession. Liquid Death built a billion-dollar water brand off this simple playbook.

## 2. Add to culture don't just attach yourself to it:

A brilliant strategist at M+C Saatchi Abel used to say: "Brands are being left out of culture because they

keep trying to attach themselves to it, rather than add something to it." It still rings true.



People can feel the difference between a brand that belongs in the moment and a brand that's arrived late wearing the wrong outfit, and trying too hard to get in the photo. According to a recent Reddit research study 66% of people believe brands today try too hard. That feels about right.

When you operate in social, digital or culture at large, you have to start with one uncomfortable assumption no one asked you to be there.

You are, in a sense, crashing the party. Which means you need to earn your keep. Bring a better joke, a better object. A better story. A better use of the moment. Don't just borrow attention from culture. Pay it back with interest.



The brands that win in culture meaningfully contribute to it. When the internet was in a frenzy around Taylor

Swift being pictured at an NFL game eating a piece of chicken with ketchup and 'seemingly' ranch, many brands tried to capitalise on the moment but only one brand truly captured attention. Heinz quickly released a new limited-edition product named 'Ketchup and Seemingly Ranch' which went viral immediately and earned the brand 6.1 billion impressions.

Heinz, 'Ketchup and Seemingly Ranch' (2025), [here](#).

JD Sports is committed to celebrating and pushing youth culture forward. So, for their 2025 Christmas campaign, they handed 286 young people a phone and asked them to film their everyday lives. The campaign was a raw portrait of the youth perspective that gave complete creative control to the exact audience they were trying to reach.

JD Sports, 'Where Are You Going' (2025), [here](#).

The question is no longer 'what can we gain from culture?', it's 'what can we add to it?' And the benefits of getting this right go beyond just the case for creativity. There's a business case as well.

### 3. Follow the data and the money will follow:

When people feel nothing, they do and say nothing too. Karen Nelson-Field's extensive research on this matter highlights how on average 85% of ad impressions receive no active attention, leaving billions in media spend unable to do its job.

Entertainment is no longer a layer needed in the work. It is the work. Not because it's fashionable, but because the economics of attention have fundamentally changed. When most advertising receives less than a few seconds of attention, the idea of 'buying reach' without earning interest is less viable with each day. We're already seeing the shift – from brands reorganising around entertainment at a structural level, like GAP, highlighting that entertaining brands drive disproportionate growth.

As acclaimed marketing consultant, Mark Ritson, famously says: "When you create more emotion, you make more money. You can't media-buy your way out of boring. Lean into showmanship, lean into storytelling, drama, humour. Provoke, seduce, and always remember, the riskiest thing a brand can do today, is be ignorable."

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