

## **Beware of Visual Vampires, Warns Measurement Firm**

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By Kenneth Hein

Wendy's red wig-clad ads are hard to miss. However, new research shows that the characters in pony-tailed toupees greatly overshadow the products featured in the same ads.

"It is a visual vampire. There is high engagement, but when they show the food it drops like a rock," said Lee Weinblatt, CEO of PreTesting, Tenafly, N.J.

For 35 years, PreTesting has been gauging consumers' reactions to ads. Four months ago it introduced its Engagement Level Factor (or ELF) measurement capabilities.

When consumers are interested in something, their eyes vibrate faster. This is called saccadic eye movement. ELF scores are derived via special eye-movement recorders that have the ability to record not only where one looks, but the rate of saccadic motion and fixation as well. Though not everyone agrees such movement is an objective way to measure advertising, Weinblatt says it shows an interest level for everything from TV and print ads to packaging. Clients include Procter & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer.

The majority (68%) of viewers of the Wendy's ad were riveted when the wig was on screen, but when hamburgers were shown it fell to 24%. The baseline for fast food commercials is 50% as consumers expect to be entertained. Other TV ads dominated by visual vampires: Subway (Jon Lovitz), Chrysler (Dr. Z) and Burger King (Coq Roq).

Wendy's said its "That's right" ads, launched May 23, have helped drive core hamburger business sales up 5%. Third-quarter research found 25% of consumers mention the red wig when asked about Wendy's and more than two-thirds can recall the copy, "I deserve a hot juicy burger."

"The red wig certainly is a device to get people's attention," said Bob Bertini, a rep for Wendy's, Columbus, Ohio. "It offers currency, humor and tonality that resonates with consumers 18-34."

Meanwhile, when it comes to packaging, consumers need to be attracted in the first three seconds or they will move on, Weinblatt said. Compared to most shampoos, Johnson & Johnson's Baby Shampoo performed best with 50% of consumers immediately engaged. "It has a European design aesthetic," said Sam Ellias, president, Pearlfisher, a design firm in New York. "It's simple, clean and uncluttered which is unlike a lot of stuff that stands out in the U.S."

Frosted Flakes (66%) and Kraft salad dressings (42%) also scored well.

Print ads need to grab consumers quickly, but they, too, can be victimized by visual vampires. A Citi ad featuring a dog wearing dentures, a T-Mobile ad showing a man skiing and a Hormel execution showing an exotic woman stretching all drew consumers' eyes, but they failed to read the copy.

Overall, iPod's TV ads were among the best executed. It drew up to 80% of viewers ages 15-24 and 43% of older consumers. The baseline for most consumer electronics ads is fewer than 30%. The most captivating ad star was Geico's gecko. "At one point he scored over 80%," said Weinblatt. "He's one of the most amazing icons we've seen."