

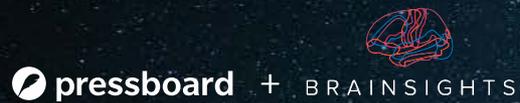
# The Neurological Impact of Branded Content

A joint case study examining how the brain reacts to branded content.

Presented by

 **pressboard** +  BRAINSIGHTS

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This study started out by asking one really big question: what is going on inside the brain when consumers engage with branded content?

We all know by now that branded content works. At Pressboard, our platform collects thousands of data points every day that [proves it](#). We wanted to know what was happening on a neurological level behind all of those clicks, views, and conversions. What is it about branded content that consumers find engaging, and how does that compare to other types of media?

As a first step in answering those questions, we teamed up with the experts at Brainsights to analyze neurological reactions to sponsored video content created through Pressboard's platform for Toyota BC Dealers, and compare it with reactions to top TV programs and advertisements, as well as social performance data. Using EEG scans of sample audiences, Brainsights measured brainwave activity that signals alertness/attention, emotional connection, and encoding to memory.

The tests studied videos sponsored by Toyota BC Dealers that were created and published on Facebook by three media properties and found that from a neurological standpoint, the branded content performed on par with top rated TV shows like *This is Us* and big budget ad campaigns from Apple. In comparing the brain scans to actual performance data from Facebook, there was a direct correlation between drops in alertness/attention and the video's average watch times.

## Some key takeaways for advertisers and content creators from the study:

- Branded content is particularly strong in communicating lifestyle and value aspects of products. Moments involving saving money on gas and environmental friendliness drove positive spikes in brainwave activity
- Advertisers should deliver the premise of the spot early
- Branded content plays by the same rules as other storytelling, and performs best with rising action and conflict at its core. Audiences were willing to spend 40%-75% more time with content that followed a traditional story arc.

# Understanding Neuromarketing

 **pressboard** + BRAINSIGHTS

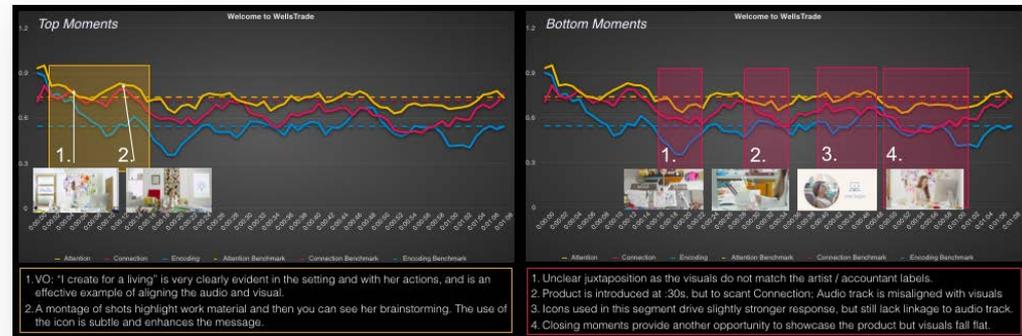


Brainsights is a technology and human insights company that turns brain data into insights that grow businesses.

It was founded in 2013 with two fundamental beliefs in mind: First, by illuminating our unconscious biases we can better understand one another, make better decisions, and lead healthier and more productive lives. Second, individuals' data is valuable and should be meaningfully and materially compensated.

With these beliefs in mind, Brainsights built a measurement technology platform that records the non-conscious response of people to stimuli - news, ads, programs, education, products - to surface the unconscious biases that influence behaviour. Customers like media companies, educators, researchers and advertisers, work with Brainsights to better understand the thoughts and feelings of people in order to solve problems.

## Brainsights turns brain data into business insights

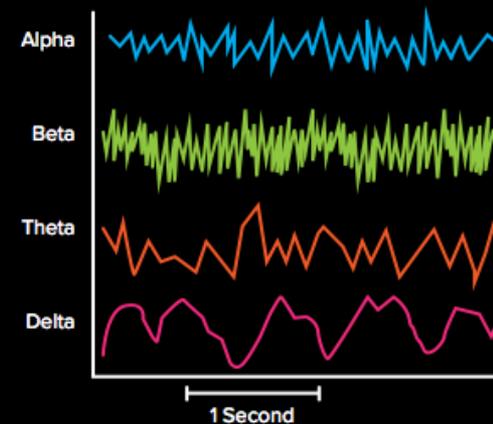


Brainsights measurement platform uses electroencephalography (EEG) to measure brain activity. Brain cells (neurons) communicate via electrochemical transmission, and are tracked and recorded using EEG.

Inobtrusive headsets with small metal electrodes on the scalp measure that electrical activity, which is recorded, amplified and displayed as waves. Waves are characterized by their respective frequency and amplitude.

The power/presence of differing frequencies have been associated with various mental states and processes ie. increased observation of beta band frequency (13-30Hz) during increased attentional tasks.

By measuring the unconscious brain activity of consumers as they view branded content, and marrying this with behavioural data, we can identify the neural correlates of content success.



The study measured consumer's non-conscious brain activity in relation to three key metrics: Attention, Connection and Encoding



METRIC	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT DOES IT ANSWER?	STRONG ASSOCIATION WITH:
ATTENTION	ALERTNESS & ATTENTION	<i>IS THE STIMULI CAPTURING MY ATTENTION?</i>	BREAKTHROUGH
CONNECTION	HIGHER-ORDER THINKING	<i>IS THERE A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STIMULI?</i>	CONSIDERATION, INTENT
ENCODING	ENCODING TO MEMORY	<i>IS THE STIMULI BEING COMMITTED TO MEMORY?</i>	<u>BRAND/PRODUCT LINK</u>

The tests studied three videos sponsored by Toyota BC Dealers that were created and published on Facebook by British Columbia based media outlets



Taco Road Trip



8 Reasons to Buy a Hybrid



Prius Insanity Test

*Click to play video in browser*

100+ participants making up a general population sample were scanned while watching a 1 hour reel of video content comprised of TV clips, commercials, and Toyota BC Dealers' three sponsored videos. The content was viewed by the sample audience on TV, Desktop and Mobile

We chose the top content and advertising in the world to understand how branded content compared and competed, both from a commercial and entertainment perspective.

## Sample Content Tested Alongside the Sponsored Content



TV Shows + Entertainment



Big Budget Advertisements

# Findings and Insights

 **pressboard** + BRAINSIGHTS





## Quality branded content performs on par with top ad and entertainment programming

Toyota BC Dealers' sponsored videos performed at par with some of the highest rated content on television, and some of the most celebrated commercial content.



## Taco Road Trip performed best overall of the three videos tested

The video was above average in Attention and Emotional Connection, and just below average for Encoding.



## Prius Insanity Test performed best of the branded content spots when analyzed for average watch time

+ 20% better than average for Attention, Connection and Encoding, compared to all other content tested.



## Branded content is particularly strong in communicating lifestyle and values aspects of products

Moments involving saving money on gas and being good for the environment can double Attention, Connection and Encoding values among consumers.

## Engagement

### 8 Reasons to Buy a Hybrid

### Prius Insanity Test

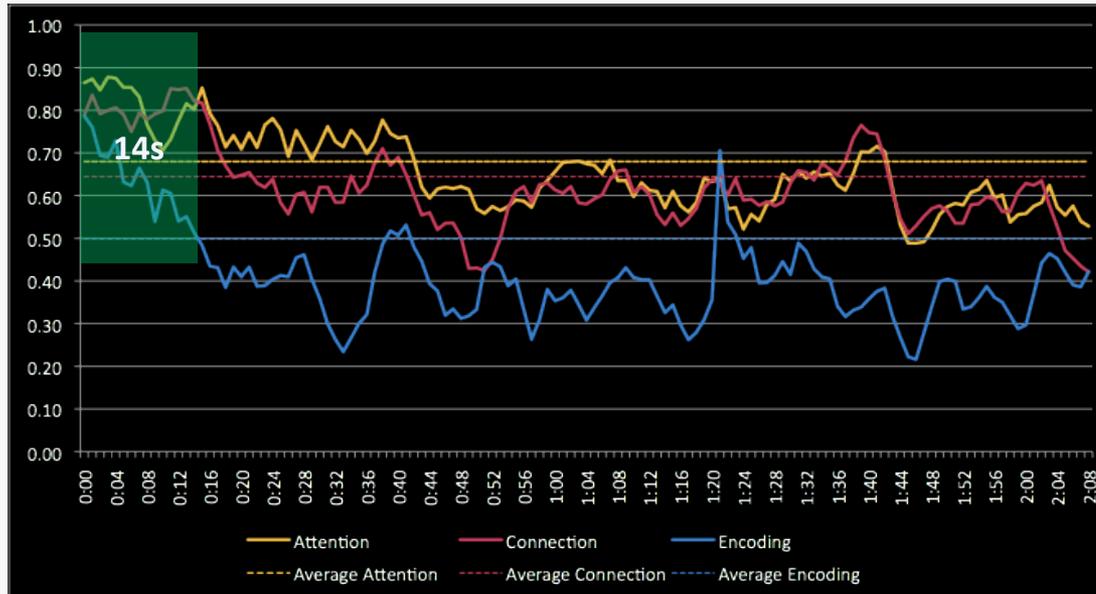
### Taco Road Trip

<b>Reached</b>	8,712	193,577	112,084
<b>Views (3s)</b>	4,839	88,093	41,227
<b>Views (10s)</b>	1,520	38,882	11,727
<b>Average Watch Time</b>	10s	14s	8s

## Neural (Indexed against study average)

<b>Overall Attention</b>	-3%	-4%	+3%
<i>For average time watched</i>	+3%	+20%	+8%
<b>Overall Connection</b>	-7%	-4%	+1%
<i>For average time watched</i>	-8%	+26%	+20%
<b>Overall Encoding</b>	-5%	-19%	-2%
<i>For average time watched</i>	+8%	+24%	+3%

## Average Watch Time: 14s



## Key Campaign Data

<b>Reached</b>	193,577
<b>Views (3s)</b>	88,093
<b>Views (10s)</b>	38,882
<b>Average Watch Time</b>	14s
<b>Reactions, Comments, Shares</b>	1826

## Average Watch Time ACE Scores



+20%



+26%

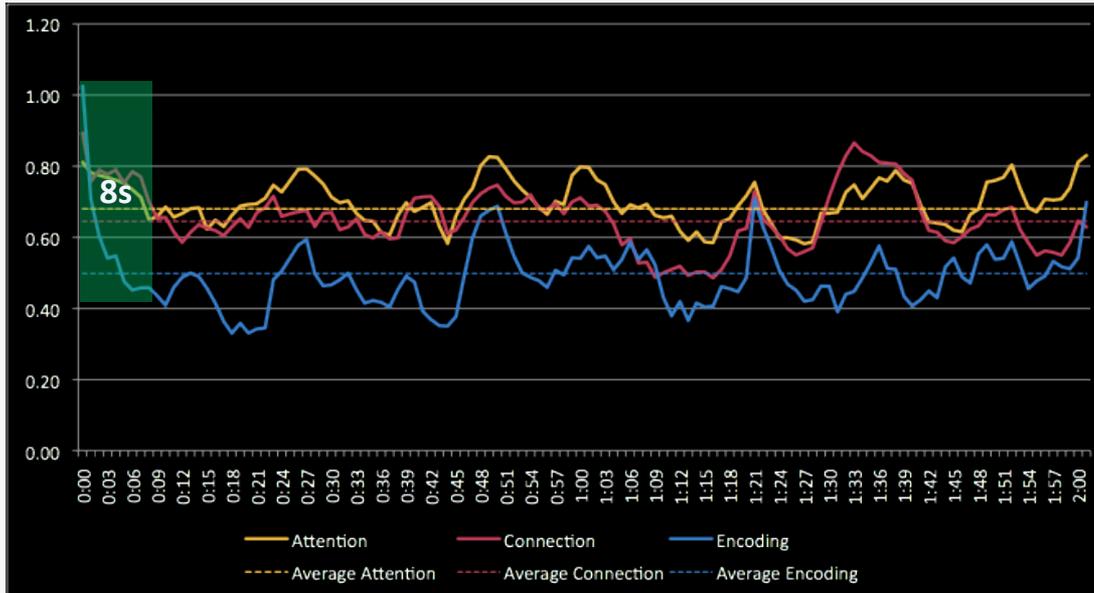


+24%

## What the neural data tells us:

- Strong emotional Connection, particularly for the average watch time (and also carries to 0:20)
- Introducing premise and key conflict early engages consumers
- The balance of familiar and unfamiliar (Stanley Park vs. Insanity challenge) is a proven tactic for online video content effectiveness
- Product and product benefit mentions/showcases within the average watch time deliver on brand objectives and lift ACE scores

Average Watch Time: 8s



Average Watch Time ACE Scores



+8%



+20%



+3%

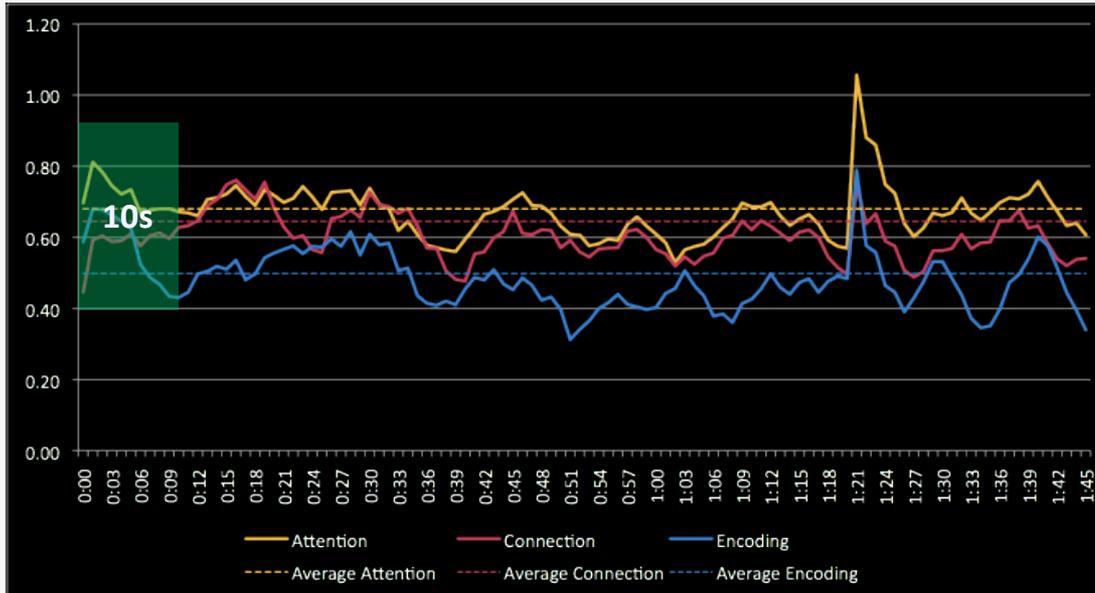
What the neural data tells us:

- Strong opening emotional Connection helps in driving consumer reaction and behaviour
- Opening joke and close up of host's face garner immediate lifts in ACE scores

## Key Campaign Data

Reached	112,084
Views (3s)	41,227
Views (10s)	11,727
Average Watch Time	8s
Reactions, Comments, Shares	329

## Average Watch Time: 10s



## Key Campaign Data

Reached	8,712
Views (3s)	4,839
Views (10s)	1,520
Average Watch Time	10s
Reactions, Comments, Shares	8

## Average Watch Time ACE Scores



+3%



+8%



+8%

## What the neural data tells us:

- Familiar setting of a family's home helps to pique Attention. Encoding levels are also above average during this time.
- Tepid emotional Connection results in fewer audience engagements
- Premise is not introduced in time, or in any meaningful way that would connect audiences and extend average view time

The Prius Insanity Test video had the highest engagement on Facebook and performed best on key neural metrics for average watch time. So, what can the video teach us about best practices for branded content?

## 3 Key Takeaways

### Striking the familiar/unfamiliar balance

- Unfamiliar premise in a familiar setting (e.g. Prius Insanity Test in Vancouver's beloved Stanley Park) is a proven tactic to capture the brain engagement of audiences. It intrigues, draws in and disarms the audience and invites the storyteller to proceed.
- Previous Brainsights analyses finds converging evidence of the success of this tactic, particularly in online formats.
- While Taco Road Trip had a similar balance, it wasn't as clear or delivered as quickly.

### Deliver the premise early

- Prius Insanity Test shares its premise right away. It's clear from the start what the pair are attempting to do, and the audience is under no illusion as to what might follow.
- Furthermore, stylistically, it's direct. The two characters are in full view speaking directly to the camera about their endeavor.
- Contrast this with both Taco Road Trip and 8 Reasons to Buy a Hybrid. With Taco Road Trip, the piece starts with a joke about a hybrid taco, which engages audiences at the unconscious level. But it's another several seconds before the hosts introduce the premise, at which point audience Attention and Connection are dropping.
- Brainsights has found that even ads that introduce the brand in the first few seconds perform on average better than those that do not - both from a neural and view time perspective.

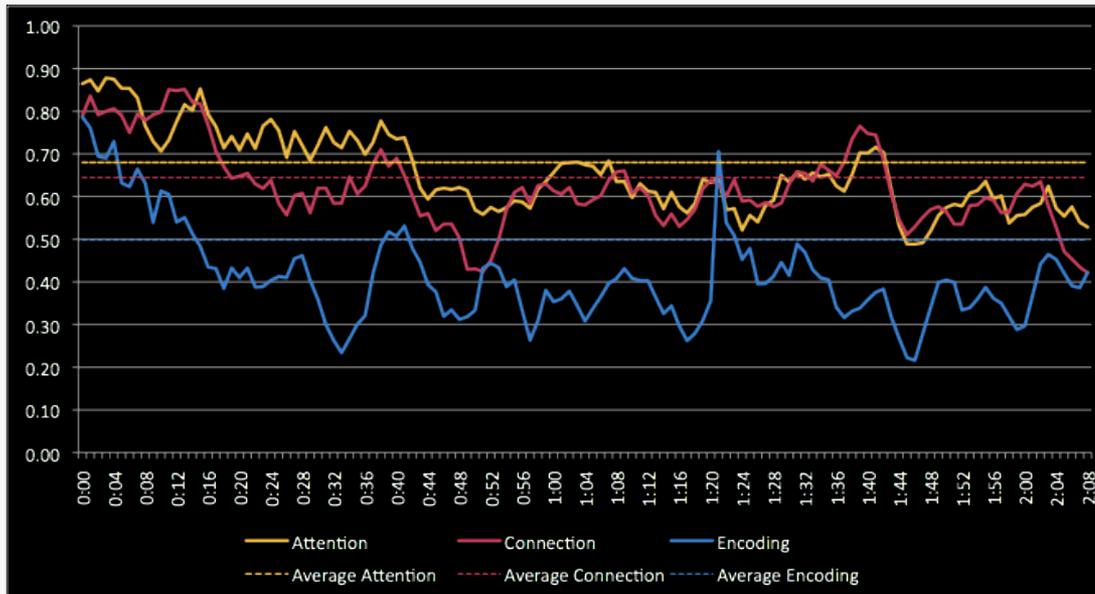
### Branded content plays by the same rules as other storytelling, and performs best with conflict at its core

- Both Taco Road Trip and 8 Reasons to Buy a Hybrid had protagonists, but only Prius Insanity Test had established a core conflict upfront, and it had two (the couple versus standard gas mileage and couple versus themselves). There was no such conflict in the other spots.
- Audiences were willing to spend 40%-75% more time with Prius Insanity Test than the other spots, as well as commit up to 16% more Attention, and 21% more to Memory. In large part, it's due to its inclusion of a core conflict.

# Creative Deep Dives

 **pressboard** + BRAINSIGHTS





## Summary

Consumers engage early, both with the unique premise and with the relatable characters, showing strong lift in Attention, Connection and Encoding. The opening 15 seconds are the equivalent of a world-class 15s commercial from a neural perspective.

Several key moments illustrating the content's purpose - demonstrating a core product unique selling point like mileage - also show lifts across the three metrics.

Softness in middle and final 20s due to repetition of premise and little additional useful information or narrative pivots to engage.

**1**



Prius Insanity Test premise is introduced to great effect. The characters are straightforward with their endeavor, reference the product and introduce their core challenge. These values are the equivalent of a world-class 15s ad spot.

**2**



Close-ups on the gas tank and an explanation of how long they've been driving weave the product benefit in meaningfully, and neural ACE scores rise as a result.

**3**



"This goddam car" - exasperation as the gas has not gone down and the product benefit is reinforced once more.

### Max Observed Values

			
<b>1</b>	+49%	+47%	+78%
<b>2</b>	+29%	+22%	+46%
<b>3</b>	+33%	+31%	-



1



Connection and Encoding drop considerably during the 'did you burp or fart' scene. Consumers are looking for information (hence Attention spiking) and gag payoff, but don't receive it.

2

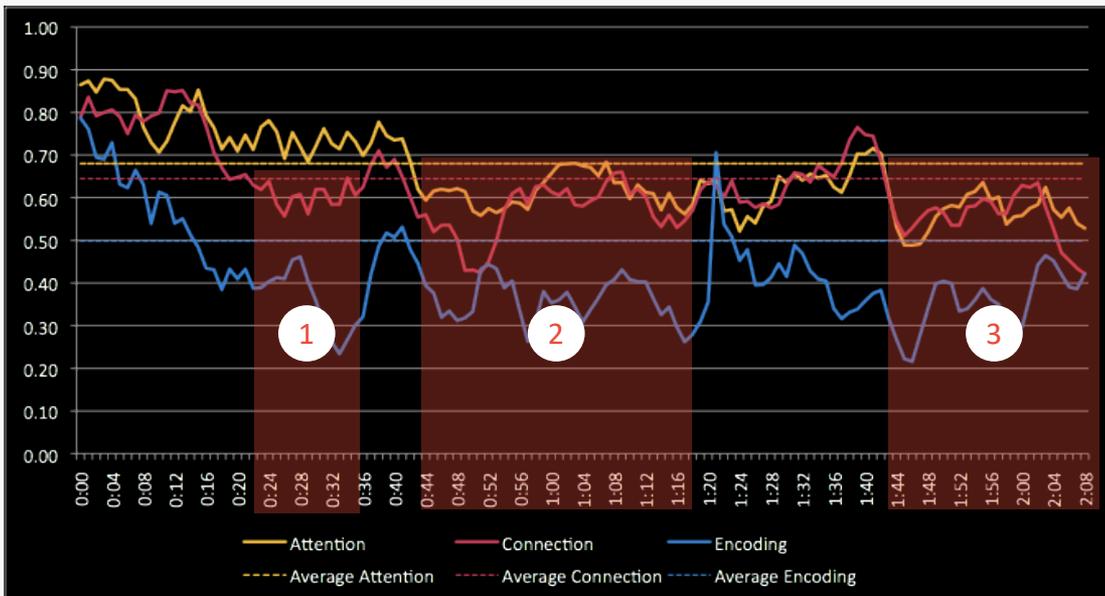


Sped-up transition following "we have literally so much time in this car" catalyzes sustained underperformance. The extended plunge into 'insanity' results in double digit drops for 30s, with steep observed troughs.

3

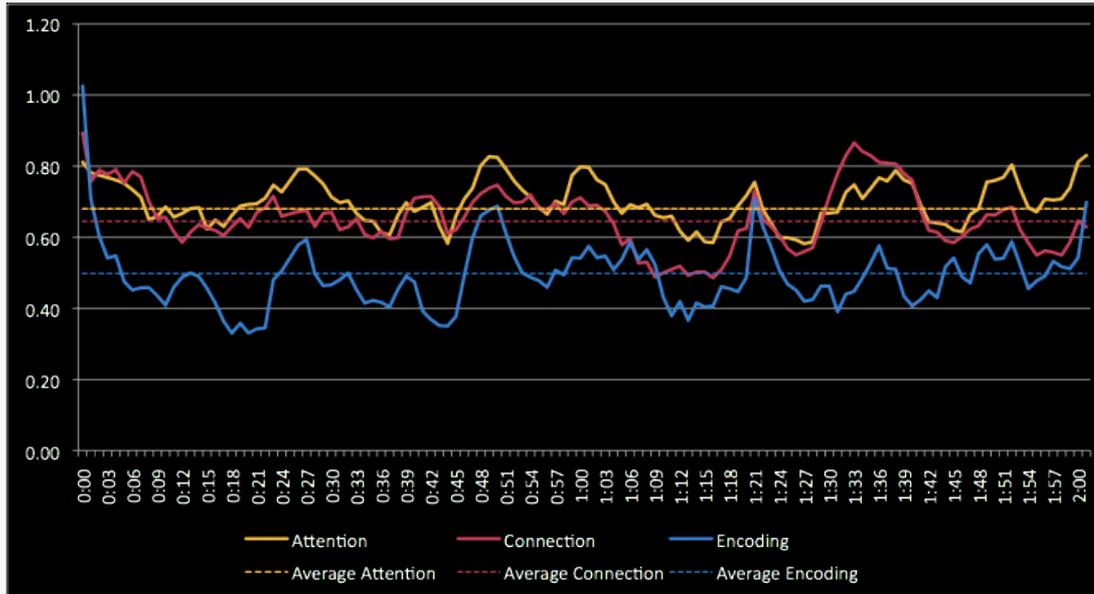


The test ends as a result of the girl threatening to break up with the guy. This leads to a pit, and the lowest point of Encoding. Consumers are likely disappointed that they didn't get the stunt payoff and that the couple quit.



## Min Observed Values

			
1	-8%	-27%	-56%
2	-35%	-61%	-74%
3	-44%	-46%	-86%



## Summary

Consumers engage early with the content, and the subtitles help to provide context to fill information gaps.

The spot engages quickly, and is well-paced throughout to maintain audience engagement.

The subtitles also provide meaningful information to consumers about where to focus their attention, and what they should be taking from the content.

Audiences engage with the hosts and their light-hearted banter. The taco road trip concept is intriguing, and audiences enjoy the taco shop scenes on the whole.

1



Opening joke resonates, hooking audiences.

2



Banter between hosts leads to rises across all three ACE metrics

3

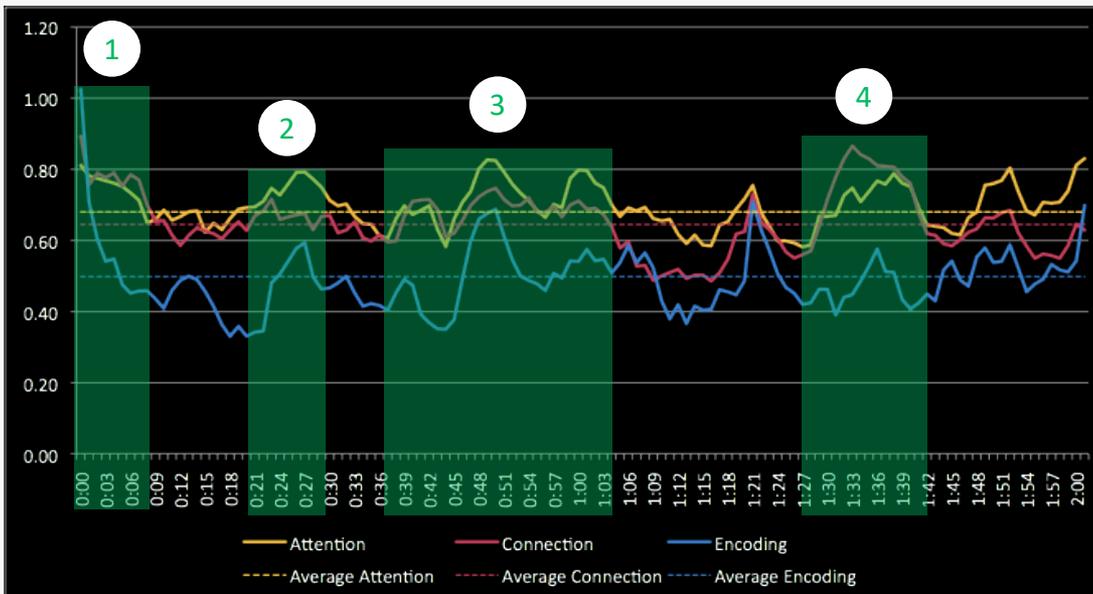


Product feature - quiet ride - benefit from the subtitles here as audiences are cued about what matters. Woven within the light banter of the hosts, this results in sustained lifts across ACE

4



More engagement with the specificities of the taco joint



## Max Observed Values

	Attention	Connection	Encoding
1	+19%	+32%	+105%
2	+34%	+30%	+87%
3	+44%	+34%	+70%
4	+31%	+48%	+38%

1



SO WE DECIDED TO SHARE THE WEALTH IN THE FORM OF TACOS

Connection drops when “Share the Wealth in the Form of Tacos” is on screen. Perhaps because the accompanying visual is a steering wheel. A preview of people enjoying tacos given to them by the hosts may have been a more suitable visual.

2



SO THESE ARE THE LEMONGRASS CHICKEN AND WE'VE GOT THE CLASSIC FISH TACO

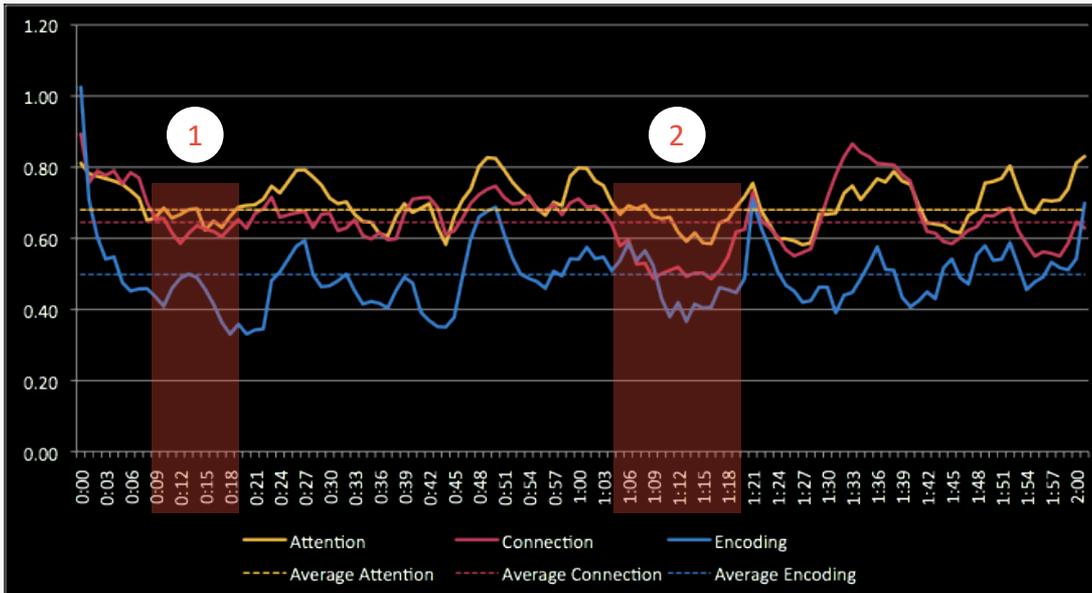
The hosts chat about how good the tacos are, and hand them out on the second shop visit, pointing out where the taco shop is. ACE scores sink during this segment. Perhaps there's confusion as to how this giveaway relates directly to the Prius. The hosts appear to be promoting the taco joint.

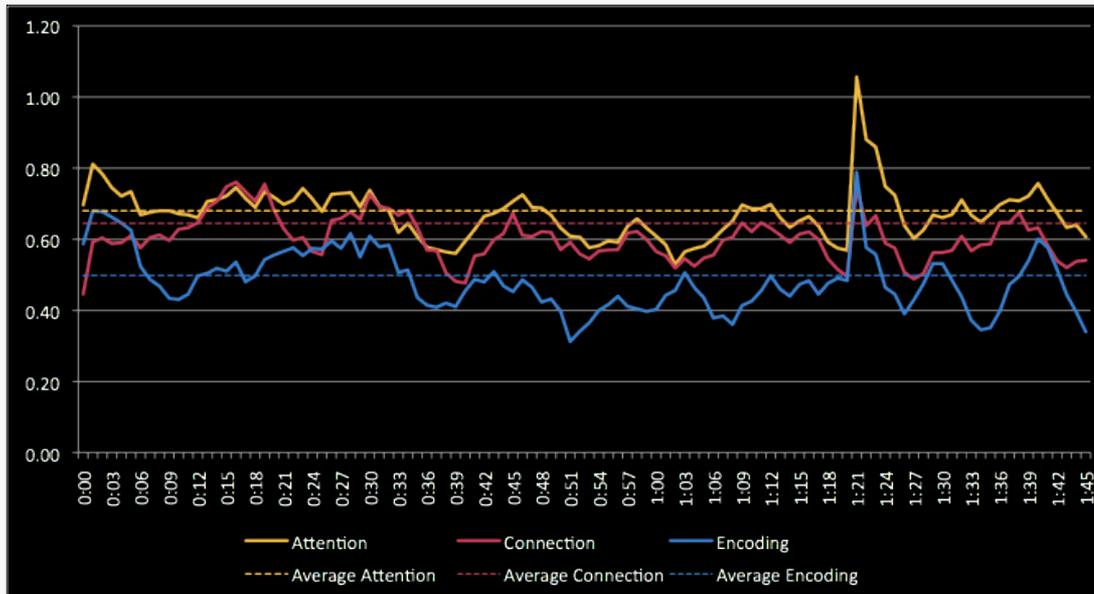
### Min Observed Values



1 -26% -16% -55%

2 -30% -44% -71%



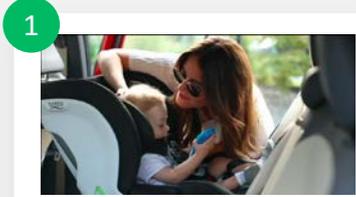


## Summary

After a tepid start, consumers engage with the lifestyle questions and decisions around family and legacy.

The core premise around making better decisions to lead their best possible life is meaningful, and when new information or lifestyle aspects are introduced, this spikes consumer interest. However, the video has some pacing challenges which result in under-indexing neural ACE scores.

# 8 Reasons to Buy a Hybrid -Top Moments



1  
 “Having a family is one of the big decisions that make you think about the future.... Making decisions that align with the environment, and also allow you to save more money, to fund education”



2  
 When the voiceover kicks back in, after extended absence, it's associated with key lifestyle information: “And if we as a family get to spend less on automobile ownership, parking, gas - we feel better about what we drive”



3  
 “Looking ahead, driving a hybrid will help set Indy up to lead his best possible life”



## Max Observed Values

1	+38%	+36%	+64%
2	+55%	+16%	+58%
3	+29%	+15%	+42%

# 8 Reasons to Buy a Hybrid - Soft Moments

1



Opening takes 7 seconds to even start to introduce what's happening. That's too long for most people.

2

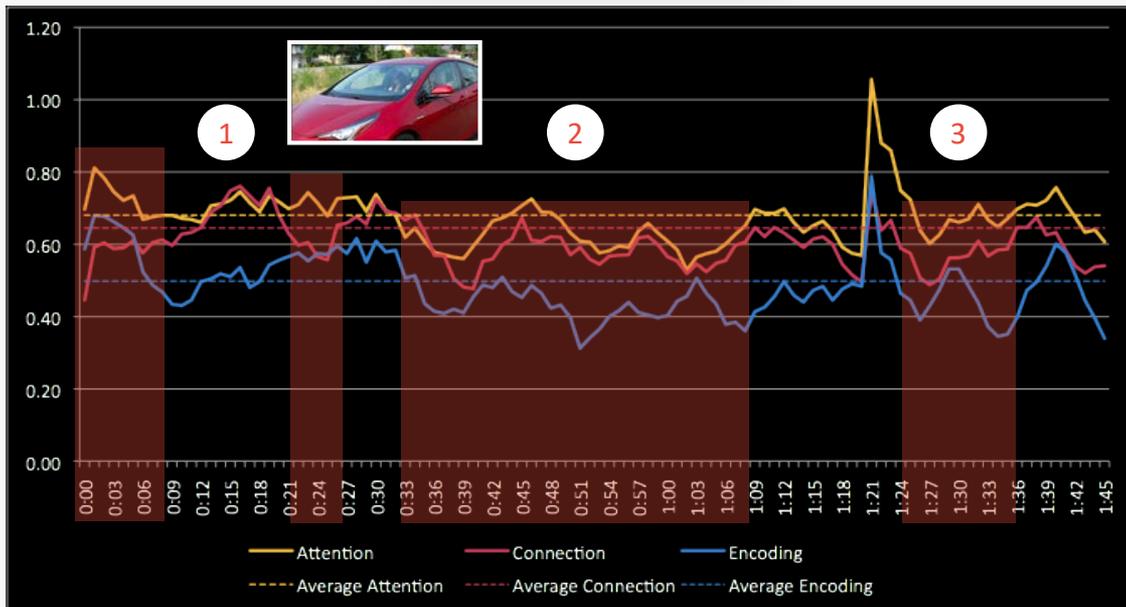


The disconnect between audio about the fundamental decisions in life and visual of various shots of car driving results in falling engagement across ACE. Extended montage of slow-music and city driving, with close ups of product but without premise or purpose, results in sustained under-performance.

3



No new story elements are introduced.



## Min Observed Values

			
1	-12%	-31%	-57%
2	-31%	-43%	-44%
3	-39%	-45%	-63%



**Branded content offers storytelling options that are neurologically competitive to traditional entertainment content**



**Branded content performs well above average in demonstrating key lifestyle and value product benefits**

We started out by asking one really big question: what is going on inside the brain when consumers engage with branded content?

This case study is a first step in determining what it is about branded content that consumers find engaging, and how it compares to other types of media. Toyota BC Dealers' sponsored videos created through Pressboard's platform demonstrated that branded content has the potential to perform at high levels of effectiveness from a neurological perspective, both as a form of entertainment and as a medium for brand messaging.

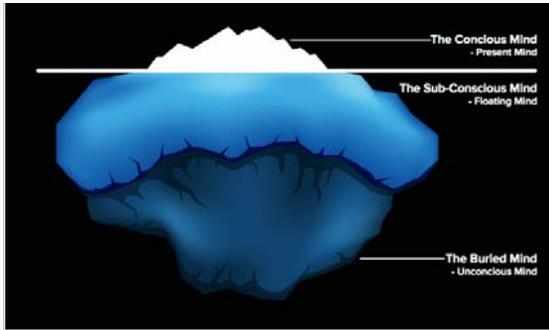
However, as with any research, there are questions answered, and more questions raised.

Are lifestyle aspects of branded content as high-performing in other industries as they are in auto? Also, do these insights hold across specific audience segments? Our aim is to answer these questions and others through additional research.

Pressboard would like to thank Brainsights, the Toyota BC Dealers and Elevator Strategy Advertising & Design Inc for their collaboration in bringing this case study to life.

1

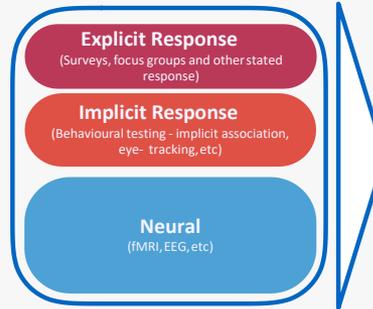
Marketers must understand the consumer's unconscious in order to understand what drives decision-making



% Influence on Decision-Making

5-10%  
(Conscious)

90-95%  
(Subconscious & Unconscious)



EEG-Based Platform



2

Brainsights measures each, but are unique in how we tackle neural measurement, delivering scale, speed and actionable insights with a robust community of participants

Key Brainsights Benefits & Differentiators

- Naturalistic (non-Lab) Environments for Accurate Results
- Comfortable/Accessible Tech for Consumer Comfort
- 15,000+ Community Advocates for Quick and Comprehensive Research Execution
- Large Mineable Database with over 5B Brain Data Points, 10K+ Brains Recorded and 10K+ Hours of Content Analyzed

3

Brainsights reports consumer Attention, Emotional Connection and Encoding to Memory every two milliseconds, syncing at the millisecond level to the content stimuli across any environment for any consumer segment



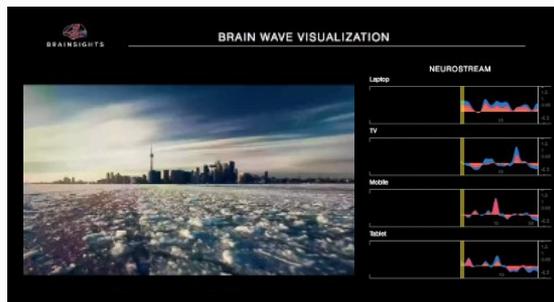
ATTENTION



CONNECTION



ENCODING

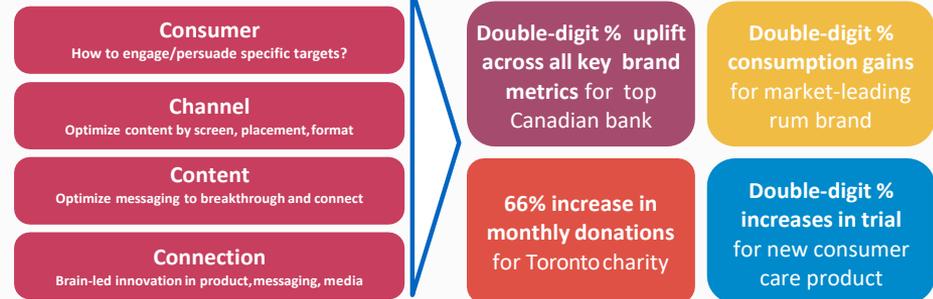


4

Activating on the insights provided by the Brainsights brain measurement platform, clients report significant increases in key business metrics

Insights

Impact



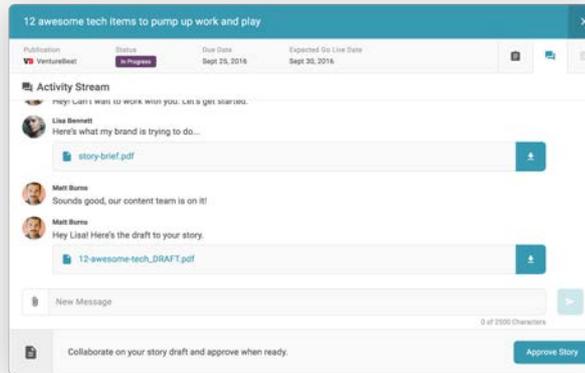
# About Pressboard

Pressboard is the world's best platform for buying sponsored content. Brands use our marketplace to get their content published by top media properties.

## Companies Using our Platform



Whether you're interested in working with the most popular business, technology or lifestyle sites in the world, you'll easily find top media properties to partner with in the Pressboard Marketplace.

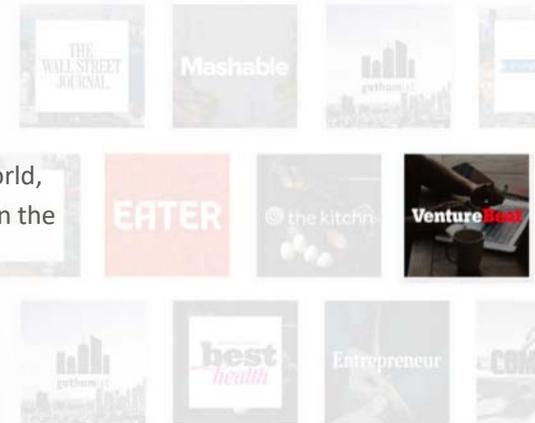


Once approved, your brand's content goes live for the world to enjoy! All content lives on your content partner's website and is shared through social media, e-newsletters and native ads.

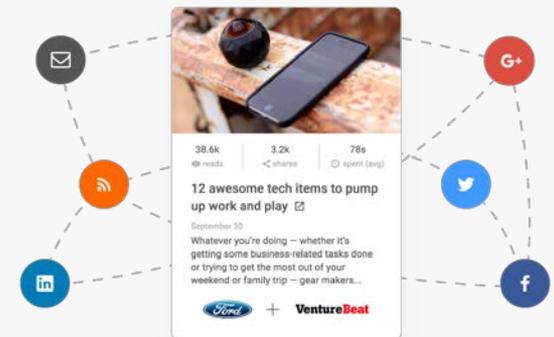
Pressboard's platform tracks the number of people viewing your stories and measures their level of interest and engagement, allowing you to optimize your sponsored content programs in real-time.

Ready to tell your brand's story?

[info@pressboardmedia.com](mailto:info@pressboardmedia.com) | [pressboardmedia.com](http://pressboardmedia.com)



Once selected, simply upload your brand's content and your publishing partner will get it ready for their site. They can also help suggest the best ways to showcase your brand to their audience, whether it's through an article, video or infographic.



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# Crush the Benchmarks

Free Download:

# 2017 Branded Content Benchmarks Report

Data and insights from over 1,300 pieces of custom branded content created by premium advertisers and publishers in North America.

<http://get.pressboardmedia.com/branded-content-benchmarks-2017>

