



SHARETHROUGH



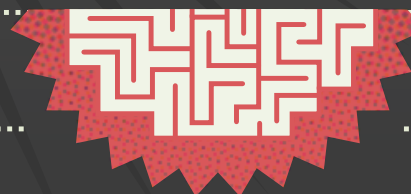
COLUMN FIVE



# SCIENCE

▶ BEHIND HOW NATIVE ADS WORK ▶

*8 Essential Tips to Improve Your Ad Creatives*



“THE VERY ACT OF RECALLING INFORMATION REINFORCES... LEARNING.  
HELPING PEOPLE CREATE CONNECTIONS — BETWEEN THE BIG PICTURE  
AND THE DETAILS — IS A KEY TO LASTING LEARNING.”

**THE MARITZ INSTITUTE**

## WE'RE IN THE MIDST OF A REVOLUTION.

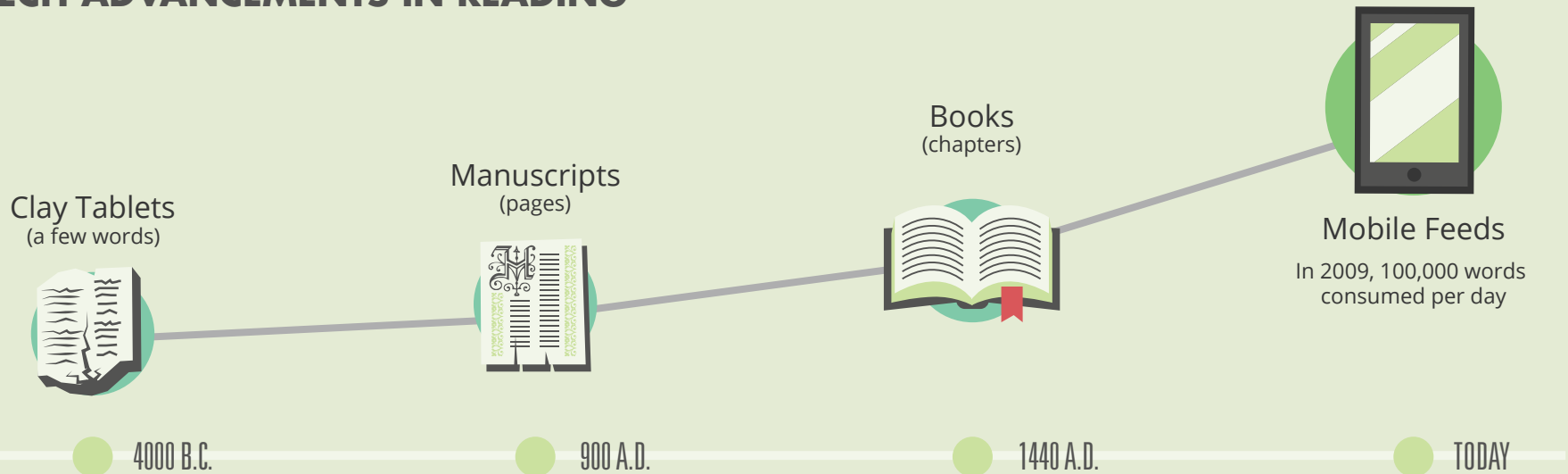
The rapid rise of mobile device usage has made the desktop computer the printing press of yesteryear. One out of every five people on the planet owns a smartphone. In America, that number is closer to two out of three, according to 2014 research from the Pew Internet Project.

With all these connected devices, comes a shifting culture; one that is always on. We're constantly checking notifications, browsing the web, shopping online, emailing, texting, gaming, and streaming media. With all this online activity, there's one thing we do, all day long that you're actually doing right now — read.

## WE READ IN FEEDS.

We're reading more than ever. Between smartphones, tablets, e-readers, laptops, desktops and watches, we've got more than enough news, entertainment and gossip for our eyeballs to handle at any given time. With so much information, we needed a way to organize it, and the feed was created. While most people are accustomed to a social media newsfeed, few realize that the mobile Internet is made of feeds. From the front page of your favorite news site to the page that delivers your Google search results all the way your email inbox, feeds are everywhere.

### TECH ADVANCEMENTS IN READING



## THE FEED IS ABOUT DISCOVERY.

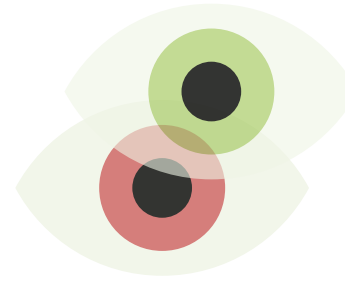
When we scroll through feeds, we're in a highly attentive mode, on the lookout for the most interesting nugget of information to catch our attention. We're thumbing through status updates, articles, videos, and Snapchats while waiting for coffee, before going to bed and when we're curious about what's going on in the world. We keep coming back in part because we never know what we're going to see, but know it'll be good.

## THE NATIVE AD VALUE.

The value of native advertising is that it's in the feed. It's in the flow of the content you're already sifting through, and it fits right in. It could be a promoted article about power couples or 33 Game of Thrones GIFs. Native ads are able to tap into the attention people have while flipping through feeds, where they're in a focused mode of discovery.

## THE VALUE OF THE IMPRESSION

As an advertiser, you're buying impressions — the single biggest advertising commodity. Native ads have the ability to bring value back to a word that has lost its meaning. Advertising impressions are supposed to make an impact for your brand. With this book, you'll start to understand the subconscious affects your native ad impressions can deliver and how to optimize the ad creatives to leave a mark — a real impression — on your target audience.



Native Ads  
result in

# 2X MORE

**visual focus** than  
banners and are read  
in the same way as  
editorial headlines.



Reading a Native Ad  
headline yields

# 308X MORE

**time** of consumer  
attention than  
processing an image  
or banner.

# 9%



Native ads registered a 9%  
higher lift in **brand affinity**  
over banner ads

# &

# 18%



an 18% higher lift for  
**purchase intent** over  
banner ads.

# 3 TIPS TO OPTIMIZE *your* NATIVE AD THUMBNAIL



## SET THE STAGE FOR THE HEADLINE

It takes almost no time at all for humans to process images. In a mere 13 milliseconds, images fill us with context and emotion (12). In fact, the thumbnail is processed 15 times faster than it takes us to read the first word of the headline (4). In theater, the first thing an audience sees is the stage set: the physical objects that suggest the world the play takes place in. Think of the thumbnail as just that: the staging.



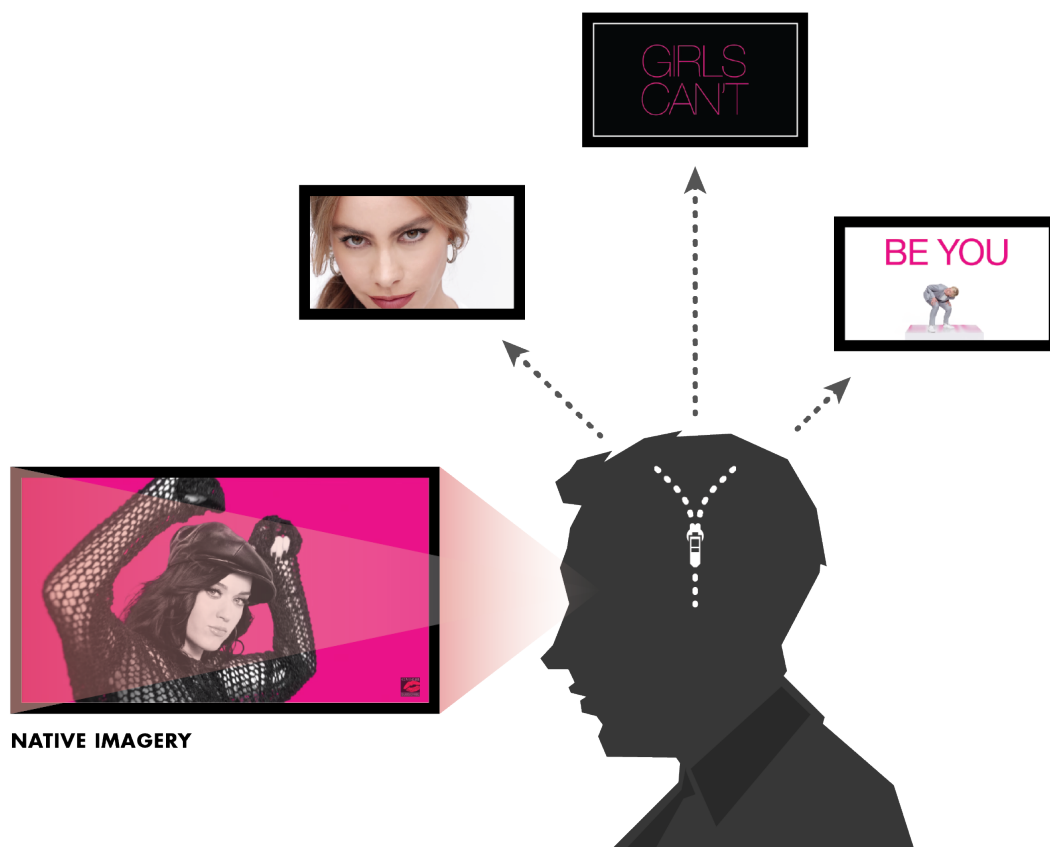
# TIP #1: USE FAMILIAR IMAGES

*Unlock the memory to strengthen brand associations.*

Including familiar brand assets, like the celebrity in your current TV commercial, can trigger memories and strengthen the ties you want to create between your brand and its benefits. The brain acts like an unzipped file, replaying the highlights of the entire ad.

## MEMORY RECALL:

During recall, the brain “replays” a pattern of neural activity that was originally generated in response to a particular event, echoing the brain’s perception of the real event.



Using a celebrity from a concurrent ad campaign is a common way advertisers unlock the memory.

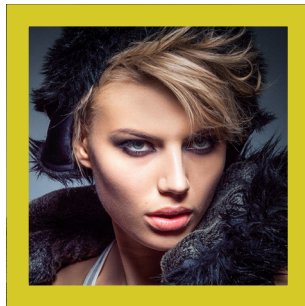
# TIP #2: USE FACES

## *Put your best face forward.*

As humans, we're wired to respond to faces — there's even a special part of the brain for it: the fusiform face area. Facial expressions are emotionally contagious. That means we're more likely to form an emotional reaction when the model in an ad makes the reader feel something, leaving a strong impression. For your next native ad, try using a thumbnail that has a clearly visible and expressive face. Paired with a product, you'll tap into more neural networks and build a strong association between the emotion and your product (9).



♥ WEAK



♥♥ MEDIUM



♥♥♥ STRONG

Evoked an emotional response by activating the part of brain that specializes in facial recognition.

### NEURAL NETWORKS:

The brain is essentially an internal map of the external world, concepts from which are stored in trillions of neural connections. Scientists recently discovered that, on average, the human brain has 86 billion neurons. Anything we do, think or recall activates these neural networks, and activating them strengthens the connections for next time. Concepts that activate one another are called associations and form an associative network.

### FUSIFORM FACE AREA:

A part of the human visual system that is specialized in facial recognition. Scientists have found that the number of visual brain cells active in the FFA diminishes with every turn of the head. An upside-down face for example, is processed in the brain as an object.

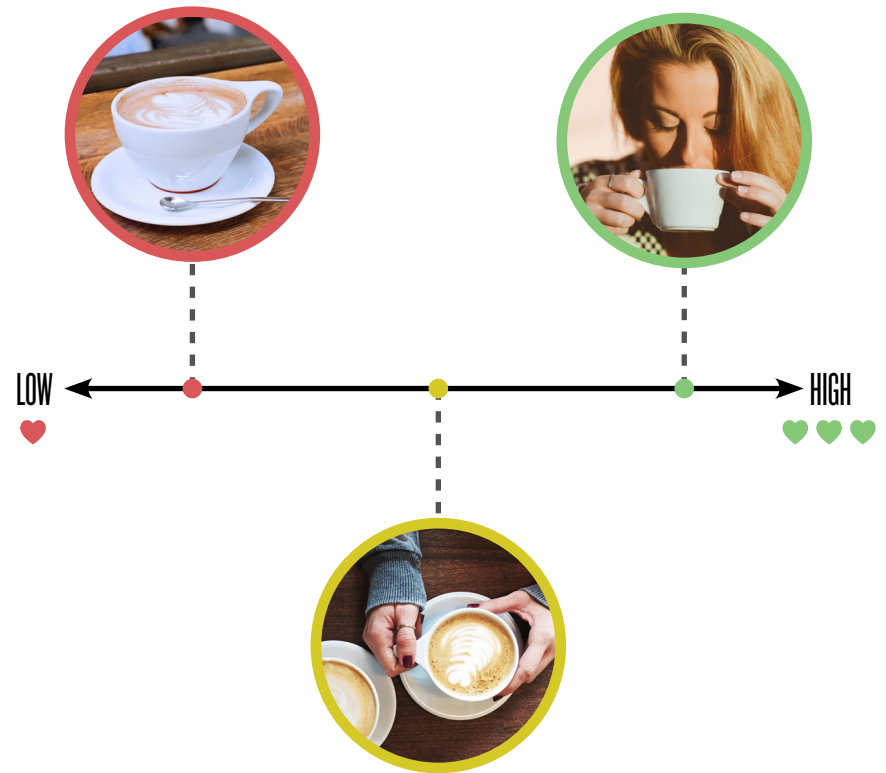
# TIP #3: MIRROR THE ACTION

## *Monkey see, monkey do.*

Our brain is wired to imitate everything we see through something called “mirror neurons.” Mirror neurons are considered to be the mind’s mirror — they fire both when an action is taken and when it is simply observed. Translation? Your brain can’t distinguish between what you’re observing and what’s actually happening to you.

### **MIRROR NEURONS:**

Neurons, the cells in the brain that transmit nerve impulses, fire both when an action is taken and when an action is observed. Mirror neurons, which seem to be more active in women, enable us to empathize with others. Considered to be the mind’s mirror, they can be activated through both images and text and are believed to have evolved as means of learning about the world (8).



Choose an image that mimics the behavior you’re looking for.



# 5 TIPS TO OPTIMIZE *your* NATIVE AD HEADLINE



## THE HEADLINE IS THE NEW TAGLINE.

A good native ad headline tells a story and paints a picture. The headline is the window into the value of the content you're promoting. The best native ads create and strengthen associations — literal connections between the neurons in your brain. You want to maximize associations between your brand and your message. Porting standard ad taglines into the format of a native ad simply won't do if you want to engage your readers. These five tips will help you activate more pathways in the brain, increase engagement, and deliver a more meaningful impression.

# TIP #1: MIRROR THE THUMBNAIL

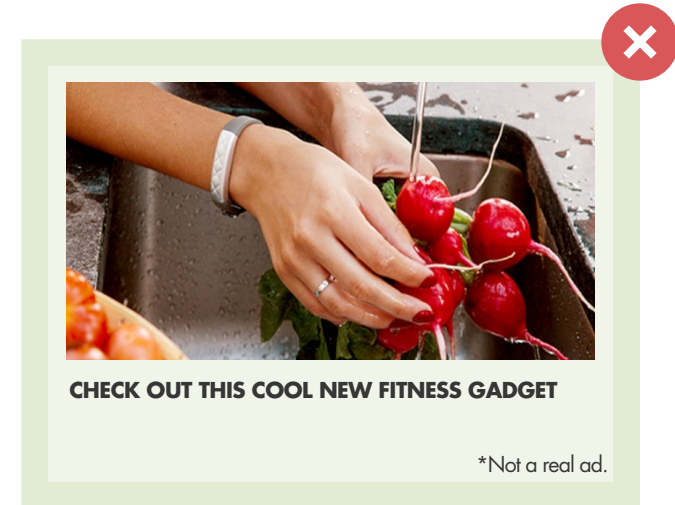
## *Connect words and imagery for greater impact.*

A 2013 study (10) on “truthiness” proved that the old adage “I’ll believe it when I see it” holds, well, true. Subjects in the study were more likely to believe a statement to be true when the image matched the claim. For example, the assertion “the Mona Lisa has no eyebrows” was paired with an untouched photo of the painting. It didn’t matter that the Mona Lisa actually had eyebrows. It was the relative truth of reading a claim with a picture that, at first glance, backed up the assertion. The split-second judgment of the information stuck: when participants were shown the same statement with no image 48 hours later, people returned with the same judgments.

By clustering keywords that describe or align with the thumbnail, you’ll deliver a more powerful, memorable and “truthful” impression. Try aligning the first five words of the headline to mirror the image.

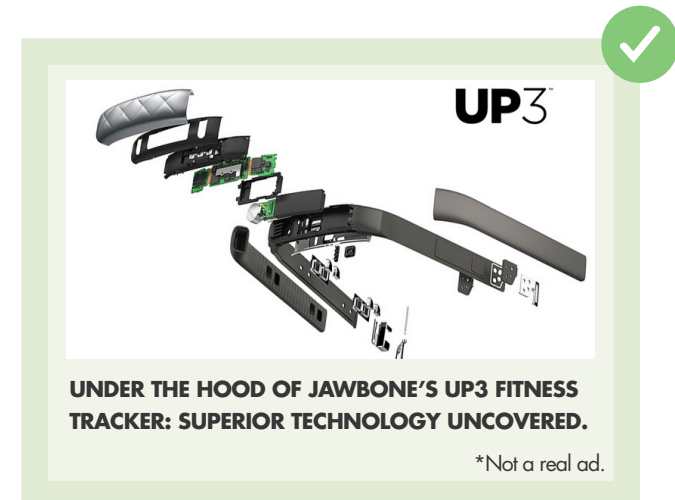
### TRUTHINESS:

The quality of seeming or being felt to be true, even if not necessarily true.



VS

Optimize  
the first 5  
words of the  
headline to  
mirror the  
image.



# TIP #2: WRITE LONG

## *Longer headlines increase engagement.*

Native ad copywriting requires a significantly different approach than writing for banners or billboards. Don't just port a tagline into a headline — the headline is the new tagline. An optimal native ad headline is more than 20 words, according to Sharethrough platform data. That can feel ridiculously long, but it works. An analysis of more than 4,000 native ads run Sharethrough's platform revealed a direct correlation between the number of words and engagement rate: the more words, the more clicks, shares and interactions.

### ENGAGEMENT RATE:

The number of trackable interactions made on a native ad (clicks, shares, etc.) divided by the total number of impressions.

Platform data from Sharethrough shows that a 27-word headline like the one to the right can feel long, but delivers a higher engagement rate.



**NEW PROGRAM HELPS THE HOMELESS GET SHOES.**

\*Not a real ad.

VS



**A NEW PAIR OF SHOES ONCE CHANGED HIS LIFE. NOW, RIKKI MENDIAS IS HELPING THE HOMELESS WITH NEW SHOES OF THEIR OWN. SEE THE GOOD HE'S DOING.**

\*Not a real ad.

# TIP #3: USE CONTEXT WORDS

## *Not all words are created equal.*

It turns out your word choice can engage readers in a way that makes a message more attractive and more memorable. In fact, certain words are able to increase a person's interest in the message on a subconscious level (6). We're calling these words **Context Words**.

Context Words were uncovered by Sharethrough when studying the relationship between words and the response in the brain (13). Context Words indicate time, insight, motion and space. Time words refer to a point in time — examples are: after, fast, long, prior, etc. Insight words provide more detail — words like secrets, discover, relate, think. Motion and space words place help us understand where something is happening — examples are: appear, replace, arrive, enter.

Why are they so effective? Context Words activate more brain activity, painting a more appealing picture inside the brain and increasing the value of the impression.



**A NOTE OF THE  
EFFICIENCY AND SAFETY  
OF OUR PLANES**

\*Not a real ad.

VS



**HOW MAN'S AGE-OLD  
DREAM TO FLY LIKE A  
BIRD MAY HOLD THE  
SOLUTION TO AIRCRAFT  
EFFICIENCY**

\*Not a real ad.

Time  
words

Motion  
words

Insight  
words

Using Context Words in a native ad headline can deliver a strong impression.



# TIP #4: USE METAPHORS

*Activate more brain activity by writing less literally.*

Thought you were done with English Lit? Think again. Metaphors are one of the oldest literary devices in The Book — literally. They date back to the Bible and Shakespeare's famous line, "All the world's a stage." Metaphors compare one thing — in this case, the world — to another — a stage — in a non-literal way. But metaphors are more than just a literary device. Scientists at Princeton and the Free University of Berlin have demonstrated that metaphorical sentences are more emotionally engaging and persuasive than the same sentences written literally (3).


## EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT:



Emotional engagement is a motivational state measurement of how drawn or attracted we are to the stimulus.



**THESE UNDERWATER BABIES  
WILL AMAZE YOU**

\*Not a real ad.





**THESE UNDERWATER BABIES  
WILL MELT YOUR HEART**

\*Not a real ad.

— Metaphor

Use metaphors to increase emotional engagement.



# TIP #5: USE BRAND SYNONYMS

*Don't forget the brand thesaurus.*

Every native ad should echo your brand sentiment, but using a brand term verbatim isn't the best approach. Sharethrough's neuroscience research shows that readers can associate a brand value with a particular word even if that word is substituted with a synonym. Brand synonyms allow for more flexibility and increase the number of versions you can create, which ultimately makes your creative optimization smarter. The synonyms allow each ad impression to subtly trigger a memory and occupy more real estate in the mind.

5	<b>Festive</b> Brand Value	<b>Outfits That Are As</b>	<b>Elegant</b> Brand Value	<b>As They Are</b>	<b>Warm</b> Brand Value
5	<b>Joyous</b> Synonym	Outfits That Are As	<b>Stylish</b> Synonym	As They Are	<b>Cozy</b> Synonym
5	<b>Merry</b> Synonym	Outfits That Are As	<b>Graceful</b> Synonym	As They Are	<b>Snug</b> Synonym
5	<b>Holiday</b> Synonym	Outfits That Are As	<b>Chic</b> Synonym	As They Are	<b>Toasty</b> Synonym

Create more associations between a brand and brand value to increase likelihood of message recall.

# CONCLUSION

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The core components of your native ads — the headline and thumbnail image — should be aligned to accomplish the same goal. These creative components combine to create a singular experience. The tips in this book should help you deliver the most impactful brand impression possible.

And remember: there's no one right answer. Testing is key and it's worth experimenting with all of the elements in each of your ads. Keep in mind all of the scientific principles outlined in this book as you go and you are sure to command value and mind share with all of your impressions!

## **ASSOCIATIONS**

The connection between thoughts and emotions in the mind.

## **EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

A motivational state measurement of how drawn or attracted we are to the stimulus.

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# GET IN TOUCH



## SHARETHROUGH

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Sharethrough is a leading native advertising software company with a platform for the real-time buying, selling and management of native in-feed advertising.

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