

3 consumer attention myths holding back marketers

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Attention spans are shrinking, right? Wrong. Publicis Media's President of Digital Investment Helen Lin busts this common consumer myth and others.

A version of this perspective appeared in [MediaVillage](#).

Let me paint what I suspect will be a familiar picture: Your alarm goes off and the first thing you do is check texts, messaging apps, emails, and feeds.

You grab coffee, rush out, and use your commute to catch up on news (or perhaps last night's Trevor Noah highlights). Even at the office, you're constantly checking every device—in between meetings, in line for lunch, waiting for your turn at the coffee machine. You're toggling between no less than a dozen apps, all at once.

On your way home, you watch a hilarious video your spouse sent you before finally relaxing in front of the TV and getting sucked into YouTube clips of The Late Late Show's latest Carpool Karaoke.

If this sounds about right, your day isn't unusual. It isn't even bad. It's just our reality. It's the reality of having endless media options vying for our attention, with video playing a major role.

think with 

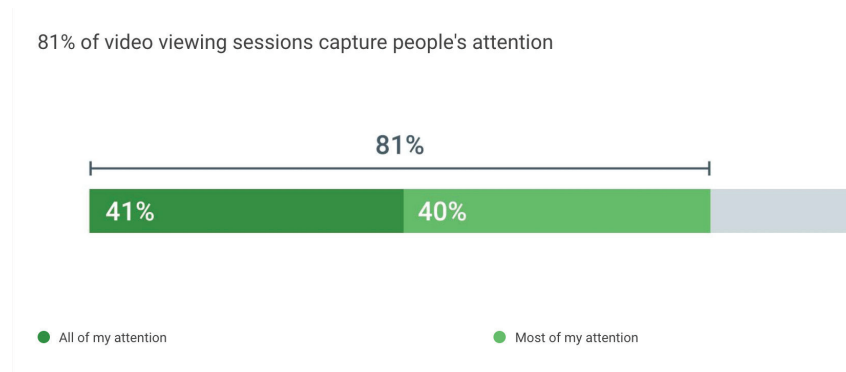
The consumer in me thinks, “This is great. I can watch what I want, when I want, whenever I can squeeze it in!” But the marketer in me thinks, “Wow, this is overwhelming.”

At agencies, it’s our job to help clients adapt to this new attention economy. However, I’ve noticed the same old myths holding back marketers from committing to change.

So, here’s a reality check.

Myth #1: People have the attention span of goldfish

I regularly hear it said that attention spans have shrunk. In reality, people can and do still pay attention. In fact, a new analysis of customer behavior shows 81% of video viewing sessions capture people’s attention.¹



Source: Google/Ipsos, “Video Mobile Diary,” U.S., 2017

If anything, we’re paying more attention than ever before. What has changed, however, is our tolerance for time wasters.

Think about your own life. You no longer put up with something just because it’s on. Ten years ago, you may have sat through a video you didn’t find interesting. Now, you just “next” it because you can.

On the other hand, when we’re really interested, we invest. Hence my marathon viewing of *The Mindy Project* and *The Americans* last weekend.

What does this mean for advertisers? It means attention is available, but the bar has been raised. If you really want someone's attention, you have to earn it.

Myth #2: People pay attention to all screens equally

Actually, not all screen time is equal.

When you've got the TV on, how often do you find yourself fully focused on it? And how does this compare to when you're watching videos on your phone?

The latest research supports what we intuitively know to be true: when people are in a "lean-forward" viewing mode, they're 1.5X as likely to pay attention than when they're in "lean-back" mode. And they're 1.8X as likely to be in lean-forward mode when watching online video compared to TV.

For marketers, these "lean-forward" moments—when viewers are less likely to be multitasking and more likely to be watching with purpose—are the best opportunity to capture attention.

We view content in two very different modes

Lean-forward mode includes...



- Learning how to do something
- Finding information about something
- Researching a purchase
- Exploring a passion
- Getting ideas

Lean-back mode includes...



- Entertaining ourselves
- Relaxing
- Killing time

Source: Google/Ipsos, "Video Mobile Diary," U.S., 2017

Myth #3: Even if people pay attention to content, they've learned to tune out ads

Admit it: sometimes you pay attention to ads, and not only because you're a marketer. If you're like me, certain ads seem to speak to you directly and you find yourself hooked.

That's because when we find ads relevant, we can't help but pay attention. According to Ipsos, ads that are relevant to the viewer or feature people like them get 3X the attention of the average ad.²

How can marketers be relevant? By creating campaigns that add to someone's viewing experience rather than subtracting from it. And that starts by understanding why consumers turn to particular platforms for content in the first place.

In talking to consumers, we found they seek out different online platforms to satisfy different emotional needs—such as inspiration, excitement, and connection.

On its own, this isn't surprising. You don't go to YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat for the same reasons, so why would your target audience?

What is surprising is how we frequently forget to think about the unique emotional role each platform plays, and make small, simple edits to our content in response. By making this a practice, we can increase attention among viewers.

We can then go one step further by making our content on each platform as relevant to each viewer as possible. In the past, this kind of hyper-relevance was a pipedream. Today, new tools and data signals make mass personalization possible.

Take the example of Kellogg Co., one of our clients, which was looking to promote its new write-on packaging for Rice Krispies Treats.

For its online ad campaign, Kellogg and creative agency Leo Burnett used [YouTube's new Director Mix technology](#) to make 110 versions of the same creative mapped against 175 keywords for a highly personalized, contextually relevant ad experience.

Someone browsing YouTube to find out how to baste a turkey might have seen this version of the six-second ad:

Rice Krispies Treats -
gobble gobble



And someone watching a video about kid-friendly dinner recipes might have seen this one:

Rice Krispies Treats -
tiny critics



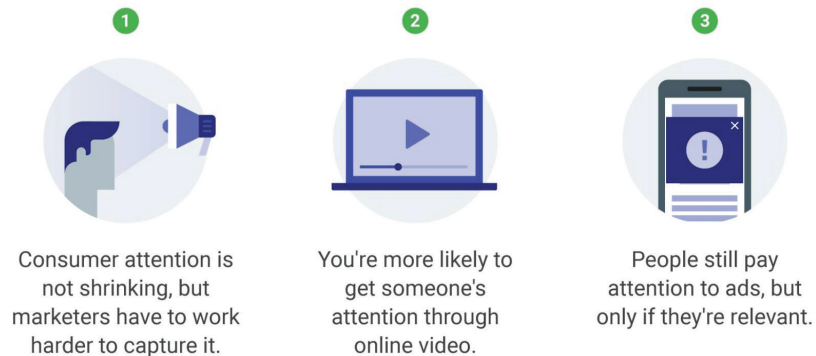
This has been one of Kellogg's most effective bumper campaigns to date, achieving strong ad recall and consideration among key demographics.

Why did it perform so well? Because it took “capturing attention” to the next level, creating a magical brand connection and experience for viewers with technology-powered relevance.

Marketing in the new attention economy

In breaking down these three myths, I hope I've painted a picture of opportunity for you. The fact is, it's more than possible to continue to win hearts and minds in today's world of “too many options, not enough time.”

3 things all marketers should remember about the new attention economy



To do so, discard the myths and remember these truths:

1. People still pay attention, but with more content out there than ever before, the quality bar has been raised.
2. You're most likely to capture people's attention through online video.
3. Once you've captured their attention, hold onto it by making your brand relevant—to each platform, each person, and each context.

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Sources

- 1 Google/Ipsos, "Video Mobile Diary," U.S., 2017. A session is defined as each instance of viewing a video(s) on same category/device and platform.
- 2 Google/Ipsos, "Video Mobile Diary," U.S., 2017, n of 4,381 (saw ads occasions)

