2022

Mobile Ad Creative Index

USER MOTIVATIONS TO HIT YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

LIFTOFF + Vungle

BANNER

REWARDED

NATIVE

INTERSTITIAL

VIDEO

Contents

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Introduction

If 2021 was the year of privacy protection, 2022 will be the year for ad creative excellence. With Apple eliminating access to IDFA and Google pledging to make similar privacy-first moves on Android, app marketers need better, more relevant creatives that can reach new audiences.

Liftoff + Vungle's 2022 Mobile Ad Creative Index examines the trends that drive performance across four key app verticals: gaming, e-commerce, finance, and entertainment. We break down CPI, CPA, and ROAS benchmarks for five leading ad formats: banners, interstitials, playables, native, and video.

Backed by new insights from GameRefinery, this report also empowers gaming advertisers to reach their target audiences in a better way. It offers an overview of 12 player motivations with tips on how to translate them into high-performing creative.

Finally, the 2022 Mobile Ad Creative Index features exclusive insights and best practices from in-house experts from Liftoff + Vungle. Drawing on years of experience, our experts assess the creative trends that drive results and give their tips on how to achieve the goals of specific app verticals.

" The best ad creatives can only be made when you understand your audience, your toolset and the motivations behind why users download your app. Learning to use motivations effectively is a relatively new idea, but it is vital for marketers to understand it to get ahead of the competition.

LIFTOFF + **Vungle**

Si Crowhurst
VP, Creative Studio

Highlights & Methodology

Gaming
At $1.98, playables have the most affordable CPI out of all five ad formats for gaming.

Player Motivations
Only 4% of casual game video ads successfully tap into player motivations. There's a lot of room to grow.

E-Commerce
For e-commerce advertisers focused on in-app purchases, banner ads offer the most value with the lowest cost and a high ITA of 32.42%.

Finance
For finance apps, banner ads offer the most value per install at $1.95.

Playable
Even if you're not advertising a gaming app—playables have a lot to offer. Introducing an interactive element to an e-commerce ad drives real engagement without compromising brand.

This report is based on data from:
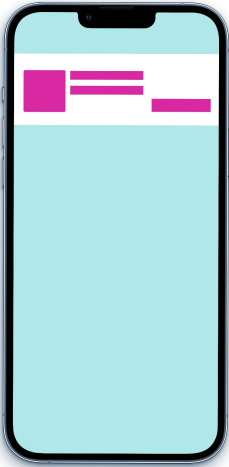
805B
Impressions

12.6B
Clicks

200M
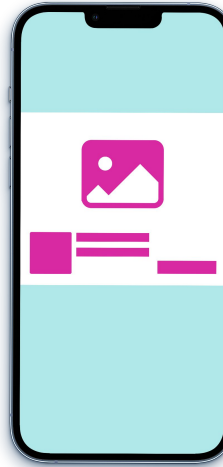Installs

Date Range: Jan 1, 2021 — Jan 1, 2022

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Banner

Traditional ad units served at the bottom or top of a smartphone screen. Banners are one of the few mobile ad formats that can easily be implemented into nearly any mobile app.

Native

Designed to match the form and function of the user experience in which they are placed. The most common native ad formats are in-feed units, paid search units, recommendation widgets, and promoted listings.
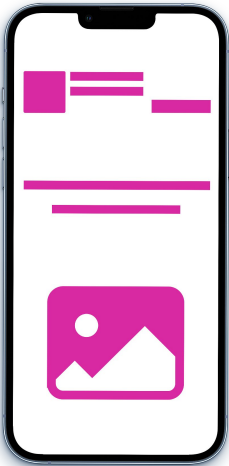
Interstitial

Full-screen ads that appear during transitions within an app. This provides a smooth change between two levels of a mobile game or between two stories in a news app, making them less intrusive and more engaging.

Playable

These interactive ads allow users to play before they buy. Those who view the ad can interact with it as a preview of what they could do in the app. A playable could show the first moments of a game, for example.
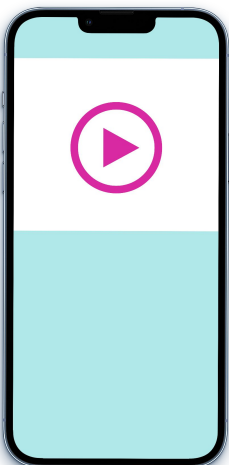
Video

This ad creative uses video to engage audiences. Rewarded video is perhaps the newest ad format, offering users perks and prizes in exchange for watching or interacting with an ad.
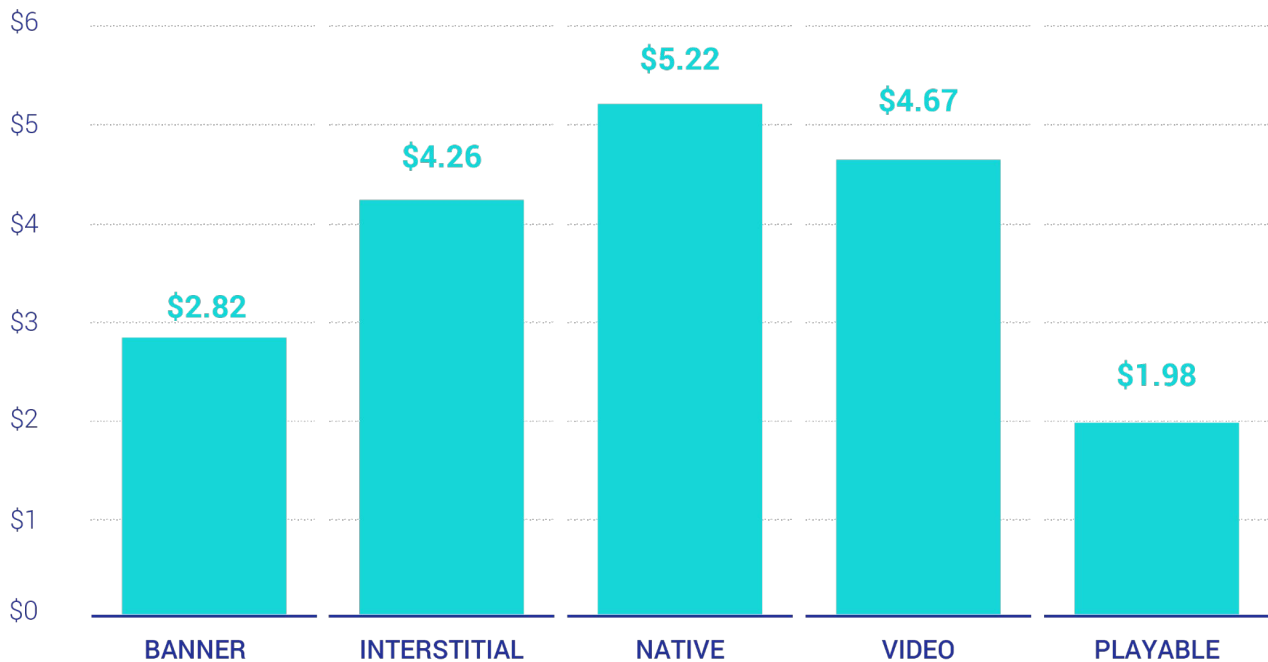
LIFTOFF + Vungle

Gaming App Trends

PLAYER MOTIVATIONS

AND BEST PRACTICES

Games

Trending Today

Royal Match

Candy Crush

Jackpot Party

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Gaming CPI by Ad Format

Breaking down Cost per Install by ad format reveals notable variations between the five ad types.

✔ At $1.98, playable ads offer the most affordable CPI, making them an attractive format for game marketers.

✔ Video and interstitial ads fall in the middle, with similar CPIs of $4.26 and $4.67, respectively.

✔ Banner ads offer the second-best bang for your buck with a CPI of $2.82.

As with all ad formats, marketers should monitor conversion rates and other down-funnel metrics to get a fuller picture of campaign performance.

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Gaming CPI by Ad Format, Android vs. iOS

Providing a "split by platform" view helps marketers think in terms of two distinct platforms.

■ ANDROID   ■ iOS

	BANNER	INTERSTITIAL	NATIVE	VIDEO	PLAYABLE
Android	$2.19	$2.94	$4.82	$3.52	$1.41
iOS	$4.46	$6.35	$7.38	$6.03	$3.66
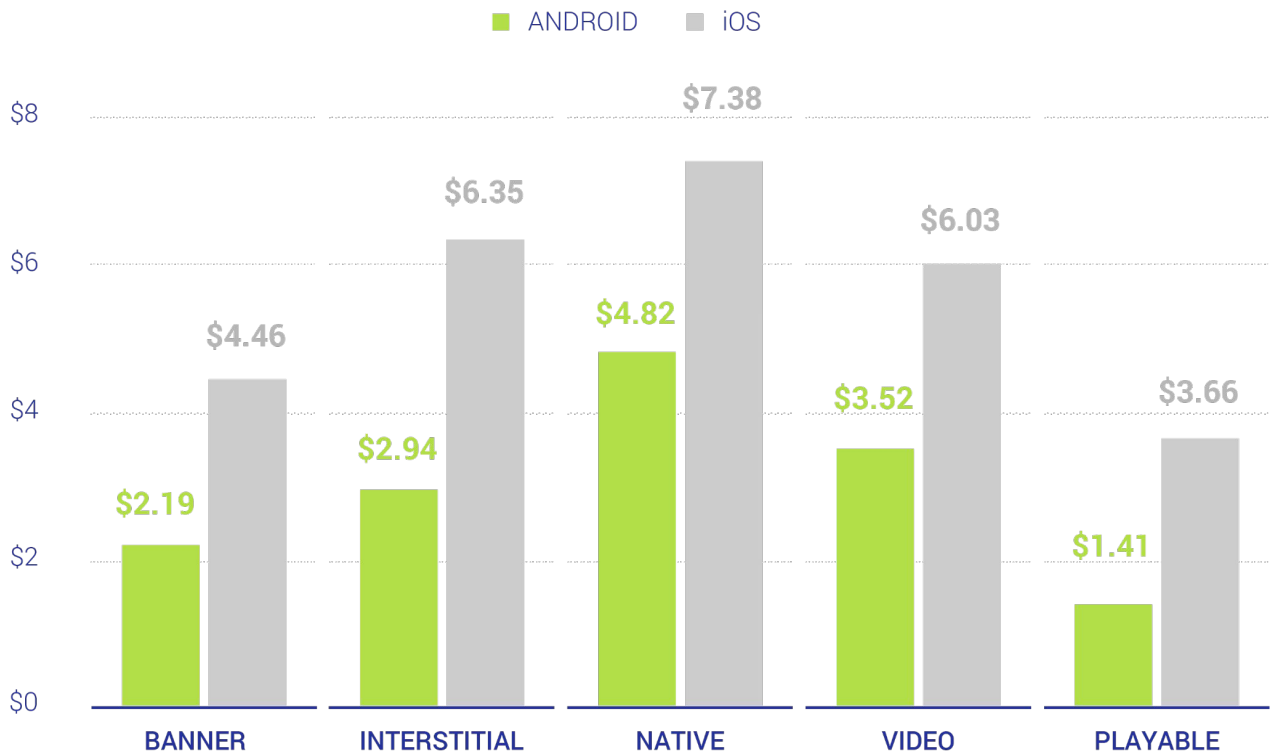
✔ Playables offer the most value for gaming marketers, closely followed by banner ads.

✔ Ad costs behave similarly on both platforms.

✔ Android devices are less expensive across all ad formats. For banner, interstitial, and playable ads, costs on iOS are over 2x their costs on Android.


❝ High-performing ad creatives balance accurately conveying product features to users and successfully grabbing their attention. They gain higher CTRs and CVRs, and more importantly, they help app marketers achieve better ROAS.

Crystal Guo
UA Manager

Monthly CPI by Ad Format

A look at cost changes over the year lets us see where costs spike and where they fall.

■ BANNER   ■ INTERSTITIAL   ■ NATIVE   ■ VIDEO   ■ PLAYABLE
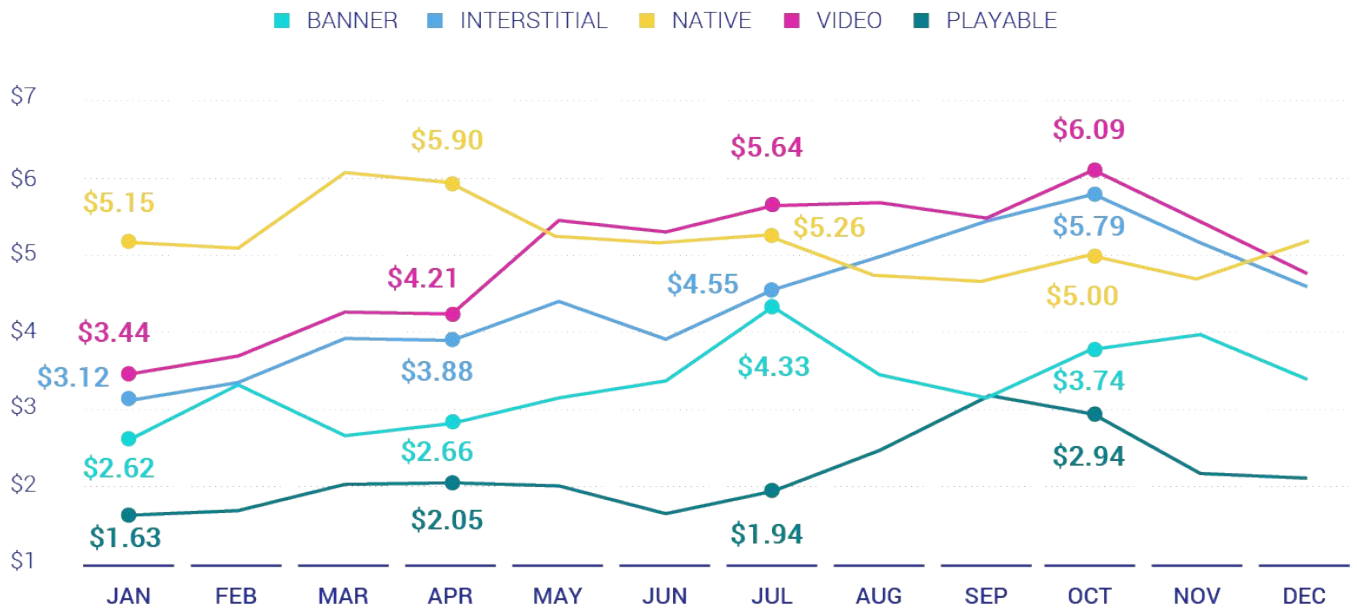
- ✔ Native ads are the priciest format for gaming creatives, but the cost of native ads remained relatively stable throughout the year, hovering between $5.00 and $5.90.

- ✔ Nearly every ad format saw a CPI increase within the year. Video ads nearly doubled from $3.44 to $6.09. Native was the only outlier.

- ✔ Other than in September, playables remained consistently the most cost-effective ad format.
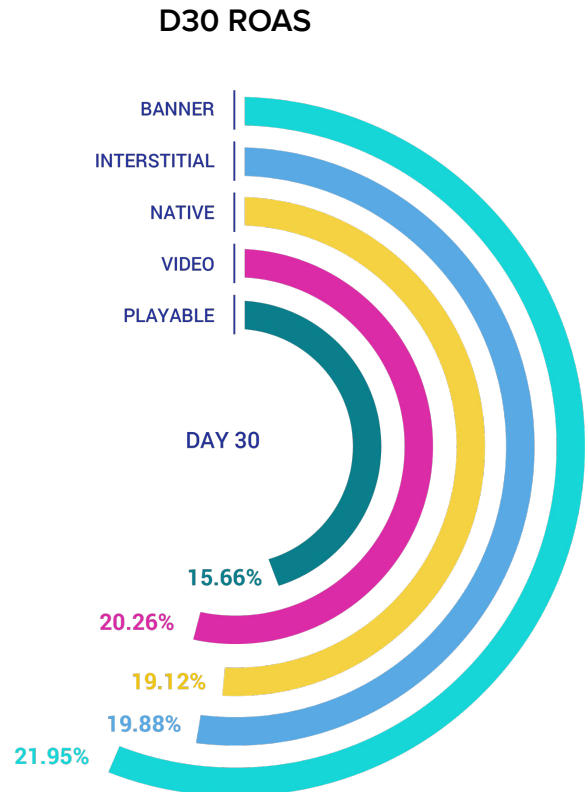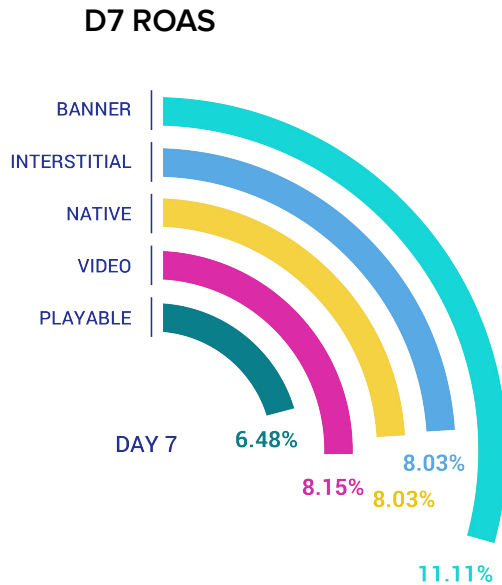
GOOD GAME

❝ One of the most significant findings we had was that influencer creatives provided a more 'user-generated' feel and made our creatives feel more authentic. With influencer creatives, we cracked channels like TikTok and Snapchat.

Alexey Gusev
Lead Performance Marketing

ROAS by Ad Format

Are certain formats more effective than others at generating revenue? While many more factors are at play, there are interesting variations in return on ad spend (ROAS) when we break it down by ad formats.

D7 ROAS

BANNER
INTERSTITIAL
NATIVE
VIDEO
PLAYABLE

DAY 7   6.48%
        8.15%   8.03%
            8.03%

        11.11%

D30 ROAS

BANNER
INTERSTITIAL
NATIVE
VIDEO
PLAYABLE

DAY 30

        15.66%
    20.26%
    19.12%
    19.88%
21.95%

✔ Playables have the most affordable CPI but the lowest ROAS out of all five ad formats—around 6.5% on Day 7 and 15.7% on Day 30.

✔ Banner ads have the second most affordable CPI. They also deliver the highest ROAS: over 11% on Day 7 and nearly 22% on Day 30.

✔ Similarly, while native ads have a higher CPI ($5.22) than interstitial ads ($4.67), they offer the same ROAS on Day 7 (8%) and nearly the same ROAS on Day 30 (19% and 20%, respectively).

LIFTOFF + Vungle

"Playables unlock the full potential of what you can do with the mobile device. It's not a passive experience. You can utilize the gesture controls, and you can interact.

Gavin McNicholl
Global Head of Vungle Creative Labs

LIFTOFF + Vungle

How to Put the "Play" Into Playables

What makes playables great? We spoke to Gavin McNicholl, Global Head of Creative Labs, to find out how to get the most from the playable format.

1 **Playable ads grab users by offering them a glimpse of the game before they install.**

"With playables, you're bringing an interactive experience to life. With gaming, playables give you the opportunity to preview and demo a game before you install it. More interaction means more engagement. Playables unlock the full potential of what you can do with the mobile device. It's not a passive experience. You can utilize the gesture controls and you can interact. It's ultimately more engaging, and it allows the user to get a sneak peek, a little grasp of the game, which will naturally help with the UA funnel."

2 **Playables are a chance to help your app stand out from the competition—so invest in making the gameplay shine.**

"The gaming space is becoming more competitive. You need to convey what makes your app special before someone makes the decision to download it.

You want to stand out, and you can do that with a slick, engaging, interactive experience. You can make your case through the artwork, the story, all that good stuff, but at the end of the day, it's the gameplay that differentiates things—and playables are how you showcase gameplay."

3 **Even if you are not advertising a gaming app, playables can still help you pull in an audience that enjoys games or interactive features.**

"Gaming advertisers were really quick to embrace playables. Non-gaming industries were a little bit slower. They're asking: 'My app isn't a game, or, my brand isn't a game—why should I produce a game-like ad?' Our response is: 'Well, let's think about what kind of engaging, interactive experiences your audience would respond to? How can we gamify your brand?' The ads we create appear on a number of gaming publishers. Getting your brand to speak to a gaming audience via playables is valuable."

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Gaming Creative Motivations

To make ads with a real impact, marketers must think about the motivating factors that drive their users to play. Different players want different experiences, from discovering new worlds or building strong characters to customizing homes and finding hidden treasure. Making ad creatives to match player motivations can unlock real potential. In this section, we'll illustrate why.

First, let's look at the 12 motivations that define your users:

Excitement & Thrill

Some players just want a thrill. They look for experiences that deliver speed, fast-paced action and non-stop engagement.

Thinking & Solving

For gamers who like puzzles and brain teasers that give a sense of accomplishment through problem-solving.

Competing Against Others

Domination is the name of the game for competitive players that enjoy outwitting, outmaneuvering, and outlasting their foes.

Working With Others

This player values camaraderie and connection. Building a team and working toward shared goals or milestones are the things that drive them.
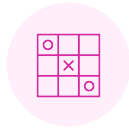
Discovering New Worlds

For explorers who delight in the wonder and excitement of discovering new places on sprawling, open-world game maps.

Collecting Treasure

This player wants to find items, grow their collections, and level up.

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Strategic Planning
Planners are driven by the satisfaction of developing, testing, and executing successful tactics and strategies.

Resource Optimization
Optimizing production streams and maximizing available resources are this player's priorities.

Customization & Decoration
This player is all about self-expression. They customize the aesthetics of their characters, items or worlds and show them off to others.

Role Playing & Emotions
Inhabiting a character and making choices that impact the story make this player feel part of the narrative.

Improving Skills
This player is searching for self-improvement and advancement.

Completing Milestones
The completionist enjoys leveling up and improving over time to achieve increasingly difficult milestones.

Matching your ad creative to your audience's motivations can launch some very effective campaigns. Here are examples of how they differ:

✔ While puzzle players are satisfied when they successfully tackle a new challenge, RPG players want to inhabit characters and make choices that count.

✔ Social casino players expect the flashing lights and melodic sounds of a Las Vegas game room while battle royale fans want to defeat hundreds of similar foes.

Taking different player mindsets as a starting point will lead to entirely different creative strategies.

LIFTOFF + Vungle

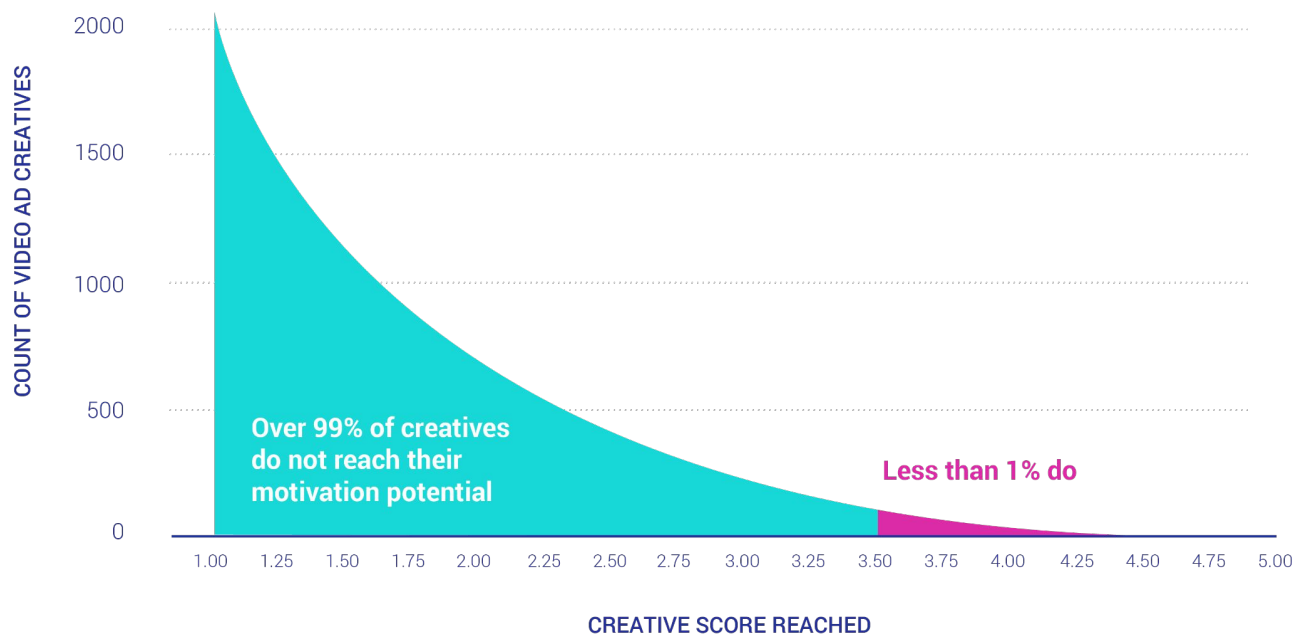# Do Many Ads Meet Their Gaming Motivation Potential?

To drive new users, ad creatives need to tap into why players play. Liftoff + Vungle's new tool VisualMind scans ad creative to determine how well gaming ads speak to what motivates gamers. Gaming ads are scored on a scale of one to five based on how well the creative aligns with a given motivation. For this study, we used VisualMind to review thousands of casual and midcore gaming video ads to discover how well a typical ad reflects the genres' top motivations.

Casual Game 'Completing Milestones' Creative Score

COUNT OF VIDEO AD CREATIVES

96% of creatives do not reach their motivation potential

Only 4% do

CREATIVE SCORE REACHED
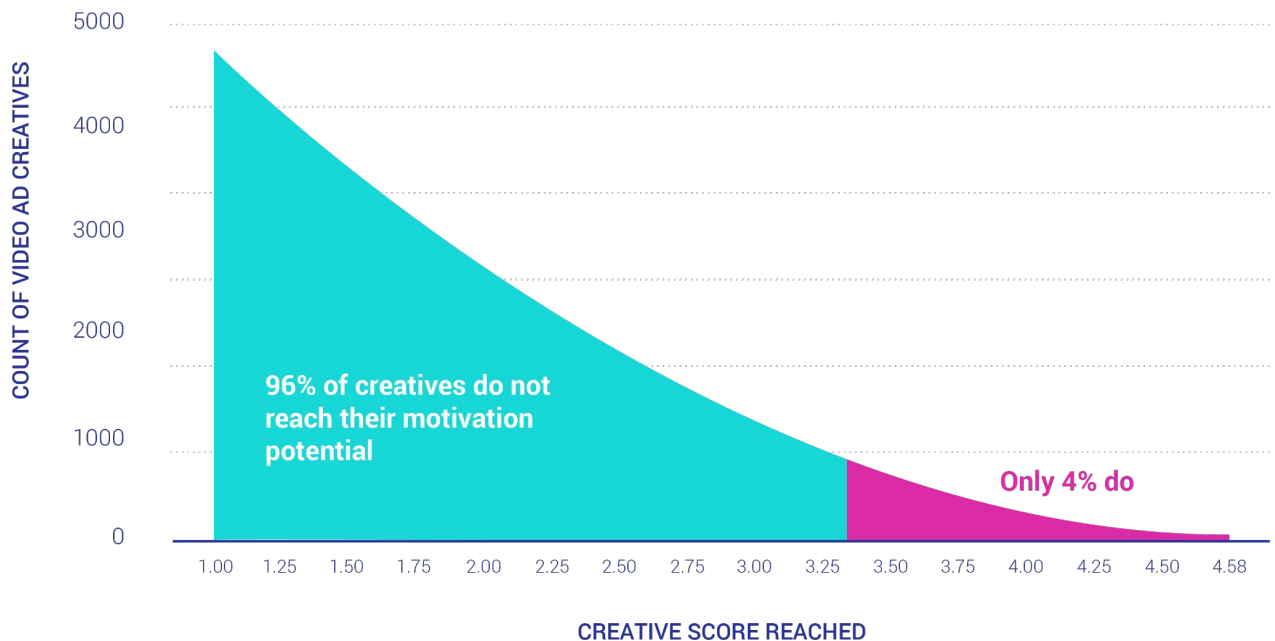
✔ The average game motivation score for "completing milestones," the top motivation for casual games, averaged 3.38 across the genre.

✔ These ads tap into their players' desire to achieve milestones and show off their accomplishments.

✔ Only 4% of ads successfully achieved their motivation potential, scoring equal to or above 3.38.

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Midcore 'Excitement & Thrill' Creative Score

The chart shows COUNT OF VIDEO AD CREATIVES (y-axis, 0 to 2000) versus CREATIVE SCORE REACHED (x-axis, 1.00 to 5.00). Over 99% of creatives do not reach their motivation potential. Less than 1% do.

- ✔ The top motivation for midcore games is "excitement and thrill," which means giving players fast-paced actions and suspenseful or thrilling creative.

- ✔ The average midcore game reached a game motivation score of 3.56.

- ✔ Even fewer ads reached their motivation potential in the midcore games category. More than 99% of ads failed to hit the average "excitement and thrill" player motivation score.

LIFTOFF + Vungle

"What's really important is understanding what motivates users, heightening what drives them to install a game."

Paolo Vergani
Head of Creative Services

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Level Up Your Gaming Creative With Player Motivations

What do motivation-led creatives look like? We asked Paolo Vergani, Head of Creative Services, about the top trends in gaming—and how to leverage player motivations to reach new audiences.

1 Gameplay is still king. But post-SKAN, it's about testing a variety of approaches.

"You will need to iterate on a lot of different concepts until you find your top performers. With intelligence from GameRefinery, we can test concepts for the top motivators for different publishers. We're not focused on A/B testing red versus blue buttons—we're looking at what happens when you show one type of game versus another type of game, playing this approach instead of another one. You will quickly see which one will take off. Iterate on the winning format until you really start optimizing for your creative goal."

2 Player motivations are the future of performance marketing. As designers, our job is to tap into them.

"We're moving away from the 'if you like this, then you'll like that' type of targeting. What's really important is understanding what motivates users, heightening what drives them to install a game.

For instance, 'thinking and solving' is a big motivation. Some ads will show you the gameplay, so you can see how to move in a game. But you can tap into another motivation, thinking and solving, by not showing the move straight away. Just move enough to highlight the situation and then let the game run. The user will start thinking: 'Ok, what can I do? Oh, I could do that, or, I will do this instead.'"

**3 When you localize your ads for a new market, the performance gains are in the details.**

"Every time we localize creatives for a region, we do what we call hyper-localization. For example, we often change the artwork and in particular, the way certain characters are drawn. In a game, a character might have a very western look, feel and manner of expression. But in Japan or Korea, characters express themselves in a different way. We make alterations to reflect that. The adjustments we make might seem small, but the impact they make is profound."

LIFTOFF + Vungle

E-commerce, Entertainment, and Finance

APP TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES

E-Commerce CPI, CPA-Purchase, and ITA by Ad Format

■ CPI   ■ CPA-PURCHASE   ● ITA
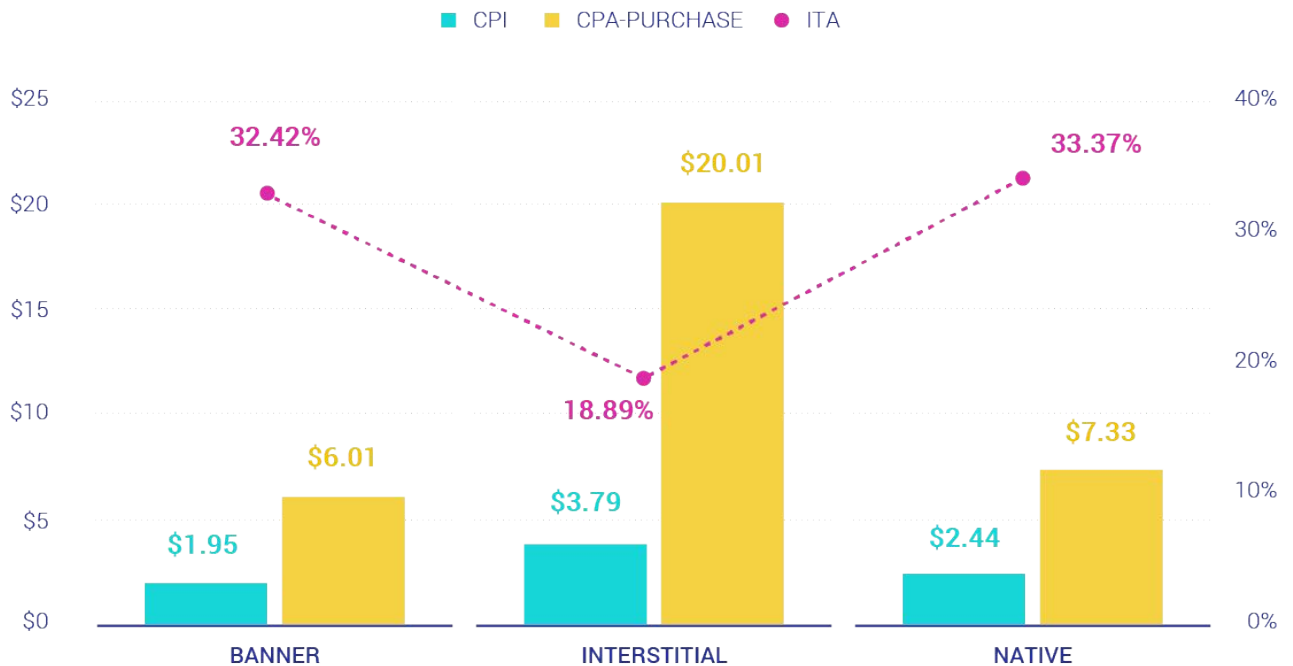
✔ Banner ads are the least expensive format in the e-commerce vertical, with a CPI of $1.95 and a CPA-Purchase of $6.01.

✔ Interstitial ads cost nearly 2x as much as banner ads per install and over 3x as much per action, and they have a lower install-to-action rate at 18.9%.

✔ For advertisers focused on in-app purchases, banner ads offer the most value with the lowest cost and a high ITA of 32.42%. Native ads have the highest ITA at 33.4%

LIFTOFF + Vungle

E-Commerce CPI by Ad Format and OS

■ iOS ■ ANDROID

BANNER: iOS $2.39, ANDROID $1.82
INTERSTITIAL: iOS $4.58, ANDROID $3.60
NATIVE: iOS $3.07, ANDROID $2.35
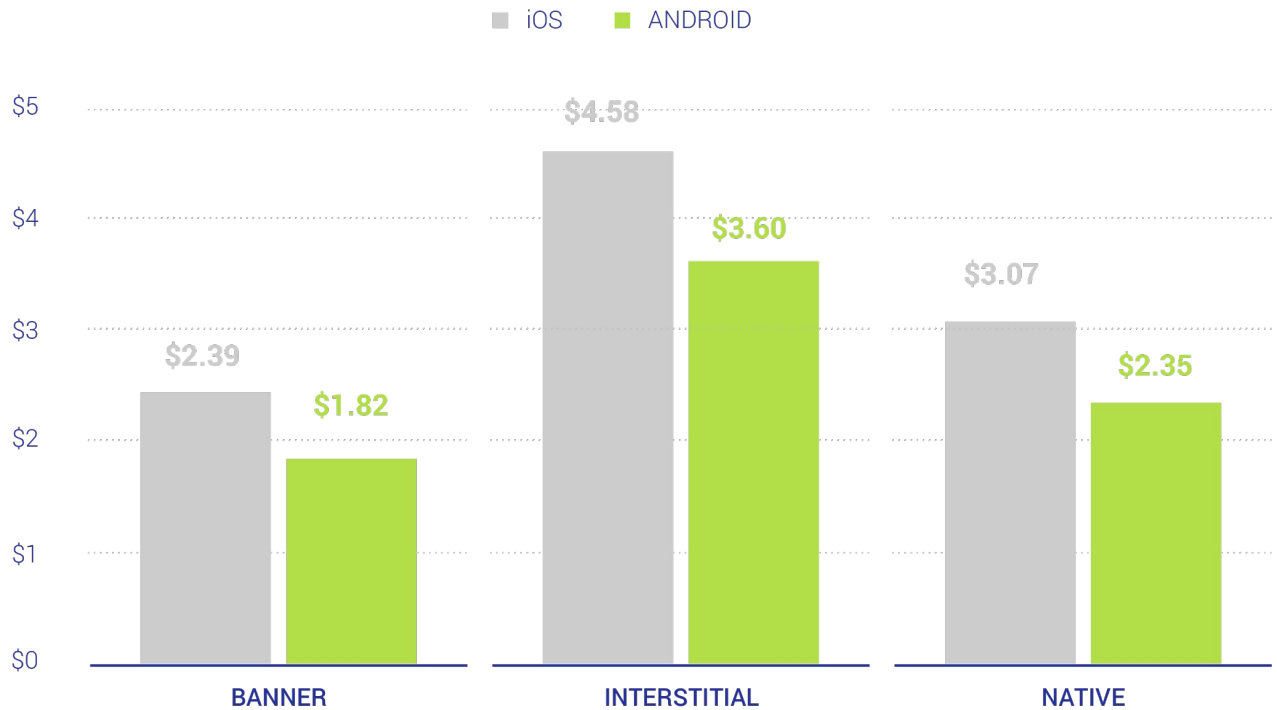
✔ Across the board, CPI rates are higher on iOS than on Android.

✔ Interstitial ads are the most expensive ad format on both platforms. They cost 2x as much as banner ads on both iOS and Android.

LIFTOFF + Vungle

"One of the ways we work with existing videos is by proposing something interactive. When working with e-commerce apps, it's important to show choice. Playables are great for that.

Justin Nield
Pod Lead

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Driving Engagement With E-Commerce Creative

How do you create e-commerce ads that drive conversions? To find out, we spoke to Justin Nield, Pod Lead. Justin's team specializes in non-gaming ads.

1 **E-commerce campaigns are often part of a larger campaign—so there may be less room to experiment. But there are still many opportunities to drive engagement.**

"One of the challenges for e-commerce is that for many shopping apps, mobile campaigns are part of a bigger marketing strategy. We experiment, but we also make sure it still fits within existing guidelines and the larger campaign. We often ask, how do we make these videos engaging without changing them too much? Our focus is to keep the content perfectly intact while still driving engagement."

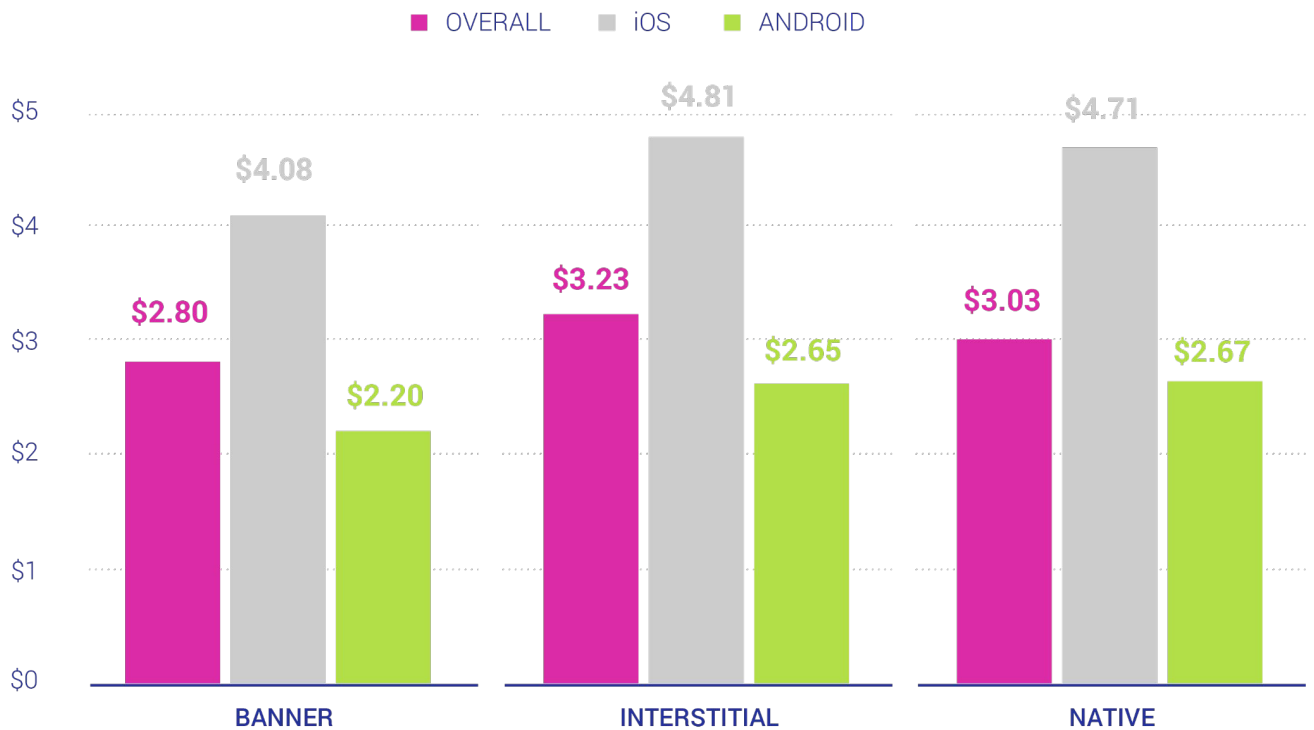**2** **When working with content, adding a playable component drives engagement.**

"One of the ways we work with existing videos is by proposing something interactive. When working with e-commerce apps, it's important to show choice. Playables are great for that. For instance, we might make videos of electronics or beauty products interactive by giving the user a choice between two items before they access the video. When we put a little bit of an engaging interaction in front of the user before they get to see a specific video—it's much more exciting for the user."

3 **Figure out why trends work, and master the elements that make them work.**

"I think the real value of best practices is less about 'do this and don't do that' and more about figuring out why something works. Shopping apps tend to work with warmer tones. They also opt for a clean, calm, quirky look. These are less transient trends than what's consistently working. We've also seen messages emphasizing home comforts and how easy something is to use at home, how fast the delivery is—this makes sense, considering the shift to working from home. Once you know what's broadly working, you've got to iterate and do it well."

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Entertainment CPI by Ad Format and OS

■ OVERALL   ■ iOS   ■ ANDROID

BANNER
- OVERALL: $2.80
- iOS: $4.08
- ANDROID: $2.20

INTERSTITIAL
- OVERALL: $3.23
- iOS: $4.81
- ANDROID: $2.65

NATIVE
- OVERALL: $3.03
- iOS: $4.71
- ANDROID: $2.67

✔ Overall CPIs are close across ad formats, ranging from $2.80 for banner and $3.23 for interstitial ads.

✔ iOS is more expensive than Android across ad formats.

✔ At $2.80, banner ads offer the most value per install.

Inkitt

" Have a media mix of fresh concepts and varied ad experiences—then test different ad copies. Focus on testing creatives with broad concepts, and iterate on winners. Watch out for ad fatigue and audience fatigue. Always refresh your creatives.

Lenette Yap
Director of Marketing Innovation

> **"** *It's really about finding concepts that work. We never make a completely new video each time. We build for iterations.*

Natalie Suthons
Motion Pod Lead

LIFTOFF + **Vungle**

Why Video Works—and How to Get the Most From Video Ads

Natalie Suthons is a Motion Pod Lead. When asked about the future of video ads, Natalie put it this way: "The past few months have really shown how important and how versatile video can be!"

1 **Don't misrepresent how gameplay works—but take inspiration from misleading ads in new ways.**

"We never thought ads that misrepresent the gameplay were going to stick around—but we have seen high-performing creatives that do this. So our main priority has been to seize on their strengths but make the ads more representative of what players might encounter in the app. For instance, we've used 'mini-games' and 'bonus levels' that closely reflect the UI of the game to drive interest in match-3 games. They've been so successful at driving users that many of our publishers have started incorporating them into the actual game."

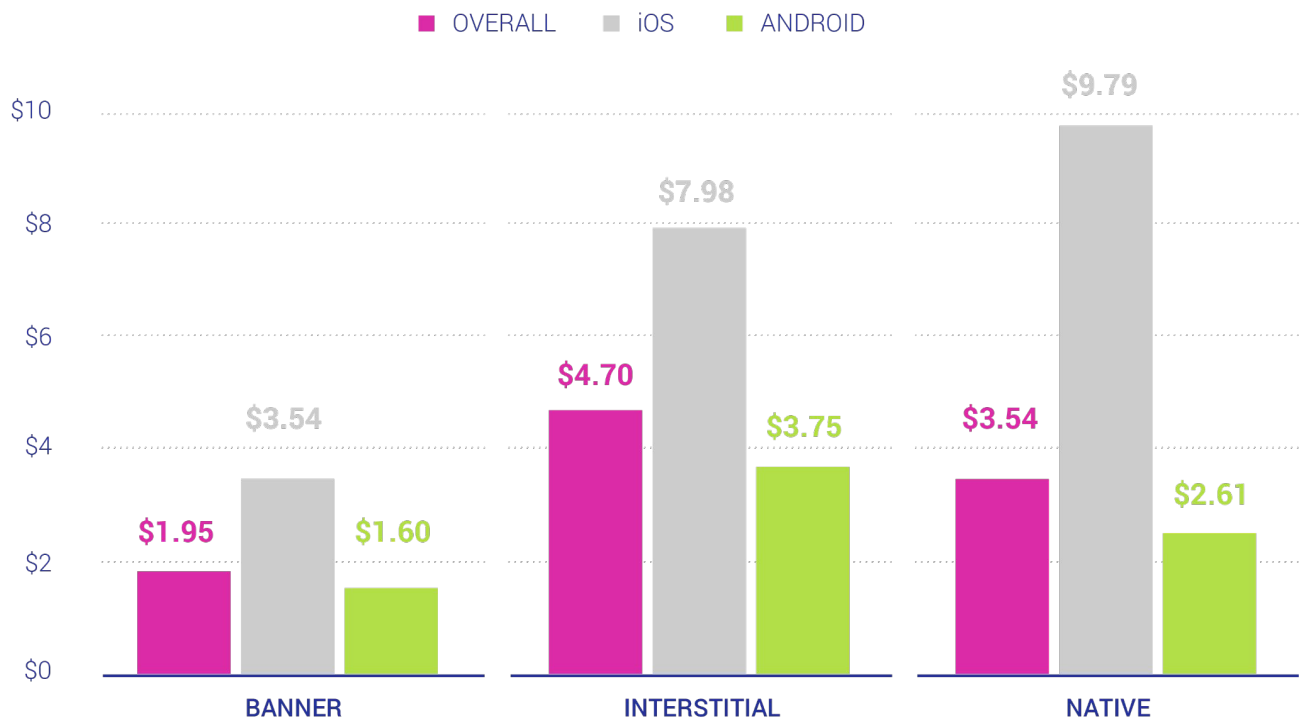**2** **Fail scenario videos are performing better and better—they're tapping into something.**

"An interesting trend we've noticed is the rise of 'fail scenario' videos. Over the last two years, we've seen these work better and better.

We think it's because there's something enjoyable about seeing silly moves and unexpected results—audiences respond to that."

3 **Create videos that are easy to iterate and build on your successes.**

"It's really about finding concepts that work. We never make a completely new video each time. We build for iterations—and it's usually a case of asset swapping. It's not automated, but we build modular elements into our videos. For instance, a video that works well for Valentine's Day can be refreshed with new assets so that it works for Easter."

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Finance CPI by Ad Format

■ OVERALL   ■ iOS   ■ ANDROID

BANNER
- OVERALL: $1.95
- iOS: $3.54
- ANDROID: $1.60

INTERSTITIAL
- OVERALL: $4.70
- iOS: $7.98
- ANDROID: $3.75

NATIVE
- OVERALL: $3.54
- iOS: $9.79
- ANDROID: $2.61

✔ iOS banner and interstitial ads cost more than 2x more than their Android counterparts. iOS native ads cost over 3x as much. Interstitial ads cost about 2x as much as banner ads on both iOS and Android.

✔ Native ads ($2.61) offer more value per install than interstitials ($3.75) on Android.

✔ Overall, banner ads ($1.95) offer the most value per install.

❝ Be methodical. Look at the data to discover which concepts work best with each audience. When you're testing, keep the variables to a minimum, and use your best-performing ad as a benchmark. As you come up with new creative concepts, test them against your benchmark to help you reach new heights.

Turner Kirk
Growth Manager
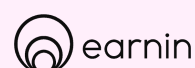
earnin

> "It's important to consider your space and your message. Focus on communicating clearly what your app does—not what someone might get if they buy it.

Abi Hargreaves
Creative Team Lead

LIFTOFF + Vungle

Finance Ads Are About Building Trust With Your Users

Finance apps play by a different set of rules. Abi Hargreaves, a Creative Team Lead at Liftoff + Vungle with years of experience in this vertical, shared her tips and best practices with us.

1 Focus on showing how the app works—not what a user might gain if they download it.

"For finance ads, the goal is to show that you're credible and to build trust with your users. One thing you definitely have to do is show off the app. Give users a look into what they might see when they sign up—create the 'try before you buy' experience. A lot of ads want to convey complex gains: 'If you buy this, you will save this amount.' But it's important to consider your space and your message. Focus on communicating clearly what your app does—not what someone might get if they buy it. Design assets that indicate whether it's for amateurs, whether it helps you save for a home, etc."

2 Simplify your design—highlight one UI element and make it shine.

"There are finance apps made for amateurs and ones made for professionals.

For both categories, you really want to simplify your design. The cleaner the better—especially for banner ads. Highlight one UI feature with an animation. Show what the app looks like if it's successful. For example, you could show money growing in an account—it might be a Bitcoin wallet or a savings account. You can show money or numbers rising on a counter, etc. Animations like that can perform very well."

3 This may seem obvious, but it's tried and true for financial apps! Celebrity endorsements will help grant you credibility.

"Depending on the app, having a celebrity in the ad helps. If you're building credibility with users, relying on someone they already trust really makes a big difference. Have them talk through the app's functionality and show them using it, endorsing it. It might seem cliché, but it really drives engagement."

LIFTOFF + Vungle

WHO IS LIFTOFF?

Liftoff is a complete mobile app marketing platform that helps companies acquire and retain high-quality app users at scale. We use unbiased ML to find all the best users for your app, creative tech to deliver the most engaging ad experience, and a unique cost per revenue model to optimize for your LTV goals.

Liftoff is proud to be a long-term partner to leading brand advertisers and app publishers since 2012. Headquartered in Redwood City, Liftoff has a global presence with offices in New York, Berlin, London, Paris, Singapore, Seoul, and Tokyo.

www.liftoff.io

LIFTOFF + Vungle

WHO IS VUNGLE?

Vungle is the trusted guide for growth and engagement, transforming how people discover and experience apps.

Vungle's data-optimized ads run on over 1 billion unique devices to drive engagement and increase returns for publishers and advertisers ranging from indie studios to powerhouse brands, including Rovio, Pandora, and Microsoft. The company is headquartered in San Francisco and has offices worldwide in Los Angeles, London, Berlin, Beijing, Tokyo, Seoul, and Singapore.

www.vungle.com

LIFTOFF + Vungle