



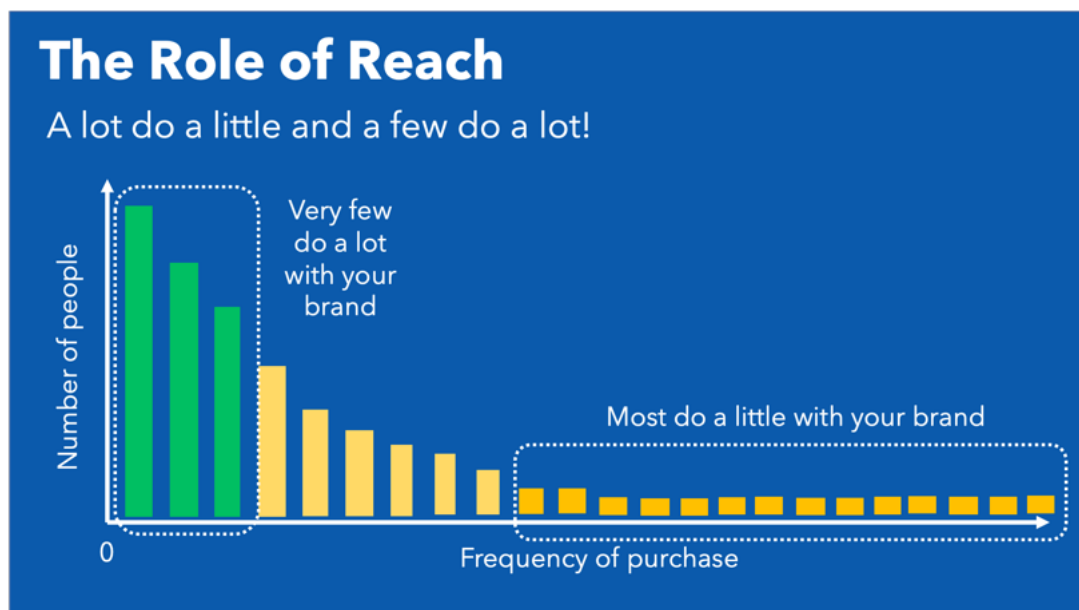
THE ROLE OF REACH

MARKETING
FUNDAMENTALS
GUIDE



A good starting point is to unpack one of the most fundamental concepts in this area: the role of reach. We must pay homage to the legend Prof Byron Sharp of the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for unlocking much of what we know about how brands grow. Having analysed thousands of brands, they determined that when trying to grow your brand, gaining the most reach or, in other words, having the most people in your target audience, hearing about your brand and its message is key is the most critical factor¹.

It's neatly summed below; only very few people and certainly not enough to grow your brand, which will typically do a lot with you. In contrast, most of your customers will be 'light buyers' and only do a little with you, but these are the ones you should focus on and extend.



The logic is that the heavy buyers will use you anyways, and if you target the light buyers, some of them will turn into serious buyers, and the cycle will continue.

The famous book by Peter Thiel – Zero to One², also has this premise at its heart. Get your light buyers from non-purchase to purchase!

If we follow through on this logic, it becomes clear that the future of our brand is determined by lots of people who don't know you well, don't think of you much and don't buy you often, if at all.

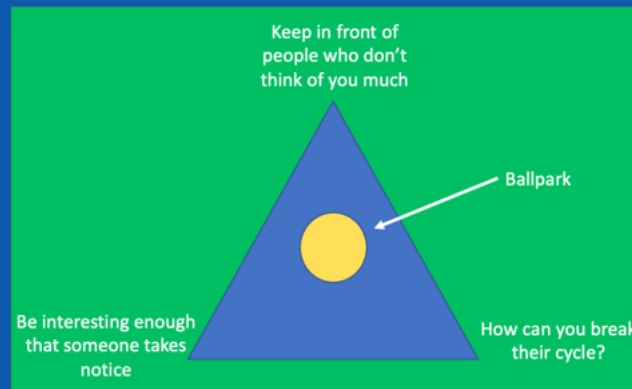
So as communicators, what does this tangibly mean for you?

¹ <https://www.marketingscience.info/grow-brand-grow/>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero_to_One

The Role of Reach

Role of reach; Influence on consumer



First, you need to think about how you can get into the eye of people who don't think of you much; how can you break their cycle and be interesting enough that someone notices what you are saying? It is best to be in the ballpark when someone is thinking broadly about your territory but not what you offer.

Let's take the example of a training organisation. Let's say that they want to reach their audience when they are thinking about their personal development or the development of others but have yet to consider the same proposition the organisation offers. To be in the ballpark, so to speak, they need to turn up in the right places and at the right time, which could be specific magazines, books, or specific times of the year when people are thinking about their development.

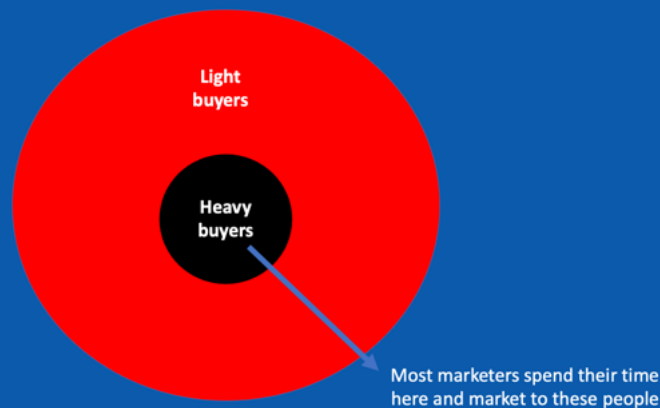
However, in any category, timing is a tricky thing, and it's hard to predict when someone is in the market, as it were. Furthermore, it's arguable that building brand salience with them happens long before they begin to consider a purchase. Based on this logic, research has shown that adopting a more 'always-on' approach to your communications is advantageous over a few big splashes over the year.

So the key is getting as broad a reach into your target audience as possible. This is not to be mistaken with broad reach to everyone as that would be just wasteful.

This takes us to an issue with targeting. We usually focus on and double down on our 'heavy buyers' and try to get them more engaged and involved with us. Rather than 'light buyers'.

The Role of Reach

Targeting



Let me give you an example to highlight the point.

Think about a message you put out on your LinkedIn profile. You will likely see a pattern with who engages with it. These will be the 'heavy' consumers of your content i.e. those who regularly engage with what you post. Although it makes you feel good that you are getting likes and comments, ask yourself, how much real value does it give your business?

The answer is, initially, it may deliver some value, as these people, in the beginning, would have been your light buyers. However, over time the value may deplete and all the while, the algorithm biases your reach and sends it to your heavy buyers, creating an echo chamber. You may well have noticed this, or you will if you post regularly on social media.

Even in this context, the real challenge is breaking out of this echo chamber and getting new light buyers to notice your content. Once they do, they get interested in your content and then become regular engagers of your content.

This is where the role of creativity can help. Creating content that others want to engage with and share instantly extends the reach to other audiences, who, if it appeals to, will become your heavy consumers over time. So, to that end, great content and creativity help extend your message at no incremental media spend since others can pick it up on social and share across their feeds.

Let's go back to a brand lens.

We see that even the most prominent players in the market have the same challenge with the need to reach their light buyers. Here we see that online-born businesses need to move into more broad-based advertising to attract light buyers for their brands to grow³. It almost feels counterintuitive that a company that has scaled tremendously online would need to use traditional channels to

³ <https://www.thinkbox.tv/news-and-opinion/newsroom/online-born-businesses-embrace-tv-advertising/>

grow, yet this is precisely what happens. For example, Amazon has become one of the largest TV advertisers in the UK.

The Role of Reach

Online born business go mainstream

- TV advertising spend by online-born businesses has increased by 37% since 2019
- £559.9 million invested in TV in Jan-Jul 2021 by online-born businesses
- Trend is seen across almost every business sector
- Online-born businesses TV investment is on the way to being £1 billion a year in the UK alone

Sector	Example brands	TV spend (£m) (Jan-Jul 2021)	% spend difference compared to Jan-Jul 2019
Price comparison websites	Compare the market, Confused, Gocompare, Moneysupermarket	£79.5	+26%
Food delivery / food subscriptions	Just Eat, Deliveroo, Gousto, Ocado, Hello Fresh	£65.1	+194%
Online market places	Amazon, Ebay, Etsy, Vinted, Gumtree	£63.1	+103%
Used cars	Cazoo, Carwow, Clinch, Webuyanycar	£36.3	+235%
Travel	Expedia, AirBNB, Hotels, Booking	£32.4	-57%

Source: Adapted table, original from: <https://www.thinkbox.tv/news-and-opinion/newsroom/online-born-businesses-embrace-tv-advertising/>

Reach redefined: How to grow your brand

Here we reveal the latest thinking and considerations on how to grow your brand.

One of the fundamental tenets of the seminal book, *How Brands Grow* by Bryon Sharp,⁴ laid the foundations for how we think about brand growth.

1. Pure Reach

The premise was in order for your brand to grow; it needed 'reach'. Let's call it 'Pure Reach'. Reach your 'light' buyers as they will be your 'heavy' buyers in the future.

It shows that few people, certainly not enough to grow your brand, will typically do a lot with you. So, while most of your customers will be light buyers and only do a little with you, these are the ones you should focus on and extend. The logic is that the heavy buyers will use you anyways, and if you target the light buyers, some of them will turn into serious buyers, and the cycle will continue.

The formula was: **More eyeballs = more impact.**

The industry took to this like bees to honey. Over the last decade, media planners everywhere looked at delivering the most significant reach for their clients with little appreciation for the influence of the channels they pushed the communications through. In addition, not much heed was given to the importance and impact of different media channels.

2. Attentive reach

This takes us to uncover the second instalment of 'reach' known as 'attentive reach'. It's baked in the understanding that simply going after 'Pure Reach' leads to considerable waste since its impact is diluted and ineffective.

Research carried out by Karen Nelson-Field shows us that we must combine our reach efforts with levels of attention to have the most impact, known as 'attention-elasticity'⁵.

She uncovered that different channels achieved different levels of attention within an elasticity band, regardless of the creative. Put another way, you could watch the same creative on one platform, and you would give it a different level of your attention compared to if you watched it on another. This was something that the 'Pure Reach' approach did not consider and had significant implications for the industry.

Work by Lumen⁶ solidifies this line of thinking further, as their studies have shown us the average cost per attentive second different channels receive. This data has made significant strides forward for media planners looking at Pure Reach but now consider the influence of the platform on influence, power and re-call.

⁴ <https://amzn.eu/d/iiAyuwj>

⁵ <https://the-media-leader.com/attention-elasticity-the-attention-economys-chicken-and-egg-question/>

⁶ <https://www.lumen-research.com/blog/p653k3atys5ubp58jcydxoyn0d0wik>

Why is this important? It's because Lumen shows that the more attention an advert receives, the higher the levels of brand recall and likelihood to purchase it will have.

So, it's now not only essential to have 'reach' but also consider the channels that deliver you that reach to ensure you have the right amount of 'attention'.

What is the right amount of attention?

Well, research conducted by Orlando Wood, Peter Field and Karen Nelson-Field, known as the attention-memory threshold⁷, suggests that an advert needs a minimum attention time of 2.5 seconds to begin to be effective. The issue is that 85% of all communications still need to achieve this threshold.

3. Contextual reach

You would have thought that it ends there. Well, not quite. The marketing landscape constantly evolves, and new insights are continually being developed.

The latest research from Zenith UK revealed on a WARC podcast⁸, suggests even greater insights to be aware of when planning media. They termed their approach 'Right Reach' and indicated that there are three factors to consider to achieve an even greater level of impact and commercial outcome:

- Level of attention: how long someone watched the advert
- Persistence: the extent to which the advert is watched to the end and shows up in-between shows that also are watched till the end
- Relevance: When communication sits beside things related to the product or service, i.e. more contextual

Zenith studied over 15 brands over two years and determined that the statistical significance is far higher when you add these three factors into your media planning vs a Pure Reach approach.

Context Matters

Context goes beyond channels. Drawing on Shotton and Hammer-Lloyd (2023), four factors shape high-attention contexts:

- **Environment:** Consumers recall better in the same setting in which they learned something (Godden & Baddeley, 1975). Ads placed where your product is consumed – like a drinks brand advertising in pubs – benefit from this effect.
- **Mood:** Fred Bronner (2007) found happy, relaxed audiences recall 52% of ads compared to 35% for unhappy readers. That's why aligning with moments of fandom or national celebrations boosts association.
- **Active attention:** Nelson-Field (2020) emphasises that active, undistracted attention drives effectiveness. Prime-time TV or cinema delivers more than background social scrolling.

⁷ <https://www.mi-3.com.au/21-06-2022/brand-fights-performance-beaches-peter-field-karen-nelson-field-orlando-wood-unpack-0>

⁸ <https://www.warc.com/content/feed/right-reach-may-be-a-better-predictor-of-business-outcomes/en-GB/7719>
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/340pfvoAqhyQlXUuEvGZKv?si=Q1JE9e5pQ0qiRmEPY3Zbuw&nd=1>

- **Specific seeking:** Even though only around 5% of your audience is in-market at any given time (LinkedIn B2B Institute, 2021), signals like searches or location cues amplify conversion when combined with prior brand salience.

Creativity: The Profit Multiplier

Creativity ensures that your hard-won reach and attention translate into business impact. *The Creative Dividend* (System1 & Effie Worldwide, 2023) proves creativity delivers a **12× profit multiplier**, outstripping gains from targeting or budget size.

- Award-winning creative yields **6.7× higher ROI**.
 - Emotionally engaging ads deliver **50% more business outcomes**.
 - Ads that evoke no emotion deliver **40% less profit** and are quickly forgotten.
- Moreover, campaigns that consistently use distinctive brand assets – colours, characters, sounds, taglines – are **3× more profitable** over time (Sharp, 2010). Creativity is not a cost centre; it's a growth engine.

A New Growth Playbook

If you're planning your next campaign:

- ✓ **Audit your reach** – are you exposing your brand beyond heavy buyers?
- ✓ **Plan for attention** – use channels that deliver enough attentive seconds.
- ✓ **Layer context** – place ads where, when and in moods that boost recall.
- ✓ **Invest in creativity** – ideas that stir emotion build mental availability.
- ✓ **Be consistent** – reinforce brand codes over time and touchpoints.
- ✓ **Combine channel, creative and context** – this is the holy trinity that converts impressions into growth.

The takeaway? Growth comes from **reaching more light buyers** in high-attention channels and contexts, with creative that people feel and remember. Do that, and the banana curve tilts in your favour – driving not just impressions, but meaningful, lasting brand growth.

So, there you have it. The world of media planning is constantly evolving.

Now it's time to redefine your approach to reach to deliver your brand objectives and outcomes.