



The FreeWheel Viewer Experience Lab Presents

Maximizing Brand Recall Through Contextual Alignment



VIEWER EXPERIENCE LAB

About the FreeWheel Viewer Experience Lab

The FreeWheel Viewer Experience Lab is designed to help media companies improve the quality, quantity, and relevance of TV advertising through quantifiable research, solutions, and technology. To learn more, visit freewheel.com/viewerexperiencelab.

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Introduction

As advertisers face challenges around identity solutions, many are turning to contextual advertising to mitigate the loss of audience signals and deliver targeted, relevant ads to consumers.

Previous research from the Viewer Experience Lab demonstrated the importance of tailored ad experiences, finding that viewers are twice as engaged when ads are relevant, ultimately leading to higher recall. The [report](#) also provided an overview of the types of relevancy in advertising to help better explain the impact of aligning ad content with program content.

This latest report further explores that topic, sharing findings from an innovative study on the impact of contextually aligned ads on the viewer's memory for brands and offers considerations for how advertisers and publishers can capitalize on the benefits of contextual alignment.



Overview of research

Purpose of the research

The Viewer Experience Lab aims to provide actionable insights, fueled by research, to help advertisers and publishers deliver the best viewer experience. The research for this report was conducted to help determine how contextual alignment, the similarity in program and ad content, impacts brand recall.

Methods

Analyzed viewing of **200+ programs and 5,000+ ads** by participants using data from a wireless wearable device and a post-exposure brand recall survey with Mediaprobe.

The text, video, and audio of the program-ad pairs were processed using VideoAI from Comcast Technology Solutions to generate IAB Content Taxonomy 3.0 tier one keywords.

Measures

Program-ad pairs were analyzed for:

- **Viewer engagement:** Emotional impact score (EIS), Mediaprobe’s measure for the physiological measure of electrodermal activation (EDA), which reflects changes in skin conductance to indicate emotional intensity.
- **Ad effectiveness:** Memory of brand name using free recall in a post-exposure survey.
- **Contextual alignment:** Measured by matching keyword overlap of program and ad content on the top keyword, 1 of the top 2 keywords and 1 of the top 3 keywords.

What is contextual alignment?

Contextual alignment refers to the similarity in program and ad content based on keyword matching and exists on a continuum from broad, when one out of a group of keywords is matched, to narrow, when there is an exact match on the top or most relevant keyword, using the IAB Content Taxonomy.*

Aligning on a common content taxonomy provides scale and ease of activation across the industry.

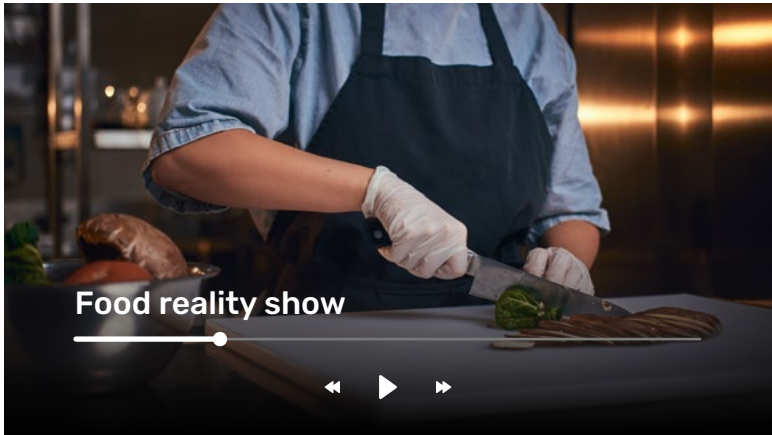
For this analysis, **aligning on one of three keywords offers the best scale for contextual activation.**

Below are examples for how program and ad keywords may overlap.

Using a standard taxonomy is important for scalability and activation. For this analysis, the **IAB Content Taxonomy 3.0 of tier-one keywords was used.*

More inventory

Less inventory



Match for one of three top keywords

- Food reality show
- 1. **Food & drink**
 - 2. Style & fashion
 - 3. Sports

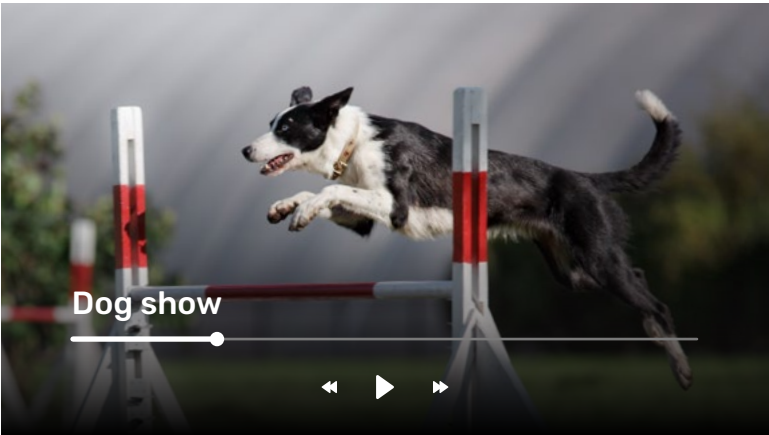
- Travel company ad
- 1. Travel
 - 2. Personal celebration
 - 3. **Food & drink**



Match for one of two top keywords

- Drama show
- 1. **Travel**
 - 2. Crime
 - 3. Tech & computing

- Automotive ad
- 1. Automotive
 - 2. **Travel**
 - 3. Holidays



The top keywords match

- Dog show
- 1. **Pets**
 - 2. Law
 - 3. Sports

- Pet food ad
- 1. **Pets**
 - 2. Food & drink
 - 3. Home & garden

Contextual alignment increases brand recall

Contextual alignment of program and ad content delivers a significant increase in brand recall.

Brand recall increases by +20% when matching on at least one out of three keywords.

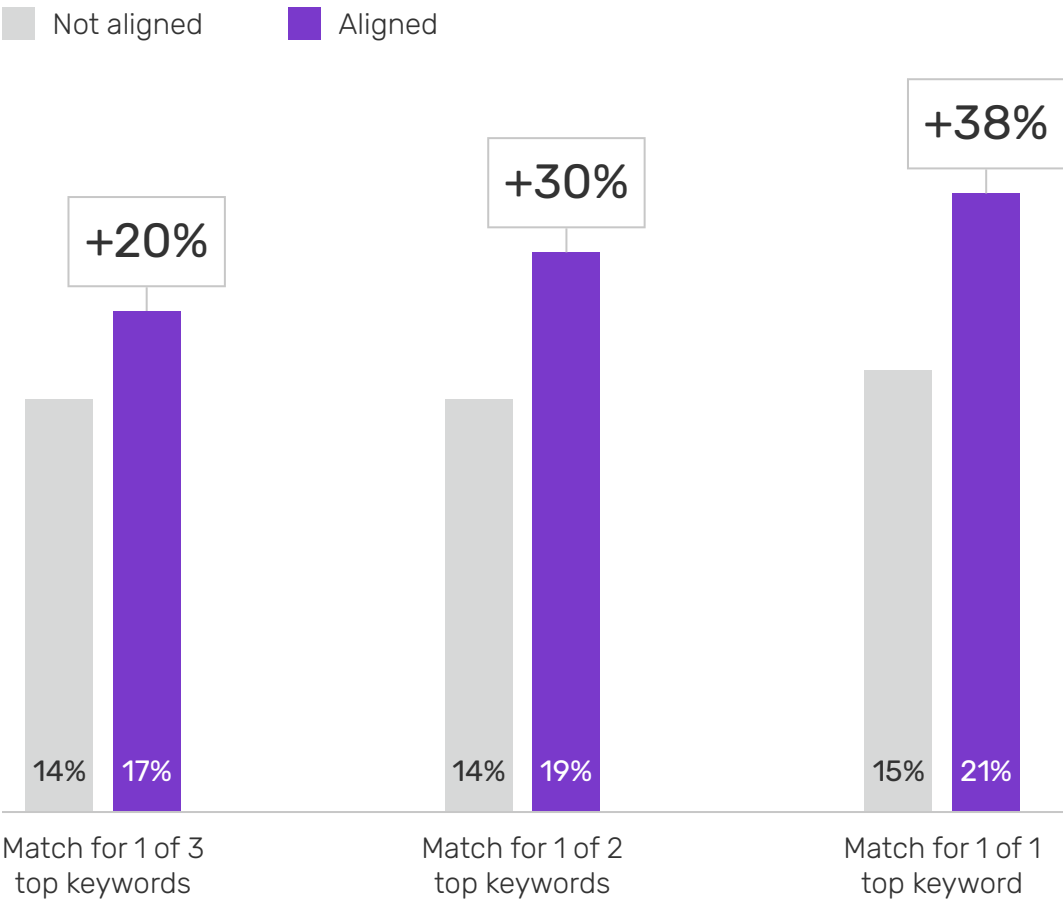
While brand recall increases by +38% when there is a 1:1 match of the top keyword, there is less inventory available with an exact match, limiting the chance for brands to capitalize on the opportunity.

Notably, our previous research found that when ads and content were related, the greater attention from viewers led to a greater lift in purchase intent.

Source: FreeWheel research study in partnership with Mediaprobe and Comcast Technology Solutions, 2025. For data shown, n=5316.

Brand recall based on contextual alignment

% of people who recalled ads they saw while watching the program



Brand recall increases regardless of engagement

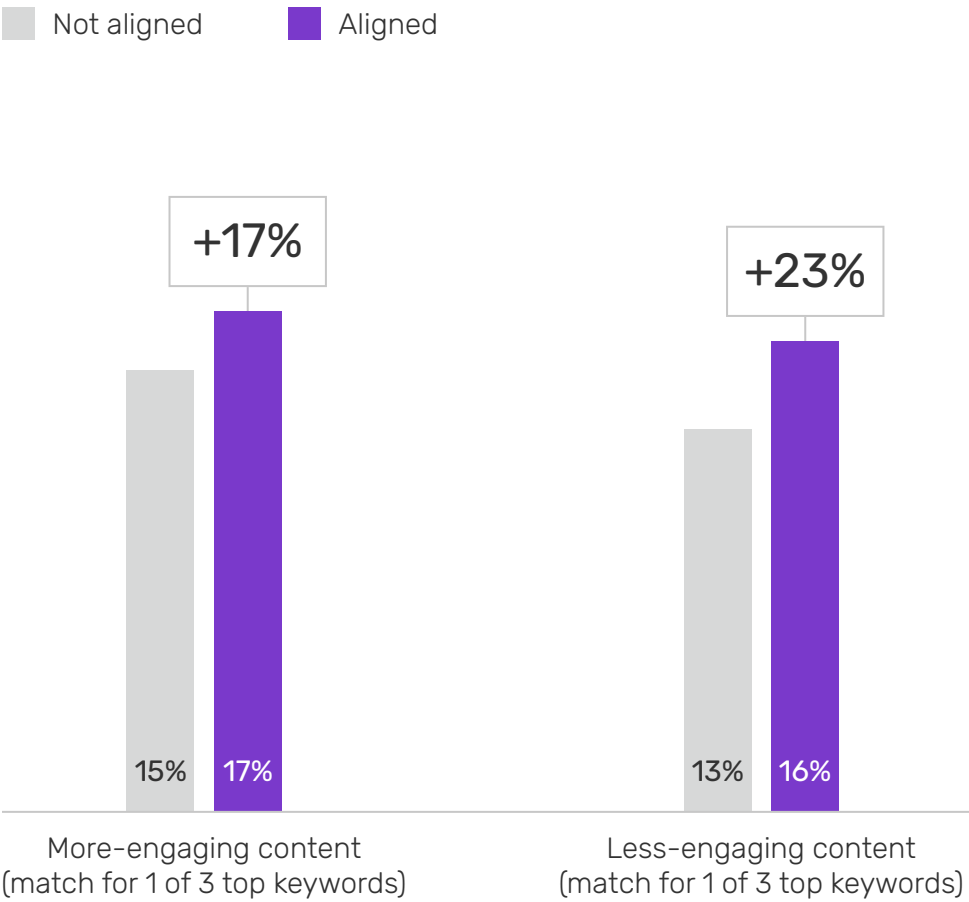
Contextual alignment provides brands a significant lift in brand recall, regardless of audience engagement with the program content. Recall increases in both more-engaging and less-engaging content when programs and ads are contextually aligned.

When matching on at least one out of three keywords, there is a **+17% lift** in brand recall for more-engaging content and a **+23% lift** for less-engaging content.

Source: FreeWheel research study in partnership with Mediaprobe and Comcast Technology Solutions, 2025. For data shown, n=5316.

Brand recall by contextual alignment in more- and less-engaging content

% of people who recalled ads they saw while watching the program



Content was broken into more-engaging and less-engaging content based on Emotional Impact Score (EIS). EIS is a measure of viewer engagement. Higher engagement leads to higher recall.

Actionable advice for unlocking the power of contextual alignment



While relevancy can take many forms, this research highlights the benefits that arise from contextually aligning program and ad content both on traditional and streaming TV advertising. For the best results, contextually aligning on 1 out of 3 top keywords is the sweet spot for brands.

To maximize the contextual opportunity, advertisers and publishers should focus on ease of use and adoption.

Sell-side considerations

Aligning on keywords from a standard taxonomy provides for repeatability and ease of execution. When automated, this can make contextual advertising a seamless targeting solution and increases the potential value of the content to advertisers. Publishers should tag keywords that best describe the content and avoid sending too many keywords to maximize impact.

Buy-side considerations

20% greater brand recall means more impact for advertiser messages. This provides an important validation for the efficacy of contextual advertising as a targeting solution that advertisers should consider. Advertisers can be confident in knowing that all content, regardless of engagement, benefits from contextual alignment.



FreeWheel technology is built for streaming and TV ads. We connect buyers and sellers directly, making it easier to access supply and demand. We provide all the tools, data, and insights you need to maximize results. [Read more insights on TV and premium video advertising here.](#)



Making the Ad Experience More Relevant

The importance of ad relevancy and the viewer experience

The report shares insights into how relevant ads can have a positive impact on brand outcomes. It also lays out the steps that buyers and sellers need to consider when developing more relevant ad experiences for their audiences.

[Download Report →](#)



Innovative Ad Formats in Streaming: Preserving the Novelty Effect

Examining new ad formats in streaming and their impact on the viewer experience

This report looks at how innovative ad formats impact the viewer experience, outlining the extent to which viewers see them around the globe and the advantages of preserving the novelty of these formats to benefit both viewers and advertisers.

[Download Report →](#)



Improving the Quality of Ad Experiences

How and why to provide a consistent, high-quality ad experience

This report explores how programmers and advertisers can provide a consistent, high-quality ad experience to positively impact the overall viewing experience.

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