



# Creative Currencies in Promotions

How the most innovative companies  
build creativity into their promotions

 Talon.One

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

**WPP Enterprise  
Solutions**

 **Mando**

**The opportunity** 3  
Why creative promotions matter

**What the research tells us** 4  
Primary research testing  
from 1,800 consumers

**What consumers want** 5  
Insights from eight years  
of promotions research

**The business case for  
creative promotions** 7

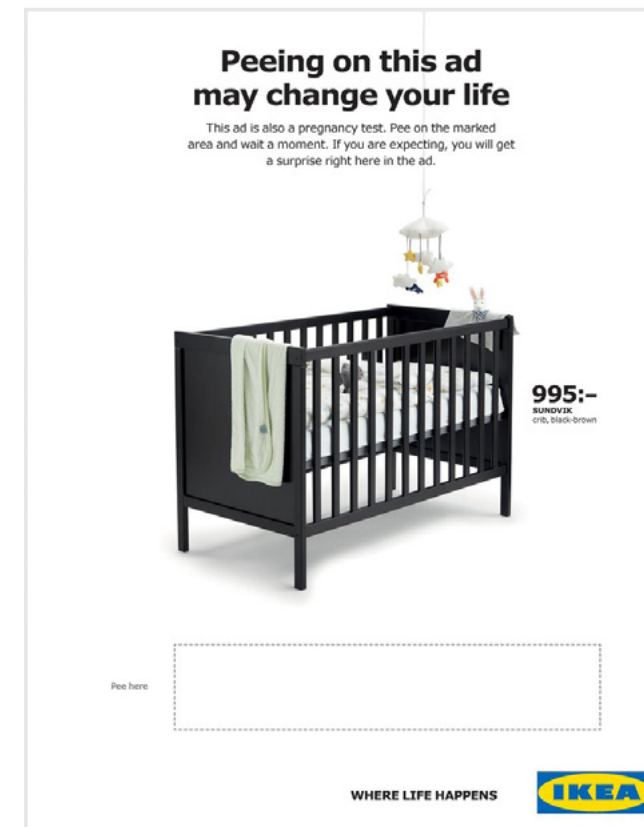
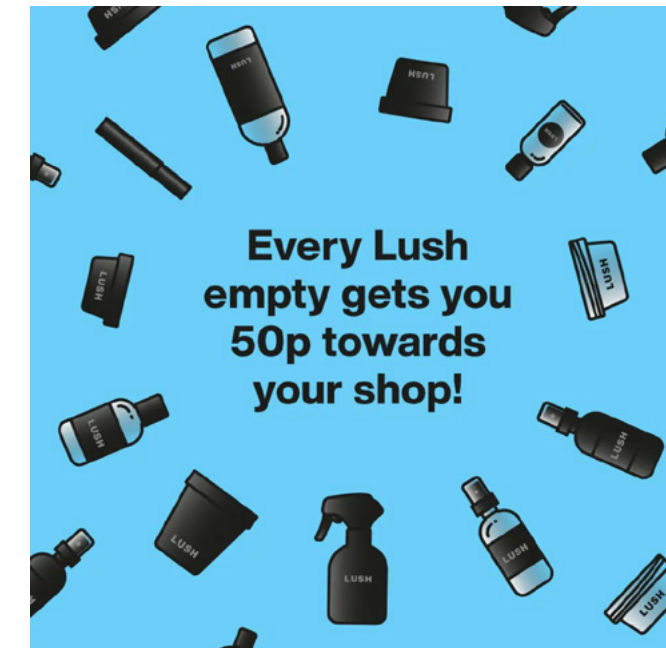
**The eight Creative Currencies** 8

- 1. Utility 9
- 2. Game 9
- 3. Cultural 10
- 4. Social 10
- 5. Aspirational 11
- 6. Purpose 11
- 7. Consistency 12
- 8. Counterintuitive 12

**Putting Creative Currencies  
into practice** 13

**Building the right capability** 14  
Technology and teams  
for execution at scale

**Conclusion** 16



# Why creative promotions matter

How the discount death spiral is costing your brand, and what to do instead



**Christoph Gerber**  
Co-founder & CEO, Talon.One

Promotions are one of the most powerful levers in marketing. They shape two of the four P's, they are the most direct activation for cost-conscious consumers, and yet they are also the single most costly activity in marketing — **with 20% of revenue being discounted away.**

The vast majority of marketing programs also leverage promotions in their activations:

#### **Acquisition Marketing**

Out-of-home and paid media campaigns frequently leverage a promotional mechanism to drive the audience toward the brand.

#### **Loyalty Programs**

Promotional value is the number one reason members enrol in loyalty programs.

#### **Lifecycle Marketing**

The most-used mechanism in CRM marketing is promotions.

#### **Merchandising & Stock Management**

Businesses primarily reach for promotions to solve for excess inventory and lapses in demand.

But most brands default to the same playbook: simple price discounts, repeated quarter after quarter. The short-term results might look great: customers respond, revenue spikes — but there is a long-term cost.

**We call this the discount death spiral: a cycle in which otherwise good brands unwittingly train their customers to wait for the next price cut.**

But there is another way. In a study conducted with System1 Group across 1,800 consumers in six global markets, gamified promotions often scored higher than the offers tested — including various discounts — on being unique, exciting, and memorable.

These are the dimensions that drive long-term brand salience and customer engagement.

This report introduces a practical framework for breaking free of the discount default. We identify eight Creative Currencies — distinct categories of non-financial value that brands can offer customers — that help marketers move beyond a purely price-led approach to promotions.

The skills required to do this aren't new. Marketers have always understood how to build emotional connection through advertising, storytelling and brand experience. That expertise just hasn't been applied to promotions with the same rigour. Creative Currencies are the bridge, bringing the DNA of great marketing into one of its most under-leveraged areas. ■

#### **In this report,**

we examine how the most innovative companies build creativity into their promotions. We introduce eight Creative Currencies that marketers should consider when planning their promotional campaigns.

These currencies broaden the aperture of what value marketers can offer customers, drawing on cultural moments, behavioral psychology, and game mechanics to deliver value beyond price. We bring those currencies to life with best-in-class examples and industry-specific playbooks.

# Primary research testing from 1,800 consumers

Understanding what consumers actually respond to beyond the immediate appeal of a discount is central to building a creative promotions strategy.

Through consumer research specially commissioned for this report, one thing was clear: people overwhelmingly prefer the certainty of a discount. But dig deeper into the data, and a more nuanced, and more useful, picture emerges.

We partnered with System1 Group to test six promotional offers with 1,800 nationally representative respondents across six markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Australia, and Saudi Arabia). All offers were framed around a \$100 shoe purchase scenario and benchmarked against System1 Group's norms database of 61,000+ ideas.

**The headline finding?  
Consumers overwhelmingly prefer guaranteed financial value.**

Of the six offers tested, only the two discount mechanics scored above 1-star on System1's composite in-market potential measure. The "second pair 50% off" offer led the field with a 4.4-Star rating, while "15% off" reached 2.0 Stars.

The four non-discount offers — 3x loyalty points, roll a dice, chance to win FIFA tickets, and chance to win \$100k — all scored between 1.1 and 1.4 stars.

While consumers prefer lower prices above all else, the data also suggests how a more creative approach to promotions drives better long-term results. In particular, three findings build a compelling case for creativity in promotions:

## The six promotions at the heart of our research

- 15% off
- Second pair 50% off
- Get 3x loyalty points
- Roll a dice, get it for free
- Chance to win \$100k
- Chance to win FIFA World Cup tickets

Research methodology: System1 Group "Test Your Innovation" methodology. 1,800 nationally representative respondents across six markets. Results benchmarked against System1's norms database of 61,000+ ideas, split by idea type and market.

### 1 Discounts win on appeal, but create the death spiral in real time

System1 Group's own qualitative data shows the death spiral at work: consumers who responded positively to the discount offers immediately asked for deeper reductions as their suggested "improvement" — a bigger discount, 75% off, lower minimum spend. The very appeal of these offers is what makes them dangerous: they train consumers to expect more, and escalate cost to the business with every repetition.

### 2 Not all discounts are equal — how you structure the offer is itself a creative decision

The gap between the two discount scenarios is striking: "second pair 50% off" scored more than twice as high as "15% off" (4.4 vs. 2.0 stars). The reason comes down to perceived value and engagement. A 50% discount on a second item feels generous and exciting at first glance, but it also keeps the customer shopping, increases basket size, and preserves the full-price anchor on the first purchase.

A flat 15% off, meanwhile, delivers a smaller saving with no reason to buy more, and over time can signal that your prices have room to come down. The lesson for promotional marketers: the real creativity in discounting isn't the percentage — it's the mechanic behind it, and whether it's designed to keep customers engaged or simply lower the price.

### 3 Creative mechanics win on the metrics that matter for long-term brand health

"Roll a Dice" — the most gamified offer we tested — scored highest of all six offers on uniqueness, and came second on excitement, innovation, and memorability. These are the dimensions that build brand salience over time, not just short-term conversion.

The creative offers didn't win on immediate commercial appeal, the discounts did. But that's exactly the point. The metrics where creative mechanics excelled are the ones that compound into lasting brand equity, and as this report will show, there's a strong case from behavioral science for why: the anticipation of an uncertain reward generates more excitement than a guaranteed one, making gamified experiences inherently more engaging.

This doesn't mean marketers should stop discounting. It means discounting deserves the same creative rigour as any other brand investment, and later in this report, we'll introduce a practical framework for bringing that thinking to life. ■

# Insights from eight years of promotions research

Our own research tells one part of the story. But it's worth asking: do these patterns hold at scale, across a wider consumer population? The answer, backed by years of tracking data, is yes, and the implications for how brands design and reward promotions are significant.

Creative mechanics drive stronger brand impact than their participation numbers might suggest. Gamification is growing fast. And the reward on offer matters just as much as the mechanic itself. These are the headline takeaways from Mando's 2026 white paper **"What the Brits want from Promotions 3.0"**, drawn from continuous tracking of British and European consumer attitudes to promotions and loyalty since 2018, in partnership with YouGov.

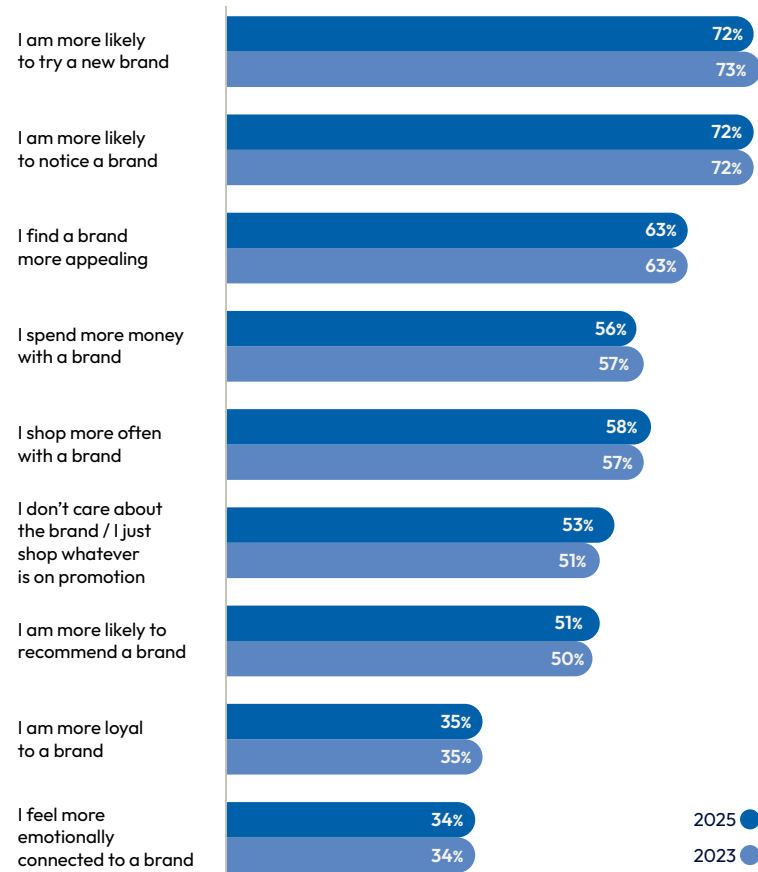
## 1 Promotions have a very positive impact on business and brand KPIs

Done well, promotions are one of the most effective and measurable marketing disciplines of all; a short, high impact HIIT style boost to the bottom line with the ability to drive brand consideration, appeal, trial and even long term love as well as sales. Positive impact peaks on short term metrics such as trial and appeal (72% are more likely to try a brand when it's on promotion, 63% find a brand more appealing when it's on promotion). But there are also very positive long term impacts — 35% are more loyal to a brand when it offers promotions and 34% feel more emotionally connected.

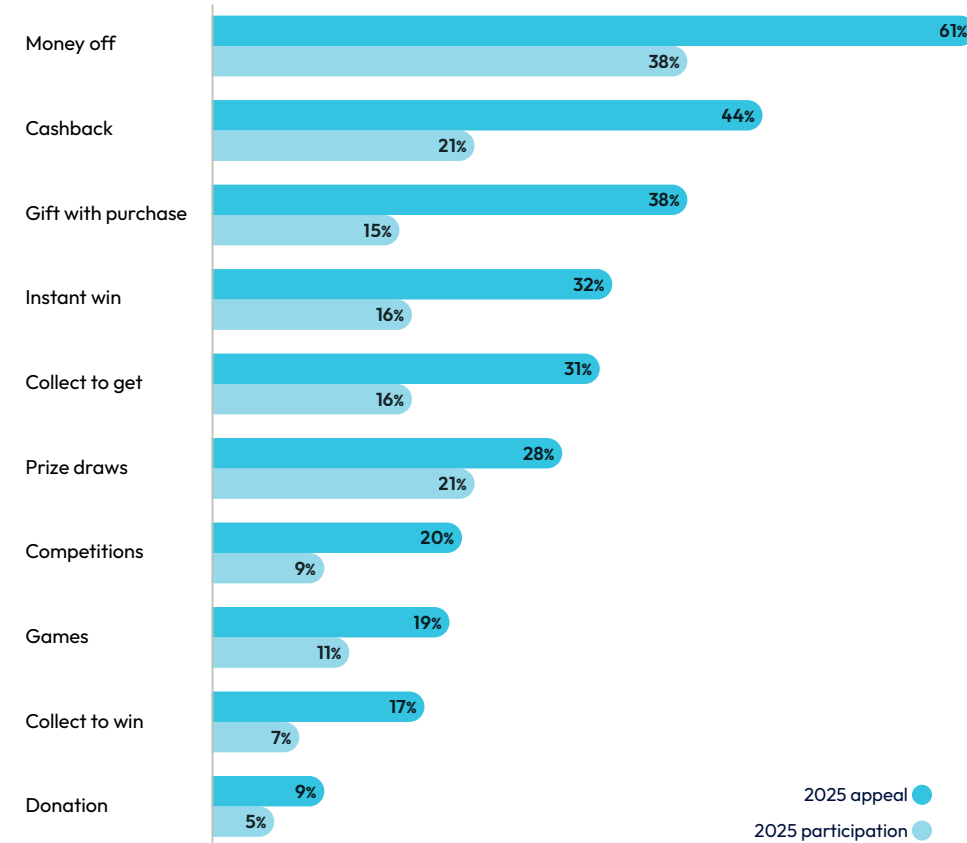
It is well worth investing in a robust promotional strategy and execution, as done well, you can almost guarantee you'll get good results!

### The positive impact of promotions (% of adults who agree with the statement)

#### When a brand offers a promotion...



## Types of promotion: appeal and participation (% of adults)



## 2 While money off and cashback promotions have the most appeal and participation, more 'creative' promotions such as gift with purchase can achieve better brand impact

Mando's study found that while the two dominant promotional mechanics are discount-based (money off with 61% appeal and 38% participation and cashback with 44% appeal and 21% participation), the more 'creative' mechanics do not lag far behind. Gift with purchase is appealing to 38%, with 15% participation, Instant win is appealing to 32%, with 16% participation, Collect to Get has 31% appeal and 16% participation and Prize Draws have 28% appeal and 21% participation — matching Cashback participation levels, but at a far lower risk of inducing a discount death spiral.

CONTINUED >



**Charlie Hills**  
CSO, Mando

"Creative promotion design is an art and a science; our research has continuously demonstrated that promotions have a hugely positive impact on consumer attitudes and behaviors — both for the long term and the short term. Marketers across the globe need to sit up and take notice — designing a creative and effective promotion is well worth the effort and time invested! And if you get it right, you can repeat and optimize year after year for even greater impact."

3

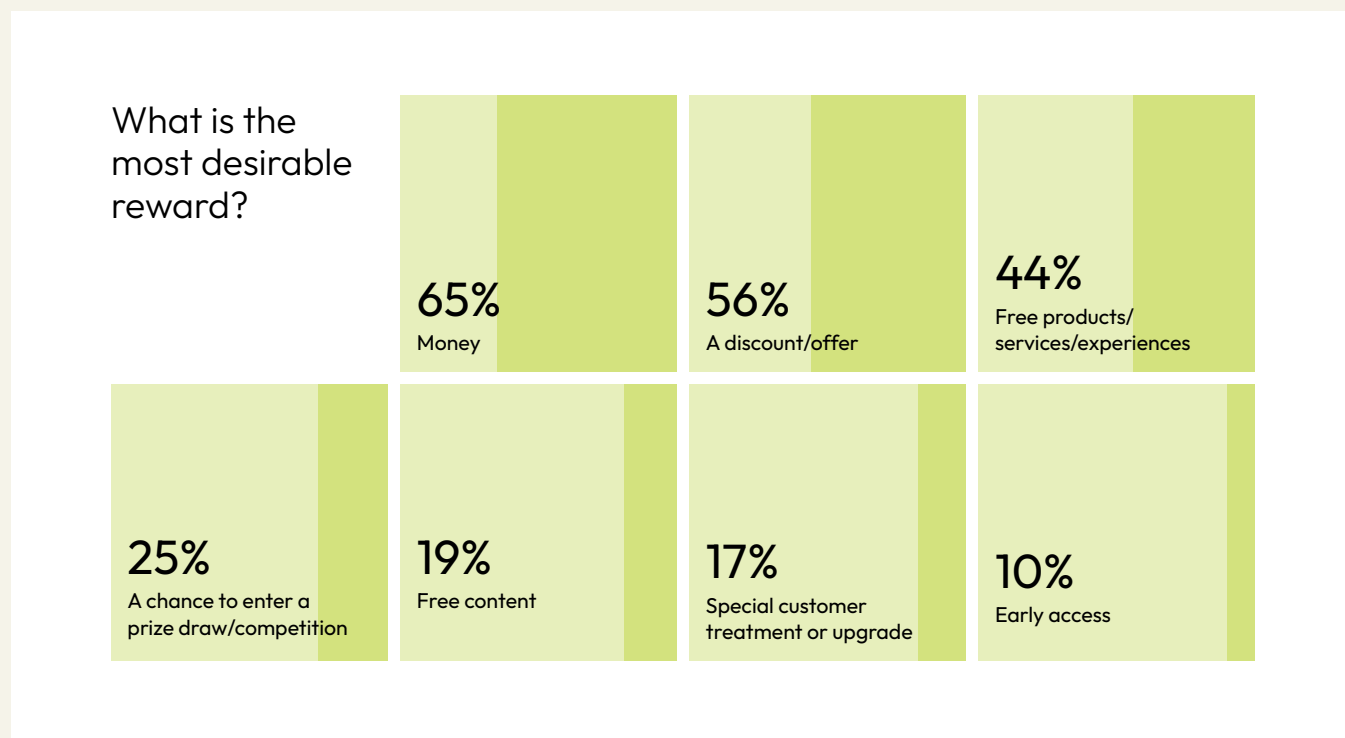
### Getting the rewards right matters

29.9% of consumers say the rewards on offer are what motivates them to enter a promotion. This means the prize or incentive matters just as much as the mechanic itself – and the same principle of balancing discounts with creative, brand-building rewards applies here too.

Money is the most desirable reward (65%), followed by discounts and offers (56%), followed by free products, services and experiences (44%), then by a chance to enter a prize draw or competition (25%), free content (19%), special customer treatment or upgrades (17%) and finally, early access (10%).

In the prizes and rewards offered we can see many of the eight creative currencies highlighted in this paper. A monetary reward is a great example of a utility currency, a special customer treatment or upgrade is a great example of an aspirational currency and early access is a great example of a social currency.

Investing in data and insight to get the right prize or reward for your target audience, is as important as designing an effective and creative promotional mechanic.



We are Mando, WPP's specialist Promotions, Partnerships, Loyalty and Rewards agency. We design and deliver brilliant promotions, partnerships, loyalty solutions and rewards based on the smart use of cutting-edge data and insight, using our specially built Insights Engine™.

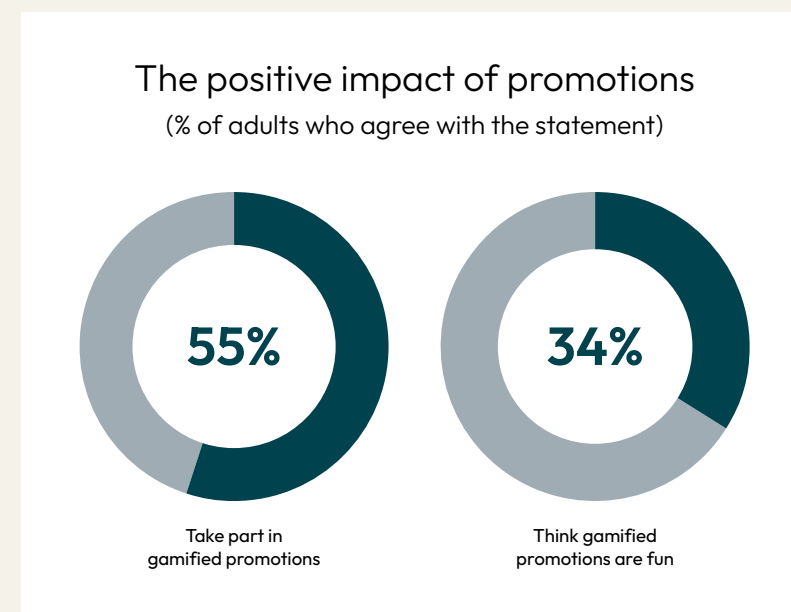
Our expertise lie in the breadth of mechanics, sectors and rewards we use to deliver tailored campaigns. We believe in the power of collaboration, innovation and the use of data and insight to design brilliant solutions that get bigger and better results, faster. [www.mando.co.uk](http://www.mando.co.uk)

4

### Gamification is on the rise and should be integral to your approach

Three of the concepts that the System1 Group research in the following pages explores are lightly gamified (roll a dice, chance to win FIFA tickets and chance to win \$100k) and it's a big trend in promotion design – adding fun and playability to core promotional mechanics to inspire and engage ever more demanding audiences. It's also noted as one of the key eight creative currencies in this paper. Some of the best promotions of 2025 and 2026 are heavily gamified – Spin the Wheel mechanics have become fairly ubiquitous, ditto treasure hunts and brands are still using licences and sports rules to bring play into promotions – the most famous of which is of course McDonald's Monopoly. Consumer love gamified promotions – 55% take part in them and 34% think they are fun. ■

Consider gamifying your promotional mechanic; even a less creative discounting mechanic can be made better through the smart application of gamification principles.



**Leonie Walker**  
Managing Director, Mando

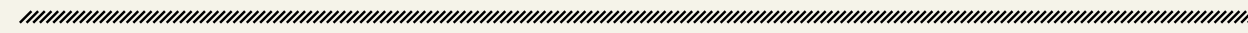
“Promotions are the gem in the marketing mix that just keep shining. Tactical short bursts of activity, that drive action, increase engagement and really shift a change in behavior ensuring marketing objectives are hit. It all stems from the design, creatively weaving in the right messaging with the right route of entry, with the right reward. Finding that sweet spot will ultimately ensure your consumers feel a connection to your brand, and the results will follow.”

# The business case for creative promotions

Creative promotions, those that go beyond a simple price reduction to engage customers through game mechanics, cultural moments, purpose, social sharing, and other non-financial forms of value, have a measurable impact on business performance. In our work powering loyalty programs and promotions with over 300 leading brands, we have repeatedly tested and proven how shifting from simple discounts to creative promotions creates durable business value.

Given 20% of revenue is discounted away, any simple price promotion replaced with a creative mechanic makes an impact.

A creative mechanic is one that delivers value through experience, emotion, or engagement rather than a straight price reduction — think a gamified challenge, a culturally-timed reward, or a personalized incentive tied to customer behavior. Because discounts directly decrease purchase price, every cent spared comes through directly on the bottom line. ■



## GOAL

## KPI INFLUENCED

### Grow the bottom line

Effective promotions minimize and optimize damage to purchase price, directly driving bottom-line growth.

### Decrease discount rate

Effective promotions avoid unnecessarily decreasing purchase price.

### Increase customer engagement & spend

Effective promotions drive incremental customer engagement and transactions.

### Drive incremental behavior

Effective promotions are incremental and generate new customer behaviors, resulting in additional purchase.

### Increase customer engagement

Effective promotions increase customer engagement, building brand salience, collecting additional data, and increasing the likelihood of future spend.

### Protect the brand

Effective promotions help build a more beloved and resilient brand, thereby increasing enterprise value.

### Improve pricing power

Effective promotions defend the business' ability to hold to and increase prices.





THE EIGHT CREATIVE CURRENCIES

# Theoretical foundations

Price discounts work because they appeal to the most basic layer of consumer decision-making: rational economic self-interest. But decades of research in behavioral science tell us that humans are more complex than that.

**Daniel Kahneman** and **Amos Tversky**, the psychologists whose foundational work established behavioral economics, showed through prospect theory that people value gains and losses asymmetrically, and that how value is framed matters as much as the value itself.

**Robert Cialdini**, author of *Influence* and one of the foremost researchers in

persuasion science, demonstrated that psychological forces (scarcity, social proof, reciprocity, commitment) reliably shape behavior in ways that pure price cannot. And **Abraham Maslow**, whose hierarchy of needs is one of the most widely referenced models in psychology, reminds us that once basic financial needs are met, humans are motivated by belonging, status, self-expression, and purpose.

The Creative Currencies draw on these bodies of work. They represent the distinct categories of non-financial value that brands can offer customers through promotions. Each currency maps to a proven human motivation.

## Moving beyond financial value

Customers demand value. Price reductions are the most preferred currency. But given the business case for better promotions, and the existential threat posed by the discount death spiral, marketers must think beyond a purely financial value proposition in their promotional work.

# The eight Creative Currencies

- 
- 1. **Utility** Value rooted in solving a specific customer friction point or life problem

---

  - 2. **Game** Value rooted in gamification and behavioral psychology

---

  - 3. **Cultural** Value rooted in cultural values, trends, and moments

---

  - 4. **Social** Value that consumers can use to show off to their communities

---

  - 5. **Aspirational** Value that provides a life-changing opportunity to select customers

---

  - 6. **Purpose** Value in support of a social cause

---

  - 7. **Consistency** Value that compounds with promotional repetition

---

  - 8. **Counterintuitive** Value that builds salience by breaking rules and surprising the customer

# Utility currency

Utility currency addresses specific customer friction points or life problems. Promotions function as a direct solution to a real pain point, ensuring the promotion is perceived as a helpful service. The brand occupies the role of a functional partner integrated into the customer's daily life.



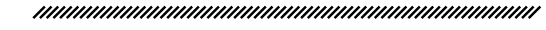
### Common mechanics

- VIP treatments and access that avoid the friction associated with the category.
- Partner perks and rewards that solve adjacent pain points to the category.



# Game currency

Game currency leverages cognitive biases and behavioral nudges to increase the perceived value and urgency of an offer using gamified mechanics. Promotions use scarcity, loss aversion, and variable rewards to drive engagement beyond the face-value cost of the promotion. The brand serves as an architect of engaging, fun experiences.

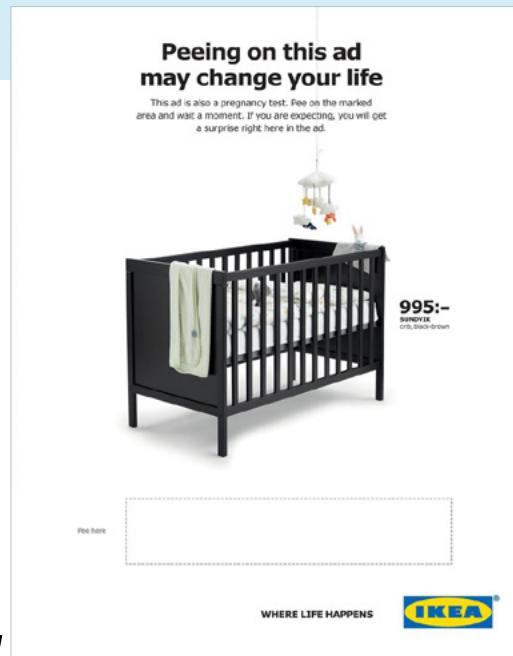


### Common mechanics

- Challenges that reward customers for completing a combination of transactional and engagement actions.
- Streaks or tiered rewards that leverage loss aversion and progress-tracking.



## Best-in-class examples ▼



**IKEA** printed an advertisement with a pregnancy test strip. If the test strip turned blue, they would see a promotional price on a crib.

**jetBlue** offered free roundtrip overseas flights to 1,000 American voters if their preferred political party lost an election.



**DiGiorno** offered customers a discount on a frozen pizza if they submitted a messed-up delivery pizza, with AI reviewing the image and offering a higher discount for more chaotic delivery pie.

## Best-in-class examples ▼



**Chipotle** celebrated National Burrito Day with the launch of its Burrito Vault game, challenging players to guess popular order combinations to unlock BOGO offers and enter a sweepstakes for a chance to win free burritos for a year.

**Sephora** regularly runs challenges for Beauty Insiders members, rewarding them with points for completing a mix of transactional and engagement challenges.



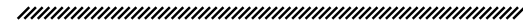
### Research insight: Game currency

System1 Group's research provides empirical support for the Game currency. The "Roll a Dice" offer scored highest of all six offers on uniqueness, and came second on excitement, innovation, and memorability." This is consistent with neuroscience: dopamine spikes more strongly in anticipation of uncertain rewards than guaranteed ones, meaning the moment of suspense before an outcome creates a more memorable brand experience than a fixed discount ever can. Importantly, the research also identifies the

conditions under which gamified mechanics underperform, and how to address them. The primary barriers were perceived risk, association with gambling, and distrust of the odds. These are fixable design problems, not fundamental weaknesses of the mechanic. In light of this, we recommend being transparent about odds, offering tiered rewards across multiple outcomes (not just the jackpot), and favoring active participation mechanics — like rolling a dice — over passive sweepstakes entry.

## Cultural currency

Cultural currency aligns the brand with current global trends, events, or societal conversations. The activation transforms the customer into an insider participating in a specific cultural moment. The brand functions as a relevant conduit for social belonging and cultural participation.



### Common mechanics

- Limited-time rewards triggered by external events, trends, or specific cultural moments.
- Exclusive access or products that signify membership in a current cultural conversation.



### Best-in-class examples ▼

**&pizza** offered two pizzas for \$13.87 if customers texted a number when Taylor Swift was shown during a KC Chiefs NFL game (87 being her fiancé Travis Kelce's number, and 13 being a signature number for Taylor Swift).



**Coca-Cola** let customers create 'fan cards' (like player trading cards) to earn a chance to win a weekly prize drop, including a grand prize of attending FIFA World Cup 26.

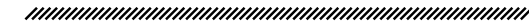
## Social currency

Social currency provides customers with moments or artifacts designed for broadcast to their personal networks. The promotion creates shareable stories or personalized data visualizations that validate the user's status within their community. The brand acts as a generator of personal capital and social influence for the consumer.

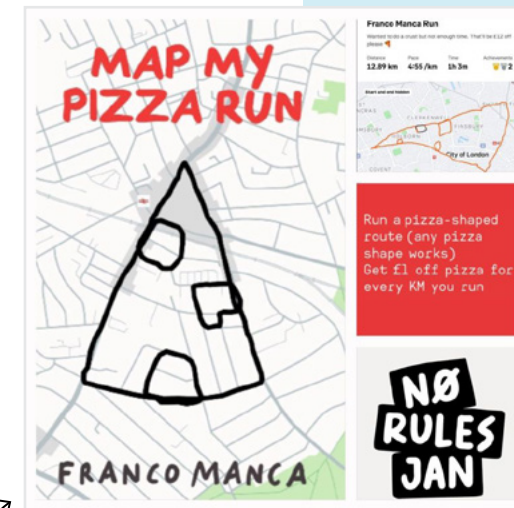


### Common mechanics

- Personalized data visualizations or summaries designed for peer-to-peer sharing.
- Collaborative or competitive mechanics that allow users to broadcast their status to their network.

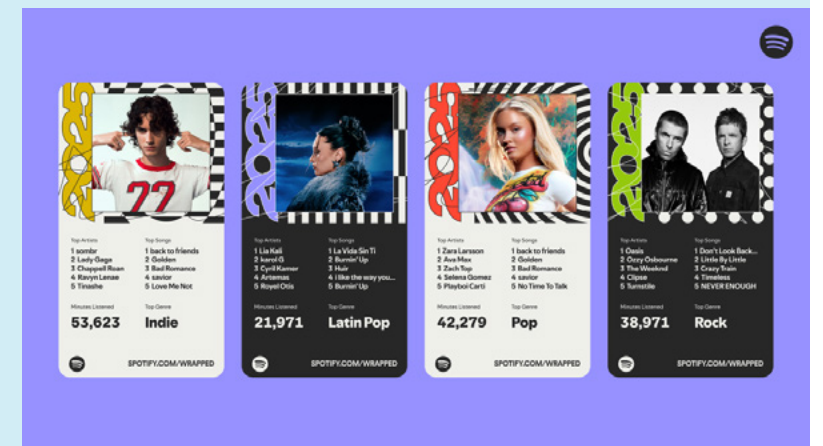


### Best-in-class examples ▼



**Franco Manca** map my pizza run gave customers £1 off a pizza per mile run – provided they took a route in the shape of a pizza and mapped it on run-tracking tools.

**Spotify** wrapped recognizes users for their listening habits, giving them a highly personalized artifact to share highlighting their listening habits.



## Aspirational currency

Aspirational currency concentrates high value into a few extraordinary opportunities rather than distributing marginal savings across a broad base. The model utilizes asymmetric payouts where the “what if” factor generates massive engagement at a low cost-per-participant. The brand assumes the role of a gatekeeper to life-changing experiences and exclusive rewards.

////////////////////////////////////

### Common mechanics

- Concentrated prize pools that offer life-changing experiences to a small number of winners.
  - Low-friction entries for high-perceived-value rewards that would otherwise be out of reach.
- ////////////////////////////////////

### Best-in-class examples ▼

**19 Crimes**, one of Australia’s fastest-growing wine brands, placed 400 winning corks in randomly selected wine bottles across their range, giving customers the chance to win a share of £100,000.



**Mastercard’s** “Priceless Experiences” allow cardholders to unlock exclusive, money-can’t-buy experiences — from finish line seats at the Tokyo marathon, to access-all-areas festival tickets to Ultra Europe.



#### Research insight: Aspirational currency

System1 Group’s research offers a direct test of two aspirational mechanics: a chance to win FIFA World Cup tickets and a chance to win \$100,000. Both offers scored at the bottom of the tested set (1.1 Stars each), but for different reasons that point to different solutions. The FIFA tickets offer struggled primarily with relevance: the prize only appeals to football fans.

The mechanic itself was sound: FIFA actually scored higher than \$100k on believability, trustworthiness, and recognizability. The fix is straightforward: choose a more universally appealing experiential prize, or

scope the activation to an audience that enjoys FIFA.

The \$100k offer faced a more fundamental challenge. When a prize is so large it feels unattainable, consumers psychologically discount it — the odds become an abstraction and the offer is dismissed as a gimmick. This is consistent with Prospect Theory: when the probability of winning feels negligible, the size of the reward stops mattering. In light of this, and for Aspirational currency to work, the prize must feel real, relevant, and attainable enough to sustain the “what if.”

## Purpose currency

Purpose currency facilitates customer impact on specific social or environmental causes. The promotional mechanism links the transaction directly to a contribution toward a shared ethical goal. The brand serves as a platform for collective social responsibility and value-driven action.

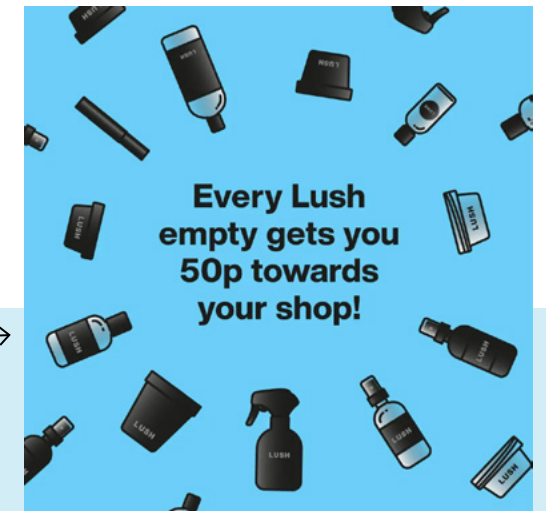
////////////////////////////////////

### Common mechanics

- Mechanisms that link customer actions directly to donations or social impact initiatives.
  - Buy-back or recycling programs that reward customers for supporting a circular economy.
- ////////////////////////////////////

### Best-in-class examples ▼

**LUSH** encourages customers to return empty Lush containers to its stores through its Bring It Back recycling program. Participants receive a reward, such as a free fresh face mask for returning five qualifying pots or a credit toward a purchase for individual returns.



**The Quaker Oats Company** partnered with food charities Magic Breakfast and FareShare to donate up to 2.5 million warm porridge breakfasts to communities in need, with purchases of special packs contributing to the initiative.



## Consistency currency

Consistency currency generates compounding value through the habitual repetition of a promotion. The reward structure relies on a predictable cadence to build consumer re-engagement and long-term behavioral routines. The brand becomes a reliable fixture within the consumer's recurring lifestyle cycles.



### Common mechanics

- Regularly scheduled rewards that build a recurring engagement habit.
- Value structures that increase or compound based on repeated participation over time.



### Best-in-class examples ▼



Sky Cinema partnered with cinema chain Vue to give subscribers two free cinema tickets every month — a tangible, recurring reward that reinforces the value of Sky subscriptions beyond the home.



Costa Coffee's Treat Drops reward program members with special offers every month — including free cakes, discounted drinks, and 2-for-1 offers — each valid for a week. The monthly cadence encourages members to build Costa visits into their routine.

### Research insight: Consistency currency

The “3x loyalty points” offer in our research serves as a useful cautionary tale for Consistency currency. Loyalty points scored 1.4 Stars overall: better than the sweepstakes offers, but well below the discounts — and the qualitative feedback points to a specific and addressable failure: the absence of a clear, tangible end benefit.

Respondents repeatedly asked “what are the points actually worth?” and noted the offer was only meaningful for existing members who shop frequently. This is not an indictment of loyalty mechanics; it is a reminder that Consistency currency only compounds

when the underlying reward feels real and the category supports the required purchase frequency.

Our analysis identifies the conditions under which loyalty mechanics thrive: high purchase frequency, fast points accumulation, meaningful rewards, switching costs, and the ability to layer in identity or status.

The implication for Consistency currency is a design imperative: always make the end reward explicit, ensure the redemption path feels achievable, and consider whether status or identity benefits can be layered on top of transactional points to increase perceived value.

## Counterintuitive currency

Counterintuitive currency deliberately subverts industry norms and customer expectations to build salience. The mechanic uses absurdity or rule-breaking to drive earned media, press coverage, and brand memorability. The brand positions itself as a disruptive authority that prioritizes authenticity over conventional sales tactics.



### Common mechanics

- Promotions that deliberately subvert category norms.
- Absurd or “pointless” participation mechanics that generate attention and reinforce brand identity.



### Best-in-class examples ▼



Patagonia “Don’t Buy This Jacket”: On Black Friday, Patagonia ran a full-page ad telling customers not to buy their jacket — encouraging repair and reuse instead. The counterintuitive message drove record sales because it built trust and brand admiration.



Burger King ran a promotion where customers could unlock a free Whopper while within 600 feet of a McDonald's.



Cards Against Humanity “pay us to dig a hole”: The company asked customers to pay money for them to dig a pointless hole in the ground. Hundreds of thousands participated. The absurdity was the product, and it reinforced brand identity while generating massive earned media.

## Putting Creative Currencies into practice

We advise marketing teams to bring the Creative Currencies into promotions planning and explore their application in a given promotion's audience, behavior, and reward:

### Audience

Can we scope this promotion to an audience interested in a specific currency? Can we personalize the promotion to strengthen the most relevant currency for a given customer?

### Behavior

Can we reward behaviors that help the customer earn a currency?

### Reward

Can the actual promotional reward offer value aligned with the creative currencies?

When bringing the Creative Currencies into promotions design, two angles are worth bearing in mind:

### Focus on the reward, not just the mechanic

The easiest application of Creative Currencies is to use them to shape the reward rather than the entry mechanic. But the strongest promotions go further, using the currency to design the entire experience, from how the customer enters to what they receive and how they share it.

While creatively-earned price promotions avoid much of the brand damage done by a simple price reduction, they often miss an opportunity to deliver value beyond price (and to protect the bottom line).

### Mix and match

The eight Creative Currencies are not mutually exclusive. The best promotions often combine two or three.

### A practical example

Consider a sportswear brand running a spring campaign to drive new member acquisition and increase average basket size:

#### Default approach:

15% off your first order. Simple, clear, but price-lowering and forgettable.

#### Creative Currency approach:

1. "Complete the Spring Starter Challenge." Buy any two items from the new season range and unlock a mystery reward (Game currency).
2. Tie the launch to a cultural running event or fitness moment (Cultural currency).
3. Make the reward shareable — a personalized "starter kit" graphic for social media (Social currency).

The discount element is still present, as the mystery reward could include money off a future purchase, but it's now wrapped in a mechanic that drives a larger basket, creates memorability, and gives the customer a reason to come back. ■

## Capabilities to get you there

BUILDING THE RIGHT CAPABILITY

# Technology and teams for execution at scale

Designing a creative promotion is one thing — executing it consistently, at scale, and in a way that’s measurable is another. The following section, contributed by MAP at WPP Enterprise Solutions — the global center of excellence within WPP for CRM, loyalty, marketing automation and personalization — outlines the key capabilities brands need to bring Creative Currencies to life.

## Define goals to set rules

First, a clear understanding of how Creative Currency promotions meet both business priorities and customer wants is required. This balance is critical to ensure a mutual value exchange that maximizes customer engagement.

### Business Drivers

It is important to distinguish between strategic goals and tactical promotions.

- Strategic: Member acquisition, basket growth, brand engagement, retention/win-back.
- Tactical: Product promotion, overstock clearance, seasonal sales.

### Customer Drivers

Consider the Creative Currency mechanics and how they can apply to specific audience segments. For example:

- For frequent purchasers, using utility mechanics that reduce friction by leveraging historical transaction data to simplify the purchase of their regular order within 1-2 clicks, are effective for time-poor, routine-based purchases.

Once alignment is achieved, rule definition is key to ensuring promotions are managed effectively and in a compliant manner, avoiding consumer friction or disappointment.

### Examples of rule considerations:

- How many times and how often can a customer claim the reward (e.g., once per promotion/transaction)?
- Are there volume or time-constraints associated with the promotion (such as the quantity of a gift with purchase)?
- Will an alternative be offered when a promotion with a constraint has expired?

This approach moves organizations away from one-to-all discounts focused on short-term sales, toward tailored, personalized Creative Currencies aligned to business outcomes and customer motivations.

## Get the architecture right

Delivering these goals and rules in a connected, consistent, and relevant way requires a robust and fully integrated architecture. This architecture acts as a central ‘brain’ for all promotional activity, with data as its fuel.

## A typical architecture comprises of:

### Customer Data Platform

Gathers and unifies customer data to understand behaviors and define audiences by bringing together real-time events, transactional data, and engagement behaviors — as well as leveraging partner and external datasets for insights beyond first-party data.

### Enterprise Resource Planning

Uses organization data to manage Creative Currencies effectively, such as inventory data for stock-based promotions or finance data to evaluate and adjust currency values.

### Loyalty Management Platform (e.g., Talon.One)

This acts as the vital brain and decisioning engine to manage the rules behind the Creative Currencies and support fraud detection, enriching member profiles with their specific engagements. The platform distributes this information across the architecture — downstream for real-time activation and upstream for insights and optimization.

### Customer Engagement Platform

Orchestrates and executes personalized communications and tracks engagement across across owned and paid channels.

### Content Management System

Manages content and personalization across member portals, member communications, and touchpoints (web, app, self-service retail screens).

### e-Commerce & POS platforms

Delivers and tracks personalized experiences in purchase channels, promoting personalized Creative Currencies and supporting program mechanics such as reward codes or points allocation and redemption.

### Customer Service tools

Ensures that customer service agents can access up-to-date customer information and support any promotional or loyalty-based queries.

### BI/Analytics

Leverages a complete picture of promotions to generate insights, dashboards, and reports to analyze and optimize performance, customer lifetime value, member engagement, and ROI.

Investing in the right technologies enables tangible use cases for AI to drive efficiency, accuracy, and personalization at scale with Creative Currencies.

This includes using propensity models to predict customer behavior, leveraging personalized algorithms to understand the ‘why behind the buy’ and using AI-powered testing to predict the success of experimentation prior to activation.

A lack of data integration and slow data latency can result in missed opportunities, as some data signals become less relevant as time passes. Robust, real-time data streams via APIs unlock instantaneous data flow and ensure downstream systems can deliver the most relevant Creative Currency and content at the precise moment of customer intent.

CONTINUED ►

## Organize your teams to deliver — as one

### Effective orchestration is fundamentally dependent on the people delivering it

Achieving business goals within the integrated architecture requires a customer-centric culture that fosters collaboration and breaks down traditional silos. This calls for a culture that prioritizes long-term customer value, addressing the classic tension between Sales (needing to hit targets) and Brand (wanting long-term advocacy). It also requires clear roles and responsibilities.

#### Leadership sell-in & advocacy

Strong leadership endorsement for collaboration is critical, as is buy-in to use the full suite of Creative Currencies to not only meet short-term sales targets, but also build brand desirability and ensure sustained, profitable growth.

#### Cross-functional teams

Collaboration across the organization, led by the Marketing and CRM team as the natural connector, and to share and leverage customer/program data and insights, is essential. Representation across the business should include:

- Sales to voice business goals and priorities
- Customer Service and Retail to represent the customer and their perspectives
- Digital, CRM, Customer Service and Retail to execute in their channels
- Martech/IT to connect data and technology and innovation



#### James Elliott

Head of Solution Consulting, MAP at WPP Enterprise Solutions

James Elliott has 20+ years of experience from the technology world. Before joining WPP Enterprise Solutions, he was part of Adobe for almost 10 years as an SME across multiple marketing solutions. He is a highly experienced and trusted marketing technology expert who has assisted some of the world's most recognizable brands with their transformation projects.



#### Kathrine Lauritzen

Business Consultancy Director, MAP at WPP Enterprise Solutions

Kathrine Lauritzen has 20+ years of experience in business architecture, global/local operational models, organizational setups, change management and development of processes supporting tools and systems. Kathrine specializes in creating synergies between people, processes and technology by building organizational setups that ensure the big picture is reflected in the details and vice versa.



#### Paul Jempson

Strategy Director, MAP at WPP Enterprise Solutions

Paul Jempson has 25+ years of experience across loyalty, CCX and CRM and brings a wealth of strategic, data and technology experience with a customer-first mindset to define and refine loyalty and customer experiences. He has experience across multiple industries including automotive, retail, fashion and FMCG.

## Our ways of working ensure agility, creativity, and customer-centricity through four core principles:

1

### Ideation through AI: Unleashing limitless creativity

Using agentic AI and informed by insights from the Creative Currencies, to rapidly generate, review, and refine concepts. This accelerates the ideation process, transforming perceived limitations into drivers for innovation, and running simulated tests to validate before committing to real-life testing.

3

### The customer as a co-creator: Flipping the funnel with social-first engagement

Customers are strategically positioned as active participants, not passive recipients. Through social-first testing and engagement, real-time feedback is gathered to validate and refine concepts, ensuring local relevancy and authentic value. This “flips the funnel” for continuous learning through an outside-in lens.

2

### The goosebump moment: Where human intuition shapes breakthroughs

With AI managing the intensive work of ideation, human intuition becomes paramount for ensuring business context and relevancy. The team jointly identifies concepts that create “goosebump” moments — those with genuine breakthrough potential, strong resonance, and alignment across both business and customer drivers.

4

### Ensuring always-on optimization: Promotions that stay relevant, effective and profitable

Leveraging AI to listen and learn from customer behaviors and responses, adjusting what is promoted moving forward. As patterns emerge, AI can adjust promotion strategies in real-time, optimizing for engagement and conversion within predefined guardrails. Beyond AI, the cross-functional teams are jointly responsible for monitoring performance and driving optimization back into the ideation process.

By aligning people, platforms, and processes across the organization, brands can execute promotions across the spectrum of Creative Currencies through a data-driven approach and a collaborative, customer-centric culture. ■

WPP Enterprise Solutions is the global center of excellence within WPP for CRM, loyalty, marketing automation and personalization. WPP Enterprise Solutions help brands unlock the full value of customer relationships by designing, activating, and scaling connected experiences that drive loyalty, growth, and lifetime value.

# Conclusion

Promotions are one of the most powerful tools in a marketer’s arsenal, and one of the most misused. The pull of the simple discount is real and, as the research in this report confirms, consumers will always feel the immediate appeal of guaranteed financial value. But that appeal is a trap. Every time a brand reaches for a price cut, it trains customers to expect the next one, chips away at its premium, and takes another step down the discount death spiral.

The eight Creative Currencies demonstrate that customers are motivated by far more than price: by the thrill of a game, the pull of a cultural moment, the pride of social recognition, the aspiration of a life-changing experience.

These are deeply human motivations, grounded in behavioral science — and they offer a way out. Every percentage point not discounted away flows directly to the bottom line, and every promotion that builds salience or deepens loyalty compounds in value over time in a way that a price cut never can.

The Creative Currencies framework gives marketing teams a practical structure for making that shift: not by replacing financial value, but by expanding what value can mean. The brands that will grow are those that make customers feel something. That is what separates creative promotions from those that simply reduce brands to a replaceable commodity. ■

## CONTRIBUTORS

### Talon.One

#### CONTENT

**Christoph Gerber**  
CEO

**Rachel Lynch**  
VP Marketing

**Sam Panzer**  
Director of Industry Strategy

**Isabelle Watson**  
Head of Content & Communications

#### DESIGN

**Caroline Nolan**  
Head of Brand & Design

**Lu Arnold**  
Senior Visual Designer

### Mando

**Charlie Hills**  
CSO

**Leonie Walker**  
Managing Director

### WPP Enterprise Solutions

**James Elliott**  
Head of Solution Consulting

**Kathrine Lauritzen**  
Business Consultancy Director

**Paul Jempson**  
Strategy Director



Talon.One is the most powerful incentives engine that unifies loyalty, personalized promotions and offer management into a single platform.

Built for enterprise scale, 300 of the world's most-loved brands including Adidas, Sephora and Carlsberg work with Talon.One to turn their incentives into a reliable growth engine.



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

