

# CHRISTMAS ADS

Rebecca Thomson speaks to advertising and social media experts to find out how retailers' festive campaigns fared

## Who won the Christmas

If there is one trend to have come from 2014's crop of Christmas ads, it's that across the board retailers have raised their game this year.

There are fewer tired ideas and retailers have introduced a bit more imagination to their marketing.

"Everyone has upped their game a little bit," says Logan Wilmont, executive creative director at creative agency Cheil UK. "The category has been redefined by John Lewis. They've redefined what communication should be and have done it rather brilliantly over the past three to four years."

### Christmas cliches

Although not everyone is quite at that level, Wilmont says.

There is still a liberal sprinkling of Christmas cliches and Richard Huntington, director of strategy at Saatchi and Saatchi, is less charitable about this year's ads.

"There might be an average rise in quality, but really it's because the two big performers – Sainsbury's and John Lewis – from last year are the big performers this year again. The rest are advertising by numbers."

Wilmont says: "There's a bunch of stuff that is 'same old, same old'." Asda's 'Christmas Smiles' ad, Morrisons' Ant and Dec ad, and Debenhams' gifting-focused ad are not Huntington or Wilmont's favourites, but others attract praise.

Waitrose and Argos both win plaudits from Huntington – the former for its "charming story" and the latter for trying something new. "I love the change in direction," he says. "It's an uplifting piece of work."

Wilmont commends Lidl and House of Fraser for trying "something fresher" – both went down a reality TV-driven route this year.

M&S's fairy-themed ad, meanwhile, splits opinion – Wilmont says it raises a smile, but Huntington believes the 'magic and sparkle' approach is a tired one.

### Emotional pull

Boots' hard-working nurse and Sainsbury's First World War story win praise.

Wilmont says of Sainsbury's: "I have a slight issue in that it is a fraction manipulative, but I am prepared to overlook that."

"It's the right sentiment, and is very ambitious – it's not just a bad version of a John Lewis ad. It is stunningly executed and fits into the spirit and sentiment of the moment."

Huntington calls the Sainsbury's ad an "extraordinary piece of work" and says the gro-

### Who won the social media battle?

Andrew Fairclough, head of social media insight at Carat, and Ed Hartigan, head of earned media at iProspect UK, rank the social media performance of the different ads.

#### Methodology

The social media insight team at Carat and the earned media team at iProspect measured social buzz in the UK over the week immediately following each advert's release date. Social buzz includes blogs, forums, tweets, and news articles – sentiment is measured across all of these platforms using a search for key words. Reach and hashtags are measured across Twitter only.

cer is riding a wave of confidence after building on its offer last year.

If this performance continues, it might even start to threaten the position of the reigning king of Christmas advertising, John Lewis – although its 'Monty the Penguin' ad hit the nail on the head this year.

The department store retailer produced another emotional ad with a twist at the end.

The real achievement, however, Wilmont says, is the fact that the ad has become such an event. "It's now part of our culture. It's extraordinary that a piece of advertising can become part of our culture at Christmas."

Another winner for Huntington is Harvey Nichols' 'Could I be any clearer' ad, which touches on the less generous side of human nature that Christmas brings out. "It's a brand that really understands its audience," he says.

As the social media analysis below shows, Sainsbury's performed well online.

Lessons from how the ads fared on social media include ensuring every ad has a Twitter hashtag that is clearly visible in the ad; spending some budget on a full social strategy to boost buzz once it has launched; and, of course, picking the right song.



### JOHN LEWIS

John Lewis's buzz and mentions were down on last year, although launching during *Gogglebox*, a highly tweeted-about TV show, was a good strategy and drove much of the ad's engagement and a large percentage of the 14,700 mentions. #Montythepenguin was also the most popular hashtag with 6,676 mentions. But John Lewis didn't quite reach the heights of last year.

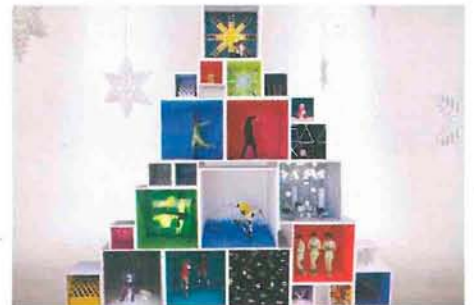
**Buzz** 14,702 mentions

**Reach** 47.4 million

**Hashtag use** 6,675

**Sentiment**

36% Positive / 51% Neutral / 10% Negative



### ARGOS

The bold move of completely ignoring traditional Christmas scenes paid off, with lots of positive attention around Argos's hip-hop offer.

#Christmasinholis was the fourth most used hashtag while #rundmc gave John Lewis's #Montythepenguin a run for its money as the second most-used. Its airing during *The X Factor* also helped. However, by not having an advert-specific hashtag Argos missed an opportunity to create more buzz.

**Buzz** 213 mentions

**Reach** 625,405

**Hashtag use** 16

**Sentiment**

39% Positive / 26% Neutral / 35% Negative

To see pictures of retailers' Christmas window displays visit [Retail-week.com/christmaswindows2014](http://Retail-week.com/christmaswindows2014)



# as ad battle?



## SAINSBURY'S

Christmas this year belongs to Sainsbury's. The ad received 24,000 mentions in the first week alone, and the partnership with the Royal British Legion was generally well received, with the words 'poppy legion' and 'proud' featuring heavily online. Interestingly, the ad benefited from being the last to air because people spent a lot of time comparing it to the rest.

**Buzz** 24,401 mentions **Reach** 83.7 million **Hashtag use** 8,042

### Sentiment

29% Positive / 55% Neutral / 16% Negative



## ALDI

While the Aldi ad didn't quite get the engagement the retailer would have hoped for, it could have avoided much of the negative sentiment (31%) by removing the Jools Holland cameo at the end. A comparison with M&S's clever social strategy can be seen here. The Aldi ad grabbed just 100 fewer mentions than the M&S effort, but only attained a reach of 504,037 compared with M&S's 3.7 million.

**Buzz** 403 mentions

**Reach** 504,037

**Hashtag use** 27

### Sentiment

18% Positive / 51% Neutral / 31% Negative



## LIDL

Lidl's ad, which showed real people being served Christmas dinner and being surprised at the end with news of its provenance, didn't go down quite so well with the general public. However, it's not all bad; most of the positive sentiment around the ad came from people agreeing that Lidl products were surprisingly good.

**Buzz** 311 mentions

**Reach** 1.1 million

**Hashtag use** 266

### Sentiment

1% Positive / 84% Neutral / 15% Negative



## MARKS & SPENCER

M&S's effort was a solid example of using intelligent investment in social media to push a message. Despite only attracting 534 mentions, the fact that it promoted its Christmas handle @thetwofairies and used this to push its CSR messages saw its reach fly up to 3.7 million – a very big number. And 23% of its buzz happened on blogs and in news stories (this is low single figures for most ads).

**Buzz** 534 mentions

**Reach** 3.7 million

**Hashtag use** 188

### Sentiment

42% Positive / 51% Neutral / 7% Negative

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Read more on Christmas at [Retail-week.com/christmas](http://Retail-week.com/christmas)



## WAITROSE

Waitrose was another ad, like Argos, that profited from the choice of song. People went mad for the cover of Dolly Parton's *Try*. However, the grocer missed a trick by not integrating its hashtag into the ad and only choosing to spend budget on promoting eight days after launch, once interest in the execution had died down.

**Buzz** 861 mentions

**Reach** 1.7 million

**Hashtag use** 145 mentions since the ad was launched, but only one in the first week.

**Sentiment**

43% Positive / 43% Neutral / 14% Negative



## BOOTS

The Boots ad highlights why you need to be careful when analysing your social data and take context into account. The overall sentiment for Boots is 46% negative, 28% neutral and 26% positive. At first glance this looks bad. But after looking at the conversations more closely you can see that a large amount of the negative mentions were down to people having a strong emotional response to the advert, such as "the Boots advert made me cry". Obviously this is the effect the ad is trying to achieve and these conversations should be construed as positive rather than negative. Lots of people actually connected with the nurse and suggested they'd do the same 'surprise Christmas' for their family members. #SpecialBecause was mentioned a total of 317 times and reached peak popularity on November 13 when Boots tweeted a YouTube link to the video and asked fans who is special to them - a very canny strategy.

**Buzz** 655 mentions

**Reach** 707,536

**Hashtag use** 317

**Sentiment**

26% Positive / 28% Neutral / 46% Negative



## TESCO

With 833 mentions and 53% of posts carrying a positive sentiment, Tesco's Christmas lights-themed ad fared well. Much of this positive sentiment was driven by the added extra of being able to view the whole light show online - which the *Mirror* called "the most spectacular lightshow since the London Olympics" - after the ad debuted on TV. A very intelligent and effective move, which picked up more than 650,000 views on YouTube.

**Buzz** 833 mentions **Reach** 2.2 million **Hashtag use** 355

**Sentiment**

53% Positive / 37% Neutral / 10% Negative



## MORRISONS

The ad garnered a lot of positive sentiment (31%) because people really love Ant and Dec. Fans spent a lot of time simply discussing how much they love the pair. Despite only getting 284 mentions (relatively low) the ad had a very high comparative reach. This was largely due to high authority Twitter accounts discussing the ad, including the *Daily Express*.

**Buzz** 284 mentions

**Reach** 2.8 million

**Hashtag use** 53

**Sentiment**

31% Positive / 60% Neutral / 9% Negative



## HOUSE OF FRASER

While hiring beautiful models to front the campaign may fit with the fashion-led brand, it did not sit right with the average consumer. Regular people just couldn't connect with the angular stunners on screen. The meagre 1% that enjoyed the advert enjoyed it because they thought it seemed authentic and modern. House of Fraser also made the mistake of not having a hashtag associated with the ad.

**Buzz** 152 mentions

**Reach** 422,488

**Hashtag use** 66

**Sentiment**

1% Positive / 37% Neutral / 62% Negative

