



SCANNING FOR SUCCESS

# BOOST TV PERFORMANCE WITH QR CODES



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# BACKGROUND

# Background

Invented in the 1990s to track vehicles during manufacturing, [QR \(Quick Response\) codes](#) advanced traditional barcodes by storing data in a two-dimensional space. The small, square patterns could store massive amounts of information in a tiny area and were easy to scan.

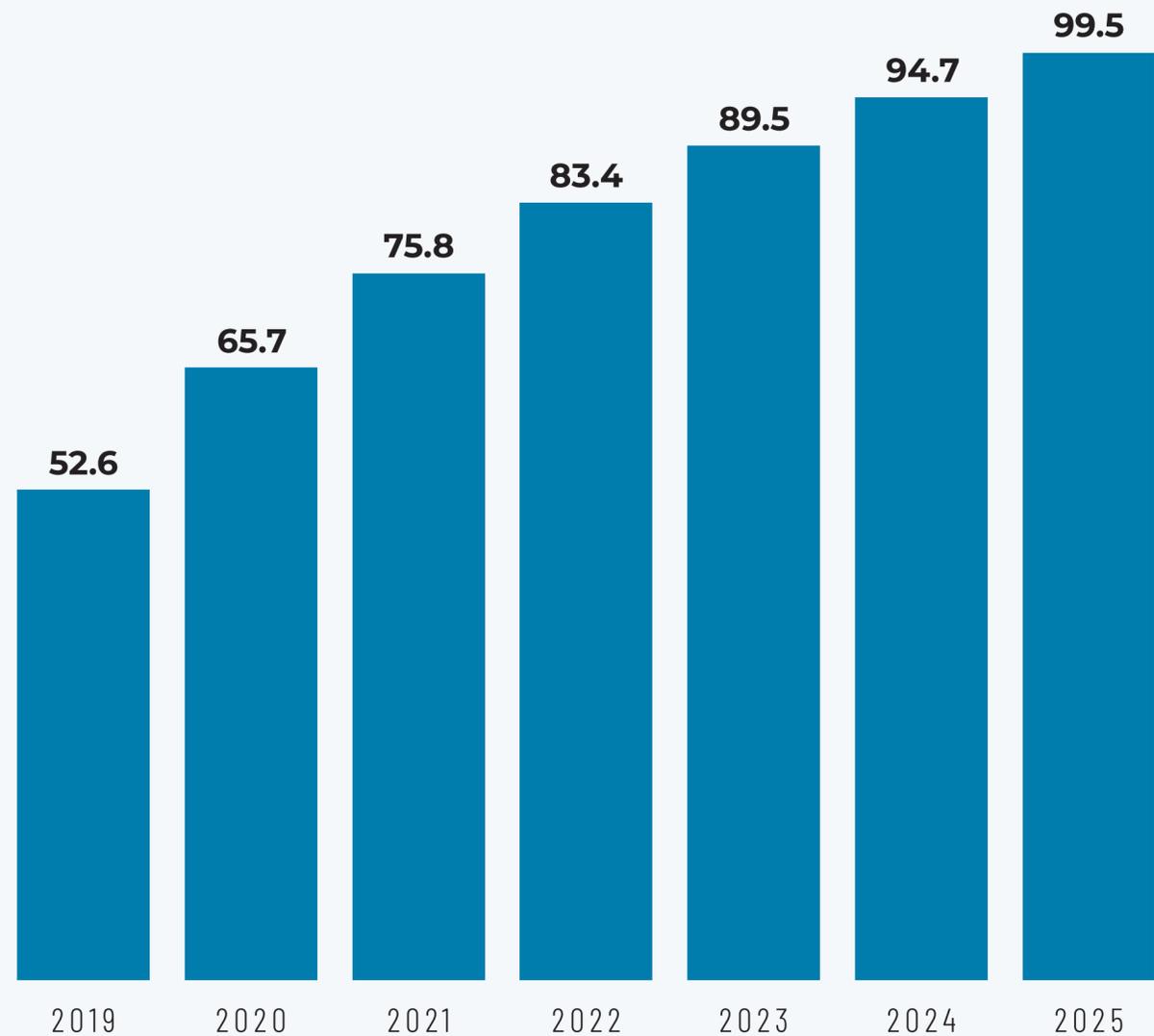
So it didn't take long before QR code use expanded beyond the industrial sector. Retailers used them to track products. Consumer-packaged-goods brands placed the codes on labels, letting buyers scan the code to get more information or sign up for a loyalty program. Marketers across industries recognized

“QR codes  
**store massive  
amounts of  
information** and  
are easy to scan.”



# US Smartphone QR Code Scanners

Millions, 2019-2025



eMarketer

the QR code as an opportunity to engage potential customers in a unique way.

But widespread consumer adoption was initially slow. Smartphones weren't common until the 2010s. And even then, phone users needed to download a special "QR Reader" app to scan the codes. It was inconvenient—the exact problem the codes were attempting to solve.

But of course, as smartphone technology evolved, camera apps eventually supported QR code scanning, eliminating the need for third-party readers. The codes gained popularity but weren't truly mainstream.

Then came 2020. With a global pandemic pushing people toward contactless interactions whenever possible, QR codes were an ideal solution. You could order at a restaurant without handling a menu that others had touched. You could pay for your weekly grocery haul without pressing buttons on a card reader. Even checking in at your doctor's office was touch-free. By the end of 2020, smartphone users who scanned QR codes had [grown nearly 25%](#), from 53 to 66 million.

This wasn't a temporary increase. While the rate of growth no longer matches 2020 levels, QR code adoption continues to grow. In 2022, 83 million US

smartphone users scanned QR codes. By 2025, that number will be just shy of 100 million, or slightly less than a third of the entire US population. Even more importantly, [75% of US consumers](#) say they plan to continue using QR codes in the future. This number [rises to 82%](#) when only looking at adults ages 18-44.

Today, QR codes show up when enabling faster Wi-Fi connections at hotels, as your mobile ticket for a concert or event, and yes, within ads. QR code appearances are even common while watching a TV commercial from your couch.

But while consumers rapidly embraced QR technology out of sheer necessity, advertisers haven't progressed much in their understanding of best practices for QR codes compared to pre-pandemic days.

It's time for that to change.

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# QR CODES IN TV ADVERTISING

# QR Codes in TV Advertising

Finding a tool that bridges the gap between a potential customer seeing an ad and responding to it is every performance marketer's dream. Now, QR codes have emerged as a potent direct response instrument with the potential to do exactly that. It's why you see the codes on everything from newspapers to billboards, direct mail, and, of course, TV.

In 2022, cryptocurrency exchange platform Coinbase aired a 60-second Super Bowl commercial featuring a solitary QR code traipsing across the screen like a retro screensaver. The commercial was a massive success. [More than 20 million people](#) visited Coinbase's landing page in a single minute, [app installs jumped 309%](#) week-over-week, and the press buzzed about the unexpected approach. And yes, the minimalist production was surprising for a Super Bowl ad. But the commercial also signaled a new era for the QR code and its role in marketers' toolkits.

Marketers are eager to test QR codes in their TV campaigns for a few reasons.

“QR codes have emerged as a **potent direct response instrument.**”





**1. QR codes give brands a direct line to the consumer.** By simply scanning a code, users can immediately engage with a brand's promotional offer, exclusive content, or view the exact item they saw on TV. Such direct engagement cuts through barriers to action and leads to higher short-term response. Best of all, a QR code call-to-action aligns perfectly with current consumer behavior. Nearly 90% of TV viewers watch with a second device in hand. They're ready and able to scan a code on their TV screen if interested.

**2. There's also the matter of measurability.** With QR codes, a traditional marketing channel like TV gets a taste of digital-like insight into consumer response. Marketers can gauge the success of a campaign based on the number of scans, duration of engagement, and subsequent consumer actions, such as filling out a lead form or making a purchase.

**3. QR code integration can reduce operational expenditures.** Direct response TV commercials historically asked viewers to call a 1-800 number. And yes, this was a more popular approach twenty years ago, but many performance brands, especially those with older audiences, still use it today. However, this requires the brand to maintain a call center—which can be expensive. With QR codes, response becomes streamlined, digital and more cost-effective.

Despite the QR code's clear potential, the rapid shift in consumer behavior means TV advertisers are in uncharted territory. There's a shortage of comprehensive research on QR code best practices, especially for applying the codes to specific ad channels. Information on how consumers feel about the codes in TV commercials, what type of person is most likely to scan a code, the optimal placement for a code within an ad, and what users expect post-scan is crucial knowledge. Not having this information could result in a brand failing to harness the full potential of QR codes or even misusing them to the detriment of their campaigns.

Recognizing our own need for QR code best practices, we conducted a deep dive into the topic. In the following pages, you'll get access to what we discovered and learn how to incorporate QR codes into TV campaigns based on real-world client results, user testing research, and expert analysis.

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# METHODOLOGY

# Methodology

Our team used the following methods to determine the best ways to incorporate QR codes into TV campaigns.

1. **Primary research** including a survey with 1,000+ participants and user testing to provide real-life insights into how consumers engage with QR codes while watching TV commercials.
2. **Secondary research** from trusted sources like Nielsen, Statista, and eMarketer established a baseline understanding of current applications and adoption of QR codes plus consumers' general sentiment toward the technology.
3. Finally, **in-market TV campaigns** for our own clients tested a variety of approaches to find what drove the best possible response and conversion rates.



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# FINDINGS

## RESPONSE

# QR codes beat traditional response methods.

For performance marketers, improving ad response is crucial. Especially for those taking a performance-first approach on a mass-reach channel like TV.

QR codes provide an easy, low-commitment way for viewers to respond to a commercial that can feel more novel and engaging than old-school methods like calling a 1-800 number. But is there hard evidence that QR codes actually improve response rates on TV?

Signs point to yes. Based on in-market tests across a diverse group of clients ranging from DTC brands to insurance providers, QR codes repeatedly improved TV response rates.

However, it's important to note that not all responses will come directly from QR code scans. While most respondents will scan the code, some viewers will still opt to manually search for the brand's website instead of scanning. So when evaluating overall commercial performance, brands should take a holistic view with multiple measurement models. By only tracking QR scans, they risk undervaluing TV's impact.





## CASE STUDY

# QR Outperforms TFN and URL

A financial services provider had used toll-free numbers (TFN) as the call-to-action on their TV commercials for years. But times were changing, and phone response had declined as a preferred response method among consumers.

We tested adding a QR code into their creative instead, although a 1-800 number was still shown on the screen. Users who scanned the code were sent to a custom landing page.

Performance was promising. Responses came in at higher volumes, more quickly, and were easier to measure than with ads featuring only the 1-800

number. A small portion of viewers still chose to call the 1-800 number, but adding the code both increased response and streamlined measurement.

Next, we tested the QR code against a spot asking users to visit a custom URL. We thought it was possible the code's win over a 1-800 number could be due more to the audience not wanting to call than their excitement for QR codes. But QR codes still came out ahead, driving greater traffic to the brand's landing page than the URL spot.

### More response

Higher volume of responses

### Faster speed

Increased response speed

### Improved measurement

Easier-to-measure responses

## CONSUMER TRUST

# Consumers trust QR codes, if they trust your brand.

As more brands incorporate QR codes into their TV commercials, understanding viewers' perception of the technology is vital. So we conducted a series of tests with [Userlytics](#), a remote user testing platform.

The first study:

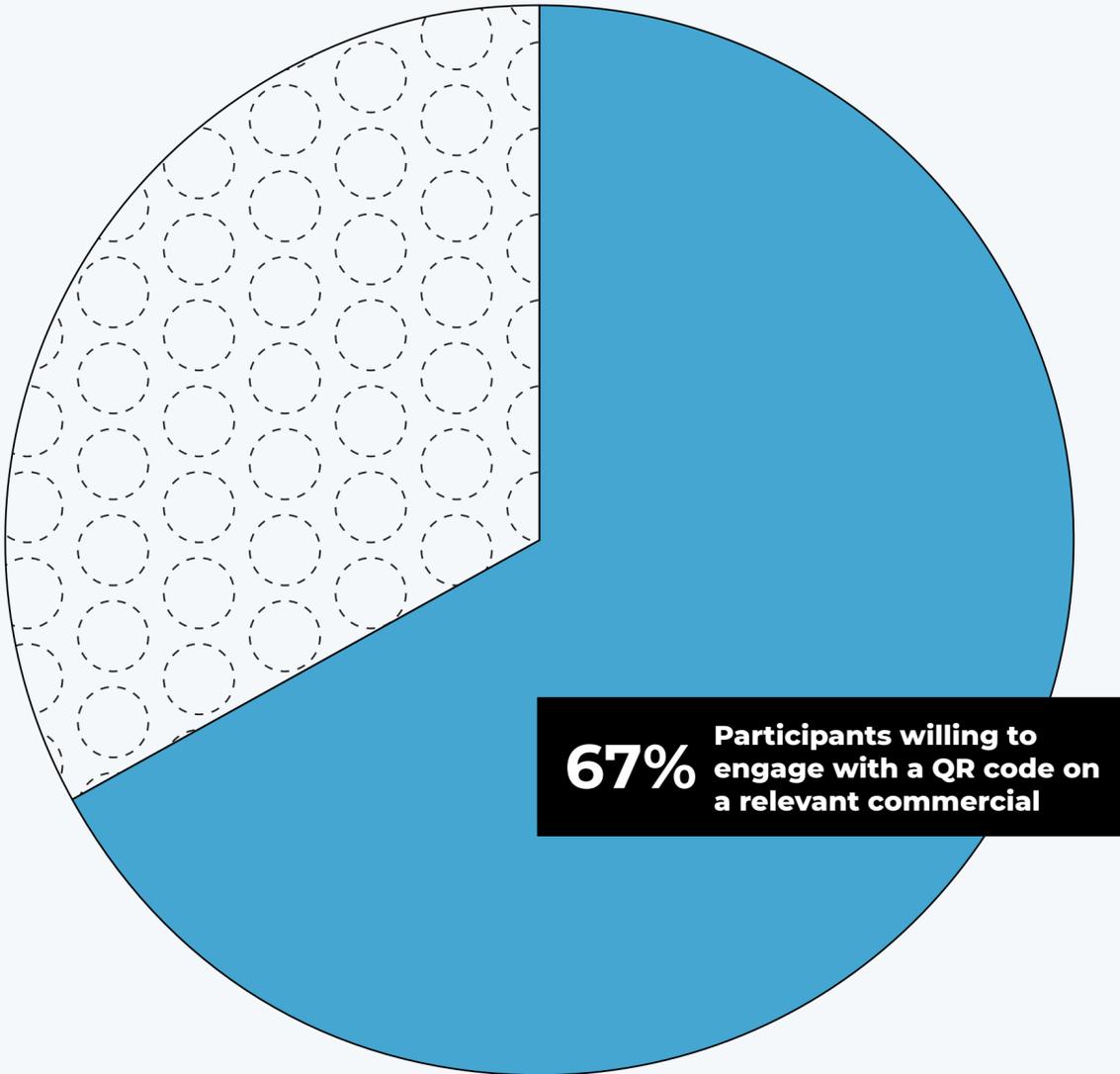
- Consisted of 15 separate 60-minute interview sessions in a moderated environment.
- 2/3 of participants were men; 1/3 were women.
- The median age of the participants was 40.

**“Two major factors** affect how trustworthy a QR code is perceived to be.”



# Television QR code engagement

% of participants willing to engage with a QR code on a relevant commercial



Subsequent studies were unmoderated and focused on learning how ‘average’ and ‘low-tech’ users felt about QR codes in TV. These let us engage with an additional 50 users across a wide range of demographics.

We anticipated some resistance to scanning codes given rising concerns around online safety and data privacy. But study participants generally had a positive view of QR codes and reported using them to save time or access important information in their everyday life. They did note, however, that trust was required to scan a code in the first place.

Two major factors affect how trustworthy a QR code is perceived to be within marketing content: the medium through which the code is shared and the brand sharing the code.

As one of the [most trusted marketing channels](#), TV is an environment where most people feel comfortable scanning QR codes. 67% of participants said they’ll engage with a QR code displayed during a commercial if it resonates with their interests. On the other hand, the participants expressed hesitation around scanning QR codes within a Facebook ad because they felt distrustful of Facebook’s vetting procedures.

In addition to the channel, trust of a QR code can be improved significantly if the user is already familiar with and trusts the brand being advertised. So, a brand with greater awareness or a more positive perception would likely get more value out of using a QR code than an unknown brand.

This matches eMarketer’s report that the top reason someone would not scan a QR code on a commercial was a lack of relevance. Only [16% across all age groups](#) said they wouldn’t scan because they didn’t trust QR codes.

Despite the test participants’ positive outlook, not everyone is excited about QR codes. Based on a survey, consumers ages 65+ are more likely to express distrust of the QR landscape. Only [31% of this age group](#) use QR codes, and those who do scan codes are more likely to use a QR code reading app than other age groups. And while 60% of users under age 60 say they like the convenience of scanning a QR code on a TV commercial, only 30% of those 60+ say the same. This unfamiliarity with QR technology underlines the importance of intuitive design and clear instructions within the ad.

## SPOT LENGTH

# People need time to scan.

Seconds matter. How long a QR code remains on a TV screen can significantly influence its success rate.

After studying response rates and viewing behavior with QR codes across 15-, 30-, and 60-second commercials, we strongly recommend a minimum of 30 seconds for a spot using a QR code call-to-action.

**44% of users** say scanning a QR code on a TV can be difficult.”





This ensures:

- ✓ **Time to Notice.** In a very short spot, there may not be enough time for viewers to notice the QR code on-screen in the first place.
- ✓ **Time to Consider.** Viewers may want a moment to consider whether or not to engage with the ad. Extra time could drive higher response rates.
- ✓ **Time to Scan.** Scanning a QR code requires the viewer to open their camera app and hold it steady over the code. If a QR code appears just briefly at the very end of a 15-second ad, viewers may feel rushed trying to scan it before the commercial ends.
- ✓ **Flexibility.** A 30-second ad has more flexibility to showcase a brand's message while also including the QR code call-to-action. The code doesn't have to dominate the entire commercial if you don't want it to.
- ✓ **Greater Recall.** Longer video ads typically have [higher brand recall](#) and memorability compared to shorter ones. This reinforces motivation to scan for viewers who may need to see your ad for a second or third time before deciding to act.

15-second commercials don't often provide viewers enough time to process your commercial's storyline, understand the call-to-action, decide if they want to scan, and then actually do so. In fact, including a QR code in shorter spots can actually harm response rates. Multiple client tests saw performance stay flat or fall when using QR codes in 15-second spots as compared to spots using other CTAs.

Based on our survey, 44% of users say scanning a QR code on a TV can be difficult. The top reason for this difficulty was simply the time it takes to scan. They explained this time could be longer than expected due to phones loading the camera slowly, the code being too far away and the user needing to move to scan the code, or the device not registering the code is in-frame.

Of course, depending on the message and how the code is incorporated, there could be a scenario where a shorter spot could work, but we'd recommend only testing this approach on an experimental basis.

## USER EXPECTATIONS

# Conversion matters just as much as response.

Driving response is only half the battle. For that response to impact your bottom line, it needs to convert into sales. Which is why matching user expectations after they scan a QR code is crucial.

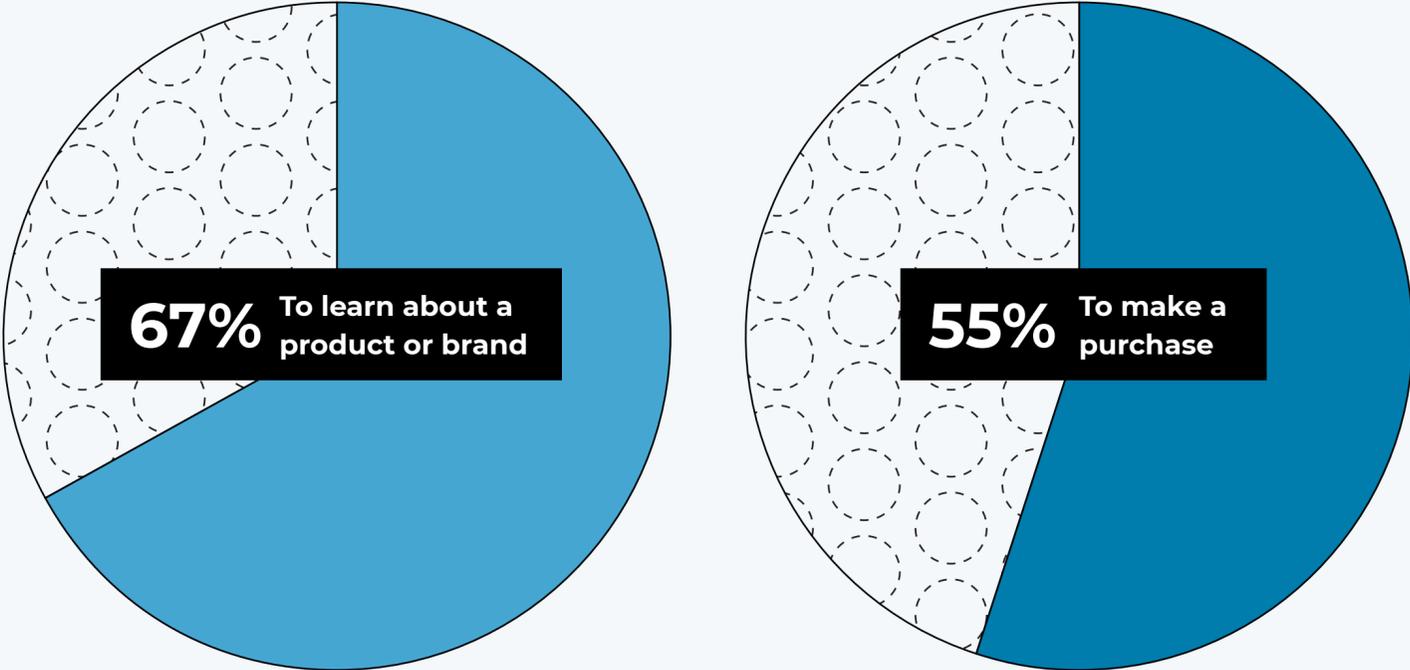
Some commercials, while successful in enticing viewers to scan, lose steam post-scan due to a disconnect between user expectations and the actual content presented. Avoid this momentum-killing scenario by keeping the post-scan experience intuitive and seamless.

**“Matching user expectations after they scan a QR code is crucial.”**



# Situations where users scan a QR code

*% of participants that are either likely or very likely to scan a QR code*



In our Userlytics studies, participants expressed a strong expectation that little would be required of them once they scanned the code. For example, if your commercial features a specific line of products, users may expect to be sent to a landing page highlighting those items, not your home page where they are forced to navigate your entire site to find them. Or, if you included a special offer, like 10% off all seasonal items, they'd want to immediately see similar messaging once they scan the code.

According to our survey:

- 67% of users are likely or very likely to scan a QR code to learn more about a product or brand.
- 55% of users are very likely or very likely to scan a QR code to make a purchase.
- Those who have scanned a QR code on TV in the past expected the code to give them access to coupons or a discount, to send them to the brand's website, or to provide product information.

In some cases, participants acknowledged a lead generation form could make sense, such as to schedule an appointment or request a quote, but anything more tedious than inputting basic contact information was met with resistance.

Advertisers can also take a proactive approach by setting user expectations before they even scan the code. For example, a voiceover saying "Scan to learn more" could boost response rates and help users understand the value of scanning in the first place.

## PLACEMENT

# Make the QR code an ad feature, not just the CTA.

Adding a QR code to a commercial to improve response is easy. But including it in a way that allows you to achieve the best possible response is a bit more complicated. The placement of a QR code within the commercial dictates how accessible a code is to scan and how natural it feels within the spot. In turn, this affects engagement. We've all seen commercials that use 27 seconds to explain their offering, then awkwardly transition to a QR code for the remaining three seconds without any clear reason or rationale behind it.

So what's the better option? Display the code for at least 30 seconds. Then, provide clarity by including directions for scanning the code both on-screen and in your spot's voice-over. In those directions, explain your offer in enough detail that users know what to expect when they scan. And finally, only use one code per creative. Multiple codes will split response, creating user confusion about which code they should scan while making attribution more difficult.

But the best option of all is integration. QR codes seamlessly incorporated into the narrative of an advertisement—essentially making them an intrinsic part of the story—see markedly higher engagement compared to QR codes that feel tacked onto the end of an ad without any strategic intent.





## CASE STUDY

# QR Code as a Product

An ecommerce retailer was eager to test QR codes in their commercials. Their tech-savvy audience was likely to feel comfortable scanning QR codes. And it was a great fit for their offering. A QR code allowed the retailer to send people directly to their website to make a purchase or even to download their app.

Moving quickly, we reworked one of the retailer's existing commercials, adding a code to the corner of the spot for the full length of the ad. Then we began tracking performance. The results looked encouraging—including the QR code increased response 5% over the previous response method. However, we felt that number could be even higher, so we created a brand new commercial where the QR code was the star.

Next, we created a brand new commercial where the QR code was the star. The ad highlighted several of the retailer's in-demand products before introducing a sleek, 3-dimensional QR code being treated like a product itself. This not only made the inclusion of the code feel natural, but it ensured the code was on-screen for a longer period of time and a size large enough to make scanning easier.

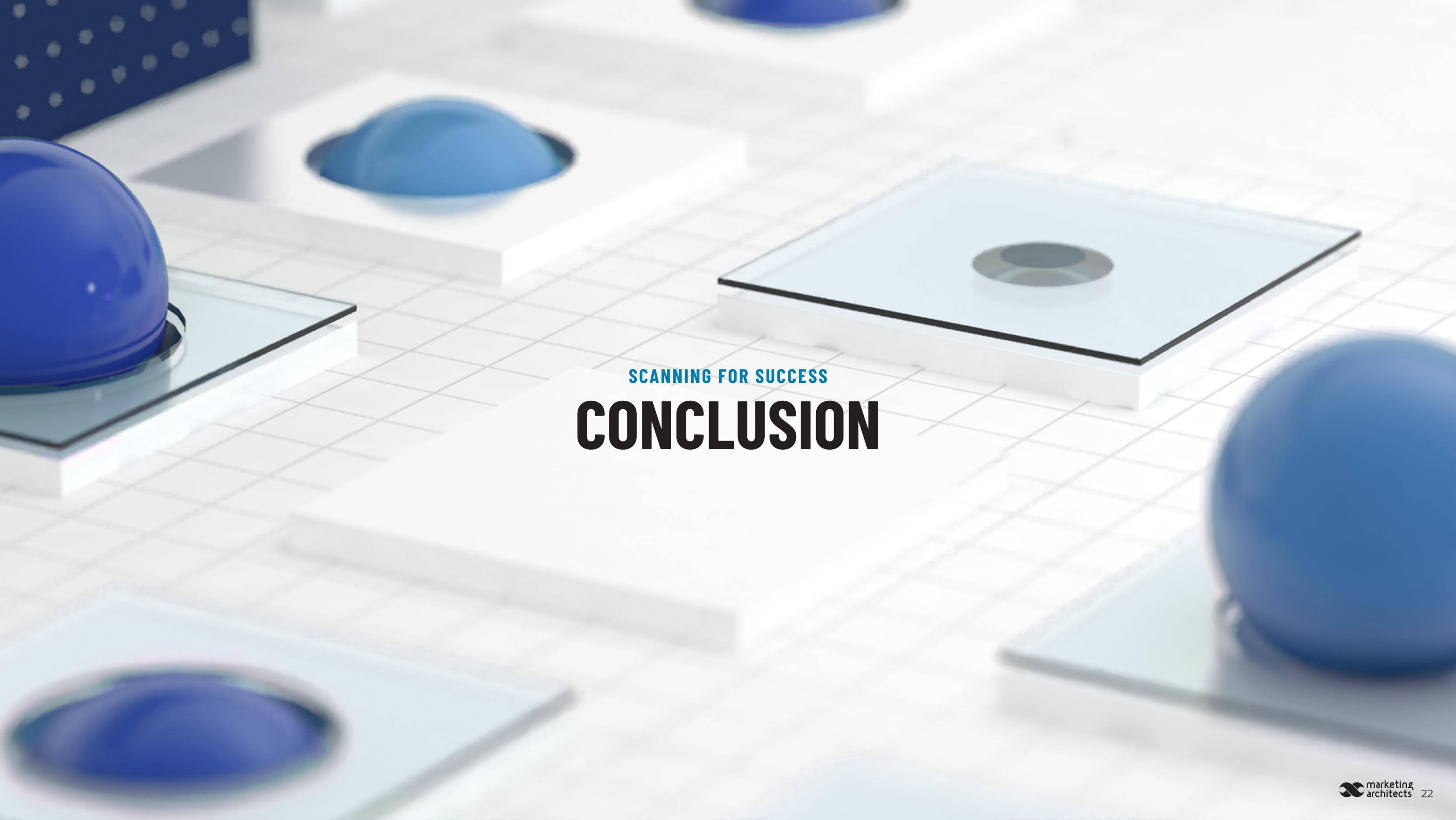
We placed the ad in-market and response rose an additional 10% over the first QR spot. Testing QR codes—and not being satisfied with the status quo approach—led to a 15% increase in response over the retailer's previous TV campaign.

**+5% response**

QR code in the corner

**+15% response**

QR code as product



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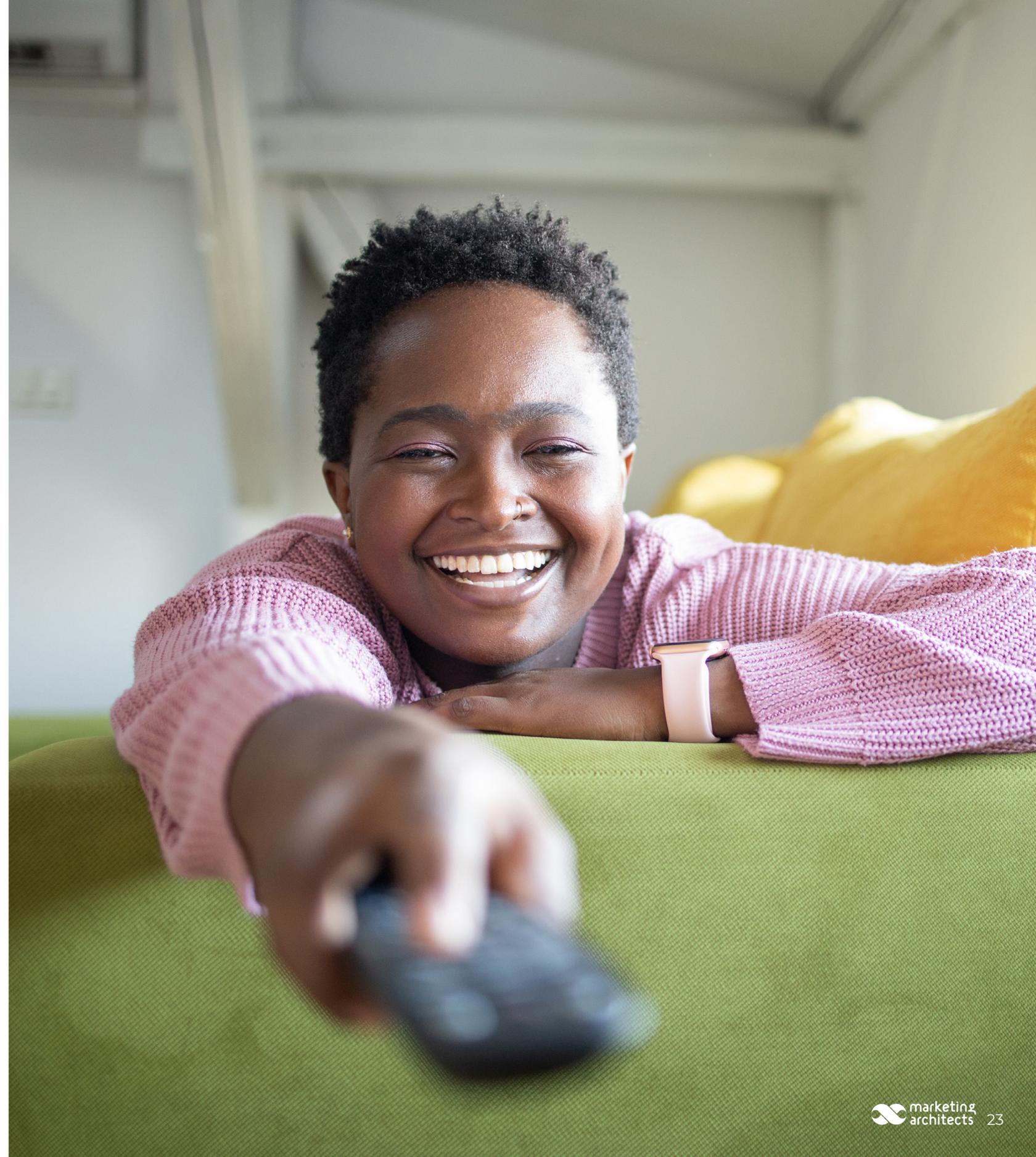
# CONCLUSION

# Conclusion

In 2023, a year after Coinbase's famous commercial, at least 10 brands used QR codes in their [Super Bowl commercials](#).

Web3 startup Limit Break took a page out of Coinbase's book and showed a single QR code for a full 30 seconds. But instead of taking users to download a game as it seemed to suggest, it entered them in a raffle for NFT assets, confusing users. Avocados from Mexico incorporated a QR code into their spot's storyline by including it in an alternative, avocado-crazed version of Times Square. But the code was only on-screen for a few moments, making it more of an Easter egg for eagle-eyed viewers than a true response mechanism. Other brands simply added the QR code as a call-to-action at the end, which we've already proven to be a less-than-optimal approach.

“We’re **still**  
**figuring out**  
exactly how to  
use QR codes in  
the best way.”





The potential of QR codes for TV is clear. They offer an improvement over traditional response methods, fostering higher engagement rates and providing advertisers detailed insights into campaign performance. Consumers who have scanned QR codes on TV report an improved customer experience.

They're a tool to bridge the gap between viewer interest and brand engagement, enabling a direct, measurable and interactive marketing experience. But we're still figuring out exactly how to use them.

QR codes in TV require strategic implementation—factors such as brand trust, the length of the commercial, placement of the QR code within the ad, and alignment with user expectations can make or break a campaign's success. And when you're investing all the time, money and resources it takes to plan and develop something as important as a Super Bowl commercial, it's worth taking the time to optimize every detail.

After all, embracing the QR code in TV advertising isn't just about adopting a new tool. It's about evolving alongside changing consumer behavior and technological advances. Already, AI can create functional QR codes that are highly customized and embedded within one-of-a-kind pieces of art. Measurement capabilities around the codes continue to improve. Shoppable streaming and CTV ads using QR codes are gaining popularity among younger audiences less likely to engage with TV commercials. And every time a person scans a QR code on a TV for the first time, they become more likely to keep scanning in the future.

It's time for marketers to optimize the integration of QR codes into TV. Because there's a future where the TV screen is not just a window into new worlds, but a portal for dynamic brand interaction.

# About Marketing Architects

TV advertising is a powerful channel.

Done right, it can become an essential growth driver for your business. At Marketing Architects, we use an approach called All-Inclusive TV to help advertisers make the most of their TV investment. Connect with us at [marketingarchitects.com](https://marketingarchitects.com) to learn more.