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The AppLovin Creative Best-Practices Guide

AppLovin is not Meta with a different logo. It is a sound-off, full-screen, forced-attention channel where the curve is inverted — the tap comes at the end. This is the complete playbook for building creative that wins there.

Field **AppLovin · Axon · Liftoff · Moloco** Format **9:16 video** Calibrated on **real DTC CTR data**

> "I've spent $100M in ad spend. My best Meta ads always fail on AppLovin."
>
> — Curtis Howland, on why platform-native creative is the whole game

MAKE · BUY · MEASURE

WHAT'S INSIDE

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01 THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

Why this channel is worth building for

Every stat here is sourced. Use them to justify the investment and to set the bar for what "good" looks like.

350%
UGC + walkthrough scale lift
Liftoff 2025 Mobile Ad Creative Index

152%
Impression-to-install lift from UGC
Liftoff 2025 · 4.7T impressions

65–340
Active creatives in winning campaigns
AppLovin Jun 2024 Ecommerce Update

37s
Median length of top-5% videos
AppLovin platform data

70%
Net-revenue-per-install lift, immersive
DTC newsletter, Mar 2026

~2M
Ad auctions per second (Axon)
AppLovin

+7–23%
All-ads-on vs curated top-5
AppLovin

95%
Top videos with burned-in captions
AppLovin top-element analysis

02 THE CORE MINDSET SHIFT

Stop interrupting. Start rewarding the wait.

On Meta and TikTok you fight for a scroll. On AppLovin the attention is already captured — the viewer is waiting out a rewarded video inside a mobile game. Your job is not to stop the thumb. It is to make the final CTA feel obvious.

META / TIKTOK	APPLOVIN REWARDED VIDEO
Interrupt the scroll	**Entertain during forced attention**
Hook in 1–3 seconds	**Build to the final seconds**
Fast proof, fast CTA	**Story → demo → proof → then CTA**
Optimize for thumb-stop	**Optimize for payoff**
Short-form often wins	**Longer videos can win (median winner 37s)**

Who you're actually reaching

INVENTORY

Casual mobile games

Puzzle, word, match-3, simulation. Mainstream and brand-safe. The audience skews **female, 35–40**, with real disposable income and high DTC intent.

THE MOMENT

A forced reward break

The ad plays while the user waits for a reward, a close button, or the next moment of gameplay. They cannot scroll past. Attention is captive, not earned.

BRAND SAFETY

Cleaner than social

Casual-game inventory is generally safer than open social feeds. The risk is creative quality, not adjacency.

The three user states — design for all of them

Captive

Waiting out the timer, mildly annoyed. The first 5 seconds must **disarm**, not sell. Native UGC, no hard pitch.

Leaned-in & relaxed

Between gameplay beats, receptive. This is your window for the story, the demo, the transformation.

Dopamine-seeking

Primed for a hit. A satisfying demo, reveal, or before/after lands hard here — give them the payoff.

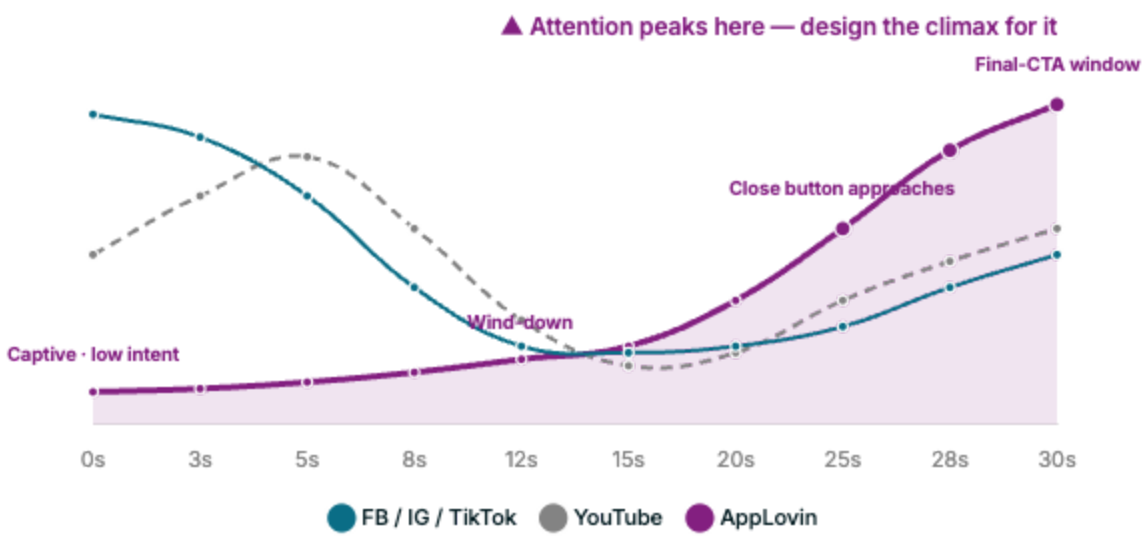
03 THE INVERTED ATTENTION CURVE

Attention peaks at the close button

This single chart is why your Meta ad fails here. Social attention is front-loaded and decays. AppLovin attention climbs — the viewer is most focused right as the close button appears. Put your strongest product moment, claim, offer, and CTA in the final 5 seconds.

Relative attention across a 30-second view, by platform

Conceptual curves illustrating where focus concentrates on each channel.



Design implication: on AppLovin, a discount or hero shot at 0s is wasted on an annoyed, captive viewer. The same beat at 26–30s lands at peak intent.

04 THE NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK

The 30-second arc, second by second

A compressed problem → solution → proof → payoff, mapped to the viewer's changing state. This is the spine every concept hangs on.

0–5s	**Disarm**	Captive, mildly annoyed → soft native entry, UGC, no hard sell.
5–12s	**Establish relevance**	Passive attention → name the problem, a relatable lifestyle moment.
12–22s	**Show value**	Growing attention → the demo, the transformation, the comparison.
22–26s	**Build tension**	Anticipation → curiosity gap, stacked proof, "here's the difference."
26–30s+	**Convert**	Peak focus → offer, CTA, end card, strongest claim.

LENGTH TIERS

15–20s	Interstitial tests, front-loaded hooks
21–30s	Core rewarded / interstitial hybrid — safe default
31–45s	Recommended scale-testing range (median winner 37s)
46–60s	Deep education / high-consideration (supplements, beauty, home)

> **One shoot, many cuts.** Ship every concept as a **30s default + a 37–45s scale cut** from the same footage. Same story, two runtimes — let Axon find the shape that scales.

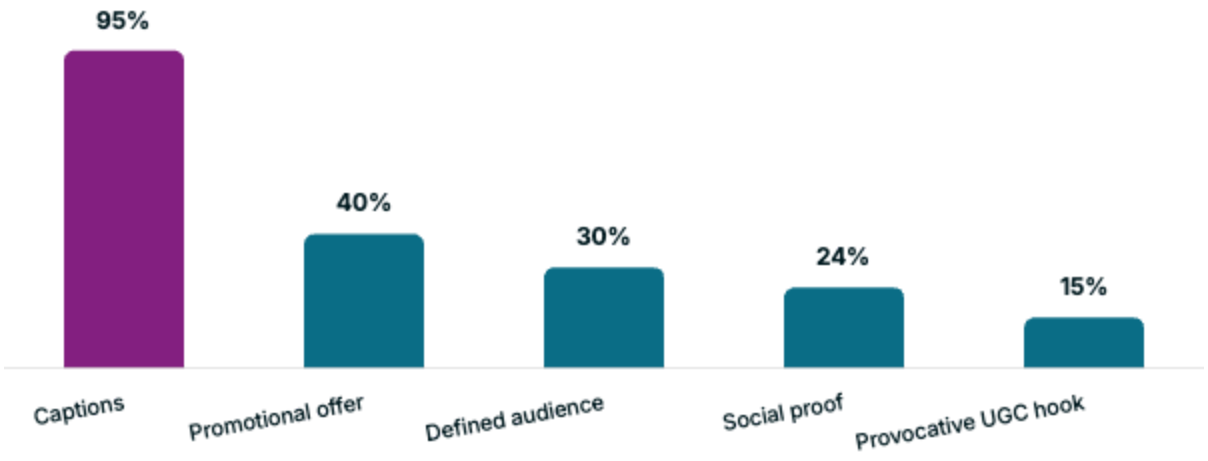
05 WHAT WINS

The elements top creatives share

Pulled from analysis of top-performing AppLovin videos. Captions are effectively mandatory. Everything else is a lever you pull on purpose.

% of top-performing AppLovin videos with each element

Captions show up in nearly every winner. Treat them as table stakes, not a choice.



THE CONVERSION MULTIPLIER

UGC + walkthrough

Adding UGC lifts impression-to-install **152%**; UGC paired with a product or app walkthrough drives a **350%** scale lift. Authentic beats polished — a 720p phone clip routinely outperforms an agency montage. Hook styles: negative-to-positive, problem confession, skepticism, comparison, listicle, demographic.

SOUND-OFF IS THE DEFAULT

Burned-in captions

Never rely on platform tracks. Order of importance: **Problem → Benefit → Proof → Offer → CTA.** Specs: 60–80px at 1080×1920, bold emphasis lines, white with a dark stroke, center or upper-third, 3–6 words per card, sticker backgrounds on the offer and CTA cards.

SAVE IT FOR THE END

Offers

~40% of top videos carry a promo, and evergreen coupon codes often win on ROAS. Mention it lightly mid-video, reinforce hard in the final 3–5s, repeat it on the end card. **Never lead with the discount** — discount-led hooks are the measured floor (0.56× benchmark).

PROOF & PERSONA

Social proof + audience truth

Social proof appears in **24%** of winners (40k reviews, awards, "I get asked about this all the time"). A defined audience appears in **30%** — name the persona in their own language: the mom, the lefty, the commuter, the over-40 shopper.

Production craft

LIGHTING & COLOR

Natural daylight, slightly elevated exposure. The brand color should appear at least twice. Clean, not cinematic.

PACING & CUTS

Cut every 1.5–3s in the body (not 0.5s like Meta). Hold the demo 3–5s. One transformation or reveal at ~18–24s.

VOICEOVER

Audio-anchored, podcast-style VO. Say the brand name 2–3×. Calm and credible beats over-energetic.

MUSIC & SFX

Music sits under the VO (~–18dB). Land a satisfying SFX hit on the demo beat. Never let music fight the captions.

06 THE CONVERSION SURFACE

End cards do up to half the work

A single impression is three surfaces: 9:16 video → AppLovin Interactive Page (end card) → product catalog. The end card can drive up to **50% of total CTR**, and it is the cheapest, fastest thing to iterate.

MUST INCLUDE

- [ ] Product image
- [ ] Brand name
- [ ] Primary benefit, stated plainly
- [ ] The offer (evergreen code)
- [ ] A tappable CTA button
- [ ] A trust signal (rating, review count, award)

LAYOUT, TOP TO BOTTOM

- [ ] Brand + proof
- [ ] Product hero
- [ ] Offer
- [ ] CTA button

> Iterate end cards faster than videos: **10–20 new end cards a week** against your top concepts is the highest-ROI surface you have.

07 VOLUME & THE OPERATING MODEL

Feed the algorithm — don't curate it

Active creative pool size matters more than refresh frequency. Curating down to a "best five" starves Axon of the variation it needs to learn. Winning campaigns run **65–340 active creatives**, and all-ads-on beats a curated top-5/10 by **7–23%**.

WEEKLY ENGINE

The cadence that scales

5–10	new concepts
10–20	new end cards
20–40	edits / variants
3–5	hook variants per concept
3–5	CTA variants per concept
Always	a 30s + a 37–45s cut

STRUCTURE THE UPLOAD

Creative sets & naming

Group variants of a concept into **sets** (Aug 2024 update) so Axon learns within a family rather than treating every cut as a stranger.

Make every asset self-describing so reporting is automatic:

`BRAND_CONCEPT_HOOK_LENGTH_vN`

e.g. LATICO_SKEPTIC_QUESTION_37s_v3

08 STARTING POINTS

Seven concept templates to test first

Proven arcs that consistently produce winners. Start here, then let the data tell you which family to scale.

Concept 1

"I was skeptical"

Open on doubt → name the problem → the product solves it → "now I get why it sells out" + offer.

Concept 2

"3 reasons"

Three crisp reasons → social proof → offer. Listicle structure, fast to produce, easy to vary.

Concept 3

"Before this, I used to..."

Old behavior → the easier solution → transformation → "try it today."

Concept 4

"For people like me"

Demographic call-out — "If you're over 40 and still dealing with [problem]..." Persona truth in their own words.

Concept 5

"The satisfying demo"

Let the product do the talking — organization, transformation, the oddly-satisfying reveal at 18–24s.

Concept 6

"Compared to the old way"

Old way vs new way, side by side. The contrast is the message.

Concept 7

"Founder explains it"

Why the product exists → proof → offer. Origin-story credibility.

09 THE PRE-UPLOAD GATE

The 100-point scorecard

Score every creative 0–5 per criterion before it ships. Weights are calibrated to the channel: the hook earns the watch, the final five seconds earn the tap. Captions and end cards are not optional.

Section 1 — Hook & Attention

25 pts

The first 2–3 seconds decide the watch. Sound is off.

CRITERION	WHAT A 5 LOOKS LIKE
1.1 First-frame thumb-stop	Distinctive color/pattern/contrast fills frame 1 (blush tote, hair-on print, red-on-black).
1.2 Hook type	Curiosity gap, single surprising feature, or audience call-out. Never opens on price.
1.3 Captions from frame 1	Burned-in, legible sound-off, ≤6 words, clear emphasis hierarchy.
1.4 Authentic / native feel	Real creator, real setting; reads as a recommendation (authentic wins even at 720p).
1.5 Sustained visual interest	Active demo/motion, cuts every 1.5–3s, no dead frames.

Auto-deductions: opens on a discount → cap 1.2 at 1. Music-only / no human → cap 1.4 at 1.

Section 2 — Message & Story

20 pts

A compressed problem → solution → proof inside 30–60s.

CRITERION	WHAT A 5 LOOKS LIKE
2.1 Problem / desire named	A felt pain in the viewer's words ("I'm always digging through my bag").
2.2 Product = the solution	Unmistakable demo / walkthrough — the "aha."
2.3 Specific use-case moment	A concrete scene ("wallet → clutch for a wedding").
2.4 Proof beat	Stacked, real proof mid-to-late (40k reviews / award / "I get asked about this all the time").

Section 3 — Production & Format Fit

20 pts

CRITERION	WHAT A 5 LOOKS LIKE
3.1 9:16 + spec	True 9:16 full-bleed, ≥1080p, MP4, AppLovin-compliant.
3.2 Length fit	45–60s with a demo that earns the length (top cuts run 39–56s).
3.3 Pacing & cuts	1.5–3s body, demo held 3–5s, tighten the final 5s.
3.4 Audio bed	VO-anchored + captions + music under (~–18dB).

Section 4 — Conversion Mechanics

20 pts

The inverted curve: build to the tap.

CRITERION	WHAT A 5 LOOKS LIKE
4.1 End-loaded climax	Strongest product + claim land in the final 5s as the close button appears.
4.2 End card (4 zones)	Brand+proof / product hero / offer / CTA button — designed to be tapped.
4.3 Offer placement	Clear offer on the end card only (evergreen code), never the opener.
4.4 CTA + reason-to-tap-now	Action + benefit + one-line reason ("your wallet and your clutch — in one").

Section 5 — Brand & Differentiation

15 pts

CRITERION	WHAT A 5 LOOKS LIKE
5.1 On-brand	Brand voice + name said/shown within ~5s; identity unmistakable.
5.2 Audience truth	A specific persona in their own language (mom, lefty, commuter).
5.3 Differentiation	A net-new angle/format no one else in the category is running.

Scoring bands

90–100	75–89	60–74	45–59	<45
Scale	Ship	Iterate	Rewrite	Kill

10 TEST & LAUNCH

One variable at a time, four weeks to signal

Volume without isolation is noise. Hold everything constant and move one lever so you actually learn what drove the lift.

FIVE ISOLATED-VARIABLE TESTS

- ☐ **Hook** — same body, different first 3s
- ☐ **Length** — 30s vs 37–45s cut
- ☐ **CTA** — copy + reason-to-act
- ☐ **End card** — layout, offer, proof
- ☐ **Format** — rewarded vs interstitial

WHAT TO MEASURE

IPM / CTR for early signal · install-to-purchase for quality · ROAS for truth · hold rate to see where you lose them.

Week 1	**Establish the rails** — Ship the spec-compliant baseline set, fire the pixels, turn all ads on.
Week 2	**Find early signal** — Read which hooks and concepts earn IPM. Kill the dead.
Week 3	**Improve conversion** — Iterate end cards hard — up to 50% of CTR.
Week 4	**Find the right shape** — Length + format tests; double down on the winner.
Ongoing	**Steady state** — Hold the cadence; 65–340 active, all ads on.

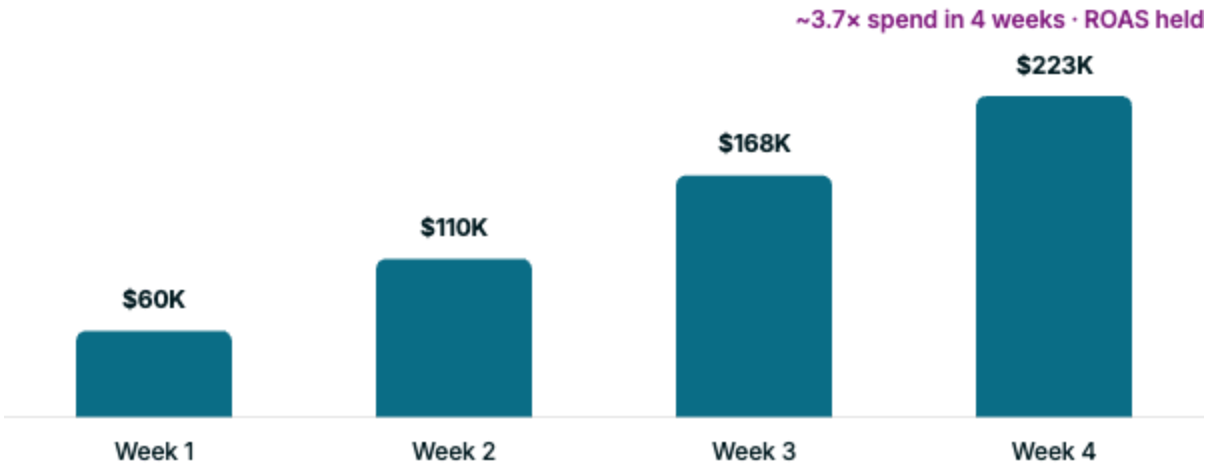
11 WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE WORKING

The engine, not the bid, scales spend

When the creative pool is deep and the conversion surface is tuned, Axon scales spend while efficiency holds. The pattern below is a representative four-week ramp.

Representative 4-week scale ramp — weekly spend

Spend scaled ~3.7× from Week 1 to Week 4 while ROAS held — the creative engine did the work.



12 SPECS & COMPLIANCE

Ship it clean

AXON WEBSITE / ECOMMERCE

MP4 / MOV / M4V · 9:16 portrait · min 270×480 · max 60s · max 1GB.

VAST / ORTB EXCHANGE

Standard video 5–30s · rewarded 20–30s · file <4MB (<2MB recommended). Keep a lightweight 20–30s, <2MB cut on hand even when the primary upload is 37–45s.

COMPLIANCE

AppLovin prohibits misleading, exaggerated, or unverifiable claims. Every claim must be supportable and aligned with the landing page it sends to. Proof beats superlatives — and it scores higher on the rubric too.

THE WINNING FORMULA, IN ONE LINE

Native UGC hook → problem → satisfying demo → stacked proof → offer + CTA in the final 5 seconds — burned-in captions throughout, shipped as 30s + 37–45s cuts, 65–340 of them, all ads on.