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NARRATOR: This is Ad Lib Performance Marketing: Dissected.

MORGAN: Decoded and delivered.

GAVIN: All right, we're back in the Ad Lab. It's Gavin, your host, and we've got a fun episode lined up for you today. For the deep dive, I'm going to be joined by two of LP's key creative contributors, Lona To Puni and Morgan Starkey. Between the two of them, they bring a strong mix of visual design, copywriting, and strategic thinking that drives some of our most impactful paid social work.

Lona is a graphic designer with a BFA from Oregon State and has five-plus years of industry experience, and Morgan brings eight-plus years of experience with a background in advertising and creative writing. They've collaborated on some major brands like Zesty Paws and Solid Gold, and are known internally not just for their work, but for how well they work together.

Segment 3: Hot Headline – Stevie Awards and Achievement Recognition

GAVIN: But before we get into that conversation, let's kick things off with our hot headline. We're actually switching things up a little bit this week because we got a news story we're really excited about: LP picking up not one, but two Gold Stevie Awards from the American Business Awards.

We got one for Marketing Achievement in Home Furnishing and Appliances. That was the work that our team did on the Smeg USA campaign, and the other award was AI-Powered Marketing. We're proud to earn that recognition for the work we've done with Cushion Lab, particularly how the team has leveraged AI tools to close the attribution gap and connect their YouTube and streaming engagement with downstream actions to better measure their impact. To dive into a little bit more depth on the Cushion Lab case study, we're joined by Karly Scott, who worked intimately on the project and is very up to speed on the strategies that were being used. Karly, thanks for joining.

KARLY: Thank you so much for having me.

Segment 4: Case Study Deep Dive – Cushion Lab Strategy

GAVIN: Yeah. So before we get into the details on the Stevie Award, first, I wanted to give the listeners an overview on who Cushion Lab is and what they do.

KARLY: Yeah. So Cushion Lab sells ergonomic cushions, pillows. They prioritize comfort. They are not just isolated just to a seat cushion or a lumbar cushion. They also sell pillows and sheets and meditation cushions. But it just boils down to comfort, ergonomics, and I cannot speak highly enough of the brand.

GAVIN: First, I wanted to get a little bit of a history lesson on not only how long you've been working on the Cushion Lab account, but a little bit on some of the strategies that you were using that surfaced this account as a Stevie Award winner. When did you start working with Cushion Lab?

KARLY: Back in 2021. Yeah, it was glory days. They had a lot of fast growth because of the pandemic. And they were a new brand entering this space, and so we had a lot of really early successes.

GAVIN: I found this award to be specifically interesting to talk about because it is about AI-powered strategies, but it's also talking full funnel because we're talking about how some of those Demand Gen strategies with YouTube and CTV funnel down into conversion actions.

KARLY: Yes.

GAVIN: Walk me through what was running from a Demand Gen side.

KARLY: Before, the account was primarily built with Video Action Campaigns. And those were some insight into Demand Gen campaigns—a Google product transition. So around the time that we started to have some growing pains, the biggest pain points were really centered around product iterations slowing down as well as creative iterations slowing down. So we really didn't push as hard into video.

So this resurgence of moving things to Demand Gen and the client getting a more creative funnel situation in place—so we had a lot of videos to test and play with and scale back up—was huge for the account. And we got back into pretty tremendous growth mode. And the reason Demand Gen was an important transition is because it taps into both video placements as well as Gmail, Discover placements, and now it also includes the Display Network. So...

GAVIN: Okay. Yeah. Got it. I think a common maybe confusion from brands and marketers out there is attribution around those top-of-funnel strategies, because I think there's still a perception out there that if you're going to be doing any sort of non-Google search related activity, that you don't have insight into the success of those campaigns. So tell me a little bit about how you measure success with an effort like this.

KARLY: So it's a couple of different things. One, you are looking at Demand Gen campaigns from a very different lens. If a client is going to evaluate Demand Gen through the same lens as Paid Search, it's probably not going to be good. But not a good—no, no, no, no. Because Demand Gen, especially if it's really leaning into the video arm—which we were—we have separate campaigns specifically that are Demand Gen video focused, because we really push hard into video and we want that control to scale there. And then the non-video placements are on their own campaign.

Now, we really attribute this—there's a couple of different ways—is taking a look at how the brand is doing. Is the brand growing while we're pushing in Demand Gen? We also have separate Demand Gen goals, which are much lower Return on Ad Spend targets. And then Google has also expanded their reporting capabilities. There's metrics like "platform comparable" that also include view-through conversions. So you kind of get more of like a social view of how Demand Gen is functioning.

GAVIN: Pause there for sure. And explain that to me like I'm a kindergartner, because I think that particular piece is so important, but I think a lot of listeners might not actually understand. Yes. So break that down.

KARLY: Okay. So you see an ad, you click on the YouTube ad, you convert—you'll see that in the Google. What you won't necessarily see is you view the ad and then you go click on something else down the line, and it might not necessarily come back. That's attributed more as a view-through conversion.

GAVIN: Got it. And you mentioned that there was some creative bottlenecks that were present when you first joined. How were those alleviated?

KARLY: So one of the biggest reasons that we got those alleviated is actually the client started reaching out and got more partnerships. So they did a lot of creator/influencer stuff. We're actually trying to scale those efforts even more specifically on YouTube.

GAVIN: Okay. So tapping into UGC.

KARLY: Tapping into UGC. They also do use AI in some of their editing and variations of it. But when we talk about AI for this account, it is a lot more about the technology that we're using within the Google Ads platform.

GAVIN: A lot of times the work that we do with brands happens within the brand bubble. Yeah, they know about it, we know about it, but there might not be a way to display those findings in the world. So whenever we win one of these, that's why we come on, we talk about it, talk about some of the strategies. Yeah. Great job.

KARLY: Thank you. It's such an honor. We're so happy about it.

Segment 5: Creative Deep Dive – Vetting New Brands and Audience Alignment

GAVIN: Okay. That was great. So interesting to hear the behind-the-scenes decisions that are made within these campaigns, especially when they're leveraging a variety of different platforms and ad types. So yeah, thanks again to Karly for sitting down to share some of those insights with us today. All right. Next, let's dive into the deep dive with Lona and Morgan.

So these two have spent years honing their craft across both the visual and messaging sides of paid social, and their partnership—them together—is a great example of how creative comes to life basically through concept all the way to execution. Because of the wide range of brands and industries that they've worked in, they also really have a unique perspective on what makes these particular platforms tick.

So in the conversation, we're going to be talking about how creative needs to adapt across different social platforms. We also talk about what brands should consider when they're building out campaigns, especially within tight budgets, and how collaboration between design and copy actually elevates performance. So yeah, it's going to be a great conversation. Let's head into the lab. Okay. Welcome to the pod, Morgan.

MORGAN: Thanks for having us.

GAVIN: Lona, thanks for hopping on. We're going to be talking about something that I think is very squarely in both of your wheelhouses, and I'm happy that you're both on today because you're both bringing, I think, different angles on this topic. And we're talking about how creative content matches with social platforms. We're bringing two different levels of expertise—or I guess, areas of expertise—to the canvas. So I did want to hear from both of you your focus when it comes to the design side, but also the copywriting side. We'll start with you, Morgan. Tell me a little bit about your day-to-day and your engagement with creative assets on social.

MORGAN: Well, as a copywriter, you know, I'm the wordsmith—the word designer, if you will—because, I mean, when you think about it, sometimes you need to shorten the copy to fit the design. And so, obviously, Lona and I work really closely together to make sure that all of those are always cohesive and aligned. So, but yeah, I'm the word person and words happen.

GAVIN: Word person, visual person. And you had a little bit of a background where you were working in the visual design space prior to LP, right?

LONA: Yeah, yeah, totally. So I've always been a designer. Paid social is definitely a niche, and what we do at LP is a niche in itself. But yeah, just what Morgan said, essentially, is I am the visual side of that. So I collaborate really closely with Morgan a lot of the time. She helps us set the creative strategy, the direction, the overlays, the messaging, which is so, so

key to communicating the visual and gives me such a good idea of what we're actually trying to relay to the audience. So they fit together really nicely.

GAVIN: Yeah. I was curious, what's a recent thing that's been inspiring you from the creative side? And anything that you've seen in the wild recently that you're like, "That's really cool from a design sense"?

LONA: The most recent thing I saw—I know, Coachella be rich, L.A. be rich...

GAVIN: It's kind of past. What's the "Hallelujah meme" that's been going around? Have you guys seen this?

MORGAN: I'm sorry, I love podcasts. See, I don't know what...

GAVIN: Was there something at Coachella?

LONA: Yes. No. The first lady of Coachella, Hailey Bieber herself.

GAVIN: Hailey Bieber.

LONA: She had a Rhode pop-up that was just iconic. I mean, it's so good. She has such an eye for design. The activation—like her brand activation in particular—was really good. And she has a decent amount of budget and she uses it wisely.

GAVIN: Yeah, but talk about alignment when you're thinking about the audience that would be at Coachella. I know we're talking outside the digital space now, but audience alignment to your brand, to celebrity, to performer. And I felt like the visual layout of that pop-up was so clean and it kind of fit that Palm Springs vibe, you know?

MORGAN: Oh yeah. So I think Rhode is very much so pretty clean, the colors. But that's a good pick because I do feel like that's a good example of aligning all those different pieces. And I'm sure they're grabbing so much good content with UGC stuff from that and then posting it online, so it all cycles back.

MORGAN: Follow-up with the online content is huge. I think for any campaigns these days. You know, it's like—I saw that Drake made an ice sculpture.

GAVIN: An Ice Man?

MORGAN: Yeah, ice, which—I'm not going to die on the Drake hill, but I do, as far as, what is it called? Guerilla marketing, where you're out in the wild. Yeah, kind of fun to get people out there. And I know that a lot of other companies were kind of riffing on that. Like, I think KFC did a "Spice Man" ad.

GAVIN: Oh my god.

MORGAN: I just—ride the coattails of Drake. Sure. Hey, listen.

GAVIN: Yeah, if you have that celebrity endorsement, and if you have times, you got to use it. I do feel like we have to transition a little bit because what we're really talking about is probably more in the SMB segment. Not all of us have a Drake cosign or a Hailey Bieber co-sign.

MORGAN: Sure.

LONA: Yeah.

GAVIN: So reeling it back and thinking about brands that might be on a tighter budget, thinking about how visual design plays into brand guidelines. So when both of you—and either of you can take this question—are starting a creative project, let's say that there's a new brand that's maybe using LP's paid ads services, what are the first steps that you take to get a feel for retroactively, "Hey, what's been going on?" Do you check out the social pages? What's your vetting process to get a lay of the land for what a brand has done so far?

LONA: Well, I think when we talk about these larger, bigger-budget trends that are happening, a lot of that filters down into the rest of the world. So you might not have the Rhode budget, but there are elements of it that you can pull and use yourself. Or something that I've seen on social media a lot is like big brands will comment on random Reels on Instagram and they're like, "What?" Like, Chili's, "What are you doing here?" Or whatever. And it's like, if you are an SMB client, why can't you do that too and put your name out there? So I think that landscape is just changing. And so going with that is what's key. So when we're starting on a brand—working on a brand that's new to LP—what's really important is understanding where they fit within the industry and what's currently working in that industry. And how can we leverage that? Because that is our expertise, and that's maybe something that they don't have the knowledge of yet, which is why they're hiring us.

MORGAN: Right. Audience is huge. Like to understand who these services are geared towards—which audiences. Maybe there's different audiences. Maybe it's Gen Zers yet and like, then, retirees. So it can be the same product with completely two different campaigns and strategies to reach different audiences. And I think it's important to get a lay of the land with what's trending in that market, but also, who are your competitors? What are your competitors doing? What is the budget like? Can we get some UGC ads going? Or, what is your current—what do you have as far as creative assets that we can strategize and come up with the content?

Segment 6: Platform-Specific Creative Strategy

GAVIN: We were talking off-mic about some natural fits between industry and platform. One that we were talking about was Pinterest, where there's some verticals that work really nicely in Pinterest. What were the—you mentioned a few—clothing and what were the other ones you were thinking?

LONA: Yeah, we were talking fashion, DIY, craft brands on Pinterest. Of course, they do really well.

MORGAN: Home decor.

LONA: Yeah.

GAVIN: Home decor stuff is big.

MORGAN: Yeah, like, "How am I going to decorate this room?" I think, you know, Amy Howard at Home is a brand that I work on that I think does really well on Pinterest because it has to be more organic. There's not a ton of text overlay. It really has to blend into the Pinterest feed. Yes.

GAVIN: And actually focusing in on that as a copywriter. So there are instances where you actually have to step back and go, "Hey, we don't actually need words here." And Pinterest is one of those platforms where it's like, "Hey, we want to blend into the feed and not stand out as an ad." Is it people using products?

MORGAN: For the most part. I think there is a way to have a text overlay in a Pinterest—if it's a guide or something—it has to be more educational. If it's going to have text in it, it should be more educational on Pinterest because I think...

GAVIN: It can offer...

MORGAN: Yeah, just something that people are enticed to learn. You know, that's why you're on Pinterest. You want to get inspired.

GAVIN: And the audience on Pinterest. Does that lean a particular direction for the demographic side?

MORGAN: I'm interested. Yeah. So I don't know what the youngins are doing.

GAVIN: Are the youngins on...

MORGAN: I think they are.

LONA: I think Gen Z is on Pinterest. Yeah, I really think so.

GAVIN: I think it's an underutilized platform because there's a lot of brands that view Meta and Google as kind of the big players, where it's like, "Hey, these are your two spots to go." I think that diversification, if you are in one of those verticals, makes a ton of sense. So Pinterest has been one that you've been recommending. TikTok—you guys played around in TikTok much before? Do you guys have TikTok accounts? This whole show for truly Gen Zers here...

MORGAN: I do say that I do not have a TikTok.

LONA: I have a TikTok. I have made a couple of TikToks.

GAVIN: It's a much more diverse audience set than I think people expect. And one of my main findings, learnings, takeaways has been: you don't know until you test it. Because that same idea with Pinterest where we might be unsure if the younger audience is there—it might be. And unless you're a brand who puts the assets out there, there's no way to really tell until you test it out and see what those audience signals look like. So YouTube...

LONA: The boys are on YouTube Shorts. I feel like that is such a thing. Yeah. And it is similar to Meta, but it's same thing, different fonts, kind of.

MORGAN: It's my dad's new form of social media. He doesn't have TikTok, Instagram, or Facebook, but he loves YouTube Shorts.

LONA: Yeah, exactly. So it's like, maybe get that car brand on YouTube Shorts. Yeah, maybe it'll do well.

MORGAN: It is like the social media for people not on social media. Yes.

GAVIN: Me specifically. I'm a classic example of a guy who goes, "Well, I'm not on TikTok," and then I waste 30 minutes on YouTube Shorts. And I think I'm part of the problem. I don't think that I'm bringing myself for any obligations.

MORGAN: Yeah.

GAVIN: Cross-pollinating creative between platforms. I'm sure this comes up with brands that you work with. How easy is it to take an asset that's working on, let's say, even Google Display, and repurposing that to a static Pinterest ad? Do you find yourself repurposing and resizing, or do you find that you need to go back to the drawing board when we're looking at a new channel? I'm curious if you had any thoughts on that.

MORGAN: I think it really depends on what the video or asset is, because LinkedIn is going to be a very different experience, as it should be. And I don't think content that is posted

specifically on Instagram should just be copied and pasted onto LinkedIn. I don't think those are the same voice that you should be having. Social media is very mindless. You want to scroll when you're chilling, you're relaxing. When you're on LinkedIn, it's probably not like the fun scrolling you want to do.

GAVIN: It's like—probably logged into your work computer.

MORGAN: Yeah. It's like, "What's going on with the market?" you know? "Who did a recent round of layoffs at big companies?" It's just like—that's where you keep up with what's happening in the world, the corporate world. So I think it should reflect that, to be a thought leader in the space. If you're going on TikTok, it definitely needs to be UGC focused because there's not like static images on TikTok. And the cadence of TikTok is every two weeks you need to have new ads going into the wild, because that is kind of like the life cycle of an ad on TikTok specifically.

Segment 7: Current Design Trends and Disruptors

GAVIN: So, any design trends you've seen in the last maybe couple of years that brands are requesting that either A, you love, or B, you wish would go away?

LONA: Search Bar Ads are quite a thing.

GAVIN: And I—what's a Search Bar Ad?

LONA: So a Search Bar Ad, if I can sum it up well, is an ad where you're mimicking the action of someone going on Google and searching keywords or phrases that then lead you to what that brand is actually selling you. So let's say you have a makeup brand and you're researching trending makeup looks of 2026, and then you're like, "best lipstick." And then it's like—you search and search and search and boom, perfect makeup brand pops up and you want to buy everything, and it's exactly what you were looking for. We emulate that through an ad. So what it usually looks like visually is we'll have a search bar and we'll have the overlays typed out. So those same things like hypothetical searches.

GAVIN: Yes. Hypothetical searches.

LONA: Hypothetical searches. And then it'll lead you to the brand or the key part of the point of the ad. So okay, if it's a lipstick you're trying to sell, it'll pop up.

GAVIN: And so that's been a recent one that you've seen come up as a request that clients are bringing?

LONA: Yeah. Well, it's something that we introduced, I'd say, in the last couple of years. And it just took off because we've seen it do well, and sometimes clients will see it and they will request it.

GAVIN: See it out in the wild and a brand goes, "Hey, I want to get in on this."

MORGAN: Oh yeah.

LONA: And it's a good one. I think it works on a decent amount of platforms.

MORGAN: I like a search bar, but I think I like some of the ads that look more native, you know, like your Notes App on your iPhone. It's like mimicking that style, but it's an ad. They're not as visually pleasing, but it's something familiar to you, for better or worse. Maybe some people feel duped by that, or maybe some people are like, "They got me. I like it." So I think it really depends on the user, the kind of experience they're going to have.

GAVIN: Where you're taking a shot at that being a way to engage, but it might go one direction or the other.

MORGAN: Yeah. I think some of the trends that we haven't been requested but that I'm not loving is the clip-art looking designs where it's like, "Our designer's out of office and all we have is this."

GAVIN: Is that a real one?

MORGAN: It feels like to me...

LONA: They've milked it. They've milked it. They're like, "Yeah, our designers are out of office, but we have a promo and we really need to tell you guys, so please."

MORGAN: I think ClassPass does it. Not to call brands out—I do like ClassPass. I don't use ClassPass, that's what I'm saying—but I feel like they do it a lot. And I don't know why.

LONA: Go do your workout.

GAVIN: It seems like it's had a simultaneous effect—and this isn't like a recent development because obviously short-form content and UGC content has been around for a while—where it flattens the playing field on a per-user experience with a given brand if all of the content starts to look more similar.

MORGAN: Yes.

GAVIN: But on the flip side, the reach is always the case where we get budgets going to make a major difference there. But it is a case where, yeah, like those examples you're

talking about, you don't need a massive budget to put up an ad like that. And if you're looking to disrupt, if you're looking to go a different angle and go with a more DIY approach, a lo-fi approach—that's accessible now to a lot of brands.

MORGAN: Oh, yeah. Totally. I mean, even going back to the Drake thing—not everyone has Drake money. Yes, but there was a video of him throwing a flip-flop at a drone outside of one of his apartments, and I saw a bunch of brands doing their own version of that. And I think that's a great way to stay topical and relevant to what's happening in the world, but do it on a budget because we don't have Drake money.

LONA: I remember, like my best friend and I in elementary school, we would watch so many parodies on YouTube. And the parodies do better than the real music videos sometimes. So I think that's kind of like what these smaller brands are emulating. It's like what they can do. We don't have the Drake money, but we did this, and then it's like, "Wait, that's so clever and hilarious."

MORGAN: You can still be clever and relevant without having all of the money in the world.

Segment 8: The Future of Creative – The Human Touch vs. AI

GAVIN: Yeah. In fact, without having that, you're almost forced to be more clever. It's actually putting you in a space where you have to go, "Hey, we have to stand out in some way. We're going to take a different approach." Any predictions for the next couple of years of digital marketing, specifically with these creative platforms?

MORGAN: Obviously AI is part of the conversation, and I do think that if everyone is moving and swinging in this direction, the pendulum kind of has to swing the other way for more of that human touch and kind of getting back to our roots of not always wondering, "Is that real? Is that genuine?" Like, we got into this field because we love art, we love writing, we love being emo in the corner. And yeah, I think creativity will be valued again in the next few years the way that it once was.

GAVIN: Yeah. Does that resonate with you?

LONA: Oh, absolutely. And I think even talking about these spin-offs—like riding the coattails of these bigger brands maybe—and what these SMBs can do, I think for small businesses, the most crucial, important thing that we've been talking about is the strategy behind the work. Like, you don't have to have all of the perfect ingredients, but if you have the strategy and the creativity, that's what's going to get you there. And that's something that requires human collaboration.

MORGAN: Yeah. Clear message.

GAVIN: We did talk as a group to say we weren't going to bring up AI in the conversation, but I think it is relevant, and it's actually a good place to close us off because it's maybe unrealistic for us to go this whole time without mentioning also the ability to make iterations on content that is being shot with humans—being able to make small edits and make small variations and test out these different things. There is, I think, a place for it there.

MORGAN: But I definitely agree with both of you, where the more human that the content gets, the more we're going to have customers and consumers resonate with it.

MORGAN: The more people resonate with it. And if everyone's doing it, then at a certain point, people are going to want or not. Yeah.

LONA: And I think, too, it's nothing new. This is like history reinventing itself. Because even in this conversation, we've talked about the success of UGC ads. And why do UGC ads do well? They do well because we went into this like hyper-branded marketing style for so long on Meta that people were scrolling and they could spot an ad within a second. And so more authentic influencer-style UGC ads were working well. So we've already seen this before; it's just a different version of that. Humans lean toward real human content.

GAVIN: Yeah, I think that's a good note to end on here, as kind of a final message for brands to not completely throw out their in-person shots, their UGC content. Really connecting with that brand story—not to discard those other tools, but to have the core and the root start from there. So, it's great. Thank you both for coming on, I appreciate it.

LONA: We appreciate it too. Yeah, this was fun.

Segment 9: Episode Outro

GAVIN: There you have it. I love how much ground we were able to cover in that combo with Morgan and Lona together. They really are a creative powerhouse, and I hope you enjoyed the conversation and where they took us. So, thanks again for joining another episode in the lab. Don't forget to subscribe on Apple and Spotify. And we're also on YouTube—if you want a video version of the pod, visit the Logical Position channel and look for the Ad Lab playlist. All the videos are going to be in there. And follow us on Instagram at @ADLibPod. We've got short clips and we'll also have announcements in there. Thanks again. I'll see you next week in the lab.