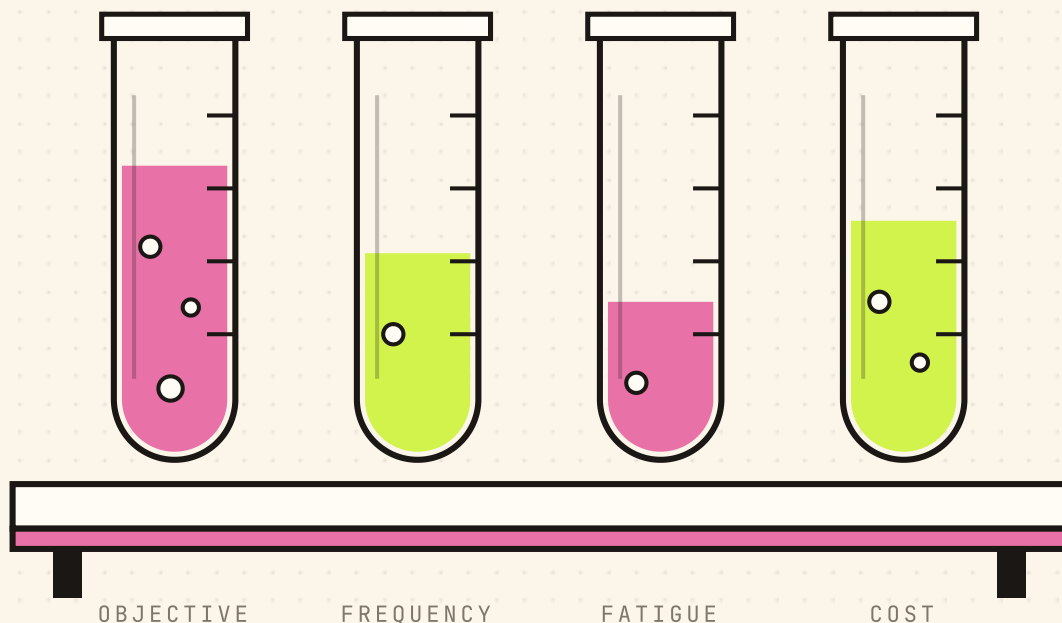


KIIN LABS

LinkedIn Thought Leader Ads Benchmarks 2026

\$8.4M of thought leader ad spend inside a \$31M LinkedIn panel. What it says about objectives, frequency, fatigue, bidding, creative and reach, every comparison paired within account.



\$31M	464	\$8.4M	447	411	365
LINKEDIN SPEND IN THE PANEL	ACCOUNTS RUNNING TLAS	THOUGHT LEADER AD SPEND	SPONSORED CONTENT • \$22.7M	ACCOUNTS RUNNING BOTH	DAYS • USD

One of the largest thought leader ads datasets outside LinkedIn. 8 Sep 2025 to 7 Sep 2026.

One of the largest thought leader ads datasets outside LinkedIn.

\$31M of spend, 464 accounts, 365 days.

What we did

We took 365 days of LinkedIn spend from Kiin Intelligence: \$31M across 464 accounts running thought leader ads and 447 running sponsored content, 411 of them running both. Audience Network is excluded throughout.

A thought leader ad is a LinkedIn ad where a company sponsors a post published from an individual's personal profile, rather than from the company page.

Then we did the thing most benchmark reports skip. Most benchmark studies compare Company A using setting X with Company B using setting Y. We don't. Wherever possible we compare the same advertiser using both. Every comparison is paired within account: the same advertiser running both objectives, both bid types, both audience types, in the same window. Fatigue is measured per creative against its own launch. Seasonality is indexed to each account's own typical month. Every paired ratio carries a 95% bootstrap confidence interval, and every stat in this report is starred by how well it survived.

Pairing costs headlines. Several findings that look strong across different accounts vanish inside the same one. Only what survived is in here.

What confirmed what we thought

Fatigue is frequency, not time. Video is the wrong format for a thought leader ad. Executives engage more. Weekends are cheap.

What surprised us

Brand awareness is not cheaper or more expensive than engagement. It buys a different thing, and whether that thing is worth having depends almost entirely on audience size. Under 10,000 people it costs \$4.75 per engagement against \$1.79. Over 100,000 it costs \$1.06 against \$1.89. Same objective, opposite answer.

Your frequency is a third of the real number.

Campaigns in the same account share people and every campaign counts them separately. Reported 3.5, true 9.5.

Higher bids bought worse inventory. Within the same accounts, highest-bid campaign versus lowest: cost per engagement +128%, engagement rate -32%. And LinkedIn does not reward engagement with cheaper impressions. It invoices it.

Top authors get 8.6× the engagement of bottom authors. Author identity explains 67% of engagement variance. No hook, length or link decision survives holding the author constant.

The lowest median landing page click in the data is not a thought leader ad. Sponsored content on traffic: \$11.75. The best quarter of TLAs match it. None beat it.



Phil Ilic

CEO OF KIIN • B2B DEMAND GEN AGENCY

A word about Kiin

Kiin is a B2B demand generation agency and LinkedIn Ads intelligence platform. We run LinkedIn, Google and outbound for sales-led B2B SaaS, and we built Kiin Intelligence, the analytics layer this study came out of.

www.kiin.co →

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\$8.4M of thought leader ad spend inside a **\$31M** panel.

411 advertisers compared against themselves.

\$8.4M

thought leader ad spend
across 464 accounts

\$22.7M

sponsored content spend
across 447 accounts

411

accounts running both, the
paired panel

365

days, 8 Sep 2025 to 7 Sep
2026. USD. Audience Network
excluded

**60% vs
34%**

of TLA spend runs on
engagement vs brand
awareness (3% video views)

95%

confidence interval on every
paired number, shown in
[brackets]

HOW TO READ THE STARS

★★★ paired within account, significant, n over 100

★★ paired within account, significant, n 25 to 100

★ directional: cross-account or small n. "ns" next to a number = not statistically significant. ★★ and ★★★ also apply to within-campaign indices and cross-campaign tables with n over 200 whose within-account check agrees.

LP landing page. LP CPC = cost per landing page click, LP CTR = landing page click rate. "Cost per click" alone = total cost per click as Campaign Manager reports it.

ENG engagement = every reaction, comment, share, follow and click (including "see more" and profile visits). Engagement rate = engagements ÷ impressions. A landing page click is the subset that reaches your site.

TLA thought leader ad: a company-sponsored post from a person's profile. Sponsored content: a post from the company page. Cold = attribute targeting, no list. Retargeting = site visitors and ad engagers. Dwell = seconds on screen.



KIIN'S POV · KIIN.CO

Why paired, and why it matters

Across different accounts, the advertisers who choose an objective, a bid type or a targeting style are not the same advertisers. Compare them and you measure who they are, not what the setting does.

So every comparison here is the same account running both sides in the same window. Smaller n, smaller headline, and the only version that survives being checked.

B2B tech advertisers, US first and Europe second, aimed at Director to C-suite at mid-market companies

2,563 thought leader ad campaigns, 464 accounts, \$8.4M, Audience Network excluded. Mostly US-billed, targeting decision makers in marketing, revenue, operations and IT. Three quarters do it by title list or uploaded account list rather than seniority or function filters, on audiences of about 20,000 people, at \$4 to 5k a year.

GEOGRAPHY · SHARE OF SPEND

TARGET	SHARE
US only	37%
Global / multi-region	22%
Europe ex-UK only	10%
North America + Europe	9%
US + Canada	8%
UK only	5%

68% of spend touches the US, 23% the UK, 20% continental Europe.

ADVERTISER LOCATION · BILLING CURRENCY

CURRENCY	ACCTS	SPEND
USD	225	73%
EUR	140	13%
GBP	38	8%
Other	61	6%

Median account \$4,345 a year. 17 accounts over \$100k are 45% of spend.

SENIORITY · WHERE A FILTER IS SET (21% OF SPEND)

TIER	SHARE
Director / VP / CXO	20% each
Manager	15%
Owner / Partner	13% each
Senior IC	6%

79% of spend sets no seniority filter. 53% of campaigns target by job title instead, median 28 titles: founders, CTO, CMO, CIO, CISO, CRO, CFO.

JOB FUNCTION · WHERE SET (24% OF SPEND)

FUNCTION	SHARE
Marketing	13%
Business development	12%
Operations	11%
IT	8%
Engineering	7%
Product / Sales / Finance	6% each

Industry filter on 30% of spend: Technology and Internet 17%, Software 6%, Financial Services 5%, Telecoms 5%.

AUDIENCE

TYPE	SPEND	N
Cold	33%	913
Uploaded list	49%	1,213
Retargeting	19%	437

Median audience 21,000. Under 10k 21% of spend, 10 to 30k 25%, 30 to 100k 27%, 100k+ 25%.

SETUP

SETUP	SPEND
Engagement / BA	60% / 34%
Single image / video	76% / 23%
CPM / CPC bid	51% / 46%
Manual / max reach	44% / 28%

A campaign counts under every value it targets, so facet shares can exceed 100%.

The six numbers to take away

MEDIANS ACROSS B2B TECH ADVERTISERS, 8 SEP 2025 TO 7 SEP 2026, USD, PAIRED WITHIN ACCOUNT, AUDIENCE NETWORK EXCLUDED.
STARS: ★★★ PAIRED, N OVER 100 · ★★ PAIRED, N 25 TO 100 · ★ DIRECTIONAL.

01

Brand awareness reaches 77% more people per dollar. Use it only on big, cold audiences

Overall, paired in 59 accounts: +77% reach, same cost per landing page click. On 100,000+ people the subset figure is 3.8x at a quarter of the CPM, and it costs less per engagement (\$1.06 vs \$1.89). Under 10,000 it reaches 1% more and costs \$4.75 per engagement vs \$1.79. ★★

02

Engagement: for retargeting, lists and small audiences

Brand awareness costs 51% to 90% more per engagement on a retargeting pool (n=7 to 8, ★), 49% more on an uploaded list (n=32, ★★), and delivers 77% fewer tracked conversions per dollar on a small list (n=19). On video it costs 99% more (n=17). Warm or small, the reach objective has nothing new to buy.

03

The cheapest format for a landing page click is sponsored content on the traffic objective: median \$11.75

The median engagement TLA: \$13.51 (n=193). Same click rate (0.449% vs 0.441%), higher CPM (\$74.71 vs \$48.80). The top quarter of TLAs match sponsored content in their own account. None beat it. ★★★

04

Your frequency is 9.5, not 3.5

Over 90 days, campaign-reported frequency is 3.45; deduplicated across the account it is 9.48 (154 ninety-day windows, 71 accounts). 47% of the people a campaign reaches were already reached by another campaign in the same account. Run 13+ campaigns and true frequency is 10.6. ★★★

05

Time doesn't kill a TLA. Frequency does.

Over 8 weeks cost per click, CPM and dwell are flat. Engagement is already 4% down when the average person has seen the ad only a quarter to half a time. One full pass: -9% engagement, -10% click rate. CPM falls to hide it, so cost per click won't warn you. ★★★

06

Top authors get 8.6x the engagement of bottom authors

Top decile 10.55%, bottom decile 1.22% (47 authors). Author identity explains 67% of engagement variance across accounts and 20% within a single company. No hook pattern, post length or link decision survives holding the author constant. ★★

01

Engagement or brand awareness

Neither is cheaper per landing page click. Brand awareness buys reach on big audiences. Engagement buys everything else.

Brand awareness reaches **77% more people** per dollar.

Engagement gets **88% more engagement**.

The landing page click costs the same: **\$17.24 vs \$17.22**.

COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK

Tie

\$17.24 vs \$17.22. Paired within 36 accounts, brand awareness cheaper in 20 of them; -6% [-30%, +39%]. A tie in every split we tested.

PEOPLE REACHED PER DOLLAR

Brand awareness wins

+77% more unique people per dollar [+45%, +96%], because its CPM is 39% lower.

ENGAGEMENT PER IMPRESSION

Engagement wins

+88% more engagement per impression, +82% more landing page clicks per impression, and more tracked conversions per dollar (directional).

METRIC	BRAND AWARENESS VS ENGAGEMENT, PAIRED WITHIN ACCOUNT	WINNER
Cost per landing page click	\$17.24 vs \$17.22 • BA -6% [-30%, +39%] • n=36	TIE
Cost per engagement	BA +36% [-2%, +87%] • n=59. Tied overall; the audience-size split on the next page resolves it	TIE
People reached per dollar	+77% [+45%, +96%] • n=59	BRAND AWARENESS
CPM	-39% [-52%, -30%] • n=59	BRAND AWARENESS
Engagement per impression	+88% (BA -47% [-64%, -39%]) • n=59	ENGAGEMENT
Landing page click rate	+82% [+22%, +117%] (BA -45% [-54%, -18%]) • n=35	ENGAGEMENT
Tracked conversions per dollar	BA -19% ns (leans engagement); -50% with a seniority filter • n=66	TIE
Daily frequency	1.10 vs 1.16 • n=59	TIE

ENGAGEMENT GETS 82% MORE LANDING PAGE CLICKS PER IMPRESSION; BRAND AWARENESS PAYS 39% LESS PER IMPRESSION. THE TWO CANCEL. A TIE IN EVERY SPLIT WE TESTED: AUDIENCE SIZE, COLD VS LIST, FORMAT, REGION, BUDGET (N=7 TO 18 PER CELL, EVERY INTERVAL SPANS ZERO). THE ONE EXCEPTION: AGAINST ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGNS BID ON CPM (N=16), BRAND AWARENESS LANDING PAGE CLICKS ARE 21% CHEAPER. RETARGETING COULD NOT BE TESTED; ALMOST NOBODY RUNS BRAND AWARENESS ON A RETARGETING POOL WITH A LINK. **

Under 10,000 people, brand awareness costs \$4.75 per engagement vs \$1.79.

Over 100,000, it costs \$1.06 vs \$1.89.

Under 10,000 people there is no one extra to reach, so brand awareness, the cheaper-impression objective, just pays more per engagement. Overall, brand awareness reaches +77% more people per dollar. That average hides the split: over 100,000 people it reaches 3.8× as many (+276%, paired), under 10,000 only +1%.

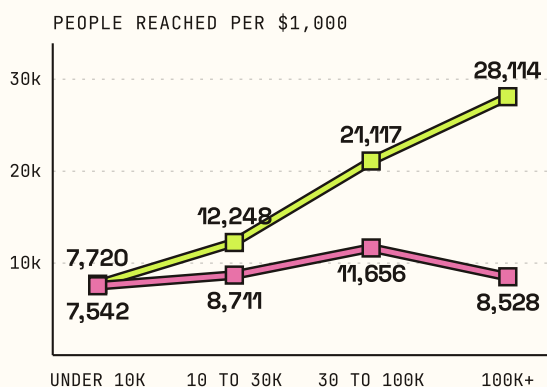
PER-ACCOUNT MEDIAN, ACCOUNTS RUNNING BOTH OBJECTIVES

AUDIENCE	N	PEOPLE REACHED PER \$1K		CPM		COST PER ENGAGEMENT	
		ENGAGEMENT	BRAND AWARENESS	ENGAGEMENT	BRAND AWARENESS	ENGAGEMENT	BRAND AWARENESS
Under 10k	17	7,542	7,720	\$110.66	\$127.28	\$1.79	\$4.75
10k to 30k	19	8,711	12,248	\$82.66	\$64.00	\$2.12	\$2.28
30k to 100k	22	11,656	21,117	\$66.68	\$40.55	\$2.20	\$2.15
100k+	16	8,528	28,114	\$104.77	\$29.46	\$1.89	\$1.06

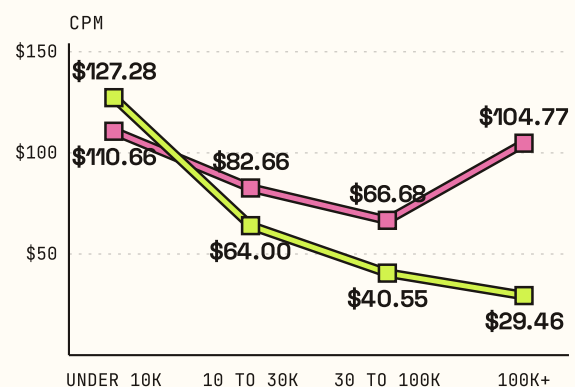
REACH PER DOLLAR PAIRED: UNDER 10K +1% • 10 TO 30K +62% • 30 TO 100K +120% • 100K+ +276%. CPM AT 100K+: -74%. **

PEOPLE REACHED PER \$1,000 AND CPM BY TARGET AUDIENCE SIZE • PER-ACCOUNT MEDIAN, ACCOUNTS RUNNING BOTH

— BRAND AWARENESS — ENGAGEMENT



n = 17 / 19 / 22 / 16 accounts per band, paired within account
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n = 17 / 19 / 22 / 16 accounts per band, paired within account
Kiin Labs • kiin.co/research/linkedin-thought-leader-ads-benchmarks-2026

Same spend, same account. Brand awareness reaches the same number of people under 10k. At 100k+ the medians are 28,114 vs 8,528; paired within account, 3.8× (+276%). Points are the four audience bands; the lines only join them.

On a 30k+ cold audience, brand awareness reaches **+184% more people at **-59% CPM**.**

On a retargeting pool it costs **+51% to +90% per engagement.**

USE BRAND AWARENESS WHEN

The audience is big and cold: 30,000 people or more you have not reached before.

Reach +184%, CPM -59%, cost per engagement level (+12%, ns). The cheap impression lands on someone new. n=18

The job is to be seen, not clicked.

Brand awareness reaches 77% more people per dollar. Its landing page click rate is 45% lower and it pays proportionally less per impression, so the click costs the same. Buy it for reach, not for the click.

The creative is a single image post.

Reach +74%, CPM -42% on single image. Never on video: cost per engagement +99%, dwell -27%. n=53 / 17

The audience is 10,000 to 30,000: no universal winner.

Brand awareness reaches +62% more per dollar; cost per engagement \$2.12 vs \$2.28, not significant. Pick by outcome: reach or action. n=19

You would bid CPM anyway.

Against CPM-bid engagement campaigns, brand awareness has the same click rate (+8%, ns), the same cost per engagement (-4%), double the reach, and landing page clicks 21% cheaper (n=16, directional).

USE ENGAGEMENT WHEN

You are retargeting website visitors or ad engagers.

Brand awareness on a retargeting pool: reach +17%, CPM +14%, cost per engagement +51% to +90%. The pool is small and already warm; a reach objective has nothing to find. n=7 to 8, every metric points the same way.

You are running an uploaded company or contact list.

Brand awareness on a list: reach +72% but cost per engagement +49%. A small list (under 30k) is the worst case: conversions per dollar -77%. n=32 / 19

The audience is under 10,000 people.

Brand awareness reaches 1% more, CPM +13%, cost per engagement +49% (\$4.75 vs \$1.79). Nobody extra to reach. n=17

You need comments, shares or clicks.

Engagement gets 88% more engagement per impression, 82% more landing page clicks per impression, 3 to 4× the comments and 2 to 5× the organic amplification.

The rule

Brand awareness for big, cold, single-image audiences where you want to be seen. Engagement for retargeting, lists, small audiences, video, and anything you need acted on. Neither is cheaper per landing page click. They buy different outcomes.

Brand awareness buys **77% more reach** with **65% to 78% fewer comments** and **22% less dwell**.

Brand awareness does not reach more people by showing the ad fewer times. Daily frequency is identical, 1.10 vs 1.16. It reaches more because it buys cheaper impressions and spreads them slightly wider: 90.8% of its impressions are unique vs 85.9%.

BA ÷ ENGAGEMENT, 66 ACCOUNTS	PAIRED
Daily frequency	-2%
Dwell	-22%
Comments per 100k impressions	-65% to -78%
Organic impressions earned from reactions, comments and shares	-42% to -81%
Share of clicks that don't reach the landing page	+0%

PER IMPRESSION, REACH IS THE SAME: AT EQUAL IMPRESSIONS PER MEMBER, PENETRATION IS IDENTICAL UP TO 1×. AT 2 TO 4×, ENGAGEMENT REACHES 90% OF THE AUDIENCE, BRAND AWARENESS 54%. THE ADVANTAGE IS ENTIRELY THE CPM. ★

DEFINITION

What “tracked conversions per dollar” means

The conversions LinkedIn records for the campaign (the conversion events each account has defined on its Insight Tag or Conversions API: demo requests, sign-ups, downloads) divided by spend on that objective. Each account defines its own conversion, so the metric is only compared within account, never across. Brand awareness: -19% overall, -50% with a seniority filter, -33% with no company-size filter. ★★

DEFINITION

What “people reached per dollar” means

Unique members served at least one impression, divided by spend, per account, then the paired ratio between objectives in the same account. It is a reach metric, not an attention metric: a person counts once whether they scrolled past or read the whole post.

How Kiin reads it:

brand awareness **above 30,000 cold,**

engagement **below 10,000 and on every list.**

The objective is a purchasing decision, not a performance setting

People treat engagement vs brand awareness as “which one is cheaper”. Paired within account, neither is: the click costs the same, and cost per engagement is tied. What changes is what a dollar buys. Brand awareness buys new people at a lower CPM. Engagement buys reactions, comments, clicks and conversions from the people it reaches. Pick the outcome first and the objective follows.

Audience size is the whole decision

The cheaper impression only helps if it lands on someone new. On 100,000 people it does, so brand awareness reaches 3.8× more per dollar. On 10,000 it cannot, so the cheaper impression just repeats and the cost per engagement goes to \$4.75. That is why every retargeting pool, list and small audience lands on engagement: not because engagement is a better objective, but because there is nobody new for brand awareness to find.

Most of engagement’s click edge is the bidding, not the objective

Against engagement campaigns that also bid CPM, brand awareness has the same click rate and the same cost per engagement, with double the reach. The 82% click-rate gap in the headline table is mostly CPC bidding paying for clicks. If you were going to bid CPM anyway, brand awareness on a big cold audience is close to free reach.

Reach is shallower than engagement, and that is fine if you know it

Brand awareness reach comes with a quarter of the comments, half the organic amplification and 22% less dwell. It is being seen, not being discussed. For a thought leader ad whose job is familiarity on a big cold audience, that is the right purchase. For one whose job is to start a conversation with a named list, it is the wrong one.

How we run it

Big cold audiences (30k+), single image, CPM bid: brand awareness. Retargeting pools, uploaded lists, anything under 10k, video, and any campaign we need acted on: engagement. We never split a small audience across both; there is nothing for the second objective to add.

The two caveats we would put on it

The retargeting cell is 7 to 8 accounts, so it is directional, though every metric points the same way. And “conversions” means whatever each account tracks, so read the conversion lines as within-account comparisons only.

02

The frequency illusion

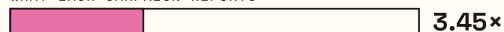
Every campaign reports its own frequency. Add them up at account level and 3.5 becomes 9.5.

Your campaign reports frequency **3.5**.

Your account's true frequency is **9.5**.

FREQUENCY OVER 90 DAYS • SAME ACCOUNTS

WHAT EACH CAMPAIGN REPORTS



WHAT THE ACCOUNT ACTUALLY DELIVERS



n = 154 ninety-day windows, 71 accounts; 131 accounts overall
Kiin Labs • kiin.co/research/linkedin-thought-leader-ads-benchmarks-2026

Understated 2.7×. 154 ninety-day windows across 71 accounts; 131 accounts overall. ★★★

PEOPLE COUNTED BY MORE THAN ONE CAMPAIGN

47%

of the people a campaign reaches over 90 days were already reached by another campaign in the same account

BY WINDOW • LINKEDIN REACH API, ALL CAMPAIGNS IN THE ACCOUNT

WINDOW	OVERLAP	REPORTED	TRUE	UNDERSTATED
7 days	18%	2.01	2.65	1.4×
30 days	36%	2.79	5.42	1.9×
90 days	47%	3.45	9.48	2.7×

BY CAMPAIGNS LIVE OVER 90 DAYS

CAMPAIGNS	OVERLAP	REPORTED	TRUE
2	3%	3.96	4.24
4 to 5	19%	2.72	3.91
7 to 11	36%	3.39	8.61
13+	55%	3.48	10.60



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What this changes

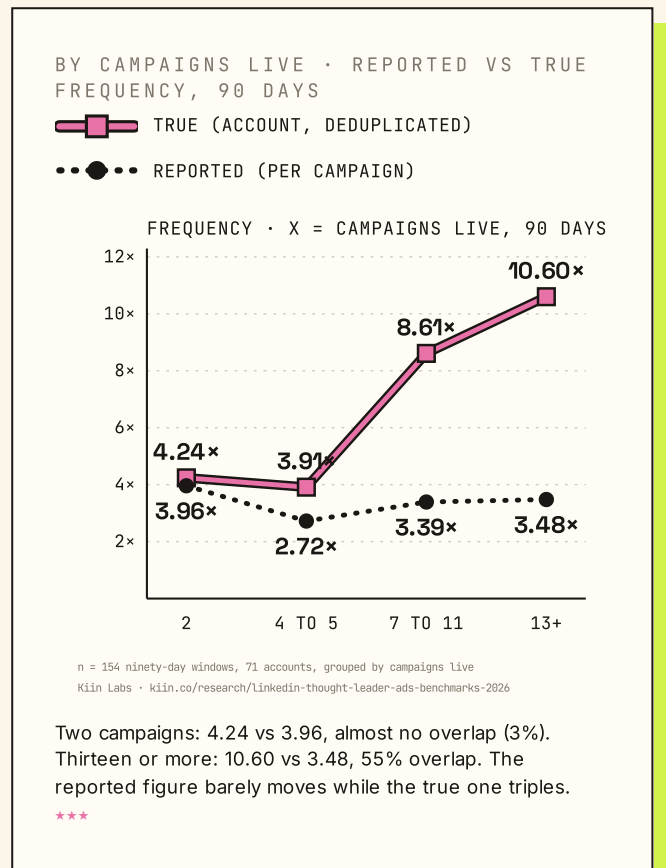
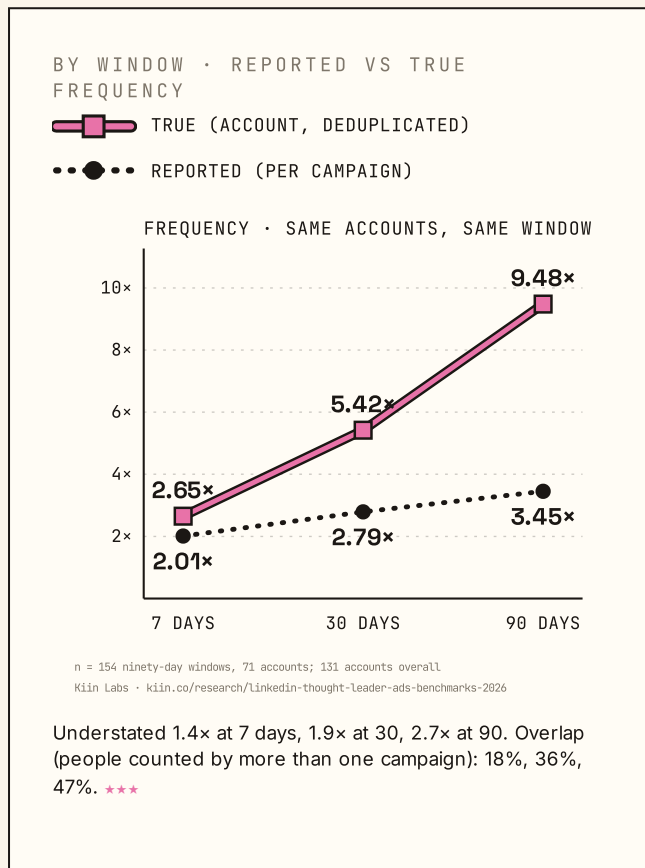
An account running 13 or more campaigns over a quarter shows each person the brand 10.6 times while every campaign report says 3.5. A person who has seen one creative once has typically seen the brand two or three times.

Whether account-level frequency explains fatigue better than campaign frequency is untestable at current data (21 accounts). The fatigue curves in the next section are measured per creative and are unaffected.

Over 90 days, campaigns report frequency **3.45**.
The account delivers **9.48**.

With **13** or more campaigns live, **10.6**.

The dotted line is what every campaign report says. The pink line is the same accounts, the same windows, deduplicated across every campaign with LinkedIn's reach API. The gap opens with the window and with the number of campaigns running.



⚡ KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

Campaign frequency is the number LinkedIn shows you. Account frequency is the number your audience experiences. We read every frequency cap, fatigue alert and creative-refresh decision against the deduplicated account figure, and we expect it to be two to three times the campaign figure once more than a handful of campaigns are live.

03

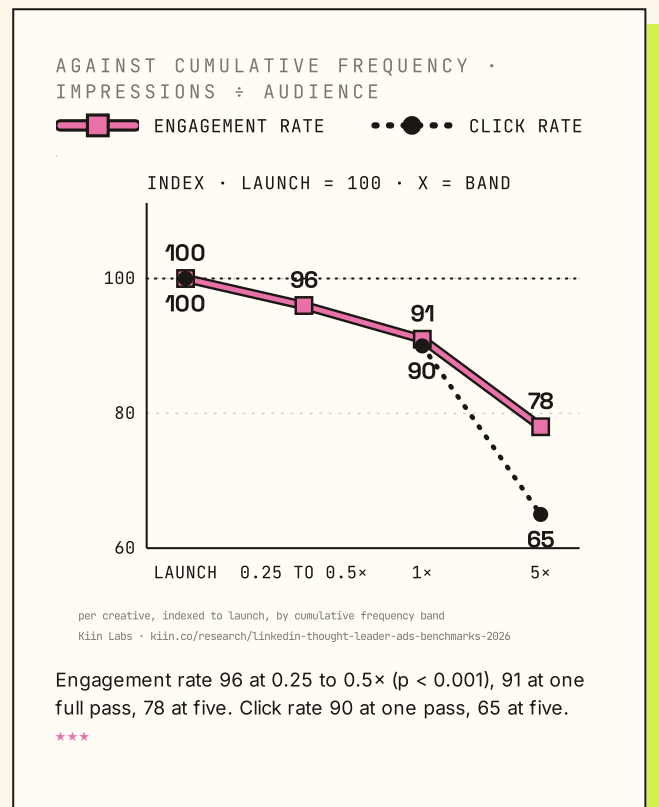
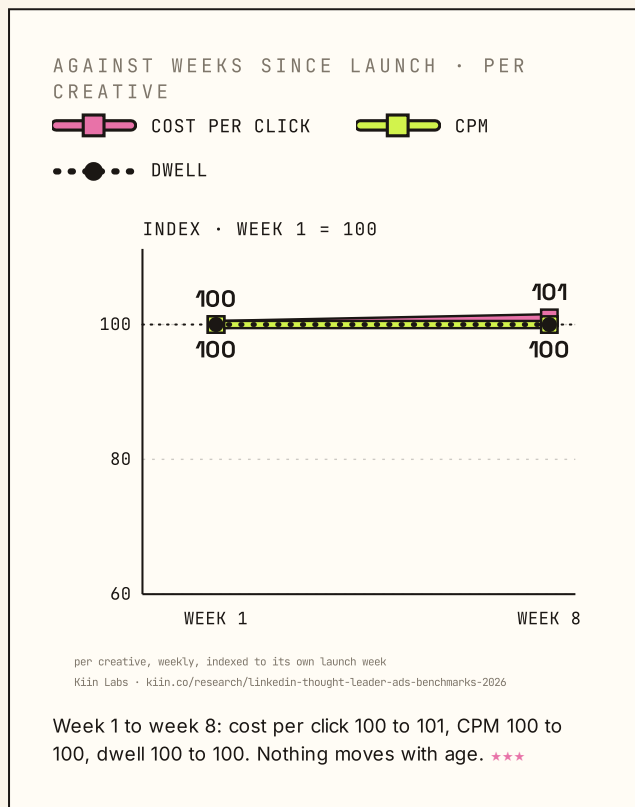
Fatigue

Engagement falls with frequency, not time. Cost per click is the last metric to notice.

Time doesn't kill a thought leader ad: cost per click, CPM and dwell flat over 8 weeks.

Frequency does: -9% engagement at one pass, -22% at five.

Cumulative frequency is impressions divided by audience. At 0.25 to 0.5x, the average person has seen the ad less than once, and engagement is already 4% below launch. By the time everyone has seen it once, it is down 9%.



Cost per click won't warn you

Cost per click (total, as reported in Campaign Manager) shows no significant change until 3 to 5x frequency. CPM falls as a campaign matures (index 94 by half a pass) and cancels out the collapsing click rate. By the time the cost line moves, you are a month late.

What to watch instead

Engagement rate and landing page click rate, against cumulative frequency, not against the calendar. A creative that is 60 days old is not tired because it is old.

⚡ KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

We set fatigue alerts on engagement rate and landing page click rate by cumulative frequency, never on cost per click and never on days live. The cost line moves a month after the problem starts.

An audience under 10,000 burns a creative in **14 days**.

A 100,000-person one takes **53**.

MEDIAN DAYS TO ONE FULL AUDIENCE PASS

TARGET AUDIENCE	DAYS TO 1×	EVER GET THERE
Under 10,000	14	74%
10,000 to 30,000	32	52%
30,000 to 100,000	48	29%
100,000+	53	10%

*** SWAP THE CREATIVE ON AUDIENCE SIZE, NOT THE CALENDAR.

CHEAPEST MONTHLY FREQUENCY BAND

1.5 to 2×

cheapest in 3 of 4 audience sizes, 732 deduplicated monthly windows **

SUB-10K AUDIENCE PUSHED TO 4 TO 5× A MONTH

6.3×

cost per click goes from \$23.64 to \$149.15

**

Refreshing stops the bleed, it doesn't buy a better ad

A freshly added creative scores 91 on engagement against the creatives already running (they = 100) and beats them only 42% of the time ($p = 0.002$). But campaigns that keep adding creative hold engagement flat; those that don't lose 8% a month.

**

Many small creatives or few big ones: no difference

Within account, more creatives live moves nothing: CPM +6%, engagement -4%, cost per LP click +10%, all spanning zero. Concentrating budget on fewer creatives costs +20% CPM [+3%, +26%], and that is the only effect. Fatigue is per creative, driven by frequency, not by what runs next to it. **

KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

Refresh cadence comes from audience size, not the calendar. Under 10k people we plan a new creative every two weeks; over 100k, monthly is plenty. We keep monthly frequency at 1.5 to 2× and treat 4× on a small audience as a budget problem, not a creative one.

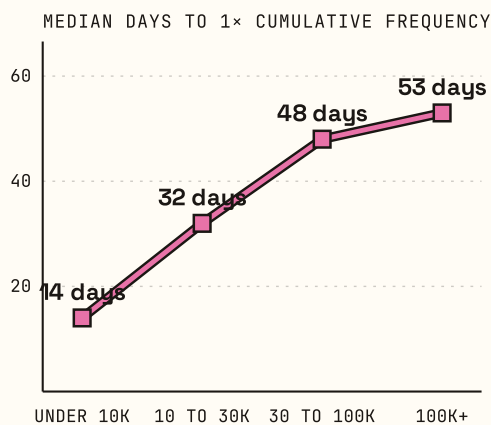
Under 10,000 people, a creative completes one full pass in **14 days** and **74%** of campaigns get there.

Over 100,000: **53 days** and **10%**.

One full pass is cumulative frequency 1x: as many impressions as there are people in the target audience. It is the point where engagement is 9% below launch. On a small audience it arrives in two weeks. On a large one most campaigns never reach it at all.

DAYS TO ONE FULL AUDIENCE PASS • BY TARGET AUDIENCE SIZE

 MEDIAN DAYS TO ONE FULL PASS

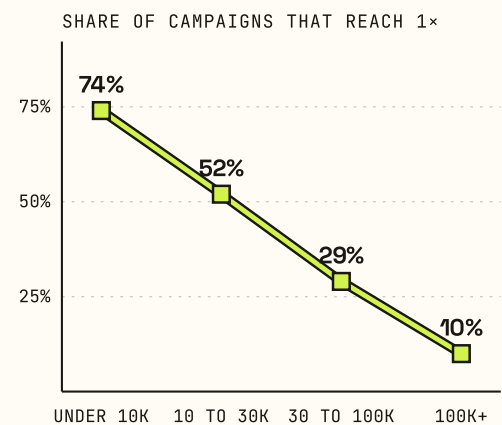


TLA campaigns by target audience band, cumulative frequency
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Median days from launch to cumulative frequency 1x. Four audience bands, straight lines between them. ***

SHARE OF CAMPAIGNS THAT EVER COMPLETE A PASS

 SHARE OF CAMPAIGNS THAT EVER GET THERE



TLA campaigns by target audience band
Kiin Labs • kiin.co/research/linkedin-thought-leader-ads-benchmarks-2026

Under 10,000 people, three in four campaigns pass 1x. Over 100,000, one in ten. The rest are refreshed, paused or run out of budget first. ***

KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

We schedule creative refreshes from these two lines, not from a calendar. A sub-10k list gets a new creative in the plan from day one, because the first one is spent inside a fortnight. On a 100k+ audience nine in ten campaigns never complete a pass, so frequency is rarely the reason to swap.

04

The auction

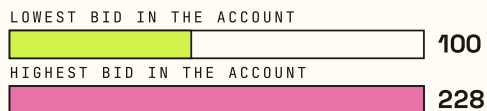
Higher bids bought more expensive, lower-engagement inventory. Bid type does nothing. Engagement never lowers CPM.

Within the same accounts, the highest-bid campaign paid **+128% per engagement** and got **-32% engagement rate** vs the lowest-bid campaign.

SAME ACCOUNT, HIGHEST-BID CAMPAIGN VS LOWEST-BID • N=67

	HIGH VS LOW BID	95% CI
CPM	+59%	[+19%, +104%]
Cost per engagement	+128%	[+99%, +161%]
Engagement rate	-32%	[-39%, -14%]
Cost per LP click	+104%	[+40%, +154%]

COST PER ENGAGEMENT • LOWEST-BID CAMPAIGN = 100



n = 67 accounts, within account, not audience-matched
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WITHIN ACCOUNT, BID TO COST PER ENGAGEMENT R = +0.70, POSITIVE IN 85% OF 78 ACCOUNTS. BID TO ENGAGEMENT RATE R = -0.40. **

CPC VS CPM BID TYPE

No difference

49 accounts running both: every CI spans zero, at every audience size. Cross-account, CPM bidding looks 27 to 58% cheaper per engagement, but those accounts target audiences 2× larger. Within account (39 pairs): -13% [-42%, +32%]. **

AUTOMATED BIDDING

Max-clicks: tie. Enhanced conversion: avoid.

Manual vs max-clicks: no difference. Enhanced conversion optimisation: cost per engagement +56% [+23%, +148%], engagement rate -34% [-51%, -15%], worse in 76 to 82% of the 17 accounts running both. **



KIIN'S POV • KIIN.CO

Bid low, and stop optimising the bid type

Within the same advertiser, the highest-bid campaign paid 128% more per engagement and got 32% less of it. This comparison is within account, not matched on audience. The highest-bid campaign in an account may also be the one on the smallest list, and the study did not control for that here (it did for the bid-type test). Read it as: higher bids went with more expensive, lower-engagement inventory in the same accounts. Meanwhile the thing people argue about, CPC versus CPM, does nothing.

On CPM bidding, engagement has **zero effect on CPM ($r = -0.02$)**.

On CPC bidding, the most engaging creative costs **+101% per 1,000 impressions**.

CPM-BID CAMPAIGNS •
ENGAGEMENT TO CPM

$r = -0.02$

over 9,077 campaign-days. Most-engaging creative vs least: +1% CPM. Zero effect on impression price ***

CPC-BID CAMPAIGNS • MOST-
ENGAGING VS LEAST

+101%

per 1,000 impressions. You are billed for every reaction ***

Within campaign, the most-engaging creative costs +66% per 1,000 impressions vs the least [+56%, +74%], cheaper in only 20% of 227 campaigns. Days at 2× a campaign's normal engagement are followed by a week at 109 CPM, not a cheaper one.

What does fall is cost per engagement: -48% for the most-engaging vs least-engaging campaign in an account, cheaper in 74 of 85. Cheaper per reaction, never per impression.

LINKEDIN AUDIENCE NETWORK

3.7× the click rate.
9× worse conversion.

Clicks 83% cheaper. Conversions per landing page click 14.80% off-LAN vs 1.68% on. Cost per conversion \$108.78 vs \$159.25 (+46%). 9 of 37 accounts got zero conversions from LAN while converting off it. **

KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

We keep bids low, because the bid-amount result is the one that moved: +128% per engagement for the highest bid in an account. We bid CPM because LinkedIn bills engagement on CPC, not because CPM is cheaper; the data says bid type makes no difference. We turn Audience Network off: it makes the dashboard look brilliant and the pipeline look empty.

05

Cost, scale and the checklist

The lowest median landing page click is \$11.75 and it is not a TLA. Big spenders pay more. Four settings separate a \$25 click from a \$6 one.

In this dataset the lowest median landing page click is **\$11.75**.

It is sponsored content, not a thought leader ad.

MEDIAN COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK BY
FORMAT AND OBJECTIVE

SETUP	ACCOUNTS	LP CPC
Sponsored content · single image · traffic (website visits) objective	219	\$11.75
Sponsored content · video · traffic objective	74	\$12.01
TLA · single image · engagement	193	\$13.51
Sponsored content · single image · engagement	133	\$16.61
TLA · single image · brand awareness	59	\$16.73
TLA · video · engagement	63	\$32.34

*** THE TOP 25% OF TLA CAMPAIGNS MATCH THE BEST SPONSORED CONTENT IN THEIR OWN ACCOUNT (~18%, NS). BELOW THE TOP QUARTER, SPONSORED CONTENT WINS BY 34 TO 120%.

Market medians: different advertisers in each row

This table places sponsored content against thought leader ads. It is not a paired objective comparison. Within the same account, engagement and brand awareness TLAs are tied on cost per landing page click (\$17.24 vs \$17.22, see 01).

TLA VS SPONSORED CONTENT · LP CTR

**0.449% vs
0.441%**

identical click rate. CPM \$74.71 vs \$48.80.
The whole TLA premium is media cost ***

SAME OBJECTIVE

**TLAs are cheaper
than company page
ads on the same
objective**

-22% per landing page click on engagement (n=106), -47% on brand awareness (n=32). Both true at once: on engagement or brand awareness a TLA beats a company post; but sponsored content on the traffic objective beats both, and TLAs cost +52 to 59% more against it (n=119 to 127). ***



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**Buy TLAs for what they
do, not for the click**

91% of clicks on a thought leader ad never reach a landing page (page 42). If the click is the job, sponsored content on traffic is the cheapest way to buy it. If the job is being read and remembered, that is a different purchase.

Half of all TLA spend comes from 23 accounts.

They pay the most per landing page click: \$20.18 vs \$10.53.

SHARE OF TLA SPEND

ACCOUNTS	SHARE
Top 1% (4 accounts)	22%
Top 5% (23)	51%
Top 10% (46)	64%
Top 20% (92)	80%
Top 50%	96%

MEDIAN ACCOUNT \$4,345 OVER 12 MONTHS.
MEAN \$18,119. 464-ACCOUNT BASE. ***

UNIT COSTS BY SPEND TIER • ENGAGEMENT SINGLE-IMAGE TLAS

TIER	CPM	COST / ENG	LP CPC	SPEND ON LISTS / RETARGETING
Top 10%	\$105.79	\$2.18	\$20.18	81%
10 to 25%	\$80.45	\$1.95	\$19.80	99%
25 to 50%	\$77.32	\$1.46	\$13.24	37%
Bottom 50%	\$46.87	\$1.11	\$10.53	0%

TOP 10% VS MIDDLE: COST PER ENGAGEMENT +50% [+2%, +117%], LP CPC +52% [0%, +218%]. **

+15%

per landing page click in the same advertiser's high-spend months vs low-spend months (n=176). CPM +18% [+11%, +23%]. Even holding the advertiser constant, spending more costs more per unit. ***



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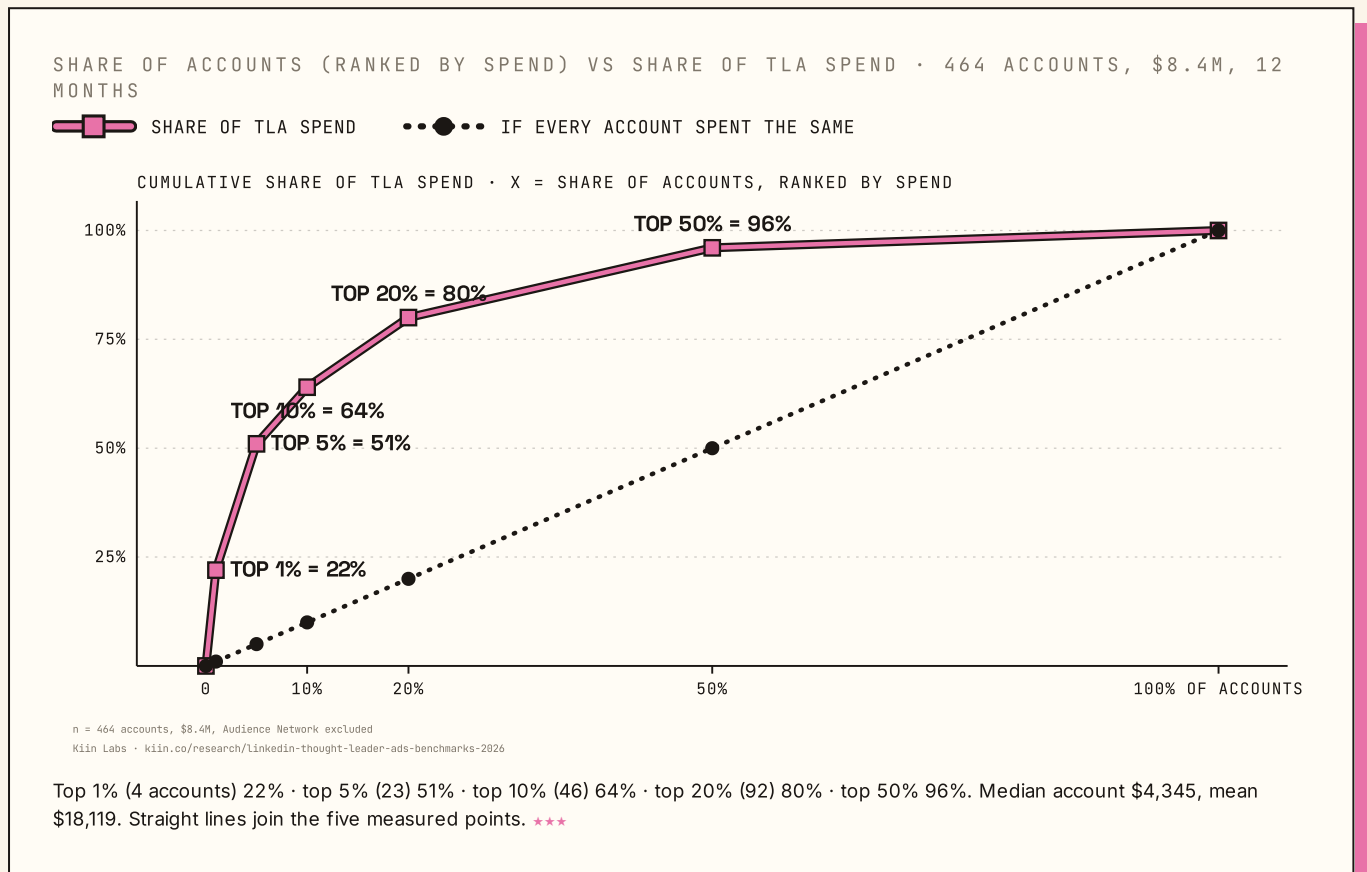
Scale does not get cheaper on LinkedIn

Two things drive it. The big spenders run 81 to 99% of their money on uploaded lists and retargeting, which are smaller, denser, more expensive audiences. And they simply spend more per person targeted, which is the variable that sets CPM (next page).

23 accounts, the top 5% of the panel, are **51%** of all thought leader ad spend.

The top 20% are **80%**.

Each point is the share of the 464 accounts, ranked by spend, against the share of the \$8.4M they account for. The dotted diagonal is what the curve would look like if every account spent the same.



⚡ KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

Any benchmark that averages across accounts is describing the 46 accounts in the top 10%. That is why every headline number in this report is a median of per-account figures, and why the paired comparisons matter more than the panel totals.

Double a campaign's daily spend: +26% per landing page click, +59% more clicks.

WITHIN CAMPAIGN • DAY'S SPEND VS ITS
NORMAL DAY • 940 CAMPAIGNS, 82,700 DAYS

DAY'S SPEND VS THE CAMPAIGN'S NORMAL DAY	CPM INDEX	LP CPC INDEX
0.5 to 0.8×	92	83
0.8 to 1.25×	101	101
1.25 to 2×	115	114
2 to 3×	135	131
3×+	156	166

$\text{COST PER LP CLICK} \propto \text{DAILY SPEND}^{0.33}$. DOUBLE A
CAMPAIGN'S SPEND: EACH LANDING PAGE CLICK
COSTS 26% MORE, YOU GET 59% MORE CLICKS.
QUADRUPLE: +66% PER LANDING PAGE CLICK. ***

THE RIGHT UNIT • \$ PER DAY PER 1,000
TARGETED MEMBERS

\$ / DAY PER 1K MEMBERS	TYPICAL AUDIENCE	CPM	LP CPC
Under \$0.50	130,000	\$39.57	\$8.07
\$0.50 to 1	40,500	\$62.86	\$12.57
\$1 to 2	26,000	\$78.10	\$16.19
\$2 to 5	11,000	\$82.66	\$15.69
\$5 to 10	5,000	\$121.81	\$22.00
\$10+	3,200	\$121 to 128	\$18 to 20

COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK DOUBLES BETWEEN
\$0.50 AND \$2 PER DAY PER 1,000 MEMBERS. THAT
IS THE ELBOW. ***

KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

We size budget to the audience, not the other way round. The number we watch is dollars per day per 1,000 targeted members; past \$2 the click has doubled in price. If a campaign needs more spend, we widen the audience before we raise the daily budget.

\$35.04 vs \$13.59

per landing page click for the same \$50 a day on an audience under 10,000 versus one over 100,000. The audience decides what a budget costs. Why: spend per targeted member drives CPM ($r = +0.50$), and CPM drives cost per landing page click ($r = +0.745$).

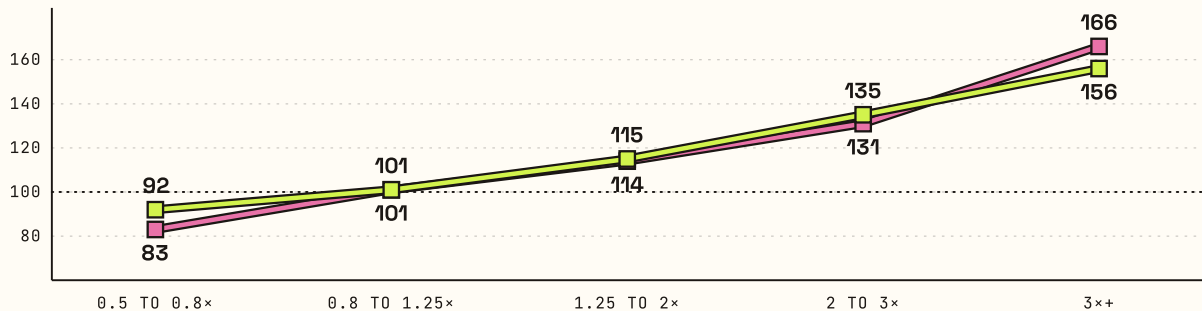
A day at 3× a campaign's normal spend pays **+56% CPM** and **+66% per landing page click**.

Past \$2 a day per 1,000 members, the click has doubled.

THE SAME CAMPAIGN ON A HEAVIER DAY • DAY'S SPEND VS ITS OWN NORMAL DAY

—■— COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK —■— CPM

INDEX • THE CAMPAIGN'S NORMAL DAY = 100



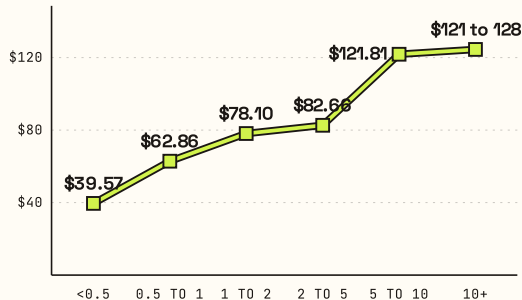
n = 948 campaigns, 82,780 campaign-days, indexed within campaign
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Within campaign, day by day. A day at 0.5 to 0.8× the normal spend buys clicks 17% cheaper; a day at three times buys them 66% more expensive. Cost per landing page click rises with daily spend to the power 0.33. ★★★

CPM BY BUDGET PRESSURE • \$ PER DAY PER 1,000 TARGETED MEMBERS

—■— CPM

CPM • X = \$ PER DAY PER 1,000 MEMBERS



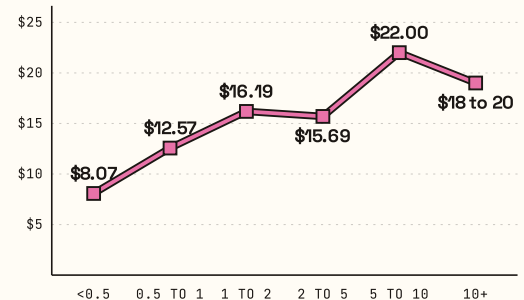
TLA campaigns grouped by daily spend per 1,000 targeted members
Kiin Labs • kiin.co/research/linkedin-thought-leader-ads-benchmarks-2026

Typical audience in each band: 130,000 • 40,500 • 26,000 • 11,000 • 5,000 • 3,200. The \$10+ band is a range in the study and is plotted at its midpoint. ★★★

COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK BY BUDGET PRESSURE

—■— COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK

COST PER LP CLICK • X = \$ PER DAY PER 1,000 MEMBERS



TLA campaigns grouped by daily spend per 1,000 targeted members
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\$8.07 under \$0.50 a day per 1,000 members, \$16.19 at \$1 to 2. The click doubles between \$0.50 and \$2. The \$10+ band is a range (\$18 to 20), plotted at its midpoint. ★★★

Four settings separate **\$25.46** and **\$6.42** per landing page click.

Across 181 accounts, cost per landing page click spreads 15.6× from the 10th to the 90th percentile: the cheapest 10 accounts pay \$1.22, the most expensive 10 pay \$61.92. The same four settings separate them.

WHAT DIFFERS • CHEAPEST 10 VS MOST EXPENSIVE 10

	CHEAPEST	MOST EXPENSIVE
Audience size	105k	17k
\$ per day per 1,000 members	\$0.26	\$8.38
Bid	\$1.82	\$6.96
List / retargeting share	4%	94%

WHAT DOESN'T

	CHEAPEST	MOST EXPENSIVE
Campaigns	2	3
Creatives per campaign	6	6
Frequency	1.3	1.2
Bid type	CPC	CPC
Seniority filter	none	none

THE CHECKLIST • EACH BOX ALONE IS WORTH 1.6 TO 2.2×



Audience 30,000 or more



Under \$2 a day per 1,000 members



At least 50% cold targeting



Bid \$3 or under

\$25.46

0 BOXES • PER LANDING PAGE CLICK

\$6.42

4 BOXES • PER LANDING PAGE CLICK

LINKEDIN FEED INVENTORY ONLY. AUDIENCE NETWORK EXCLUDED.

63% OF THE VARIANCE IN COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK IS CPM, 28% CLICK RATE. CPM PREDICTS COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK AT $R = +0.745$, THE STRONGEST RELATIONSHIP IN THE DATA. YOU CAN'T CREATIVE YOUR WAY OUT OF A BAD CPM. ***

KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

This is the first thing we check on any account we take over. Four settings, in this order: widen the audience past 30,000, drop budget pressure under \$2 a day per 1,000 members, move at least half the spend to cold targeting, cap the bid at \$3. Creative comes after.

06

Creative

Author identity explains 67% of engagement variance. Hooks, length, links, boosting and launch timing are noise. Video is 2.4× worse.

The author explains **67%** of engagement variance across accounts, **20%** within one company.

Top decile **10.55%**, bottom decile **1.22%**.

ENGAGEMENT RATE BY AUTHOR DECILE • 47 AUTHORS

TOP DECILE OF AUTHORS

10.55%

BOTTOM DECILE OF AUTHORS

1.22%

n = 47 authors
Kiin Labs • kiin.co/research/linkedin-thought-leader-ads-benchmarks-2026

An 8.6x spread. Early posts predict later ones at $r = +0.82$.

★★

VARIANCE IN ENGAGEMENT RATE EXPLAINED BY AUTHOR

67%

across accounts. 20% within a single company, where author is not confounded with company and audience ★★

HOOKS

No hook pattern survives the author

Short first line (+5%, ns). "You" (0%). Question opener (ns). First person (ns). Every pattern that looks like it works across accounts is the author writing that way. ★★

LENGTH

Post length doesn't matter

Length to engagement $r = +0.05$, to click rate +0.06, to dwell +0.08. The top decile by engagement writes 1,167 characters. The bottom decile writes 1,122. ★★★



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Pick the person, then worry about the post

Most creative testing on thought leader ads is testing the wrong variable. The first 48 hours predict a campaign's life at $r = 0.81$, and that is the post being good on day one and still good on day 21, not the launch time or the hook formula.

Video TLAs cost **\$32.34** per landing page click vs **\$13.51**. Links, boosting and launch timing: **no effect**.

VIDEO TLA VS
SINGLE IMAGE · LP
CPC

\$32.34
VS
\$13.51

2.4× worse. Video is 14% of engagement TLA campaigns with LP clicks, 5% of the top quarter. Sponsored content video is fine: \$12.01 on traffic. ***

LINK-LESS VS
LINKED ·
WITHIN 32
ACCOUNTS

+2%

engagement. Nothing. Between accounts two thirds of 10%+ posts have no link; that is who runs them. Removing your link won't raise engagement. **

BOOSTED VS
PURPOSE-
BUILT · 86
ACCOUNTS

+3%

engagement [-4%, +17%], cost per LP click -12% ns, identical 11% decay. A post's organic track record doesn't transfer to paid. **

When posts go paid

23% of TLA creatives are promoted within 2 days of posting, 39% within a week. Median post age at promotion: 16 days. 22% are over 90 days old. Cross-account, old posts look 43% better; the accounts that boost old posts are better, the boosting isn't. (3,394 creatives, 361 accounts.)

No launch-day or launch-hour effect

Fri to Sun launch vs Tue to Thu, cost per engagement -4% [-13%, +5%]. Afternoon vs morning: +1%. Launch weekday to cost per engagement within account: $r = 0.00$. Launch habits: Mon 21% · Tue 20% · Wed 23% · Thu 17% · Fri 16% · weekend 3%. **

KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

We stop A/B testing the container. Single image, the author's own voice, a link if the post needs one. The variables that move results are who is posting and how often the same person has seen it.

07

Targeting and reach

Executives engage more and cost the same. A list is a cold audience. A median TLA reaches 20% of its target.

CXOs engage 4.42% vs 3.46% for senior ICs, at the same cost per click.

74% of engagement TLA campaigns (79% of spend) set no seniority filter.

ENGAGEMENT RATE BY SENIORITY TIER

TIER	ENGAGEMENT
Senior IC	3.46%
Manager	3.88%
Director	4.33%
VP	4.31%
CXO	4.42%
Owner	4.30%
Partner	4.42%

COST PER LP CLICK \$12.51 TO \$13.47 ACROSS EVERY TIER. NO-SENIORITY-FILTER CAMPAIGNS PAY THE MOST: \$16.88. **

COST PER LP CLICK BY JOB FUNCTION

FUNCTION	LP CPC
Entrepreneurship	\$9.60
HR	\$13.67
Marketing	\$13.98
Sales	\$16.66
Operations	\$18.22
IT	\$19.21
Quality assurance	\$22.17

HR ENGAGES 5.52%, QA 1.70%: 3x. TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL FUNCTIONS COST 50 TO 100% MORE TO REACH. **

COMPANY SIZE

SMB engages 40% more than enterprise

2 to 10 employees: 5.93% engagement, \$1.22 per engagement. 10,001+: 3.58%, \$2.01. Monotonic decline through every size band. **

TARGETING BREADTH

Narrow is cheaper

One job function \$12.51 per landing page click, \$49 CPM; seven or more \$19.12, \$66. Two to three seniority tiers \$0.98 per engagement, \$40 CPM; no seniority filter \$1.90 and \$78. **

 KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

We always set a seniority filter, usually Director and above, and one or two functions. It costs nothing extra to reach the C-suite with a thought leader ad, and the no-filter campaigns pay the most per click of any group.

An uploaded list performs like cold: **every paired interval spans zero.**

True retargeting: +25% engagement at +58% CPM.

Of 1,927 TLA campaigns: 33% cold (median audience 63,500), 48% uploaded company or contact lists (23,000), 19% true retargeting of website visitors and ad engagers (5,900). Most of what gets called retargeting is a list.

PAIRED WITHIN ACCOUNT • VS COLD

	CPM	ENG RATE	COST / ENG	LP CPC
Uploaded list (n=43)	+11%	-2%	+22%	-3%
True retargeting (n=52)	+58%	+25%	+14%	+14%

LIST: EVERY CI SPANS ZERO. RETARGETING: CPM AND ENGAGEMENT SIGNIFICANT, BOTH COSTS SPAN ZERO. RETARGETING BEATS A LIST IN THE SAME ACCOUNT: ENGAGEMENT +40%, COST PER ENGAGEMENT -9%, LP CTR +23%. CONVERSIONS +20% PER CLICK, COST PER CONVERSION -47%, N=16 ★

COST PER LP CLICK BY AUDIENCE SIZE • ROLLING MEDIAN

AUDIENCE	LP CPC	NOTE
1,000 to 150,000	\$15 to 18	flat
5,000 to 15,000	\$18 to 25	budget pressure zone: a normal \$30 to 50 a day overspends here
200,000	\$14.20	
300,000	\$10.61	
Over 1M	\$8 to 9	

LP CTR FLAT ACROSS THE WHOLE RANGE (0.41 TO 0.59%). SIZE CHANGES WHAT AN IMPRESSION COSTS, NOT WHETHER PEOPLE CLICK. AT EQUAL BUDGET PRESSURE, SIZE DOESN'T MATTER. A LIST COSTS \$340 PER 1,000 PEOPLE REACHED VS \$159 COLD, 2.1x. ★★★

KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

We treat an uploaded list as a cold audience with a higher CPM, not as retargeting. Real retargeting is website visitors and ad engagers, and it buys attention for its premium: same cost per click, +25% engagement, +20% dwell. A list costs 2.1x more per person reached than cold (\$340 vs \$159 per 1,000).

The median TLA reaches **20.5%** of its audience in 90 days.

Only **1 in 4** ever pass 40%.

MEDIAN TLA · SHARE OF AUDIENCE REACHED IN 90 DAYS

20.5%

p75 40.5%, p90 77%. Only 25% of campaigns ever pass 40%; 11% pass 75%. 401 campaigns, 50 accounts, deduplicated reach **

SHARE OF 90-DAY REACH IN THE FIRST 30 DAYS

68%

7 days 9.4% · 30 days 22.7% · 90 days 36.3%. Reach builds fast then stalls **

PENETRATION = $1 - e^{-(\text{IMPRESSIONS PER MEMBER} \div 2)}$

	REACHED	NEXT IMPRESSIONS TO SOMEONE NEW
1 impression per member	39%	24%
2	63%	23%
4	86%	15%

FREQUENCY DOESN'T BUY REACH: AT 1× CUMULATIVE, ONLY 24% OF THE NEXT IMPRESSIONS GO TO ANYONE NEW. LINKEDIN RE-SERVES BEFORE IT PROSPECTS. **

WHAT IT COSTS TO REACH HALF AN AUDIENCE

AUDIENCE	COST TO 50%
3,400 people	\$448
9,800	\$1,752
27,000	\$3,544
81,000	\$9,740
260,000	\$15,832

COST PER 1,000 REACHED RISES WITH DEPTH: \$122 AT 0 TO 5% PENETRATION, \$500 AT 35 TO 50%. REACHING DEEPER DOESN'T DILUTE ENGAGEMENT (THE 75 TO 100% BAND ENGAGES 5.58%, THE HIGHEST). **

KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

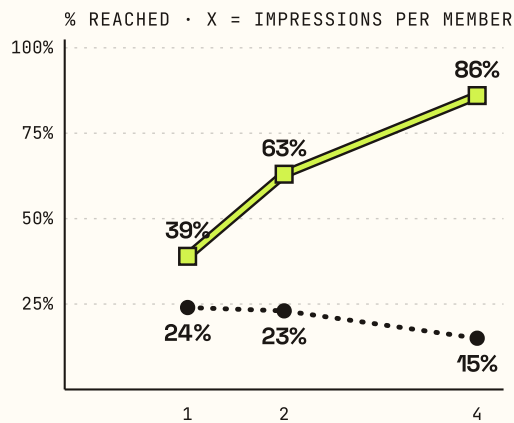
We report reach as a share of the target audience, not as an impression count. A campaign that has reached 20% of its list is normal; one at 40% is in the top quarter. The 40th percent costs 4× the first 5%, and it engages just as well.

One impression per member reaches **39%** of an audience. Four reach **86%**.
Reaching half of 260,000 people costs **\$15,832**.

PENETRATION AGAINST IMPRESSIONS PER MEMBER

—■— SHARE OF AUDIENCE REACHED

••••• NEXT IMPRESSIONS TO SOMEONE NEW

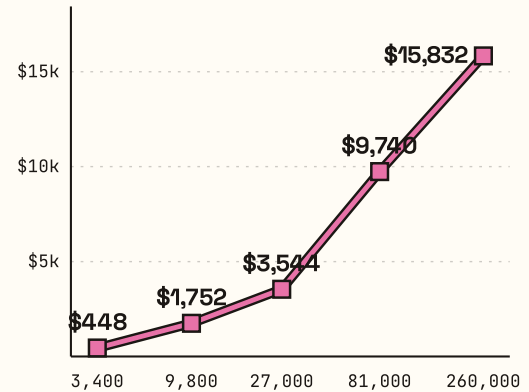


Reached: 39%, 63%, 86% at 1, 2 and 4 impressions per member (fit: $1 - e^{-x/2}$). Dotted: at 1x only 24% of the next impressions go to someone new, at 4x 15%. LinkedIn reserves before it prospects. **

WHAT IT COSTS TO REACH HALF AN AUDIENCE

—■— COST TO REACH HALF THE AUDIENCE

COST TO REACH 50% • LOG X AXIS

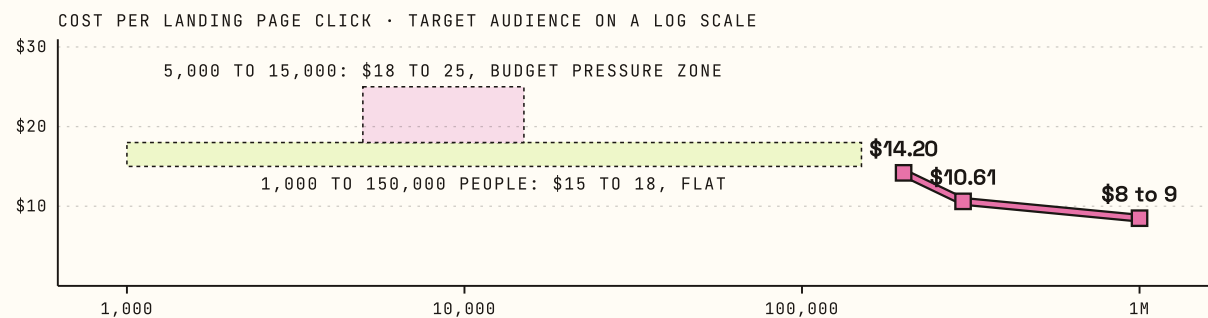


modelled: 1.39 impressions per member at the observed median CPM per band
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\$448 for 3,400 people, \$15,832 for 260,000. Modelled from 1.39 impressions per member at each band's observed median CPM, not campaigns that got there. Audience on a log scale, so equal steps are equal multiples. Cost per 1,000 reached rises with depth: \$122 at 0 to 5% penetration, \$500 at 35 to 50%. **

COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK BY TARGET AUDIENCE SIZE • ROLLING MEDIAN

—■— COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK, ROLLING MEDIAN



rolling median across TLA campaigns by target audience size; shaded areas are ranges
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Flat at \$15 to 18 from 1,000 to 150,000 people (shaded lime). The 5,000 to 15,000 zone runs \$18 to 25 because a normal \$30 to 50 a day overspends it (shaded pink). Above 200,000 the click gets cheaper: \$14.20, \$10.61, \$8 to 9 over 1M. LP click rate is flat across the range (0.41 to 0.59%). ***

08

The calendar

Weekends click 9 to 10% better. March is 16% cheaper. Q1 to Q2 is a 30% CPM step.

Weekend impressions cost **1 to 4% less** and click through **9 to 10% better** than weekdays.

Within campaign: each serving day indexed against the campaign's own typical day (100). 823 engagement single-image TLA campaigns.

SERVING DAY	CPM	ENGAGEMENT RATE	LANDING PAGE CTR	COST PER ENGAGEMENT
Monday to Friday	100 to 102	98 to 102	97 to 100	99 to 101
Saturday	99	98	110 [106 to 113]	100
Sunday	96 [95 to 98]	100	109 [106 to 113]	97 [96 to 98]

WEEKENDS CARRY 18% OF SPEND. THE LANDING PAGE CLICK-RATE LIFT IS THE ONLY DAY-OF-WEEK EFFECT IN THE DATA THAT ISN'T NOISE. ***

WHAT IT MEANS

Don't daypart out the weekend

Excluding Saturday and Sunday removes your cheapest, highest-clicking 18% of delivery. ***

LAUNCH TIMING

No launch-day effect either

Fri to Sun launch vs Tue to Thu: cost per engagement -4% [-13%, +5%]. Launch weekday to cost per engagement, within account: $r = 0.00$. **



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How Kiin reads it

Weekend scheduling is one of the most common "optimisations" in thought leader ad accounts, and it costs money. People scroll LinkedIn on Saturday; the auction is quieter; the click rate is higher. Leave it on.

March CPM is **16% under** the year.

Q2 vs Q1, same advertisers: **+30% CPM, +47% per landing page click.**

WITHIN ACCOUNT · MONTH VS THE ACCOUNT'S
TYPICAL MONTH = 100

MONTH	CPM	ENG RATE	COST / ENG
March	84	96	91
February	90	100	93
December	104	105	100
August	104	97	105
September*	107	92	116 [104 to 124]

*FIRST 8 DAYS OF SEPTEMBER, 86 ACCOUNTS. PROVISIONAL; RE-CHECKED WHEN THE MONTH COMPLETES. FULL WITHIN-ACCOUNT RANGE: 27 POINTS (84 TO 107). RAW DATASET CPM DOUBLED OVER THE YEAR (\$45 TO \$90): ACCOUNT MIX, NOT CALENDAR. **

CONCLUSION 01

**March cheapest.
Early September
most expensive so
far.**

CPM 84 vs 107. September is 8 days, provisional.

CONCLUSION 02

**December is not
dead.**

Engagement 105, CPM 104.

QUARTER ON QUARTER, SAME ADVERTISERS

	CPM	ENG RATE	COST / ENG	LP CPC
Q4 to Q1 (n=63)	-16% [-27%, -3%]	-6%	-13%	-4%
Q1 to Q2 (n=153)	+30% [+22%, +44%]	-1%	+29%	+47% [+24%, +70%]
Q2 to Q3 (n=150)	+1%	-10% [-15%, -8%]	+8%	+11%

Q1 INDEX 86: 14 TO 16% UNDER THE TYPICAL QUARTER. NO JANUARY PREMIUM. Q2 TO Q3 PRICE HOLDS, ENGAGEMENT -10%. ONE YEAR, ONE CYCLE; Q4 RESTS ON 63 TO 73 ACCOUNTS. ***

KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

We front-load annual budgets into Q1 and keep December on. September looks expensive so far, but that is eight days of data; we are not planning around it yet.

09

Measurement and benchmarks

91% of TLA clicks never reach a landing page. Median LP CTR 0.46%, engagement 4.46%, dwell 7.0s.

91% of clicks on thought leader ads never reach a landing page.

Total CTR 4.56%. Landing page CTR 0.43%.

Because LinkedIn counts reactions, comments, “see more” and profile visits as clicks. Only about 9% of total TLA clicks in this dataset were clicks to a landing page. Nothing failed to load; most clicks were never headed there.

WHERE 100 CLICKS ON AN ENGAGEMENT TLA GO • TOTAL CTR 4.56% • LP CTR 0.43%



MEASURED ON TOTAL CPC, TLAS LOOK **80% CHEAPER** THAN TRAFFIC ADS. ON COST PER LANDING PAGE CLICK, **102% MORE EXPENSIVE**. A 9× SWING FROM THE DENOMINATOR ALONE. ***

WHAT PREDICTS WHAT	R
Engagement rate → LP click rate, within account	+0.57
Engagement rate → LP click rate, across accounts	+0.19
Dwell → engagement rate	+0.65
Dwell → LP click rate	+0.05
Total CTR → engagement rate	+0.998
CPM → LP CPC	+0.745
CPM → LP click rate	-0.01

ENGAGEMENT RATE TELLS YOU WHICH POST IN YOUR ACCOUNT WILL GET LANDING PAGE CLICKS, NOT WHICH ACCOUNT WILL. ATTENTION CONVERTS TO REACTIONS, NOT VISITS. TOTAL CTR IS ENGAGEMENT RATE WITH A DIFFERENT NAME. ***

BENCHMARKS • 212 ACCOUNTS • MEDIAN / GOOD / EXCEPTIONAL

	MEDIAN	GOOD	EXCEPTIONAL
LP CTR	0.46%	0.67%	0.99%
Engagement rate	4.46%	6.44%	9.26%
Dwell	7.0s	9.0s	10.4s
Cost per LP click	\$14.71	\$8.37	\$3.15
CPM	\$65	\$36	\$21

THREE MEDIANS FOR A TLA LANDING PAGE CLICK APPEAR IN THIS REPORT AND THEY ARE DIFFERENT SUBSETS: \$14.71 HERE (212 ENGAGEMENT-TLA ACCOUNTS, THE BENCHMARK), \$13.51 ON PAGE 24 (SINGLE-IMAGE ENGAGEMENT TLAS, 193 ACCOUNTS) AND \$17.22 ON PAGE 8 (THE 36 ACCOUNTS RUNNING BOTH OBJECTIVES, PAIRED). CITE \$14.71 AS THE BENCHMARK. SPREAD 15.6× P10 TO P90 (181 ACCOUNTS); COMPANY ADS 9×. ***

⚡ KIIN HOW KIIN READS IT

We report thought leader ads on engagement rate, cost per engagement and cost per landing page click, never on total CTR or CPC. Total CTR is engagement rate with a different name ($r = 0.998$), and total CPC makes a TLA look 80% cheaper than it is.

Ten numbers to quote, with what they rest on

MEDIANS ACROSS B2B TECH ADVERTISERS, 8 SEP 2025 TO 7 SEP 2026, USD, PAIRED WITHIN ACCOUNT, AUDIENCE NETWORK EXCLUDED. FREE TO CITE AND REPRODUCE WITH A LINK TO [KIIN.CO/RESEARCH/LINKEDIN-THOUGHT-LEADER-ADS-BENCHMARKS-2026](https://kiin.co/research/linkedin-thought-leader-ads-benchmarks-2026).

NUMBER	WHAT IT IS	BASE	CONFIDENCE
+77%	more people reached per dollar on brand awareness vs engagement	paired, 59 accounts	**
\$17.24 vs \$17.22	cost per landing page click, brand awareness vs engagement, a tie	paired, 36 accounts	**
\$4.75 vs \$1.06	brand awareness cost per engagement on an audience under 10k vs over 100k	paired, 17 and 16 accounts	**
9.5 vs 3.5	true account-level frequency vs campaign-reported, 90 days	154 ninety-day windows, 71 accounts	***
-9% / -22%	engagement after one full audience pass / after five	per creative, cumulative frequency	***
14 vs 53 days	to one full pass on an audience under 10k vs over 100k	median per campaign	***
+128%	cost per engagement, highest-bid vs lowest-bid campaign in the same account	67 accounts, not audience-matched	**
\$11.75 vs \$13.51	median landing page click, sponsored content on traffic vs engagement TLA	219 and 193 accounts	***
8.6×	engagement rate, top decile of authors vs bottom decile (10.55% vs 1.22%)	47 authors	**
91%	of clicks on engagement TLAs never reach a landing page	total CTR 4.56% vs LP CTR 0.43%	***

How to cite

Ilic, P. (2026). LinkedIn Thought Leader Ads Benchmarks 2026. Kiin Labs. kiin.co/research/linkedin-thought-leader-ads-benchmarks-2026. Figures are medians of paired within-account comparisons, USD, 8 Sep 2025 to 7 Sep 2026, LinkedIn Audience Network excluded.

Method

The panel

\$31M of LinkedIn spend over 365 days. 464 accounts running thought leader ads (\$8.4M), 447 running sponsored content (\$22.7M), 411 running both. LinkedIn Audience Network excluded throughout. Data via the LinkedIn Marketing API and reach API through Kiin Intelligence, at campaign, creative and daily level.

Paired within account

Every comparison is the same account running both sides in the same window. Ratios are per-account, then the median across accounts, with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval on the paired ratio. Where a split is cross-account it is marked with a single star and treated as directional.

Indexing

Fatigue is measured per creative against its own launch period (launch = 100), by cumulative frequency and separately by week. Calendar effects are indexed to each account's own typical month or quarter, so the mix of advertisers cannot move them. Diminishing returns are measured within campaign, each day against the campaign's median day.

Bid comparisons

The bid-amount result (highest vs lowest bid) is within account, not matched on audience. The bid-type result (CPC vs CPM) is matched within account on audience size (0.5 to 2×).

Deduplicated reach

True frequency uses account-level deduplicated reach from LinkedIn's reach API against the sum of campaign-reported reach in the same windows (131 accounts). Penetration figures rest on 401 campaigns across 50 accounts with deduplicated reach data, not the full panel.

What we can't answer

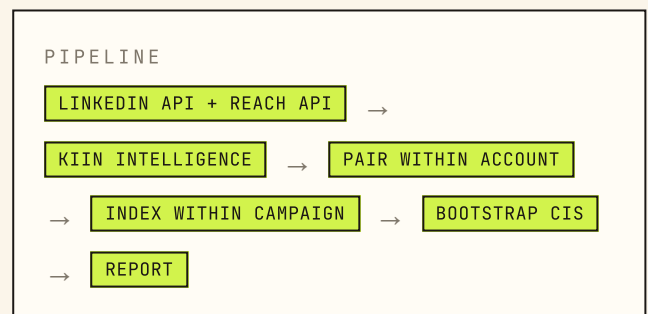
Founder vs employee posting. Role isn't in the data; it needs 189 author lookups.

Whether TLAs lift sponsored content. Only 20 of 447 sponsored content accounts don't also run TLAs, so there is no control group. The observed -13% cost per landing page click and +19% engagement is mostly not significant.

Which objective drives pipeline. Needs CRM-matched deals by objective. Separate study.

Whether account-level frequency explains fatigue better than campaign frequency. 21 accounts have enough account-level reach windows; neither correlation reaches 0.25.

228 TLA campaigns misfiled as sponsored content by a flag-propagation gap. Reclassifying would make the sponsored-content-wins-on-clicks finding slightly stronger.





KIIN LABS

About Kiin Labs

Kiin Labs is the research arm of Kiin, a London B2B LinkedIn Ads agency. Kiin manages 200+ B2B ad accounts and runs thought leader ads for clients; this analysis draws on accounts connected to Kiin Intelligence. Three of Kiin's eight-person team came from LinkedIn Marketing Solutions.

THE REPORT ONLINE

kiin.co/research/linkedin-thought-leader-ads-benchmarks-2026

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