

What makes an effective digital ad?

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Plain and simple, you can't put your TV ad onto digital channels and expect it to work. Consumer behaviour when we're staring at our phone is completely different to when we're sat at home looking at the TV.

Our attention is shorter, more divided, more task oriented. We're more impatient – expecting answers quicker, demanding entertainment sooner, and wanting tasks completed immediately. And obviously the screen is smaller and often watched outdoors, making it harder to see the content that's on it.

So, if you're investing in digital video, you need to think digital first, and create assets that are designed to be thumb-stoppingly effective. Here are six and a half rules to help you get it right:

1. GRAB ATTENTION

It seems obvious, but there's really no space for subtleties here: loud, proud and in your face is the order of the day. Visual effects such as split screen or mirroring, filming the whole ad in reverse, using time lapse or filling the screen with big typography or bold graphics work wonders. There are countless techniques to employ here. And where you can, go vertical for the full-attention effect.

2. PUT THE PRODUCT OR BRAND FRONT AND CENTRE

Somewhat depressingly, you've only got three seconds to land a message before the user scrolls past, so it's probably best that what you are selling is shown in that window. Ideally it feels natural and the product is a key part or catalyst of the story. Or failing that, go super bold and unapologetic and show a hundred spinning cans of your cat food across the screen.

3. KEEP IT SHORT

Short ads force us to tell a complete story quickly. We're better at remembering stories, especially when they're brief. That's why short ads – about 15 seconds – are better across all metrics. This means your storytelling needs to be simple, clear and straight to the point. But it doesn't mean you have to lose a brand's tone. In fact, humour works really well when you strip it back to the basic structure of telling a joke.

4. THINK ABOUT CONTEXT

Work with the restrictions and capabilities of the channel, not against them. It's certainly not about gaming the format; too much self-awareness doesn't benefit the consumer or get what you're promoting across.

A fundamental consideration is sound. With 85% of Facebook films being watched without audio, your ad either needs to work entirely without sound or you need to be smart with subtitles or other graphics to tell the story. On the flipside, Snapchat and YouTube videos are predominantly watched with sound, so you need to plan for both eventualities.

5. MAKE IT AUTHENTIC

As they say, the best adverts aren't adverts. But when we do need to create an advert, there are some techniques to employ to make it feel more authentic. Working in partnership with others can be a shortcut to authenticity. Social media influencers or editorial platforms such as LADbible or BuzzFeed, all have higher levels of trust with consumers because they are real, authentic voices. Similarly, commissioning creator networks like Vidsy or Mofilm who work with raw emerging creators can generate a different perspective on your content.

Alternatively, using real people, in real situations, with unscripted dialogue – or simply shooting on consumer devices such as a camera phone – can all create authenticity, while allowing you to retain more control over the output.

6. MAKE IT PERSONAL

The beauty of digital is the fact you don't need a one-size-fits-all approach. With bountiful data at your disposal, we can create bespoke, highly targeted videos. This can be approached in two ways. In a basic approach, this could be personalising the creative with some little touches, such as speaking the individual's name in the ad or referencing where they live in the video.

A more advanced approach is to create highly tailored versions of the ad, that can be changed based on what we know about that consumer. If they've got kids,

we can give them a version featuring a family. If we know they're an ABC1 professional who likes Grime, we could make a version for them too. The promise of this capability has existed for a while, but with more programmatic video and more brands investing in DMPs, we expect to see more highly-tailored video creative in the future.

6.5 FORGET ALL THE ABOVE

It's OK. You haven't just wasted five minutes of your day reading this, but the point is sometimes these rules don't apply. Perhaps because it's a product that's so fantastically weird and wonderful that all conventions are out of the window. Or an ad people will share because it's so shocking or funny; or a brand so loved you will watch their two-hour launch film. These ads are rare because they're hard to get right. But they're not impossible for clients who are in the right situation, and brave enough to take the risk ■

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