

Considerations about TV and video ad length

There is increasing evidence of the effectiveness of shorter lengths in TV and online – and of the strategic purposes they are best suited for. Shorter lengths are less likely to be appropriate for emotional storytelling or complex messages.

Definition

TV advertising is produced and paid for by marketers to reach a target audience during TV air time. The cost of TV buying varies depending on ad length and positioning. TV ad length can range from 10 seconds to several minutes. The medium is in rapid transition and is continually evolving and adapting to meet consumers' changing media consumption habits.

Video advertising is produced by marketers and broadcast across multiple screens, including computer and mobile, on 'owned' channels, in paid media or via earned media i.e. through viewer sharing. Video ad length can range from five seconds to several minutes.

Key insights

1. Short-form video can be effective when used right

Short-form video – defined as under 10 seconds in length – means less time to engage viewers, so seizing attention quickly with a strong concept and strong opening visual is key. Short-form video should be a complement to existing media investments rather than a complete replacement, as it has been shown to have greater impact when reinforcing a message already delivered in other channels and formats. Purchase intent is highest when a six-second ad is the last spot to be aired. It can be effective to place multiple short-form ads in-market at the same time, sequencing them in different ways or showing various cuts of the ads, to keep the campaign fresh. Short-form video can also be an opportunity to deliver a greater, more personalised range of creative assets.

2. Use of six second ads looks set to increase on TV

Testing of short-form TV ads (between five and seven seconds) found they scored almost the same on metrics like ad memorability, brand linkage and brand memorability as longer-form 15- or 30-second ads. The same effectiveness principles apply whatever the length – simplicity, focus and avoiding information overload.

However, advertisers should not switch wholesale to shorter formats. While they can be effective on their own, they tend to work best when running alongside longer ads or supporting wider campaigns. A study sponsored by the Advertising Research Foundation looking at consumer visual attention to TV ads found that six second ads are most likely to gain visual attention when on broadcast TV versus cable, paired with another ad from the same brand and running solo in an ad pod.

3. Branding devices are key to recognition in short-form ads

Short-form ads are a challenge because there is so little time in which to develop the creative and deliver a message – but having triggers to link the brand to the ad can help drive recognition quickly. The Ehrenberg- Bass Institute talks about “distinctive brand assets” that can evoke the brand name without it being present. While ad researchers System1 use the concept of the “fluent device” to make ads more recognisable. Either way such branding devices should be simple and unique.

4. Neuroscience tools can help create equally engaging video cut- downs

US public service campaign creator The Ad Council used learnings from neuroscientific testing of its high- scoring, 60-second Love has no labels ad to find the single ‘iconic’ moment with which to create a six-second ad for use across platforms. When recall was tested, it gained 51% aided recall versus a 35% average for six- second public service ads. On the other hand, the American Lung Association’s Saved by the Scan ad was cut down from a 30-second ad to a 15-second and a six-second using Nielsen’s ad compression algorithm to suggest the key elements to use in a shorter ad.

5. Brands should not be afraid of making longer-form content

While much of the mainstream industry advice is towards shorter messaging, some dissenting voices are championing longer-form video and the digital platforms that allow them. They argue that, rather than throwing in a logo in the first three seconds, brands should be focused on creating content people actually want to watch. They cite four-minute videos, which have very strong completion rates thanks to relevance, cultural timing and brand integration.

6. Six second ads deliver 60% of a thirty second ad’s impact

Research by MediaScience and the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute found that average unaided brand recall for a seven second ad is 9% versus 12% for a fifteen second and 15% for a thirty second spot – leading to their principle that six second ads deliver 60% of the impact of a thirty second ad. However, the research also highlighted that six second ads do not allow for emotional storytelling. Brands should therefore use a portfolio of ad lengths for different kinds of ad experiences.

7. While 30-second video ads are still most common, shorter lengths are delivering results

Data from early 2019 shows 30-second ads account for over two-thirds (69%) of all video impressions. This is actually up from 46% in Q1 2018 at the expense of fifteen second ads which have fallen from 48% to just over one-quarter (28%) due to a growth in connected TV impressions.

This fits with a 2017 study by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Europe, which also showed 30-second video ads dominating with more than two-thirds of agencies using them across all devices. This is despite increasing evidence of the effectiveness of shorter ads, which in theory are more likely to increase view through rates among viewers willing and able to invest little time with ads. AOL research has found that while 30 second ads drive the highest recall, 15 second ads drive the highest affinity and purchase intent. Brands are also having success with even shorter formats. For example, Netflix in Asia and L'Oréal in the US have reported strong results from six-second ads on YouTube.

8. The right opening and emotion are key to engaging six second video ads

Video advertising specialist Unruly reports a big increase in the number of six second video ads distributed on its platform. It suggests six best practice principles for short-form videos to maximise effectiveness:

Clarity of purpose to ensure the message is designed to be effortless Brand or product at the heart rather than separate branding

Tap into emotions that can be evoked very rapidly

Use at high frequency to build awareness at the start of a campaign, and at the end as a reminder and nudge to act

Play with the viewer's perception of time to drive engagement

An opening image that is instantly recognisable and highly relatable

9. Fifteen second ads build brands as effectively as thirty second spots

Looking beyond the usual measures of liking, awareness and recall at the rational drivers and emotions that underpin consumption behaviour, a study by research firm Forethought found no significant difference between fifteen and thirty second ads. It attributes this to the "peak-end rule" as length had little impact on effectiveness when commercials had the same peak and end creative elements. However, it suggests brands should invest in longer form spots as well as fifteens as they can better elicit emotion and are more appropriate for complex messages such as a new product or campaign launches.

10. Long-form TV ads are more cost effective if considered as a campaign

High cost, prestige media spots are, quite rightly, under a lot of scrutiny as to their value. When used efficiently a 30 second ad can be the corner stone of a 60-day campaign that builds anticipation or extends the lifespan of the prestige media investment. Analysis of recent Super Bowl campaigns shows that the cost per view is in fact very similar to prime time TV when used this way. To sustain a campaign of this duration the creativity and storytelling have to be high quality.

A good example is Tourism Australia's 2018 campaign, which created a spoof Hollywood-style promotional campaign for a new Crocodile Dundee film. While the official movie trailer aired in the Super Bowl, it was surrounded by carefully orchestrated digital and social content before and after the game. Social conversations and PR coverage made it the most-discussed brand prior to the game, and the most viewed, searched and shared campaign of Super Bowl 2018. Post-game, those who had interacted with the content were programmatically retargeted with conversion assets tailored to their interests, significantly driving intermediate metrics and bookings. The campaign also won eight Cannes Lions, including a Titanium Lion.

11. Brands should consider how ad length contributes to 'storytelling'

Long form advertising is best suited to storytelling styles of messaging because better brand results occur when the audience has been drawn into 'anticipation' for the punchline and is more comfortable with a natural transition to the product claims. As with all good stories, this requires time to be spent on the introduction, premise, development, and conclusion.