

BLURRED LINES BETWEEN BRANDED VIDEO CONTENT AND ADS

THE **RUNDOWN**

Marketers are increasingly interested in creating more branded video content and ads, because consumers are increasingly demanding more and more of each. But what is the best way to meaningfully connect with consumers using online video? Our new research in partnership with IPG Media Lab shows that consumers see both branded video content and ads as marketing and know that they are made for “commercial” purposes. Consumers also indicate that - if done right - branded video content impacts their perceptions of brands. To help marketers make the most of branded video content and ads together, we have developed a framework for a holistic video strategy so that marketers know better how to deliver the right message at the right time to their consumers.

Online video is gaining importance on every marketer's agenda as consumers are increasing their engagement with it. But how much and what type of videos should marketers create to build meaningful connections with these video-hungry audiences? Should marketers invest in creating standard :15 or :30 spots as they did for TV? Or should they start creating made-for-web video content irrespective of video length? "As more brands try to master these questions, they wonder how they can create branded video content at scale and make branded video content work in tandem with ads. They usually don't know where to start," [says Kim Larson, head of Google's BrandLab](#). Indeed, 81% of marketers [recently surveyed by ANA](#) indicate 'the need for content and new customer experiences' as a top challenge on their agenda.

To create video content that drives results, brand marketers need to understand how consumers perceive both branded content and standard ads. To discover consumer insights on this topic, IPG Media Lab and Google recently partnered to survey 7213 consumers, who viewed 69 videos selected from 15 clients of IPG across multiple categories. For this research, these videos were categorized as branded content when they were made-for-web and were any length from :15 secs to multiple minutes. They were categorized as ads when they were mostly :15, :30 or :60 second spots that were made to run on TV or on online platforms.

1. Consumers are savvy: they understand the commercial uses of video

We discovered that consumers do see branded content and video ads differently, but not as differently as you might think. In fact, people perceived branded video content as more like advertising than not. On a scale of 0-100, with 0 being "more like advertising" and 100 being "less like advertising", branded video content was scored as 25.4 on average, whereas standard video ads were scored as 13.2 on average. So although consumers saw branded content slightly less like advertising, they saw both types of videos as strongly related to marketing.

Clearly, consumers are savvy. They understand that brands create both ads and branded content as part of their marketing strategies. Interestingly, all but one of the videos tested in this research, whether branded video content or ads, were perceived

closer to “more like advertising”. This suggests there is more room to differentiate with branded video content and ads and produce videos to tell good stories. So what attributes make videos seem “less like advertising”?

2. What separates branded video content from ads?

A video becomes less of a ‘commercial’ and perhaps more of a story when it’s perceived as being “less like advertising” by consumers. In our research, videos that were rated as “less like advertising” were seen as more informative, authentic and original. This was the case for both branded video content and ads.

So what differences did consumers perceive between branded video content and ads? Specifically, when consumers rated branded video content as “less like advertising”, they saw it as being “useful”, “relevant”, and “trustworthy”, compared to content that was rated “more like advertising”. The video ads that consumers thought were “less like advertising” were seen as “educational”, “entertaining” and “uplifting”, compared to ads that were rated “more like advertising”.

Build a holistic video strategy with branded content and ads

Consumers are savvy and will choose to watch branded video content that tells a compelling story. [YouTube Ads Leaderboard](#) publishes top ads consumers choose to watch every month. In 2014, the average length of a video among the top ads on YouTube was just under three minutes long. In essence, brands are creating longer content to tell their stories and consumers are choosing to watch and engage with this content. Hence, branded video content versus ads is a false dichotomy. A video is a video for a consumer and it should have a singular goal for marketers: to influence perceptions of consumers and drive them to action.

It's important to think of branded video content and ads working in unison. We developed a framework that can help marketers deliver the right messages at the right time with their content strategy: Help, Hub and Hero content.

Content Creation Strategy: Help, Hub and Hero content

Help

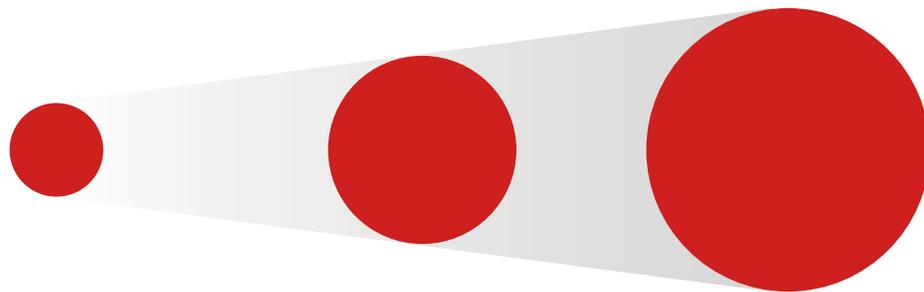
Always-on 'pull' content designed for your **core target**

Hub

Regularly scheduled 'push' content designed for your **prime prospect**

Hero

Large-scale, tent-pole events or 'go big' moments designed to **raise broad awareness**



Size of circle corresponds to the potential audience size

Source: Google BrandLab

Help video content helps brands to engage their core audiences with their brand or category. Product demos, tutorials or how-to videos are great examples of Help content every brand needs. Hub video content speaks to people's passion points to broaden a brand's appeal. Hub content can draw from a variety of other marketing programs such as sponsorships or partnerships with YouTube stars, as long as they bring passion points like music, science, cooking or beauty to life. Finally Hero video content builds around the major events in a brand's marketing calendar, such as big product launches and tentpole moments.

Brands that get the most out of online video are thinking beyond a single spot. To deliver marketing objectives, they're embracing a publishing calendar that starts with consumer insights and intentions. The brands that do this successfully serve consumers searching for their product or category in a useful and meaningful way with Help content. Meanwhile, they're also pushing out episodic or recurring Hub content related to their target consumer's passions. Finally, brands execute those "go big" moments throughout the year to raise awareness to new consumers with Hero content.

Some brands are leading the way with successful holistic video strategies. As Kara Manatt, VP Consumer Research at IPG Media Lab, points out, “Brands with the strongest content strategies don’t simply repurpose content that has worked for another medium. Instead, they learn from unique consumer behaviors and mindset at each medium and touch point, turning those insights into content that works for each platform. In the process, they take small risks, test and learn, then adjust before they scale.”

Opportunity to drive results with branded video content

So, does branded content work? In addition to capturing consumers’ perceptions of branded video content versus ads, it was important to see if branded content could drive real marketing metrics. In our research we found that after watching branded video content, consumers were more likely to think favorably of the brand (6% points lift vs. control), more likely to agree the brand lives up to its values (6% points lift vs. control) and more likely to show purchase intent for the brand (8% points lift vs. control). The control group was people who saw an ad that was not the advertiser’s ad and unbranded content. The answer, from this research, seems to be yes, branded content does work.



“We wanted to engage our audience and connect with them in a way that we couldn’t with traditional advertising. To achieve this goal, we created a branded video series to showcase values that matter to both Blue Moon and the Blue Moon drinker. Blue Moon Brewing Company worked with Complex Media to create ‘The Craftsmen’, featuring musicians, artists and designers discussing their creative process and what ‘craftsmanship’ meant to them. Our target consumers found the videos to be more informative and educational - and therefore more useful, relevant and trustworthy - than traditional advertising. We definitely saw success with this type of storytelling as it improved customer trust.” - *Brian Pokorny, Senior Manager, Media & Digital*

To get inspired by YouTube’s top brand videos from 2014, [watch YouTube’s mash-up of the top global ads of 2014](#)