

## Pre-Roll Video: A How-To Guide

by Eric Franchi, Tuesday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008



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**About a month ago**, fellow Video Insider author Alan Schulman wrote a great piece called "To Change Advertisers' Digital Aptitude, We Need To Add The 'How-To.'" His call for more education as the way to drive further investment into video struck a chord with me. I talk with marketers and agencies on a daily basis. While some are experiencing success in their online video campaigns, there are plenty that are still in the learning stage. Therefore, in the spirit of education, let's take the most common and prevalent format -- pre-roll -- and walk through some best practices that are consistently employed by successful marketers.

For creative, the best online video campaigns use original, Web-only ads that are designed to elicit response. Repurposed or edited :30s from television were a good starting point a couple of years ago, but there's no excuse for not developing online-only spots today. Secure online talent rights and shoot specific spots with calls to action based on the campaign initiative. If that is impossible, take advantage of the myriad of lower-cost production vehicles out there that can create ready-for-online ads quickly using video technology. The lean-forward environment of online video requires smart spots that stand out.

Another pre-roll ad solution that is under-utilized, but certainly viable, is Flash. A short Flash clip can be easy to make, highly customizable to the content and deliver excellent performance. For all pre-roll spots, it's important to develop several versions that vary in length and experiment. For now, :15-second clips are standard, but shorter clips may work even better.

For the last piece of the creative puzzle, create companion ad units that encourage user interaction. Once users are engaged, interested to learn more or ready to transact, give them the chance to do so. The most successful video campaigns have companion units that speak to the pre-roll ad that was just viewed. And from a technical standpoint, make sure to implement trackers to judge duration, completion rates and click-through rates on both the video and companions. This in itself can provide a wealth of actionable campaign data and guide future practices of ad length and campaign planning.

From a content perspective, endeavor to buy the right type of media against your target demographic or interest segments. This is where pre-roll can be a little tricky to place, with so many available streams consisting of short, low quality or user-generated clips. Professional content always wins, not only

because it is safer for brands, but because of the carryover from the offline world: Viewers are accustomed to seeing ads prior to segments of their favorite TV show.

Buy against the right endemic sites, and use ad networks' targeting capabilities to extend your reach against more sites that hit your target audience. In addition, make sure that your ads run against clips of appropriate length and are frequency capped. Length and capping can vary from partner to partner, but with professional content sites there is typically a minimum length and cap already established.

These practices are used by some of the most successful and savvy marketers everyday. In keeping with the education theme, I invite everyone to share their tips in the comments section about how they've been able to drive success with online video, pre-roll or otherwise.