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## [The Role Of Rolls: Pre-Roll And Online Video Advertising](#)

Posted August 28th, 2008 by Glenn Pingul

OK, so you've spent a ton of cash on developing a memorable 15-second video spot for TV. Doesn't it then make sense to get as much mileage out of it as possible? And doesn't this mean that you should look to repurpose that spot wherever you can, specifically in online video advertising? Sometimes, but not always.

There are times and places where repurposing a brief video can be impactful, but it has to be 100% relevant to everything around it. Plenty has been said and written about the pros and cons of using pre-roll in various contexts, but let me weigh in on why effective online video advertising cannot be limited to pre-roll:

**The Age of Authenticity is Here:** What constitutes a high-quality message is changing in the eyes of the consumer. Online, high production value commercials from the age of TV, sometimes with no actionable message, are starting to be replaced by more authentic and informative ads that cost a small fraction of the TV-style ads to produce. In this way, small businesses that have an authentic and easy-to-understand message can go toe-to-toe with bigger competitors who've historically banked on budgetary advantages to develop expensive pre-roll spots. The Internet as a medium has brought this macro-trend forward: Information is more accessible. Search makes research easier. Sites like WebMD exist to inform visitors, not entertain. Why shouldn't video ads do the same?

**The Viewer is Now In Charge:** One of the benefits of the Web is that the viewer can be in control. In broadcast television, viewers were really not in control. Appointment-based viewing meant viewers had to get home in time to see a program at the appointed time. And watching that program meant watching the commercials (or leaving the room to get a snack). Time-shifting and place-shifting has changed the

experience for television viewers. Viewers can now watch on their terms, not the advertisers'.

At the onset of the development of commercial Web sites, advertisers underestimated the importance consumers placed on having control — and the marketing ploy called "pop up" ads was invented. They were short lived at a mass scale not just because they were annoying but because they took control away from the viewer and forced them to view something they did not want to view.

If we accept pre-rolls alone as the de facto standard, we are going back in time to forcing users to watch, whether relevant or not: After all, if an Internet user wants to watch a John McCain or Barack Obama speech, what is the benefit in forcing them to watch an irrelevant 15-second pre-roll commercial for deodorant advertiser XYZ? It is very important here to note that online video advertising is not just about video ads in front of existing video content. Online video ads can live in directory profiles, Web sites, landing pages, banners, and other targeted places online.

**Length Doesn't Always Matter:** In video ads we've deployed for clients, we've consistently found that length matters far less than the quality and information provided. Whether as an in-banner video ad or on a video-enabled profile or landing page, we've, routinely seen average view rates of 50% to 70% of the video, regardless of whether it is 30 seconds or 3 minutes long.

What is the residual fuss with a 15-second video ad length anyway? Why not 22 seconds or 2 minutes? 15-, 30- and even 60-second video lengths are rooted in commercial pods placed within and around television programming. Do they really apply in an online world? Maybe length matters when a national advertiser is trying to keep the annoyance level down as an interstitial between what the viewer expects to see when they click on a Obama or McCain speech and are instead greeted with the pre-roll deodorant ad.

**Quality is being Redefined:** Big brands still seem to equate high quality with high production value. 15-second video ads fit perfectly into that equation because it costs a lot more to squeeze a message into 15 seconds than three minutes. But if you define quality as the benefit received by the viewer (in this case information value), it takes an entirely new meaning. Quality is about the information and trust in the business that is providing it. Consequently, local small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) are perfectly suited for longer-form video ads. Local SMBs rely on good customer service and selling in a more personal way. They have to, because they want that customer to show up at their door. And this value proposition cannot be conveyed in exactly 15-seconds, no matter the production budget.

There is a misperception that high-production-value videos translate to better results. We are seeing equally high conversion rates with much lower-cost custom video — authentic pieces with product demos, testimonials with real customers, and locally produced repurposed commercials with the real owner or dealer talking as with big brand commercials.

**Goals are more measureable than ever:** At the end of the day, it all comes down to what advertisers are trying to achieve. Is it branding? Is it to drive measurable sales? The "lean forward" opportunity of online video vs. the "sit back" experience with broadcast puts potential customers that much closer to taking action - beyond just viewing.

With 15-second pre-rolls, all advertisers really get is 15 seconds of engagement. For big brands, it may be enough to know that X percent of people viewed their video ad. For local SMBs, however, they need more than the hope that viewers will turn into customers. They want to know how much someone watched of their video ad and if they took action that drives them closer to a sale. They want direct response.

On their own, pre-rolls simply fall short here, as they do on a number of measures in terms of realizing the full potential of online video advertising. Some of today's most effective video ads are either custom, long-

form information-focused ads that encourage direct response and interaction (such as a tour of a selected real estate property) or even photo slideshows that can perform just as well. Today, format matters less than being truly informative.

This entry was posted on Thursday, August 28th, 2008 at 3:16 pm and is filed under [Video](#), [Glenn Pingul](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

## 7 Responses to “The Role Of Rolls: Pre-Roll And Online Video Advertising”

1. *John Pillsbury* from Destiny Media Technologies says:

[August 28th, 2008 at 4:51 pm](#)

Glenn,

Yes, I agree. Not every ad has to be a “tag on” Roll. Ads can stand on their own, as their own message, and entertainment eve, The recent political ads of John McCain are an excellent example, fresh, quickly released, crisp and timely = effective and entertaining.

Here’s a message in an ad for Luxury Sunseeker Boat that I produced with Moviemaker in a few short hours. It is focused on one thing promoting the experience of owning a fine Luxury Cruiser Yacht. The video has limited life. The clip hopefully entertains while also performing an unashamed marketing purpose.

<http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=BI4HHuz4FCs>

Video is fun, creative, and valuable even without all the pre-post roll debates.

Enjoy,

John Pillsbury

[Johnp@dsny.com](mailto:Johnp@dsny.com)

2. *thedigi talhobo* from TheDigitalHobo.com says:

[August 28th, 2008 at 5:02 pm](#)

Why are you completely ignoring nearly every other factor that would weigh on a media purchasing decision here? Contextual and behavioral targeting technology make it possible to serve that deodorant ad to someone who was searching for information about a sweating problem 10 mins earlier.

For your local SMBs, why not just geo-target to the zip code level? Problem solved.

Regarding the length of the ads, you are correct that the timing is completely arbitrary. Dynamic ad insertion makes the 7 vs 12 second issue completely moot. Now go find an advertiser who has any. Plenty of people will run them.

We can’t blame the advertiser for the myriad challenges the industry faces, but they do contribute to the problem quite a bit. More pre-roll ads of any length would mean seeing better targeted ads. But they need to exist in order to deliver them.

Primarily, though, I think you've confused the goals of local SMBs, DR advertisers, and national brand advertisers, or at least the tactics. There's nothing new about low production cost product demos driving sales. They are called infomercials. And you can find them on TV. I'm not a buyer, but I'm pretty sure they are selling some Flobies and "Set it and Forget It" cookers with some pretty low production value TV.

Marketing 101 teaches us good pre-roll vs. bad pre-roll. What are your goals? How are you measuring success? How are you moving the needle? If it doesn't make sense to do pre-roll, then don't. But to say that it has to be 100% relevant to everything around it is a very unfair (but sure would be nice!) goal. Why shouldn't your non-video advertising be just as relevant?

But we all still remember that Coke did "I'd like to teach the world to sing..." and it wouldn't have the same impact 25(?) years later if it were a 7 second pre-roll.

3. *thedigi talhobo* from TheDigitalHobo.com says:  
[August 28th, 2008 at 5:19 pm](#)

@ John -

I hope you are kidding. That absolutely looks like you made it in MovieMaker or iMovie, and using a Ken Burns effect over still photos isn't "video." That video looks like "My Vacation 2.0" and not how you sell luxury.

I honestly just don't think we're talking about the same thing here.

4. *John Pillsbury* from Destiny Media Technologies says:  
[August 28th, 2008 at 5:34 pm](#)

Glenn,

Thanks for your feedback "and reverse" compliment of exactly what I wanted to do. Yes, My Vacation 2.0 for sure. That's what the millionaire actually wants to buy... a simple 60's vacation with fun and family...even if it cost's him a million bucks in a Yacht!

The more professional you make something on youtube the more fake it is, and less people watch it. The more homemade the better. Just like old fashion Ben and Jerry's ice cream...without all the additives, and box labels.

I remember an online video campaign we did with Ogilvy Interactive and they spend tens of thousands of dollars to make the ad look home made. Same with crunchy Doritos ad that they put on the superbowl.

Sometimes simple homemade is more honest, and sells better without the ad agency spin. Even the McCain ads have that flavor.

I hope your video business model is not to compete with the big boys with the same sort of "video stuff". I suggest, Go around them to the real receptive viewers online.

5. *Larry Le Francis* from S4 Studios, LLC says:  
[August 28th, 2008 at 5:34 pm](#)

I'd like to weigh in too, John Pillsbury. Digital Hobo is right. I've seen packages put together in

middle schools with more kick. If I am about to spend \$27 million for a boat, you better knock my socks off. In a way, it reminds me of the classic Detroit/ad agency dilemma in which the client insists just to show the sheet metal and chrome, what else is needed? More to the point, why not utilize the wonderful possibilities of the web? For example, how about a live podcast from the bridge out on Lake Powell or hell, ANYWHERE for that matter? You get streaming video right to your computer or mobile. This is how advertisers need to conceptualize, and many are starting to.

6. *John Pillsbury* from Destiny Media Technologies says:

[August 28th, 2008 at 6:14 pm](#)

Thanks for the ideas. We are going to have a Special VIP showing on Elliot Bay Marina for the Sunseeker brokers on Sept 20th. Ok, I will have a live Streaming set up on the boat's WIFI for the whole world to see. Great idea, thanks.

On car analogy, I am like the local dealer in Seattle selling a cool Corvette online. If you want to see the "big boys" sell them by thousands then go to <http://www.chevrolet.com/corvette/>

Or, if you want to see Flash, streaming videos, etc. of the Sunseeker Yacht model just go to <http://www.sunseeker.com/>

Then come and enjoy our real boat, and real family cruising vacation that you too can have in Northwest. <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=BI4HHuz4FCs>

7. *John Pillsbury* from Destiny Media Technologies says:

[August 28th, 2008 at 7:37 pm](#)

Seems like everyone is talking same thing on hurtful pre-rolls today

Pre-Roll Takes a Terrible Toll  
Why Are You Applying Pre-Internet Tech to Web Video?

By Jeff Einstein

Published: August 27, 2008  
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