



Mobile Video Advertising: Making Unskippable Ads

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In the face of a mobile revolution, consider this: Should where we're telling stories change how we're telling stories? How should video advertising evolve for mobile? Google's Art, Copy & Code team set out to find an answer. Here we explore the results of our first experiment.

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Our mobile devices have become constant companions. They're in our hands, in our pockets, and on our bedside tables—everywhere we are. They're often the first thing we look at in the morning and one of the last things we check before turning in for the night. So what does this powerful connection mean for creatives and the stories we tell? And how does that small screen affect the way people experience these stories?

Ad creatives have long lamented mobile. The small screen can be a challenging canvas for big stories. Yet we know that brands can [establish a deeper personal connection](#) on mobile, more so than on TV or desktop. So as the mobile world increasingly shifts to video, brands need to figure out how to tell new and better brand stories on mobile devices.

Introducing Unskippable Labs

What resonates with people in mobile video advertising? And how is that different from what resonates on TV? Nobody knows. The best way to try to understand this emerging mobile world is to experiment: Put creative out there and see what people respond to in meaningful, measurable ways.

Using YouTube [TrueView](#), an ad format that allows people to choose if they want to watch or skip an ad, we tested three alternate cuts of the same story to understand what makes an ad worth watching. We also used Google's [Brand Lift](#) solution to gather metrics like ad recall and brand awareness, which helped us understand if particular cuts were more impactful than others. Our key question with these experiments was simply: What makes an ad unskippable?

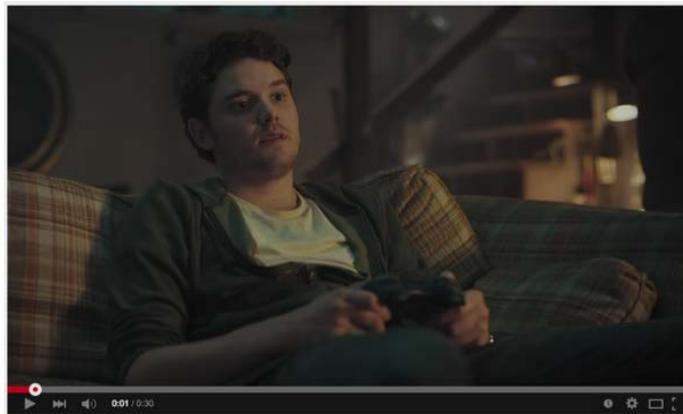
An experiment in video advertising: “The Mobile Recut”

For the first Unskippable Labs experiment, Google's Art, Copy & Code team worked with Mountain Dew, BBDO NY, and OMD Worldwide to

understand what mobile video advertising people are most likely to watch and how their views impact brand metrics. Could we start with a great ad, adapt it, and make it work even better on mobile?

We started with the Mountain Dew® Kickstart™ “Come Alive” spot—a popular ad that had been running on television and TrueView for two months and earned nearly 9 million total views on YouTube. Our mission was to take this ad and make it even more “unskippable,” especially on mobile.

So, what did we find? Check out the three cuts of the mobile video ad we tested below to find out:



["The Original": Mtn Dew Kickstart ad v1](#)

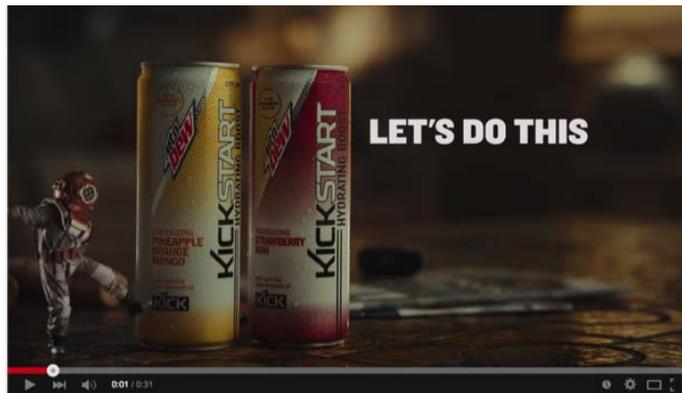
The cut:

“The Original” served as the control in our experiment. It’s a 30-second spot starring three guys who grab a Mtn Dew Kickstart, start dancing, and everything in the basement—from the overstuffed chair to the dog—joins in. Then the guys head out for whatever comes next.

The theory:

The old way is the best way. The spot has a classic ad story arc with a clear beginning, middle, and end. A great story, great action, great editing, and a great song make for a winning combination.

["The Big Punch": Mtn Dew Kickstart ad v2](#)



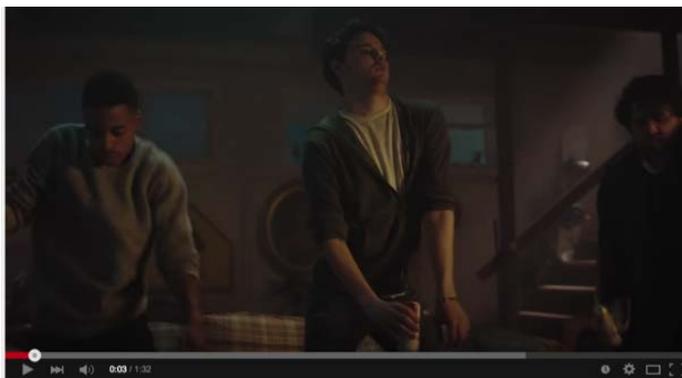
The cut:

This 31-second mobile ad recut starts with a big, bold product shot and a countdown, signaling that something cool is about to happen. Viewers are then dropped into the middle of the action and the story unfolds from there.

The theory:

The idea here is to get the brand in front of the audience before viewers can skip the ad. From there, the story arc isn't as clear as it is in "The Original," but it has lots of the same action. It might not deliver on viewership, but it should work hardest at lifting brand metrics.

["Pure Fun": Mtn Dew Kickstart ad v3](#)



The cut:

The "Pure Fun" recut drops viewers into the middle of the action with no

music or any real sense of what's happening. Then the music kicks in and the ad shows different dancing elements. It's significantly longer than the first two ads at 1 minute, 33 seconds.

The theory:

What happens when viewers don't know what's happening? No music, no cues, no story. If they like it, keep the unexpected coming—hockey trophies, dancing dogs, a table slow jam. The ad doesn't feature a strong story arc; the brand and product are featured over time, but less explicitly than in the first two ads.

Findings from “The Mobile Recut”

What did we find? While there wasn't one clear winner across all the metrics we looked at, we did find that mobile may offer a fresh canvas, inviting creatives to ditch ad norms and have a little more fun.

The unexpected can be powerful.

View-through rates (VTRs) for all three ads were about the same when we looked at views from desktop computers. But something funny happened on mobile. “Pure Fun” had no traditional storyline or structure, yet it was viewed at a 26% higher rate than the other cuts on mobile.

Our speculation is that people were intrigued by the mystery of what they saw. They were more interested in seeing where the story went than in skipping ahead. Even though we started with a successful ad, we got an even stronger response by putting a different sort of story out there.

Viewers may watch more on mobile.

Not only did more viewers watch “Pure Fun” (v3) on mobile than on desktop, but they watched for a longer period of time. “Pure Fun” gave them more to watch—at 1 minute and 33 seconds, it was more than three times as long as the others. With the chance to watch more, people did, watching more than 1 minute and 9 seconds.

This is a creative opportunity: Everything doesn't need to be a cut-down from the TV spot. It suggests that the challenge in creating mobile video ads isn't to make everything faster, but to make everything more effective. We shouldn't just stuff our stories into smaller frames; we can make new frames altogether.

It doesn't take "ads" to move brands.

There was a fascinating split in the Brand Lift results. Ad recall for "Pure Fun" was significantly lower—more than 54% lower than for the other two cuts on mobile. But the brand awareness lift for all three cuts was about the same. People who saw "Pure Fun" didn't remember seeing an ad for Mtn Dew Kickstart (maybe because it didn't feel like an ad), but they remembered the brand just as well as the other cuts. It also showed that there is more to adapting for digital than making sure your brand is seen before people can skip it. "The Big Punch" did no better than "The Original" or "Pure Fun" at lifting the brand. Putting the brand first is not the easy answer.

And there was one other interesting layer to "Pure Fun" when we looked at how people responded to it on mobile versus desktop. Brand awareness was significantly higher on mobile than it was on desktop. But why? Something about it worked quite differently, but we don't know what. Maybe mobile viewers were more focused on it and thus remembered the brand better even though they didn't see it as an ad. Perhaps another experiment is in order to help illuminate the answer.

Our goal was to take a great ad and make it even better on mobile. We got people to skip less often and watch longer. We uncovered some dynamics about the way people respond to mobile video advertising that show it may be more different than we think. In this case, we worked with what we had—no second shoots or weeks of editing—just an afternoon of editing.

This Mobile Recut experiment didn't hand us a silver bullet or show us that we need to throw out everything we know about advertising. But it did show us that we can make an impact with longer, richer stories—content that doesn't necessarily feel like an ad. As BBDO NY's John Osborn put it: "It's like taking a life-sized Picasso and trying to stick it in a dollhouse." His point is clear: Context matters. We can make even the best ads on television better for mobile.

Greg Lyons, vice president of marketing for Mountain Dew, echoes that sentiment. "The Unskippable Labs partnership demonstrates how YouTube connects us with our increasingly mobile-first consumer, when and where they are most engaged. It's not about interrupting them with a brand message, but creating content that is entertaining and worthy of their time and attention."

This experiment suggests that maybe it's time to look past our notions of a "traditional" ad when it comes to mobile. Our ads don't need to be shorter, quicker, and more snackable; they can be longer, richer, and perhaps even a bit stranger. As our time and attention increasingly shift to mobile, we look forward to seeing what mobile-first video starts to look like. The evolution will be fascinating to watch.