

Creativity in Constraint: Unlock New Forms of Storytelling With 6-Second YouTube Bumper Ads Creativity

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As part of this year's Sundance Film Festival, YouTube challenged agency creatives and filmmakers to tell a video story in just six seconds. The request proved an amazing catalyst for innovative storytelling. Tyranny of the blank page? You've just met your video match.

It probably took you around six seconds to read that intro paragraph. Think it's possible to tell a compelling video story in that time?

"Challenge accepted," said the agency creatives and filmmakers featured below. They responded not with long-form cutdowns or even six-second distillations of 15-second stories. Instead, they crafted films specifically to fit the :06 format—a format that YouTube [recently began offering advertisers](#) to help them capture attention in today's mobile world.

Take a look at these remarkable pieces, and learn how their makers approached filming, editing, and weaving an impactful story in six seconds.

think with 

'Think of your story like a joke'

"The biggest surprise was honestly the fact that six seconds really is enough time to get a big message across. When I was writing, it was hard to keep the narrative small enough when I was thinking in words, but once I divided the time into images, it felt like there really was enough time to say something bigger.

Think of your story like a joke. Distill it down to the punchline and then figure out how to build that with whatever tools you have at your disposal."

—Maud Deitch, Creative, Mother NY



"The High Diver" from Mother NY

'One word, one image, one second is enough for someone to be drawn in'

"We originally thought the time constraint would be a hindrance to tell an emotional story. But we quickly learned that you don't need to tell an entire story in the traditional sense to evoke emotion.

One word, one image, one second is enough for someone to be drawn in. The story we chose to tell, of a little girl blowing out her birthday candles, can spark a myriad of thoughts and emotions, leaving the viewer with a desire to watch more. That's the beauty of storytelling."

—Mia Kuhn, Producer, TBWA/Chiat/Day



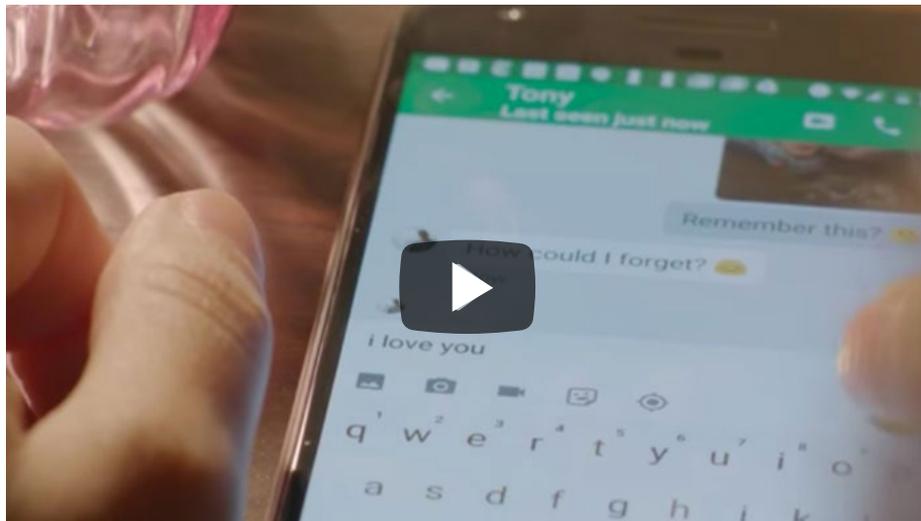
"Breath" from TBWA/Chiat/Da

'The core of every good story is change'

"Restrictions are important to creativity. Hurdles give us direction on where to go and what to jump over.

The core of every good story is change—a square becomes a circle; a character learns about herself; a landscape shifts. Six seconds is a limited time frame to show that transformation, so I knew I had to pinpoint the exact moment that everything changes."

—Tony Xie, Associate Broadcast Producer, Droga5



"Modern Love" from Droga5

'Our brains aren't really constrained by time'

"I was surprised by the efficiency and power of images, and the elasticity of the brain. It's only six seconds. 180 frames. But watching the film, our brains aren't really constrained by time. The images feel much longer to me in my memory.

If anything, I was surprised to learn that a six-second film felt longer to me than many 30-second films I've made."

—Topher Cochrane, Senior Producer, Leo Burnett



"Tattoo" from Leo Burnett

'Keep everything simple'

"The time limitation forces you to find creative ways to establish the who, what, and where very quickly. Keep everything simple: the idea, the narrative, the visuals. You can say a lot if every element is working together."

—Lawrence Chen, Director, BBDO

—Daniel Adrain, Creative Director, BBDO



"Time Travel" from BBDO

'Start with something relatable'

"Like with all storytelling, I wanted to start with something relatable. That's always important, but here, especially so. There's no time with six seconds, so when your audience can relate, they'll project their own experience into the piece—filling in the blanks and giving you freedom to move more quickly through your narrative."

—Alexander Engel, Filmmaker



"Deliverance" from director Alexander Engel

'Build curiosity'

"For this short format, I thought about ways to quickly seduce my viewer and build curiosity, but then leave them with the lasting message and metaphor that I was imparting. The work should be layered, but not overly labored, so that it presents itself with ease."

—Lake Buckley, Filmmaker



"Loveletter" from director Lake Buckley

Plan for six seconds—and create something amazing

All that creativity, all those emotions, all those stories you just watched fit into 42 total seconds.

The creatives and filmmakers here emphasised simplicity, strong visual elements, fundamentals of good storytelling, and leaving some things up to the viewers' imagination. So start with an image, a punchline, a feeling—and create something amazing.