



YouTube's Ad UX Leaders on How Video Ads Have Evolved

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Every change made to YouTube's video ad products are made with users in mind. David Mogensen, Google's head of YouTube ads marketing, sits down with YouTube UX leads Javier Bargas-Avila and Scott Hines to get a pulse on the consumer insights that are powering the evolution of video ads.

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At Google, we have our own Ten Commandments. They're the "Ten Things We Know to Be True" – ten things we hold ourselves to in our work every day. The first of those things is, "Focus on the user and all else will follow."

That means user experience guides everything we do – including ad tech at YouTube. Every evolution of our video ads is grounded in an insight about our users. Since our users are your users, I sat down with YouTube UX leads Javier Bargas-Avila and Scott Hines to capture a few of those consumer insights:

David: As UX (user experience) leads on YouTube ads, what do you guys focus on?

Javier: My first priority is to find a way for us to show the right ads to the right users at exactly the right moment. When we achieve that, video ads aren't intrusive – they're part of the experience. A large part of user experience isn't about the user interface, it's about understanding the user's intent. If we can understand that, we can deliver the perfect ad.

David: How do you go about reaching the right user at the right time with the right ad?

Javier: When you set out with the goal of making ads users love, you have to set up ways of getting feedback from users on what's working. We do that by understanding which behaviour and signals indicate "love" or "not love". The skip button is one of many signals we use for this, for example. We're constantly working to improve our algorithms to learn which ads are appreciated by which users when.

David: What other consumer behaviour is driving the evolution of YouTube ads?

Scott: Growth in mobile has been essential to the evolution of YouTube. We've also been focused on how YouTube aids people in their decision-making at every step of the journey across platforms.

People use ads on YouTube to discover brands, find and evaluate products, make purchase decisions and then, after they purchase, come back to learn more.

Javier: The biggest changes we've seen in our research are in the ways people consume video. Scott's right; it started with mobile, but we're also working a lot on living room viewing. YouTube watch time in the living room doubled over the past year. In fact, more than half of American adults report watching YouTube on their TVs. People are moving away from live TV and towards on-demand and YouTube is a key player there.

David: How is the rise in living room viewing impacting YouTube ads?

Scott: Beyond watching YouTube on the TV, the second screen is an opportunity to continue the ad experience while your content plays on the living room screen. Think about it: you're more likely to interact with your phone than you are with your TV screen. We're looking for ways to augment viewing experiences with additional data or information that might be useful to somebody within the context of watching television. The second screen is a chance for brands to keep the conversation going when people want to learn more.

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David: You mentioned interaction. How does that play into video advertising on YouTube?

Scott: One of the challenges with interactivity is keeping it really simple. We strive to minimise the number of elements so that we're not distracting from the viewing experience. We apply a lot of constraints in that regard, in an effort to deliver focused utility, so that if there is interest in engaging with a brand or service, we capture that interest and make it a meaningful moment.

For example, we evolved what we call “cards” from Google’s Material Design patterns to provide users with a seamless way to get more information about a product as they’re watching a video. You might see a card if a creator is speaking about a particular pair of trainers in their content. The interactive “card” allows users to click to learn more about a product, like where they can buy it or how much it is, all without leaving the video they’re watching.

Javier: Mobile doesn’t just mean that people have access to video anytime; it also means they have access to it in the most critical times – when they’re in the shop, making purchase decisions. In any given day, after home and work, shops are the most common place cross-device users use their smartphones.¹

So we have to think about interactivity in those critical moments and, like Scott said, keep it as simple as possible.

David: Can you talk about the consumer insights you uncovered about purchase intent on YouTube?

Scott: We start with intent: why are people coming to YouTube? For example, we’d estimate that millions of people watch YouTube videos every day to perform tasks related to purchase. We’ve also found that 68% of the time people reported knowing exactly what they were looking for and considered their tasks important (50%) or even urgent (45%).

Most important for advertisers, in one third of visits to YouTube to make a purchase decision, participants wanted official content about a product or service. People are seeking out branded content and advertising. We see particularly high interest in certain categories, like beauty, electronics and movies, to name just a few.



When people watch **YouTube videos** to perform tasks related to purchase, they **know exactly what they're looking** for about **68%** of the time.

Javier: We see a lot of behaviour related to the lower part of the purchase funnel. Our research shows consumers turning to video to experience a product before they buy, to see what a creator they trust has to say about that product and to weigh the pros and cons with fellow users in the comments. Our first job is to understand all of these moments of consideration – what information are people after and when? Then we need to have ad products that help them along the funnel and make it easy for them to convert. For example, these insights on purchase decisions have led us to develop new ad formats, like TrueView for Shopping, which makes video advertising shoppable.

David: How do you think brands could take better advantage of video advertising?

Javier: I wish more brands would focus on what happens on YouTube after customers make a purchase. In our research, we've seen that in purchase-related visits, 86% were reported to be before the purchase, while 14% were after. I think too often that 14% is forgotten. People are coming back to YouTube to figure out how to use products. That's a great opportunity for brands to be there for their consumers, even after the sale.

Beyond that, I'd really like to see more marketers realise and explore the potential of remarketing with video ads. Advertisers who use remarketing are so excited about it – they have such good results that they make sure all of their campaigns involve remarketing. Take Audi and Atlantic Records as examples, among others.

Scott: I agree with Javier – there’s huge potential for remarketing to tell an ongoing story to the same user, as they go through their purchase journey or customer lifecycle. But beyond that, I think more brands could use YouTube for pre-flighting and creative testing to optimise their media across channels, including TV. They can put their creative out there with TrueView and figure out ways to segment customers based on where they are in the funnel, and then tailor the messaging, spot length and creative format.

“People are coming back to YouTube to figure out **how** to use products.”

David: What’s the biggest misconception you think marketers have about online video?

Javier: There’s this buzzword you hear a lot in the industry – “snackable” – especially as mobile continues to grow. People assume that viewers on mobile devices are only snacking when it comes to video; that they only want short-form content. But we’re seeing 40-minute average session duration on YouTube from mobile users. They’re not just snacking. They’re enjoying a good, long meal. Sure, there are apps people use to kill time on mobile devices. But people aren’t killing time on YouTube; they’re spending time.

David: How do you balance the tension between more powerful tools and the creeping complexity of video advertising?

Scott: There are two primary things that drive our team to keep it simple. First, it’s the fact that we always think about how to design an experience that serves viewers, creators and brands – and what’s best for all of them. The focus on the needs of multiple users drives our design process. Second, as we work towards solutions, we emphasise principles like focused utility and crafted execution to help ensure that every ad is a great experience. Bumper ads are a good example of our focus on these principles.

Bumper ads are one of our newer formats: six-second ads sold through the AdWords auction on a CPM basis. On one hand, this is a new creative option – it's different than a 15 or 30 second spot – and a new media option. But ultimately we believe Bumpers simplify the experience for viewers, creators and brands by presenting viewers with valuable information about a product they're interested in, giving brands a streamlined solution to deliver the right message in the right moment and all that funds creators.

Javier: We've seen in hundreds of Brand Lift studies that the seconds before we count a "view" still matter. With Bumpers, we wanted to create an ad format sold on an impression basis that you could use, simply, to remind people, "Hey, I'm here. This is my brand or product."

David: What keeps you passionate about video advertising?

Javier: Video advertising used to be exclusively available to a few large businesses – on television. YouTube ads started this trend of democratising video advertising and opening the medium up for all businesses around the world. It's pretty inspiring to come into work and think we're enabling businesses to try video, see what works, get to know their audiences and market more efficiently while they're at it.

Scott: I really enjoy integrating interactivity into the watch experience. It's a challenging problem. Our TrueView for app installs product is a great example of adding interactivity while keeping it simple. It allows for one-click app installs, making conversion – even on a mobile device – that much easier. I'm also excited about emerging formats, like 360 video and VR, that are creating new ways to create immersive and highly engaging experiences between customers and brands. As these technologies become more widely available, we'll help brands find more ways of connecting with consumers through video in the moments that matter.

All stats referenced, unless otherwise noted, are based on the YouTube Needs internal research study and the YouTube internal logs, pulled for September 2015 for study participants ages 18-50, based on a combination of survey and log data (n=432).

Sources

¹ Cross-device behaviour in a mobile-first world, Google data, based on convenience sample of opt-in US cross-device users, age 18-49 who signed into Google and turned on Location History (mobile Android-only & IE/Chrome/Firefox desktop browser). Calibrated to population studied, January 2016 - March 2016. Location analysis excludes locations that are not identifiable. A shop refers to a commercial entity that offers services or goods (examples: department store, big box retailer, clothes shop, etc) and is not part of a shopping centre.