

The YouTube logo is centered in the upper half of the image. It features the word "You" in red and "Tube" in white on a red rounded rectangle, all set against a white background that is part of a large, stylized number "10". The background of the entire top section is a dark red with various white icons like hearts, stars, trophies, and people.

YouTube

# A Decade of YouTube Ads: The Top Ads and the Trends That Define Them

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Narrowing down a decade of YouTube video ads to the five best isn't easy. So we asked you—the ad makers, brand shapers, copywriters, and coders—to vote for your favorites through our partnership with The Webby Awards. Here are the ads you chose and the trends that define them.

think with 

**Y**ou voted. We tallied. YouTube recently released the "[Top Ads from the First 10 Years of YouTube](#)" in partnership with The Webby Awards. These industry-selected ads are part of a special edition [YouTube Ads Leaderboard](#), celebrating brands that have helped redefine advertising over the last decade. ([See all 20 nominees here](#) and winners in the playlist below.)

And while advertisers and marketers voted for this set of top ads, consumers have been voting too—with their views. For the last decade, they've been *choosing* to watch ads like Nike's "[Winner Stays](#)" and Volvo's "Epic Split." At the end of last year, we also analyzed consumer "votes" (in the form of views) as well, and found that four of the [top trending videos on YouTube in 2014](#) were created by advertisers.

**"Viewers are able to engage—comment, share, and click—on YouTube, ways in which television viewers never could."**

Whether advertisers are voting or consumers are viewing, there's certainly a lot we can learn from the winners. What secret formulas are leading brands using? Here are ten trends we've identified from the last ten years of successful ads on YouTube:

**1. Be authentic:** On YouTube, authenticity is always the right choice. Look no further than the massive fandoms that vloggers like [Grace Helbig](#) continue to build with their straight-to-camera videos. Consider taking a page out of their books, like [Dollar Shave Club](#) did in 2012 with a video that shared everything from the brand's persona to its value proposition—all while oozing authenticity.

**2. Make video ads interactive:** YouTube viewers are able to engage—comment, share, and click—in ways television never could. Make it easy for viewers to watch more or click-through to your website with

interactive cards. Or consider responding to their comments directly, like the [Old Spice Man](#) did back in 2010. However you make your videos interactive, give the engaged YouTube audience the opportunity to *do* something, not just see something.

**3. Collaborate with experts who live and breathe YouTube:** Consider [partnering](#) with an experienced YouTube creator, like Friskies did with BuzzFeed on "[Dear Kitten](#)," and get the added bonus of engaging a fandom of millions. YouTube creators are experts in cultivating relationships with their fans through the content they produce. They know the right tone to take and the right topics to cover because they're having conversations on their own YouTube channels every day.

**4. Take the time you need to tell your story:** It's time to break free of the 30-second spot. Nike's "[Winner Stays](#)" video, which has more than 115 million views, is more than four minutes long. Your story doesn't have to fit into a timeframe of 15 or 30 seconds anymore; it just has to be a story viewers *want* to watch.

**5. Think like a filmmaker, not an ad maker.** "Epic" used to be a word to describe the films that followed ads, but not anymore. Ads these days can be epic too. Consider creating videos with a film-y feel and a dramatic, storytelling quality. Chipotle's animated short "[The Scarecrow](#)," launched a movement. Cartier's "[The Proposal](#)" moved us emotionally. If you have the time to tell any story you like, why not make it epic?

**6. Play a positive prank or two:** There are such things as positive pranks, and people love to watch them. Pepsi Max, for example, put an unsuspecting car salesman in a Mustang with Jeff Gordon in "[Test Drive](#)." And when a journalist questioned the authenticity of the ad, *he* became the unsuspecting passenger in a [cab driven by Gordon](#) for a follow-up ad. It's fun to watch people get fooled as long as it's all in good fun.

**7. Have fun with ad formats:** Ad formats don't have to be limitations. What if you used them to your advantage? Take the “skip” button, for example. GEICO created [a series of “unskippable” ads](#) that communicate the brand’s message in just five seconds, telling the user, “You can’t skip this GEICO ad ... because it’s already over.”

**8. Make your own memes:** Memes aren’t just images and block letters—they can be humorous videos and video themes that spread quickly. Brands stand to benefit from adopting internet memes or inventing their own. Take Pepsi’s version of the “[Harlem Shake](#)” or T-Mobile’s [flash mob](#). If fueling an existing meme fire isn’t for you, try making your own. Los Angeles-based fashion brand Wren’s “[First Kiss](#)” video, for example, has earned thousands of spinoff videos. For brands that dare to be bold, meme ads are great ways of joining the cultural conversation.

**9. Give events a before, during, and after:** Whether it’s for a sporting event such as the World Cup, or a cultural moment, such as the Academy Awards, brands are extending their air time during major events by uploading their ads early to YouTube. People watched nearly [7 million hours](#) of ads and ad teasers from the Big Game in the first six weeks of 2015—more than in all 52 weeks of 2014. And adidas proved the value of getting an early start and sticking around long after an event with its [2014 World Cup campaign](#).

**10. More Jean-Claude Van Damme:** [Enough said](#).

Gone are the days when ads lived in one medium and spoke *at* consumers. Brands and marketers have used YouTube over the past decade to change that paradigm. Ads on YouTube are still vehicles for telling great stories, but now they’re much more than that. They allow advertisers to invite users to interact, cultivate relationships, and build fandoms of their own. Whether you’re just getting started or tweaking an

existing strategy, we hope these trends will serve as inspiration for your brand on YouTube. We can't wait to see what you'll bring to YouTube in the next ten years.

And without further ado, check out which YouTube ads were voted the top five from the past decade.



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Click through for  
*Top 5 Ads from  
the First 10 Years  
of YouTube*