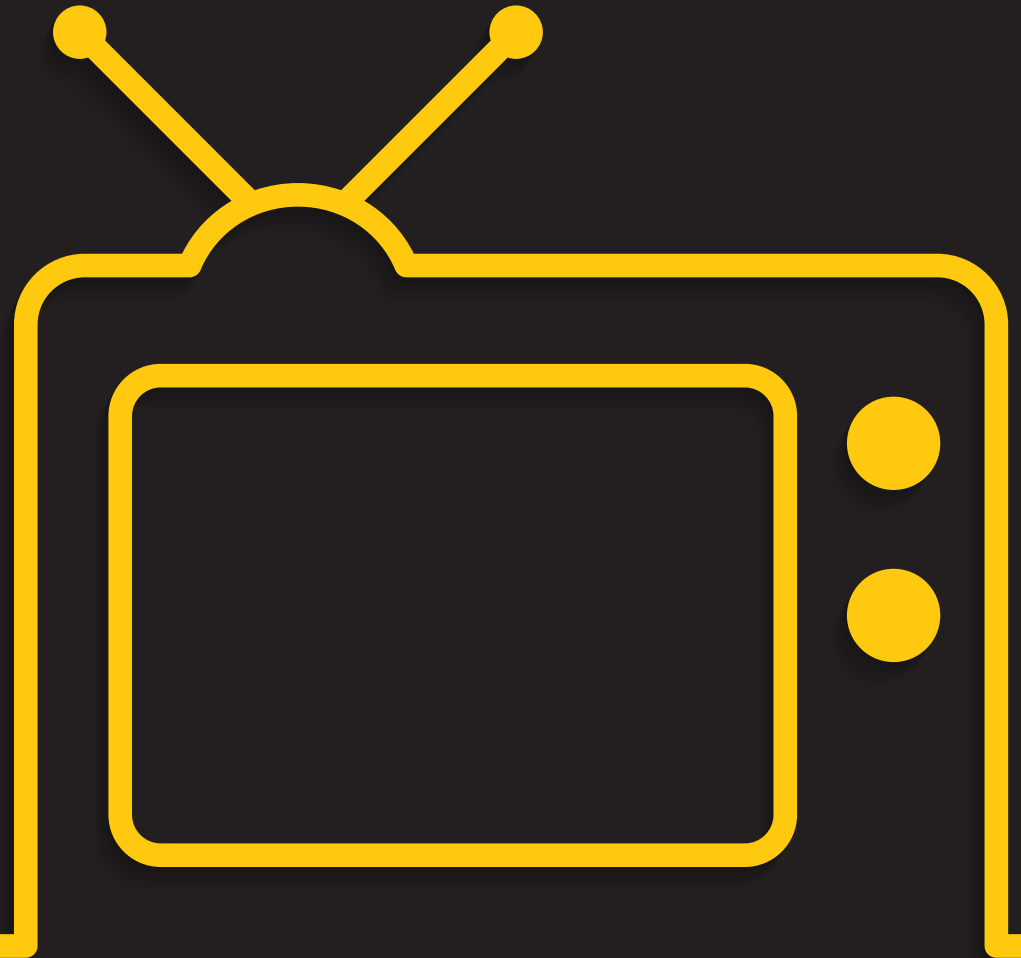


HOW TO MAKE TV ADS THAT WORK

**Tools You Can Use
for Everything From
Your First Creative
to Refreshing
Your Campaign**



By Jay Nelson, Founder and Creative Director, Nelson Creative Group
& Matt Collins, SVP of Marketing, Simulmedia



OVERVIEW

- **INTRODUCTION**
- **WHY THE CREATIVE WORK YOU PUT OUT IS IMPORTANT FOR DRIVING GROWTH**
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INTRODUCTION

“CAN YOU RECOMMEND ANY TIPS ON HOW TO CREATE OUR FIRST TV COMMERCIAL?”

With direct-to-consumer brands turning to TV advertising to unlock new sources of scale beyond search and social, many growth marketers and founders have been asking us precisely this question a lot lately. That's because many of them face an unfamiliar challenge: what's the best, fastest and most efficient way to make that first TV creative?

This playbook is designed to answer this question and make it much more likely that your investment will deliver interesting, engaging, relevant, and on-message creative. By the time you're done reading, you'll know how to develop creative work that is actually worth seeing and is more likely to deliver the results you expect, whether that's sales, website visits, app downloads, or brand awareness.

**Unlock Your Next Growth Channel and
Create Your First TV Commercial with**



THE FIRST THING TO KNOW IS THAT CREATIVE IS REALLY IMPORTANT

Research confirms it. [Nielsen Catalina Solutions](#) measured the impact of audience targeting, context, creative work, brand focus, reach and frequency on a television campaign's effectiveness. The most powerful predictor of campaign success? The quality of the creative work, which is twice as important as reach and beats targeting by over 5 to 1.

Creative work also builds your brand, and your brand is the anchor to all your other marketing. It's what a consumer will turn to anytime they are torn or in doubt about a purchase, often preferring the brand they know to the brand they don't. Strong brands can reduce the mental payload customers must process as they size up more logical considerations, including price. For this reason, stronger brands are easier for a customer to add to their shopping carts than weaker ones.

When your creative work helps to build a strong brand, you reinforce this relationship between your product and your customer, which increases customer retention and reduces churn. Once people are emotionally connected to a brand, it encourages them to stay as opposed to coping with the unknown emotional and logical risks of switching to another.

In addition, effective branding powers sales. The annual John Lewis TV campaign in the UK proves it. As this [case study](#) shows, the company's TV has generated a 10:1 return on marketing investment.¹ If you assume that's because the ads must be heavily product and direct response-focused, you'd be wrong. The company wrings this level of performance out of its marketing in spite of their spots not showing product, as evidenced by the firm's poignant [2018 Christmas ad](#).

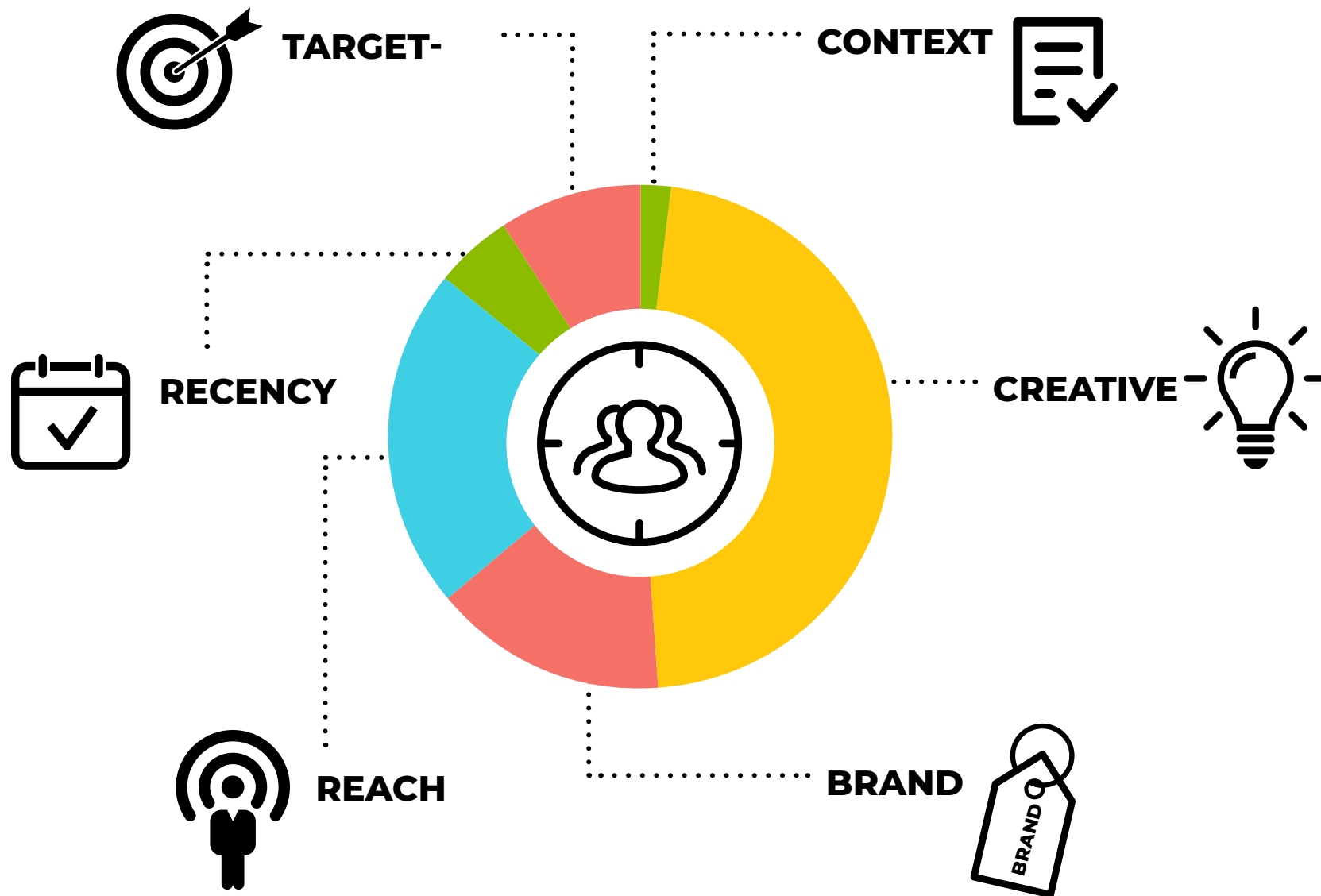
For all these reasons, investing in creative to bolster your brand is an investment in growth.



For all initial campaigns, in particular for new-to-market businesses and brands, consider putting more weight behind a 30 second spot. This will allow more time for telling your story. As your audience becomes familiar with the :30s and your brand, you should shift weight to less costly :15s.

¹See page 50 in the case study.

PERCENT SALES CONTRIBUTION BY ADVERTISING ELEMENT



Nearly 500 campaigns across all media platforms. Source: Nielsen Catalina Solutions © 2017; Period 2016-Q1 2017

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STEPS TO ACHIEVING GREAT CREATIVE WORK

Making TV ads that stand out and achieve their business goals takes effort and collaboration. Here, we'll walk you through a step-by-step approach to making an actual TV ad. We'll also describe the various roles and responsibilities associated with the work, including how creative agencies and production companies contribute to the final product.

Let's start with the things you'll want to nail down before you engage anyone in a creative or production capacity.

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SELLING

It sounds easy enough, but it takes some thought. For example, you can be a bank with a mortgage product, but what is it about the mortgage product that you're actually selling? If your mortgage rates are lower than anyone else's, then you're selling rate. If your rates are equal, or even a bit higher, but you have mortgage bankers who have navigated multiple market rises and corrections, then you might be selling expertise. If you have more options of mortgage products, you might be selling breadth of product. If you have a customer service department with friendly, helpful people who always pick up the phone, then maybe you're selling peace of mind.

The point here is, whatever your product or service, you'll need to know what you're selling before you can decide how to best sell it. We'll talk about this more shortly.



As you ponder what you're selling, consider the ELMR framework. ELMR stands for Emotion, Logic, Motivation and Reward. Emotion comes first because as we discussed earlier, it's typically the most powerful influence on a customer's perception about your product or brand.

STEPS TO ACHIEVING GREAT CREATIVE WORK

KNOW WHO YOU'RE SELLING TO

Before you can know how to sell something, you have to know something about your customers. How is what you are offering unique and distinctive, as they see it? What problem, need or desire does it solve? Do you understand what barriers they might have to accept, including how they think about your competition? Do you know what a day in their lives is like, both inside and outside of the work environment? The more you know about who you're selling to, the better shot you have at connecting with them through your advertising.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY

Knowing what you're selling and to whom isn't sufficient. You also have to decide what you want to communicate. With so many possible features and benefits available to you, and with so much you can say to your customers, narrowing this down is hard work.

Here's an exercise that can help: imagine you had 100 people in a room, and you were certain these were the most qualified prospective clients possible. Now imagine you have just 10 seconds to speak to them.

What's the one thing you would say?

That will become your single-minded message, and a tight and single-minded message is the most critical input to great creative work.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT PEOPLE TO DO—SPECIFICALLY

Once you run your television campaign, what will you determine to be a success? Website visits? Actual sales? Inquiries by phone? Email? Leads? Or are you just trying to raise awareness? Know your metric for success before you start, so that your creative work will reflect it.

STEPS TO ACHIEVING GREAT CREATIVE WORK

DON'T ASK YOUR CREATIVE TO DO TOO MUCH

The best way to kill strong creative television work is to try to do too much. We've all seen ads that seemingly try to communicate every feature and detailed pricing information. That can happen because the marketer becomes afraid of leaving something out, or because he or she really can't decide what's most important. Regardless, saddling your creative with too much work makes it next to impossible to deliver the single-minded message.



What is considered one of the best print ads in history was the [“Think Small”](#) ad done for Volkswagen way back in 1959. To get an idea of how the fear of leaving out key messages can sabotage your creative decision making, read [this article](#) on how one key advertising veteran suggested “improving” this great ad. The article itself is satirical, but it's certainly based on real world examples of how a client can overthink creative work to the point of destroying it.

KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE TO SPEND ON CREATIVE AND PRODUCTION

The moment you decide that television advertising is the way to go, you'll need to determine a creative and production budget. They are separate because they involve different skills and, usually, different providers. Creative costs are typically based on time and an hourly rate. Production costs depend on more factors. As you're considering your budget, you'll want to make sure your creative team knows how much you can pay for production. This will allow the creative team to deliver concepts that they actually can execute.

Now that we've covered these critical inputs, let's get to one of the most common questions that new-to-TV advertisers have.

SO HOW MUCH DOES A TV COMMERCIAL COST?

There's no simple answer to this question because it always depends on the creative work being produced.

A TV commercial can be produced for almost any amount. There's always someone out there who will do a TV commercial cheaper. Always. The question becomes, is that what you want for your TV commercial?

Think about it this way: say you want to build a house, and you want to know how cheaply a house can be built for. If you ask the question that way, then every decision will be made around what costs the least. Who's the cheapest architect you can get? Who are the cheapest carpenters? The cheapest masons, painters, plumbers and electricians? What are the cheapest materials you can use? What corners can they cut to save time and money on the job? In the end, this approach will deliver a cheap house, but that may not be one you actually want to live in.

Instead, imagine you said, "I have X amount of dollars to build a house. I'm going to build the best possible house I can for that price." Then you hire talented people who will build you the best house possible for the money you have. It might be a smaller house, or a different house than you had in mind, but it won't be a cheap house. It'll be the best house you can possibly build for the money and a house you can be proud of.

It's the same with building a TV commercial.

The best way to make sure you have a great TV commercial is to let the creative team know exactly how much you have to spend on production before they start thinking. That way, they can create their best concepts with an understanding of the production realities.

Remember, just as in building a house, there is always a way to do it more cheaply. Optimizing for cost typically means sacrificing quality because you give up certain things to save money.

SO HOW MUCH DOES A TV COMMERCIAL COST?

REMEMBER, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE IDEA

You could have \$500,000 to produce a lousy idea and you'd have a very nice looking TV commercial. But it would still be lousy.

Budget is important, but budget does not define the quality of an idea.

Your production budget tells the creative team the box they need to work within. You can draw them a \$10,000 production box and they'll work with that. If it's a \$50,000 production budget, they'll work with that. Same with \$150,000 and on up. The larger the production budget, the more expansive the creative thinking can be.

Just remember, it's a lot harder to produce a great TV spot for \$10,000. It can be done, but you need to accept an extreme level of simplicity. It's a bit like having \$10 and wanting a steak. You can do it, but the steak you get may be really small or not much fun to eat. Or, you can get something really awesome to eat for \$10, but accept that it won't be a steak.

SO HOW MUCH DOES A TV COMMERCIAL COST?

OK, BUT YOU REALLY NEED A NUMBER, RIGHT?

If you absolutely need to have an idea of “what a TV commercial costs,” here’s an example that will give you some guidance. It’s an estimate based on the minimum amount of time and talent we’ve seen good ads require.²

ONE DAY OF SHOOTING: Typically, it’s a 10-hour day. One day of shooting is not a lot. In fact, most TV commercials aren’t the product of just one day shoots. To be completed in a day, your creative concept, not surprisingly, would need to be something that can be shot in a day. In other words, simple. Your creative team, if they’re good, will know how to create something great within this guideline. More days of shooting means higher cost.

ONE ON-CAMERA TALENT: Here, we’re referring to the part of your TV ad’s cast that will appear in the ad itself. One on-camera talent is not a lot, either. Most spots have more than that, but you can still do a great spot with just one. Typically, your on-camera talent will be an actor. Non-union actors are cheaper, and you can typically pay them a flat fee of about \$500 each. If you use non-union actors you may be able to afford more talent on-camera. Union talent costs more, and you have to pay them additional fees, called residuals, if your spot runs on certain mediums and for certain amounts of time. To keep costs down, we suggest using non-union talent if you can, though as you might expect, union talent are almost always better actors. More on camera talent means more cost.

THE CREW: Most times a crew is led by a Commercial Director that you hire based on the quality of previous work. He or she will direct the action in your commercial. The crew also will include a Director of Photography (DP), who is responsible for the quality of the actual footage. The crew will include other roles, from lighting to electrical to make-up. The size of the crew and whether or not you hire a Commercial Director and DP is one of the major factors in cost.

ONE LOCATION: This means one place, though you may be able to have multiple setups (scenes) in that one place. You likely won’t be able to afford a ton of props, special effects, or complicated action. But remember, simple doesn’t mean bad. Simple just means simple. Plenty of simple commercials are great.

POST PRODUCTION: Established and proven creative editors cost more than kids right out of school. If your spot is a very simple one to edit, you can spend less on an editor, but if you’re really telling a story, you want someone with more creativity who has experience. Less experience costs less. More experience costs more.

² NOTE: These costs do not include creative team time to see the project through, being on set, in edit, and creative directing from start to finish.

SO HOW MUCH DOES A TV COMMERCIAL COST?

TWO SPENDING LEVELS FOR THE PREVIOUS SCENARIO:

HIGH END—\$125,000: For this budget you'd have an established and proven Commercial Director working for you. That director would have an established and proven Director of Photography making sure your spot looks great, and you would have a crew upwards of 25 people making sure every detail on the set is right. You'd also have an experienced editor taking your spot to finish.

LOW END—\$50,000: You basically drop down the size of the crew by at least half or more, which limits some of what you can do on location, and you give up having an experienced Commercial Director, an experienced Director of Photography and a more experienced Editor. When the goal is to save money, you typically will have to hire lesser or less experienced talent.

Does this mean you can't do a strong creative TV spot for less than \$50,000? You absolutely can! This is just an example to help you understand some basic production cost realities.

In closing, the three most important things for creating a great TV commercial are these:

- Hire strong creative people to create ideas for you.
- Give them a predetermined production budget to work with.
- Set your production expectations to be in line with your budget.



Advertisers looking for ways to save money have a couple of options. First, they can amortize the cost across channels. After all, a great TV spot can work effectively on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and any other digital video channel. If you're spending significantly in these channels already, then the sticker price of your creative may not seem so high. Or, they may be able to upgrade an existing video they've already made.

CREATING A STRONG STRATEGIC CREATIVE DOCUMENT

SELECTING A CREATIVE TEAM

You need to make sure that the creative team creating your spot are people who come recommended, who you like and can trust. That's because the team will do more than just deliver you a great idea. They're also going to take the lead in bringing the spot to life. The creative team will guide you through all the steps of the production process, including recommending production teams for you to hire. They'll also serve as quality control at every step of the process.

When selecting a creative team, we recommend you review the work they've created previously. Do you like it? Just as importantly, do you like the team? If you're a fan of their work, and you like the people, chances are pretty good that you'll be able to work with them to create the right spot for you.

CREATING AN ACTUAL STRATEGY TO GUIDE THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Now that you've identified what you're selling, to whom, and what you have to say, and once you've selected a creative and production budget and the creative team that will lead the way, it's time to give the creative team their marching orders.

It all starts with the creative brief. Its purpose is to translate your brand, product, and/or service marketing strategy into sight, sound and motion.

CREATING A STRONG STRATEGIC CREATIVE DOCUMENT

THE KEY COMPONENTS OF A CREATIVE BRIEF ARE:

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: a short summary, including the product or brand that's in focus and what you need from the project, e.g. a :30s, :15s and digital video.

THE OBJECTIVE: e.g. drive awareness, sales, app downloads, etc.

THE TARGET AUDIENCE: be specific, including demographic, behavioral and psychographic/attitudinal inputs.

INSIGHTS ABOUT YOUR BRAND OR PRODUCT: what makes it better than or different than the competition? Is there anything new for the customer?

COMPETITION: if your customers don't select your product, which one(s) would they choose instead?

THE KEY COMMUNICATION: what's the single-minded message your audience must take away from the creative. Remember the 100 people in a room with 10 seconds to talk to them? This is that.

TOPE OR PERSONALITY: are you going for humor, drama, action, empathy, other?

OUTPUTS: including length (e.g. :30s, :15s, :60s) and file format (if relevant, and especially if you plan on airing the spot digitally).

CREATIVE INSPIRATION: are there other examples of TV spots that capture a style or message that appeals to you and that you think are relevant?

TIMING: including pre-completion milestones if you need them for initial concept testing or testing a pre-release draft of the final ad. You also should ask your creative resource to provide dates for various stages of review, e.g. initial concepts, storyboards, a rough cut of the ad.

BUDGET: Whatever you indicate here is likely the minimum that your creative will cost. You should expect people to work to this budget, not look to reduce it.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS: e.g. if you have a logo that must be visible, or a legal line, indicate that here.

CREATING A STRONG STRATEGIC CREATIVE DOCUMENT



Regardless of the ideas or concepts your creative team recommends, here are a few tips that we've found to be useful especially for brands that are new to TV.

LEAD WITH :30 SECOND SPOTS, IF YOU CAN AFFORD THEM: While they cost more to run, :30s will give you more time to explain your ad and its value. As your campaign evolves, you can put more media weight into :15 second versions of your ad. With this in mind, make sure your creatives deliver at least a :30s and a :15s. If you plan on running digitally, then you also may want a :06 second version.

MAKE A POWERFUL FIRST IMPRESSION: Viewers are more distracted than ever. If you want to capture their attention and convince them not to change the channel, then put your best foot forward by starting the ad with something that makes an immediate and positive first impression. If you're introducing your brand to the world for the first time, consider featuring your brand name early in your spot: Your creative team can help you figure out how to do it. This not a hard and fast rule, but for new brands that haven't done much marketing, it's something your creative team should consider. Some D2C brands also will show their logo throughout the spot. That may work for you, too, as long as it fits within the overall concept your creative team suggests.

CREATING A STRONG STRATEGIC CREATIVE DOCUMENT

THE KICK OFF MEETING

Once you've finished your brief and emailed it to the creative team, you'll want to schedule a meeting to discuss it. Share your brief at least a day before your meeting so people can come in ready with questions.



Always encourage questions. Then encourage more questions. The more questions there are, the tighter your messaging will become. Also, allow yourself to be wrong. You want the creative team, and anyone else for that matter, to try to shoot holes in your brief. Only then can you be certain it's solid.

Also, make sure you spend time discussing the project's schedule. This includes:

- Know your air date and work backwards from there to develop a production schedule.
- Align on how many initial creative concepts to expect and when to expect them.
- Define your internal approval processes and schedule accordingly. How many levels of people in your company need to approve the work? At what stage do they need to get involved? Factor this into your schedule.
- How many rounds of revisions will you want to see? Factor this into your schedule.
- Are you testing creative work? Make sure you have the timing for that worked out, along with additional creative time should testing suggest any changes.
- Factor in production time once concepts are approved. Your creative team and producer can help you do this.

Once the creative briefing meeting is over, there should be no surprises unless something unexpected comes up.

TV PRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE END-TO-END PROCESS

PRODUCTION:

Who will shoot or animate your spot? The quality of what you put out there will be in direct proportion to the talent of the people who will be shooting and/or animating, editing and mixing (the sound of your spot - music, voice, and sound effects are finalized) your spot. When considering vendors, ask your creative agency for recommendations. In all likelihood, there are many options in your local market. Ideally you'll want to work with teams with whom your creative team has experience and for whom they can vouch. Their costs will vary depending on their experience and talent. Budget will drive who your creative team recommends you hire. You're going to want to listen to your creative team and make sure that they are comfortable with the production company you select. You will want your creative team or to be part of the production process from start to finish. Also, do not choose a production company on your own or before anything else is done.



We recommend you avoid hiring friends or family for cost reasons over more proven production companies. They may cost less, but they are likely to introduce other disappointments and problems that can more than eat up any savings

TV PRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE END-TO-END PROCESS

PRODUCTION CONSIDERATIONS:

CASTING: depending on your spot, this can take as little as a few days to as much as two weeks. Also note that union talent is more expensive, and often but not always better than non-union talent.

LOCATION: if your budget allows, you may have one or multiple locations. Typically, these require a fee paid to whomever owns or is responsible for that location, e.g. a property owner or municipality if filmed in a public space. The location is something that will be factored into the budget the creative team uses.

EDITING: Once shooting is done, your spot moves into the edit phase. This can take as little as a week or as long as three or more, depending on the scope of your spot. First pass viewing will produce a rough cut. The rough cut is nothing more than a first look at how the spot will “roughly” look. This means all the visuals and audio will be in place, but the color, sound, voice, music and mix will not be final.

VOICEOVER: If your spot requires a voiceover (think of a voiceover as a narrator for your spot) in addition to on camera talent, you will likely want to cast for that, which you would do as you cast for the on camera talent. You’ll need to head to a sound studio to record the voice. Note that a rough cut will typically have a “scratch track” voiceover, which is usually just someone on the creative team reading the copy so it’s in place. This will be replaced with a professional voice talent later.

MUSIC: Stock (i.e. pre-recorded) music options are quite good and affordable. Some you can have for as little as \$50 depending on your media buy. Choosing stock means there’s the risk of having music in your spot that’s also in someone else’s. If you want to avoid that risk entirely, you can pay more for original music, which is likely to be a four-digit cost.

GRAPHICS: For simple logo and type, this is easily handled by the editor editing your spot. But if you want more ambitious graphic treatments, this typically will add another step and additional costs. If you have your heart set on graphics, make sure you share that with your creative team. It may impact your budget and require tradeoffs elsewhere in the production.

FINAL EDIT/MIX: Once the rough cut is approved, the editor and sound engineer finalize all the elements and deliver your spot.

Note that you should determine how you want to be involved in each step of the process ahead of time. But you should definitely be at the final mix and in the studio for final approval if you can.

CLOSING

We've now taken you through the entire creative process, from selecting a vendor to crafting a brief to the conclusion of the production process. There's no magic formula to producing terrific creative, but the more you follow this guidance and manage the inputs, the more likely you'll be proud of the output.

If you have questions about anything we've covered here, or you're interested in making your first TV creative, we'd love to hear from you. You can contact the authors directly:

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MATT COLLINS is the Senior Vice President of Marketing for Simulmedia, an advanced TV provider that guarantees the targeted national TV campaigns it runs for brands and agencies will produce more new customers and higher sales than conventionally planned and targeted campaigns. Prior to joining Simulmedia, he served as Vice President of Marketing and Communications for Ampush, a performance marketing start-up and leading Facebook Marketing Partner. In addition, Collins spent over eight years in mobile developer and partner marketing at Nokia and Microsoft. Collins also worked for over seven years in the video game industry and has marketed (and produced TV commercials for) some of the world's top entertainment brands, including Monopoly, Dungeons & Dragons, Dragon Ball Z, and RollerCoaster Tycoon. Collins earned his MBA in Marketing at Indiana University and a BA in English at Amherst College.

His favorite TV commercial? Another classic by Volkswagen.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

JAY NELSON is Principal/Creative Director of the Nelson Creative Group, based in Boston. Previously, Jay was a Creative Director with two of Boston's largest agencies, Hill Holliday and Arnold Worldwide. He was also a Creative Director/Partner at Donovan Group, taking on the challenge of building a smaller agency into a creative Boston powerhouse. Under his leadership, the Donovan Group grew four-fold, won many creative awards and was named one of the fastest growing agencies in New England. After leaving Donovan Group, Jay moved to McCarthy Mambro Bertino (MMB). That's when he met Matt. The two collaborated on a number of TV advertising campaigns for video games based on Dragon Ball Z, a classic anime franchise. Jay then started his own agency, Sprague Nelson, and after about 10 years of wearing all the hats of small agency ownership, decided was time to get back to focusing on what he does best—the creative work. In his career, Jay has worked on a variety of blue chip brands, including McDonald's, Titleist, FootJoy, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, the NHL, Atari, Subway, as well as several smaller brands and startups. Jay now freelances for agencies and directly with brands. He would tell you that there are so many great TV spots, that it's hard to pick just one. Some that go back a long way. Here are a few of Jay's favorites:

Just in time for the holidays, a favorite long format piece for JC Penney—a great format for the web.

Another classic spot from Volkswagen, from way back. But it's still great.

And a favorite low budget spot that Jay and his colleagues did.



Got questions? Learn more at www.d2cx.com.

