TV Advertising Insights

Do Shorter Commercials Perform Better on TV?

The Impact of Commercial Length on Audience Attention

iSpot.tv

TV Ad Measurement for Disruptive Brands
Summary

The new breed of TV ad measurement capabilities now rival the best of digital media. As a result, some of digital’s best lessons, insights, debates and practices are applicable to TV too.

This edition of TV Advertising Insights focuses on the impact ad duration has on the attention of TV audiences. In some cases, it examines and applies digital similarities and practices. The statistical insights are based on a study that examined more than four and a half million commercial airings at the end of 2017 and early 2018.

This report answers several key questions for TV advertisers, including:

- What are the primary factors that impact viewer attention?
- Which TV ad lengths command the greatest audience attention?
- Do different circumstances, such as position-in-pod, affect Attention Scores in conjunction with ad lengths?
- How do these insights relate to digital video advertising? What is the significance of that relationship?
- How can these insights be applied to reduce advertising costs and improve campaign results?
Welcome to the Platinum Age

For years, the digital advertising industry exploded with innovative technologies, programmatic breakthroughs and new measurement capabilities. All the while, TV quietly entered an unprecedented era that some are now calling its “platinum age.” The number of channels, the quality of programs and the breadth of targeting options have never been greater. And now, the ability to granularly measure TV advertising rivals the best of digital media.

One of the most important recent advancements in TV measurement is the advent of Attention Analytics. Regardless of whether the viewer watches a live or time-shifted program, Attention Analytics provide a foundational measure of ad effectiveness by revealing the degree of which an ad is capturing viewers’ attention. Attention Analytics are more precise and actionable than older, legacy TV metrics (like the GRP) because they track viewer behavior across millions of Smart TVs (live and time-shifted) and present the results to marketers in real time.

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There are three primary factors that determine an ad’s ability to grab and hold the viewer’s attention. These include the ad creative, the show it appears within and creative wear. Each of these factors has a number of contributing attributes. The ad’s duration is only one aspect of the creative, but when ad length is tracked across millions of ads and airings, trends emerge that reveal considerable insights.

The recent introduction of the 6-second TV spot and the increased adoption of the ten-second commercial have TV marketers asking an important question that has been debated in digital circles for years -- Is it better to use super short ads for communicating messages before viewers can skip or tune them out? Or, is it better to take advantage of the emotional power of video, audio, length and motion to tell a uniquely compelling brand story?

The 3 Key Primary Factors that Impact Audience Attention

The Ad Creative
Viewers are less likely to interrupt commercials that are fresh and engaging. Attention Analytics help marketers understand the degree of their ad’s allure. Although the length of the ad plays a significant role in its ability to grab and hold viewer attention, the newness, story and creative style also carry a lot of weight.

The Show
Audience attention can also vary depending on the content it’s associated with. The TV series, show genre, network and day part all play a role in whether the audience pays attention to a particular commercial when it airs. The ad’s position within a show’s ad break can be a factor, too.

Creative Wear
Creative Wear is a measure of ad exposure and eventual audience fatigue. Viewers tend to pay less attention to commercials after they’ve seen them several times. Wear is trackable and can often have a direct, measurable, causal relationship with Attention Scores. The total number of airings, days from the start of a campaign, airings per channel and airings within a show can contribute significantly to the viewers’ propensity to pay attention to a specific commercial.
5 Key Insights About Commercial Length & Audience Attention

A recent iSpot study, analyzing the effect of ad duration on audience attention, revealed five key insights regarding the attention-grabbing capabilities of TV ads.

#1: Shorter is Better
Generally, the research couldn’t be clearer. Among TV audiences, shorter ads command greater audience attention. There’s a significant difference between the Attention Scores of the shortest and longest standard formats.

Across all of the ad impressions in the study, the average Attention Score was 90.2. Audience attention is generally measured and scored within the 75-98 range. A difference of a few points is significant. Overall, 10-second commercials performed above this average and 60-second ads performed well below.

When it comes to Attention, 10-second commercials score 4% higher than 60-second ads (on avg.)

What About the New :06 TV Ads?
At first glance, the new 6-second commercial ad length appears to perform well, but there aren’t yet enough of them to calculate a meaningful, accurate industry measure.
#2: Shorter is Better, but not Always
A closer analysis of 60-second ads by advertiser and industry revealed some key attention performance differences. For advertisers in the Automotive, Travel and Entertainment segments the 60-second ad produces exceptional results, generating the highest Attention Scores for all three.

These segments may be garnering more attention with longer ads because they tend to put a great deal of emphasis on production quality, beautiful product footage, celebrities, or exciting, fast-paced action.

Interestingly, in each of these cases, the next best results were in the shortest formats (10 and 15 seconds)
#3: Pod Position Boosts the Impact of Ad Length
Ad length appears to have a greater impact on audience attention (for better or worse) depending on where the ad appears within ad breaks. An analysis of all Attention Scores of ads in specific pod positions illustrates that, generally, audiences pay less attention to commercials at the very beginning and very end of the ad break.

However, a deeper analysis of ad break positions by ad length reveals that shorter ads (10- and 15-seconds) that run in the second position and second-to-last position score consistently highest in audience attention.

Short ads in the first and last position also score much better than the average depicted above.

The worst overall performers were 60-second commercials at the beginning and end of the ad break. Viewers tend to take more interruptive actions toward the beginning and at the end of ad breaks. The ad break itself may instigate many of these actions, but a long commercial right at the beginning of the break may encourage more of those actions.
#4: A Look at the Bottom

Of course, some commercials score higher than the average and many others score lower. Some, usually 60-second spots, score exceptionally low.

An analysis of the impact of ad length within each industry surfaced a number of not-so-favorable trends. Three segments in particular had more than twice as many 60-second commercials with poor Attention Scores than all of the other segments.

Ads tend to perform quite poorly when their Attention Scores drop below 70.

Advertisers in these low-ranking categories should consider using fewer 60-second commercials. If it’s necessary to use 60-second spots, consider a creative plan that quickly switches to 30-, 15- or 10-second cut-downs of the longer versions.
#5: TV & Digital Video Ads Look Very Similar: It’s 15- & 30-Second Ads Across the Board

The same ad measurement technologies and methods can now be employed for both TV and digital video (some examples: device-based reach, frequency, ad interruption, duration and conversion tracking).

Interestingly, the analytics of both are revealing similar audience behaviors and driving TV and digital video to become very similar in form and execution, too.

In late 2017, about 35% of digital video ads were 15 seconds and roughly 59% were 30 seconds. Virtually none were 60 seconds. Six-second ads and other lengths made up only 6%. It turns out that a lot of what the industry has learned about digital ads and audiences applies to TV, and vice versa.

For example, the 6-second video ad has now jumped to TV because of its potential to deliver a message before it can be skipped or tuned out.

As the 60-second TV commercial continues to drop in popularity and effectiveness, the 6-, and especially the 10-second ad is on the rise.

Conversely, recent studies show that 15- and 30-second video ads on both Facebook and YouTube are viewed to completion more often than their shorter counterparts. Those findings appear to be fueling broader favorability of slightly longer digital ad lengths.

These are important convergence trends that can work in the advertiser’s favor. Today, most large TV advertisers are also running video ads on digital media. As creative formats and metrics converge, so too can brands’ creative strategies, budgets and broad use of the same ad creative.
Considerations for TV Advertisers

Ad length is a critical factor when using TV advertising to grab audience attention and attention is a crucial measure of ad effectiveness.

Here are a few final thoughts for consideration:

- If you are telling the longer story, consider whether you can tell it in 15, or even 10 seconds, instead of 30 or 60.
- If possible, experiment with different lengths to see how different versions may command different degrees of audience attention.
- Regardless of the ad length you use, be sure to track audience attention. One-minute ads rank lowest for attention most commonly, but there are other factors that can affect attention as well. Attention Analytics can point you toward those factors.
- Keep your eye on your ad’s position in ad breaks. If your ads are 10 or 15 seconds, try to secure positions that are very early or very late in the break.
- By focusing on 15- and 30-second ads, said-ads may perform better attention-wise, and they’ll be more readily formatted for digital use.

The ongoing convergence of digital and television advertising presents significant opportunities for TV advertisers to reduce costs and improve results. It may be time to take a more holistic, multi-screen approach to video creative, execution, KPIs (like audience attention) and measurement.

You can access more information on our Attention Analytics here. To request a demo or gain personalized insights specific to your brand, contact marketing@ispot.tv.
About the Report

The Attention insights in this report are the result of statistical analyses of 37,854 TV commercials across 4.69 million tracked commercial airings and ongoing ad interruption tracking of more than 8 million active viewers across every significant TV network, geographic region, DMA and demographic. The study was conducted during the four-month period spanning Q4 2017 and January, 2018. All of the statistics presented in this report are averages calculated from huge data sets and parsed subsets.

About iSpot.tv

iSpot is a TV advertising measurement company that brings transparency, digital-like precision, and control to disruptive brands. The real-time platform empowers marketers with a complete view of advertising impressions, engagement, attention and conversion across all forms of TV, and connect those analytics to business outcomes.