



## Video Ads Go in Line, in Time

By [Gary Stein](#) , August 27, 2007

For advertisers and their agencies, the notion of video on the Web has long been an exciting but uneasy topic. In the early days, video was exciting and new, but nearly impossible to deliver. File formats conflicted with pretty much every site, and download speeds practically ensured that no one would ever see more than a jumpy bunch of half-drawn frames. But the technology on both the serving and the receiving end got better quickly. Advertisers can now be pretty sure the videos they put up can be viewed.

That leaves the problem of whether they *would* be seen. For a long time, the reality has been that people weren't going online to look at stuff. They were going online to *do* stuff. This is why this industry is called "interactive marketing". Certainly the interactive part has something to do with technology. But mostly, "interactive marketing" means marketing where there's an ongoing, evolving, deepening give-and-take between a consumer and a brand.

Watching a video isn't necessarily a give-and-take experience, which is central to advertisers' struggle. That is, technology got better, consumers got interested, and video began to take off. Consumers were watching videos online. Advertisers soon followed and quickly muddled the experience with pre- and post-roll ads and ads within the video itself.

If you tried either pre- or post-roll, you're probably familiar with the problems. Pre-roll ads, unless they're highly relevant to the video the consumer chose to watch, annoy people. So much so, that people tend to bail on the whole video rather than sit through the ad. Post-roll is even worse. Again, unless this ad is highly relevant, no one is sticking around to see it.

The third solution, to put the ad into the video itself, seems anathema to the medium. Interrupting content to show an ad was precisely the way most interactive gurus denigrated traditional advertising. To show ads in the middle of content, in a way that's out of the user's control, was just wrong, wrong, wrong.

But within the last several months, we seem to have gotten it at last: place the ads within the video player frame. YouTube [announced last week](#) that it will begin offering a very clever ad execution that places a small strip at the bottom of certain videos, offering a message and a chance to click for more content. VideoEgg has been offering much the same thing for a long time now. The ad is a bit more consistent in the VideoEgg examples, but the idea is totally on target.

As YouTube's implementation of the inline ad takes hold of the market, we'll see how successful this approach can be. It offers a lot of promise. First, they're on target with consumer expectations of not only the medium but of advertising's place in it. There seems to be a cardinal rule that exists online: no one should ever see an ad unless she has specifically requested to see that ad.

Sure, you can argue people don't request to see banners, but you can also argue banners are really invitations to see the real ad (whether that ad is a video, a rich media experience, or just a landing page). The inline ad, however, follows that cardinal rule. It invites you to engage further, but that's all. In fact, it goes away, never to be heard from again, if you don't touch it.

Second, inline ads don't disrupt and barely distract. With both the YouTube and VideoEgg executions, the ads never take people away from the content they're watching permanently. Instead, they offer a separate bit of content that can be consumed distinctly; the original video is paused. Think about your own browsing habits: most likely you're constantly hopping back and forth between multiple pieces of content. The path consumers are asked to take through these ads is deeply familiar.

Lastly, inline ads don't need to be limited to video. The line between a video and a rich media experience is blurring daily, and inline video units can take advantage of this new space. The click on an inline video ad unit can take the viewer to a rich experience with interactivity, games, and who knows what else. Which will be the first brand to sell something in this space?

Whatever the immediate results are from these initial forays into inline video advertising, we can look forward to a new video advertising option. Shoot, in advertising in general. More and more content will be delivered digitally in the coming years. You can already watch YouTube via the AppleTV player, in your living room. This online format -- one that takes the notion of interactivity to heart -- may have life outside of Web sites.

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A banner advertisement for Email Labs. On the left, the 'Email Labs' logo is displayed in blue and black text on a white background. In the center is a photograph of a long, straight road with white dashed lines, stretching into the distance under a cloudy sky. On the right, a dark blue rectangular area contains the white text 'Deliver on expectations or the relationship ends'. A small orange triangle is visible on the far right edge of the banner.

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