

IAB Display Creative Guidelines Release Notes

These updated Display Creative Guidelines are the work-product of an exhaustive 9-month cross-industry working group effort to bring the industry inline with the creative demands of brand advertisers. The IAB had two overriding goals for this update:

- 1) Issue guidelines that empower creative shops to exercise the limits of their imagination, only tempering creativity as it relates to positive consumer experience; and
- 2) Further simplify the digital supply chain by making these new guidelines easily accessible, adoptable and understandable.

While the accommodation of every individual concern is beyond reach, near universal approval of these specifications and guidelines was achieved by the Working Group participants. Despite a few inevitable compromises, these updated guidelines represent a quantum leap forward— they embrace and foster creativity in ways never before possible. These guidelines should empower marketers and their creative shops to re-imagine online advertising, the result of which will represent a new generation of rich interactivity and "sticky" consumer experiences.

Availability and Adoption

Please be advised that these IAB guidelines represent an industry recommendation. Accordingly, not all publishers, nor all IAB member companies, adopt these guidelines without modification relative to their own unique business offering. Marketers, creative designers and media agencies are strongly advised to consult directly with publishers in order to obtain their exact creative specifications.

Following the release of these Guidelines, the IAB will begin work on an update to its Creative Specs Database (www.iab.net/creativespecs) – the update is expected to be final in Q1 of 2012. The Creative Specs Database allows qualified agencies and their creative partners access to individual creative specs made available by participating publishers.

Balancing File Load Size with Consumer Experience

Balancing the requirements of advertisers and publishers while ensuring that the consumer experience remains positive were considerations that heavily influenced these guidelines. Two important factors were: creative file demands and page load performance.

A separate IAB working group studying the effects of ad load performance on consumer behavior has offered valuable insights based on real research surrounding page abandonment and other effects of compromised page load performance. Influenced by this research and the concrete rationalization that consumers visit websites primarily to consume site content, it was decided that initial file load sizes be constrained across the board. However, to compensate for the trend towards more rich media, two additional categories for file size loading were added: subsequent polite load and subsequent user-initiated load.

In creating the new categories for subsequent file loads, creative limitations are lifted once a user indicates their intent to engage with an ad (i.e. after a click or mouse-over). In adopting these new specs, creative shops should design ads that progressively load content in reaction to a user's engagement with the ad. The good news is that almost all publishers agree, once the user has shown their intent to engage with an ad, the page experience should yield to the ad's requirements for additional file weight to satisfy creative demands.

CPU Usage as a Gating Performance Factor

Ads that load faster can help web pages load faster, leading to higher user satisfaction, lower page abandonment, and most importantly for agencies and marketers, more brand engagement and increased opportunities for ads to yield higher conversions and click through rates.

Ads that use too much of a consumer's processing power, load slower. Accordingly, limits on the percentage of CPU usage were introduced in this update to the guidelines. Users' computers are limited in how much processing power is available for loading webpage elements and ads. The diversity of computers currently in use complicates the identification of a common CPU percentage across the industry— as such, creative designers should consult individual publishers about benchmark testing requirements based on the attributes of their unique audience.

Frame Rate Increase from 18 to 24-fps

The previous guideline for "Maximum Animation Frame Rate" was 18 frames-per-second (fps). While some in the industry argued for an increase to 30-fps, several research studies were presented to the working group that showed a significant increase in CPU usage when loading a file at 30-fps. Conversely, the increase from 18-fps to 24-fps was nominal. Another research study presented to the working group noted that for small-scale video playback (i.e. video played in a display ad on a computer screen), the human eye can't distinguish a quality difference between video played at 24-fps vs. 30-fps.

Increased Video Play Time

The previous guideline for "Maximum Video Length" for Rich Media Units was set at 15-seconds. In order to better facilitate the transition of television commercial content online, it was decided to increase this maximum to 30-seconds.

Animation Length vs. Video Length

In this update, the previous guideline for “Animation Length” was divided into two sub-categories in order to help highlight the distinction between non-video animation (i.e. Flash™ effects) and video (moving picture images). Traditional non-video animation often uses a different technology than video and these updated guidelines now allow for different display lengths for each.

To enable the easy transition of TV broadcast commercials online, these updated guidelines now allow for a full 30-seconds of video animation in-banner. The majority of TV broadcast commercials are 30-seconds in length. As such, when incorporating broadcast TV video into display ads, additional non-video animation (i.e. Flash or HTML5 effects) may be required to gracefully load the video player and provide additional user interface controls and features. Accordingly, these guidelines propose a distinction between video animation and non-video animation, allowing 15 seconds of animation to accompany a 30-second video ad.

Z-Index Range Use Recommendations

The Z-index represents layers of elements on a webpage. When ad elements and other page elements are layered incorrectly, proper display of either page content or ad content (or both) may be compromised. The accidental “collision” of competing elements on a webpage that share the same Z-index value leads to a poor consumer experience, in the form of distorted or mangled images and text. Accordingly, the establishment of an industry accepted z-index hierarchy and associated numerical range is crucial to solving the occurrence of collisions. Please note that adoption of these new Z-index guidelines by all publishers will take time. Creative designers are advised to consult directly with publishers for their individual Z-index guidelines.

Submission Lead Time

In order to ensure timely and smooth campaign launches, this new guideline was added to allow publishers the minimum time required to test ad creative on their webpages prior to campaigns going live. Time, money and even user engagement can be lost when an ad doesn’t display properly on a webpage at the start of a campaign. Minimum submission lead times recommended in this document are an important step to improving the process for releasing a quality ad experience on publisher’s webpages. Advertisers, creative designers and media agencies are strongly advised to consult directly with publishers for their individual submission lead-times.

HTML5 and Flash™

Prior to the wide adoption of devices like the iPhone™ and iPad™, Flash™ formatted creative was widely accepted and easily displayed across the industry. In today’s market, adjustments have to be made to accommodate ads across multiple display devices. HTML5 has provided one solution, but is not yet widely adopted and requires different creative specifications than Flash formatted creative. Requests were made to call out a separate category of creative specs to accommodate HTML5 ads, but for this release of creative guidelines, it was decided to keep the specs “technology neutral.” An addendum for HTML5 for display advertising best practices is currently being pursued.

The Super Leaderboard

Added as a provisional unit in January 2012, the Super Leaderboard is the result of industry demand for a wider Leaderboard option.

The industry has seen an increase in wider screens since the IAB Leaderboard was introduced in 2003. At 728x90, the Leaderboard spanned page content sufficiently for the smaller screens of the day. Today, however, site content is designed for wider screens and the traditional 728x90 Leaderboard leaves awkward blank spaces to either side of the ad. The 970x90 Super Leaderboard spans the width of publisher content designed for today’s wider screens. It provides more brand space and eliminates the awkward blank spaces that surround the narrower traditional Leaderboard. The 970 width also mirrors the width of the IAB Pushdown and Billboard units and, as such, simplify the creative development of these units. An optional 970x66 unit enables publishers to offer something more subtle while still allowing for brand space and is the same size as the resting state of the alternate IAB Pushdown. If adoption proves successful, this new 970-wide unit will eventually replace the 780-wide Leaderboard. The 780x90 Leaderboard is still endorsed by the IAB and will remain so until industry adoption is obvious.

Delisted Units

In a move to embrace the enhanced creative requirements of brand marketers, the industry has created and adopted several new rich media ad units—the “IAB Universal Brand Package”. Other units whose usage has decreased over time have been retired. Accordingly, these delisted units are identified herein. It should be noted that while some companies may still promote and use delisted units, the IAB no longer provides guidance on their use and implementation.

Constructive Feedback Welcome

In updating these guidelines, the IAB and its member companies have made every reasonable attempt to include the perspectives of the entire digital supply chain. We realize however, that not every party involved in this vast ecosystem will have had an opportunity for individual influence. As such, we invite you to provide your constructive feedback. Most importantly, **we are interested in hearing directly from the creative designers, creative directors and creative technologists that use these guidelines. Please email constructive feedback and input to chris.mejia@iab.net.** When providing your feedback, be sure to mention the exact category name of the guideline(s) for which you are referencing in addition to real-world use-case examples. We’ll do our best to consider your input when making future updates to these guidelines. Thank you!

About the IAB

The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) is comprised of more than 500 leading media and technology companies that are responsible for selling 86% of online advertising in the United States. The IAB educates marketers, agencies, media companies and the wider business community about the value of interactive advertising. Working with its member companies, the IAB evaluates and recommends guidelines and practices and fields critical research on interactive advertising. Founded in 1996, the IAB is headquartered in New York City with a Public Policy office in Washington, D.C. For more information, please visit www.iab.net.