

SUTV Design Best Practices

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Overview

This document builds upon the information provided in the SUTV media kit, and is intended to provide more detailed direction for designers that are creating ads for the SUTV digital screen network. The recommendations included in this document are based on our own experience with advertisements, and the experience of our clients as the network has grown. Additional comments and recommendations are always welcome.

Design Principles

Simplicity

Remember that your ad will cycle relatively quickly, so keeping it simple will ensure that your content and your message comes across as you'd like it to. We have found that “less is more”: getting a message across with visuals rather than text definitely performs better in this environment. The examples below show a good ad that was later revised (by the client) into what we agree is a better and much more engaging ad.



Appropriateness

Ads are displayed in many locations on campus, so it is imperative that they be tactful and appropriate. Ads must not be offensive, inappropriate for any age group, or contain profane language, nudity, etc. We will reject any ad that we consider to be inappropriate.

Content Ownership

Whether you are creating a new design from scratch or incorporating pre-existing elements in your ad, you must be absolutely certain that your content does not violate copyrights or in any way infringes on the rights of the original content owner. Copyrighted content must have explicit written permission from the copyright owner, including content that you find online such as images or video. As we are not able to verify the copyright status of ads you provide, it is your responsibility to ensure ads comply with all relevant copyright laws.

The best way to ensure your content does not violate copyright is to make it 100% original—write your own content, create your own images, record your own video, etc.

Safe Areas

A maximum of 3 pixels of each edge of an 1150x865 ad may be cropped. Additionally, some screen locations incorporate a “rounded-corner” design, which may crop each corner of an ad at a radius of up to 20 pixels.

To avoid an audience perception of a tight edge, we recommend padding any text or critical imagery in your ad at least 60 pixels from all edges.

File Quality

Please ensure that your image-based files (PDF and JPEG) are saved at a high quality level, particularly JPEG files. Low quality files can result in a poor visual appearance. When submitting a video-based ad, ensure you are finding an appropriate balance between compression rate and file size—if using Handbrake to convert/compress your video file (see our video conversion White Paper), an RF value between 20 and 25 is usually appropriate.

Aspect Ratio & Scale

It is not a good idea to disproportionately stretch existing artwork of a different aspect ratio (such as a design for a poster) to match the dimensions of an SUTV ad. In order to maintain iv-

sual integrity, designs that have been stretched from their original aspect ratio will be rejected. Artwork designed for another format (such as a poster) likely contains too many words and too small of text anyway, and should be adjusted appropriately.

Universal Accessibility

The University is a diverse campus and includes individuals with visual and other impairments, as well as individuals for which English is not their first language. Please keep this in mind when designing your ad and developing content.

Typography Principles

Text Size

Our experience has determined that a good size for headline text is 100pt or larger, and we would recommend against going smaller than 60pt for everything else. Text that is too small will not be readable based on the location of SUTV screens.

Avoid using “fine print” on a slide, as the ad duration is not long enough for its inclusion, and it will be virtually unreadable from the regular viewing distance of the screens. If you want the audience to obtain more detailed information, refer them to another location such as a website or phone number instead. Refer to the screenshot below for a better idea of text size perspectives.



Content Hierarchy and Copywriting

Headlines are the first chance to capture attention and engage the viewer to read the rest of the information on the slides. Headlines should be clearly distinct from the rest of the message. In addition to a headline, it is best to include some brief information to inform the audience, as well as a call to action and where to go for more information.

Remember to limit the number of words/characters per slide and avoid any hyphenated line breaks.

Word Count

You should have a total word count of less than 25 words in your ad. This allows your message to be clear and memorable. People will thank you for making your text big enough to read!

Precise word limits are obviously dependant on the design of your particular ad. In a video-based ad, remember that if your scenes are less than 12 seconds then your audience will have less time to read, and therefore there should be even fewer words.

Typefaces

While there are no specific typeface requirements for ads, it is important to ensure that your ad is legible and professional. Avoid overly-complex display typefaces which may be difficult to read on-screen in a short amount of time.

URLs and Web References

Providing a URL is an easy way to limit the content required on the actual ad while still giving viewers an opportunity to get more information about you or your product, service or event.

Because ads cycle relatively quickly, and because there is also likely other content on the ad that users will be trying to read, we recommend using as short a URL as possible that still makes sense to the user. Avoid longer URLs like **www.su.ualberta.ca/about/upcoming_events/myevent.php** and see if you can create a “short URL” like **www.su.ualberta.ca/myevent** that redirects to the original page. You could also use your homepage’s URL and place a dominant link from there to the specific page you’d like the audience to visit.

While they can make URLs shorter, we recommend against using third-party URL shorteners (eg. **http://bit.ly/zzz11**) since the URL may be too confusing for users to quickly remember.

You may also want to consider pointing users to a web location without providing a URL. For example, the Students’ Union could direct users to its Facebook page (University of Alberta Students’ Union) instead of its website.

QR codes are not recommended, as they are not universally recognized by smartphone users, and the relatively short du-

ration of ads make it difficult for your audience to capture the code quickly enough.

Color Principles

Color Space and Color Variance

Because digital screens use RGB colors, ensure that your designs use an RGB color space. Files that use CMYK colors may appear significantly different on-screen due to the conversion to RGB.

Please also keep in mind that due to variances in color output between different screens, even files designed with RGB colors may have their colors appear to be slightly distorted. We have found these variances to be most prevalent in colors that are very close to native Red, Green or Blue colors.

Contrast

Effective use of color helps to make your ad more vibrant, more attractive, and more noticeable. Because digital screens are backlit, a good strategy is to use high-contrast color combinations.

Background

Avoid overly complicated backgrounds that will make your text harder to read. Clean, simple backgrounds are ideal.

Object Strokes

Use heavy enough stroke weights (thicknesses) to allow for visual integrity. Strokes that are too thin will appear lost or broken, especially on dark backgrounds.

Motion/Video Principles

Scene Count

Please always keep in mind the duration of your video-based ad. It may be tempting to include a large number of different scenes to allow for a greater amount of content, but remember that your audience will have a short amount of time to register each of these scenes. It may also take a few seconds for your audience to get oriented with each scene, especially they vary drastically.

Scene Content

Scenes that contain text should have a long enough duration to ensure that your audience has a reasonable amount of time to read all content on the page.

Motions and Transitions

Creators of video-based ads should be careful when adding motions (eg. text movement on-screen) and transitions between scenes. Overly flashy or excessive transitions can cause the audience to lose focus. It also compromises the integrity of the entire screen, including the areas outside of the ad space (eg. news and weather content). As a result, we reserve the right to reject any file that we feel is too distracting or detracting.

Additional Information

Please contact us if you would like any additional information, or if you would like us to design an image-based ad for you (design charges will apply).