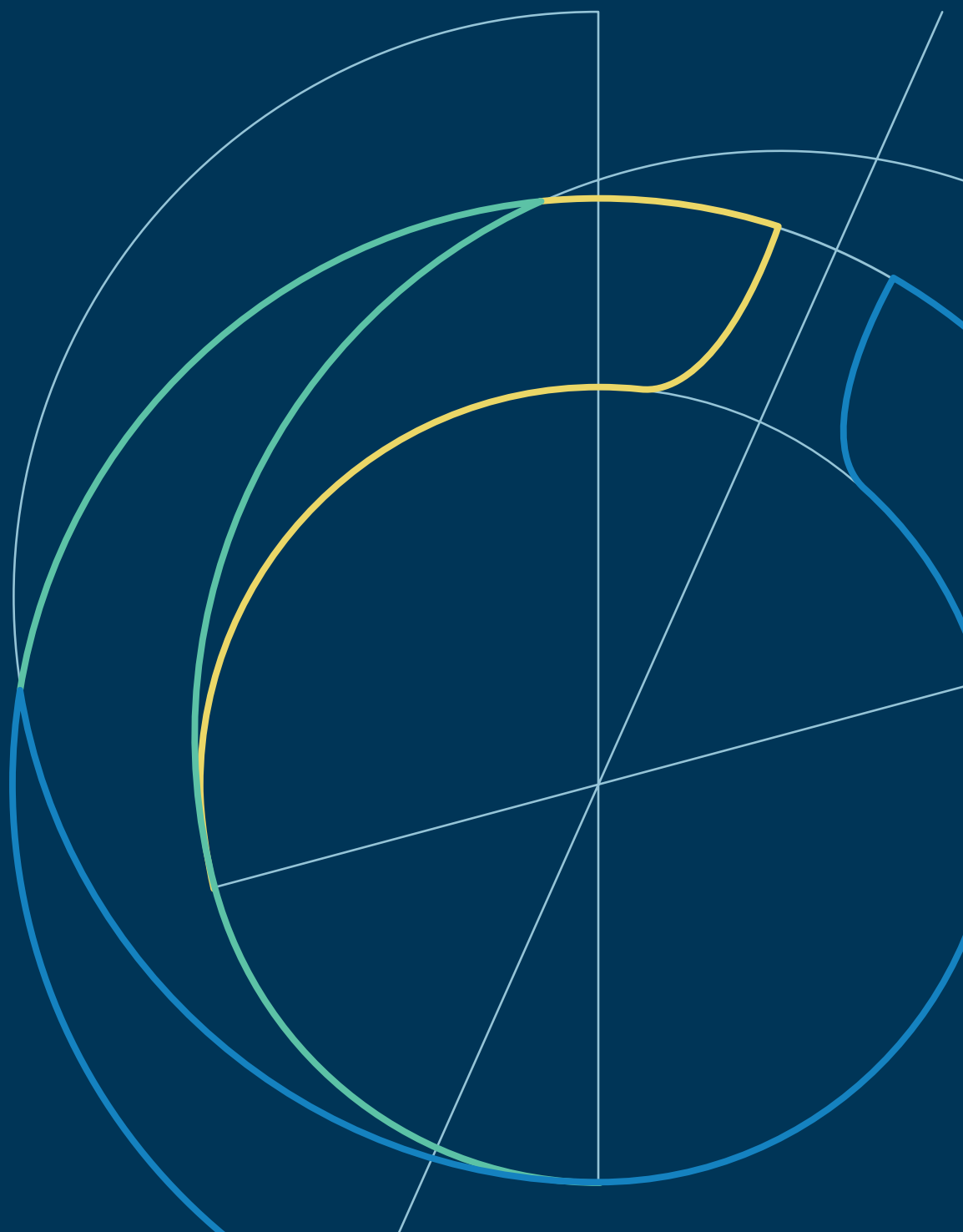# adform | Creative Guidelines

Introduction

As an advertising technology company and rich media innovator, we are proud to see the creative digital advertising industry growing, becoming increasingly more standardized, and self-organizing to address consumer concerns.

For more than 16 years one of the most exciting aspects of the services we provide has been witnessing the evolution of rich media. This has come as publisher have worked hand-in-hand with advertisers to create unique and engaging online experiences.

However, during this process there's always a struggle for balance between unfettered creativity and the urge to maximize engagement or conversions. This can lead to a blurry line between what's good user experience and what is not. In the face of many different standards and growing complexity a need for standardized best practices has arisen. One magnified by the adoption of ad blockers and the proliferation of bad actors who misuse and abuse creative capabilities to serve questionable content.

At Adform, we believe in a working towards a transparent, fraud-free and high-quality advertising market. Whether it is programmatic buying and our efforts to battle fraud in an industry-shaping way (see HyphBot) or by focusing on the creative landscape and industry standards to battle abusive consumer experiences we are constantly looking at new ways to improve and innovate.

The Initial Better Ads Standard is based on scientific consumer research and brings together both creatives and publishers in the pursuit of an optimal solution that benefits both sides while delivering a superior consumer experience.

Although the initial standard might seem technical or ambiguous in some cases, it relies on largely universal principals:
- Don't block the publisher's content (e.g. do it only if a user specifically wants to engage)
- Don't distract the user (e.g. don't play video with sound or do any flashing animations)
- The User is in control (don't block the user from closing an ad or reading the article)

This document has been prepared to help you interpret the Initial Better Ads Standard and offers recommendations for best-performing formats and creative solutions optimal for telling compelling creative stories that conform to the new standard.

Initial Better Ads Standard

The standard applies to creative content and elements inside the creative and the way that these elements interact with the outside content – publisher content. This part is referred to as the creative requirements and usually applies to the creative production process.

The standard also focuses heavily on how the customer interacts with the ad and how a publisher creates ad placements. Most potential user experience problems originate from the way ad placements overcrowd original content or the way that ads are rendered during the user's journey across the website or a mobile web/app. This section mainly applies to publishers as they are in control the user's journey across the website and ad placement. However, it should be noted that sometimes this falls through the cracks as publishers give a lot of freedom to when and where an ad may be executed at any given time. Ideally, publishers should utilize these requirements for maximum impact as part of their creative specs.

Creative Requirements

Creative issues for desktop

Auto-playing video ad with sound

Creative issues for mobile

Auto-playing video ad with sound

Flashing animated ad

Publisher Requirements

Site design issues for desktop

Pop-up ads

Prestitial ad with countdown

Large sticky ad at bottom of screen

Site design issues for mobile

Pop-up ad and prestitial ad

Ad density higher than 30%

Postitial ad with countdown

Full-screen scrollover ad

Large sticky ad

Creative Requirements Deep Dive

Video Ads

✓ **For a video ad with the auto-play mode, the sound should be muted by default.**

Video content is one of the most popular components in online advertising today. Still, users suffer from a disruptive ad experience, especially when a video invasively interrupts their attention. Therefore, some regulations relating to video ads and user engagement have been introduced. This is important in order to increase the range of users and not to alienate users due to a bad ad experience.

The legacy practice to grab users' attention was to launch auto-played video content with the sound on. However, the research uncovered that display and mobile ads with such videos are the most distracting and frustrating. To maximally decrease the level of distraction, a new initial requirement was introduced.

In other words, video ads can only be auto-played in silent mode and sound can only be enabled by the user (click, mouse over, touch, etc.). The research showed that the best practice is to enable the sound by mouse click (on Desktop) or by touching the sound button (on Mobile).

This requirement is mandatory for:
• Display ads with video content
• Mobile ads with video content

The requirement is not applicable for Pre-roll, Mid-roll and Post-roll ads.

Floating Ads (Prestitial/Interstitial/Pop-ups)

Creatives that appear over the webpage, either in full screen or in a smaller rectangular window, are generally called floating ads. Pop-up, Prestitial and Postitial describe the place and time of ad appearance on the website (before the content loads, in the middle, or when navigating between pages). From the creative side, it is the single core ad, but from the publisher's perspective, they represent different ad experiences.

Pop-up (or interstitial) appears before or after the website is fully loaded. It can also appear unexpectedly after a user performs some kind of interaction on the website (e.g., scrolls down). This is the most distracting ad experience – a user cannot see the fully loaded website content or may be forced to view the ad for a period of time until it is closed. More to that, pop-up ads usually appear with a countdown and cannot be dismissed or skipped. This type of creative experience is unacceptable and should be discontinued. An acceptable user experience would be to let the user decide what they want to do with the ad.

✕ **Pop-up ads that appear unexpectedly while a user interacts with the website are no longer an acceptable ad experience. Such ads should be avoided.**

This requirement is mandatory for:
• Display
• Mobile

Instead of pop-up ads for Display, we suggest using prestitial ads. They would provide an acceptable user experience on Display screens.

✓ **Display prestitial ads should always contain a Close/Skip button that allows users to immediately stop viewing the ad.**

Still, in order to avoid accidental occasions when a user loses control of the ad, we need to introduce another requirement.

This requirement is mandatory for:
• Display

This requirement applies to all prestitial (floating) ads launched on the desktop, including those with a countdown functionality.

Unfortunately, prestitial ads do not create an acceptable ad experience on mobile devices, therefore they should be avoided there.

Mobile prestitial ads are no longer an acceptable ad experience. Such ads should be avoided.

This requirement is mandatory for:

• Mobile

Instead of Mobile prestitials, we suggest using postitial ads that provide a more effective and acceptable user experience. Ads of this type appear in between the pages or after clicking the link and thus don't distract a user while reading the website content.

Like with Display prestitial, a user must have a full control of the Mobile postitial ad. Therefore:

Mobile postitial ads should always contain a Close/Skip button that allows users to immediately stop viewing the ad.

This requirement is mandatory for:

• Mobile

Summarizing the above information, we suggest:

• You stop using distractive pop-ups across devices
• Use Display prestitials with a Close/Skip button
• Use Mobile postitials with a Close/Skip button

Large Sticky Ads

❌ **Large Display sticky ads shouldn't be used as an acceptable ad experience if the height exceeds 250 px.**

❌ **Large Mobile sticky ads shouldn't be used as an acceptable ad experience if the height covers more than 30% of the screen.**

Large sticky ads were an attractive solution for a long time. However, they have some negative sides as sticky ads often hide part of the web content, especially large sticky ads that are near the height of the screen or expand their size and thus cover almost half of the screen (e.g., the well-known FloorAd or IAB Slider). Such ads should not be used anymore.

This doesn't mean that sticky ads cannot be used at all from now on. You should only avoid creating ads whose height is larger than 30% of the screen. Another option could be to look for completely different solutions which could be just as attractive, like postitial ads mentioned above.

Heavy Rich Media

Although these new requirements might seem a bit restrictive in some cases, they don't contradict the goal of communicating with an engaged consumer. These new requirements in no way hinder or limit creativity and bespoke rich media. We actually view it as the opposite. Most bespoke rich media solutions that Adform is offering are already compliant with the new standard as we've always focused on the consumer as the end audience. When the consumer is happy, a better and more engaged experience results.

Changes in the Adform Creative Platform

To adhere to the new standards, we will introduce small changes across our creative platform and ad server.

Changes will include, but will be not limited to:

• The Video player component will automatically prevent the video from auto-playing with sound (this is not accepted by the new Ad Experience and Ad Filtering policies from Google Chrome and is also enforced by the Safari browser). Customers will be able to override this with custom JavaScript at their own risk.

• Creative template changes that will affect the default behavior of rich media elements.

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