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## DEVELOPING A BRAND CONTENT INTEGRATION STRATEGY



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*This piece originally appeared in ClickZ*

Online brand content continues to gain traction and success worldwide, according to this CNBC report, raising questions that must be answered (and measured): What works best when it comes to balancing brand and content? How much brand exposure within a video is too much? And at what point does the brand lose its utility and become an annoyance to the very audience it is trying to reach?

The beauty of digital brand content development is that you have more creative freedom and options than traditional television integrations ever allowed. Today, in addition to keeping in mind Millward Brown's success factors of fit, focus, and fame, you must also create the right combination of custom video units and smart integrations that will allow the brand to add an element of surprise and delight and keep the content experience fresh.

While standardizing where and how a brand integrates across each show within your program may make the project's workflow easier, it also makes the brand integration more easily ignored. Mix and match a combination of integration methods throughout the show's duration focusing on the brand's goals, the type of show content, and, most important, the audience's response.

Here are several methods to choose from when planning for a brand integration strategy.

### **Custom Pre-roll**

Pre-roll is the one of the most common video ads available today. However, these 0:15 to 0:30 units usually have very little to do with the content they precede and offer the viewer no additional

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utility. Utilizing this same space but customizing specifically to the content is a great alternative to other integration methods when the brand isn't an organic fit.

If show's talent is willing, partner with them to create a message that makes sense for them and the audience, or at the very least use their voice. Let the content creator come up with an introductory concept that ties the brand message to the show's message. Keep in mind, you don't have to stay within the 0:15 and 0:30 rule; take into consideration the video length and what is really needed to get the job done.

## **Custom Midroll**

Custom midroll is another great way to create brand alignment without having to force a brand message or product within the actual program. Use this time slot to create a side story to the plot or find a fun way, such as this Nite Fite/Starburst example, to get the message out while thematically aligning to that show's topic. Think of the 10-second interruption as a way to add value to the show rather than just simply interrupt.

## **Post Call to Action**

The post call to action is the opportunity to leave one last impression, as well as drive viewers to further engage within the community or on another site. As with pre-roll, leaning on your content partners to develop and shape the creative is key. And tying it back to the pre-roll can be a great way to continue a story or shape the message further.

## **Custom Overlay**

Overlays can range from a quick tip or message that pops up during the show to an embedded microsite. If the content has a broad distribution strategy, adding ways to participate directly to the video window is a great way to increase engagement and brand awareness. Polls, games, product overviews, and coupons are all fun ways to play.

## **Brand Utility**

If your brand content video program is housed within a robust destination site that already has an existing audience base, engaging them around and within the video is a great way to show added value. Build a mobile application or develop easy ways for people to share and express themselves both on the site and within the video. Whether it's letting people put their faces on content using

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new 3-D mapping technologies, such as this Big Stage example, or testing out the latest alternate reality game experiences, brands can bring memorable interactivity to a video program without being a part of the video itself.

## Brand as Character

Developing a brand as a character, when done well, is an excellent way to marry brand with content without having to interrupt the flow of the show. EQAL, Neutrogena, and CAA pioneered this strategy in 2007 when they added the evil-fighting Neutrogena scientist Spencer Gilman to the character lineup of *Lonelygirl15*. And while the blogosphere reviews were mixed, the show comments illustrate that the audience itself never seemed to mind.

Developing a brand as character requires a constant evaluation of the brand-to-content ratio. The potential to annoy or be disruptive is higher than in other forms of integration, but done right, as with this Klondike character, even the most overtly brand-derived character can work.

## Brand as Hero

Though not sustainable across all shows, the occasional brand as hero integration, as Capri Sun's "Is your Family Green Enough?" in *Jen and Barb: Mom Life* can work well when a brand aligns with the content sensibility and topic interest. While this method of integration generally has the most heavy-handed product placement, if the brand brings value to the audience -- either through information, additional entertainment, or as an end prize -- the awareness, deeper engagement, and positive response can be worth the risk of a potential backlash.

Choosing the right combination of custom units and level of integration depends on the needs of the brand, content, and ultimately the audience. Figuring out the right balance may take some experimenting. Dedicating media and production dollars for optimizing that ratio is key to the brand's and content's success.