

Designing digital adverts: a brief guide

The sole goal of digital advertising design for public sector campaigns is to get the viewer interested enough to click on the ad to find out more. So, the main message: keep it simple.

Below is checklist for designers working on a campaign that includes digital advertising.

Checklist for designing digital adverts	
Context – the background info you need	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Campaign plan including target audience(s). 2. Customer journey – i.e. where will the user land when they click on the ads? It could be a page on your website or a video on YouTube. Will there be a different landing page for retarget ads (see below)? 3. A brief design plan including suggested concept ideas, copy, deadlines & technical specs (outlined below).
Design concept – overall look & feel	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Digital advertising needs to cut through the “noise” on a webpage or social media feed to speak to the intended audience(s) but to also work in a variety of content and contexts. 2. Imagery and messaging should be informed by the campaign plan. Who are you trying to engage? What does the research say about what this audience responds to? What action do you want them to take? What are the benefits for them? What are the barriers for them? 3. Develop a number of different messages that speak to the target audience(s). What will encourage someone to find out more? Maybe some will post a question, some set up intrigue, and some will be direct.
Design collateral – the outputs	<p>These should be detailed in the campaign design plan & include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Web ads: to the technical specifications shown below. 2. Social media ads: usually only Facebook and Instagram (see below). 3. Retarget ads: these are shown to those who have clicked on one of the original ads to nudge them into taking the next step. 4. Landing page collateral: such as webpage header, video slides and graphics, application forms and downloadable information.
Digital design “don’ts” – these are usually a waste of your time	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Animated ads: for accessibility reasons, these often go round once and stop on the final slide. So, the message needs to be understood on a single slide anyway. You may as well save time & make ads static. 2. Using loads of different images: the number of alternative messages is more important so the tech can identify which ones work for which audiences and optimise those. Obviously if you are using people images these need to reflect your different audiences. 3. Overly complicated graphics – will just confuse in the seconds a viewer gets to take in your message.
Digital ad design and accessibility	<p>On 23 September 2020, the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 come into force. Adverts on public sector websites are not subject to the regulations as they are classed as third-party content.</p>

	<p>However, in keeping with the spirit of the legislation – and to help all web users access all content – it’s good practice to treat ad design (as far as possible) in the same way as design for regular web content in terms of accessibility.</p> <p>The Government’s website has a comprehensive section on web content design. The main advice is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not use colour as the only way to distinguish something. • Do use text colours that show up clearly against the background colour. • Do not use images of text. • Do work with the comms team and external agencies to make sure alt text is included for campaign adverts if possible.
<p>Technical specs – sizes and naming conventions</p>	<p>Static web ads should be supplied as jpgs. Animated ads (see above) need to be in HTML5. Each ad design needs to be output in 4 formats:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leaderboard: 728 x 90 pixels 2. MPU: 300 x 250 pixels 3. Double MPU: 300 x 600 pixels 4. Super Skyscraper: 160 x 600 pixels <p>Social media advertising specs (for Facebook and Instagram) are subject to change. Sprout Social is great for keeping up to date.</p> <p>Naming design docs: the “what it says on the tin” approach works best as it’s easy to trace campaign ads across the internet: [Campaign name]_[shortened version of specific ad message]_[channel]_[ad type if appropriate] = for e.g. FosteringFirst_LGBT_WebAd_MPU or FosteringFirst_Older_Facebook</p>

If you need practical help with digital advertising design, [give us a shout](#). We can produce cost-effective creatives for your public sector campaigns, alongside the scheduling and technical expertise we provide through [Citizen Reach™](#).

You can search hundreds of award-winning examples of public sector campaigns to give you an idea of what has worked well in the past in a free resource we created in partnership with comms2point0 called [COMMS:FILES](#).