



VIDEO AD VOLUME: **LOUDNESS GUIDELINES**

OCTOBER 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital video advertising makes up a larger and ever-growing segment of the digital advertising market. Along with Display, guidelines must be in place to ensure that audiences receive the best advertising experience possible maintaining the balance between advertiser's goals and overall user satisfaction. Presently, a large gap exists wherein there are no official guidelines in the Australian market that outlines the acceptable level of loudness a commercial video advertisement should abide by.

This document, using the existing guidelines that exist for broadcast television in Australia as a reference, will outline the current challenges faced in market, followed by the requirements for guidelines, the guidelines themselves and finally the recommended steps that all industry groups can follow to meet the new guidelines.

EXISTING CHALLENGES

Video advertising as of 2016 now represents a significant portion of the ad spend in the Australian market. Between 2015 and 2016, the spend [increased by 55% to \\$600 million](#), and is forecasted to increase comparatively from 2016 to 2017 financial years. The bottom-line being that users are exposed to a greater portion of digital video advertising than ever before.

With this increase of user exposure to digital video ads, it becomes imperative that the user's experience is maintained to the highest level to align with positive campaign objectives. One of the major obstacles to this has been the video ad volume itself being noticeably louder than the streaming content the ad was viewed from. A [recent study](#) conducted by video solutions provider Brightcove showed that 92% of surveyed users agreed changes needed to be made to current online video advertising to improve the viewer experience. When asked to pinpoint their specific objections to video advertising, consumers cited "volume" as one of the key offenders to their experience. When the user experience is compromised, fewer ads are seen to completion, ad impressions themselves are lost, viewability percentages go down and overall publisher and advertiser reputation is negatively impacted, often leading to [public outcry](#).

Currently there are no established guidelines for digital video loudness in Australia – let alone video ads. In the US, they have been governed for some time by the [FCC's CALM Act](#), and the IAB has responded in the AU market within their [Digital Video InStream Ad Format Guidelines](#). Within these, the IAB recommends publishers and agencies produce content that aligns with the Act by "setting practices in place to ensure normalized volume across content and ads" and "normalizing ad volume levels to avoid any spikes within the ad." To date, no practical guidelines have been produced in the Australian market to provide a standard on digital video advertising volume, even though broadcast media and advertising have had their own guidelines in place for several years.

REQUIREMENTS FOR GUIDELINES

- Guidelines must be in place to provide a benchmark;
- Guidelines must be logical and should leverage existing video standards in the AU market;
- Guidelines should be realistically feasible in order to be easily adopted by all industry groups;
- Guidelines must be enforceable to maintain the standard;
- Guidelines require a free-to-use industry tool to ensure ads adhere to them;
- Guidelines should be peer-reviewed and further revised.

GUIDELINES

For loudness measurement, we are measuring the electrical (data) signal of the soundtrack in question. We are not concerned with acoustic levels.

The loudness target should be:

-24LKFS1

Where “LKFS” is an acronym:

- “L” is for loudness;
- “K” indicates the unique filtering of the meter algorithm;
- “FS” for full scale (digital).

If a signal does not measure -24LKFS, the adopted target loudness, then correction (normalisation) to match that value is very simple.

EXAMPLE A: if video advertisement soundtrack measures -28LKFS, this means it is “softer” (further down the scale) than the target. This is simply corrected (normalised) by applying a 4dB gain increase – the steps between LKFS units are equal to 1dB intervals.

EXAMPLE B: if a video advertisement soundtrack measures -18LKFS, this means it is “louder” (further up the scale) than the -24LKFS target. This is corrected (normalised) by applying 6dB of attenuation (gain reduction).

For further details on how to implement this loudness target in the video ad itself, consult the Free TV Australia [Operational Practice – OP 59 document](#): Measurement and Management of Loudness in Soundtracks for Television Broadcasting.

RECOMMENDED STEPS

PUBLISHERS

- Ensure all video content is adjusted to loudness target level;
- Adopt the loudness level target and implement across public ad specs;
- Enforce the loudness target across video ads utilising industry test-tool.

AGENCIES

- Internally educate on the loudness target level and familiarise with the OP 59 document;
- Produce ad content that is aligned with the loudness target;
- Use industry test-tool to ensure that all content adheres to the loudness target.

RICH MEDIA VENDORS

- Create an audio setting in their platforms to adhere to loudness level.

AD SERVERS AND DEMAND-SIDE PLATFORMS

- Create an audio setting for testing purposes;
- Build in an audio measurement and ad quality rules to ensure ads can be automatically flagged if not adhering to loudness target.

SUPPLY-SIDE PLATFORMS

- Create an audio setting for creative approval purposes;
- Build ad quality features that allow publishers to block video ads that don't conform with the -24LKFS audio standard from appearing on their inventory.