The comprehensive guide to creative video

Contents

Foreword

Hi there, and thanks for checking this comprehensive guide to creative video, brought to you by Ministry of Motion!

Whether you're new to video marketing or consider yourself a seasoned content creator looking for new options and greater understanding of the field, we hope this comprehensive guide provides you with insight and inspiration.

For over 15 years I've been working as a content creator and professional animator/film-maker. This guide is a glance into the animator's mindset and a summary of what I've come to find common practice over the years I've been producing content and advising clients.

Not only will this guide help you better understand the considerations and factors that go into creating animation, but it will also offer practical insights into how you can make your content work harder and become more engaging and impactful. It's worth remembering that the world of video content has changed a lot over the past decade and therefore it is important to move with the times - after all, what's the point of a great video if it's not presented correctly to its intended audience.

We'll give you the insight to make these informed decisions so you can create spectacular video content that delivers exceptional results.

Once you're done reading this guide, we hope you'll be throwing around industry terms with confidence, refining your creative approach and feeling confident with your costing.

If there's anything you feel needs greater explanation, or if you would like to discuss any points in greater detail, then please do feel free to **reach out to me on LinkedIn** or email me directly.

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Jargon buster

2k/4k: 2k refers to the standard format for HDTV. This is because HDTV video has the approximate width of 2000px, at a resolution of 2048x1080px. 4k refers to super HD, as super HD has the approximate width of 4000px, at a screen size of 3840x2160px.

Animatic: This is the rough version of the video, comprised of storyboard shots placed in sequence to demonstrate how the final animation will look when timed out and accompanied by audio.

AR/VR: These are two different types of immersive media. Augmented Reality adds graphics to a scene in real-time (like your phone camera's view), via special apps. Virtual Reality is a complete scene that you can look around in, usually with a headset (like Google Cardboard).
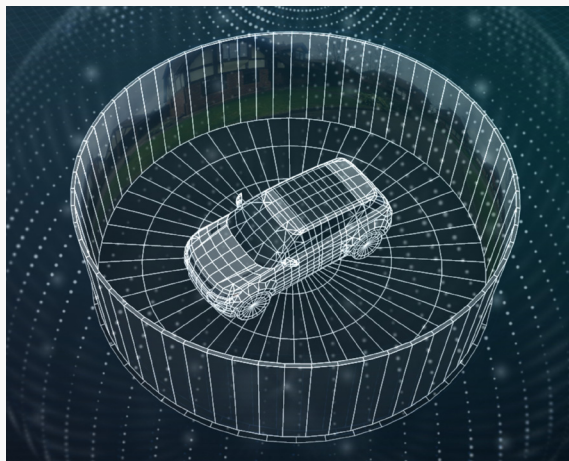
AI: AI is Artificial intelligence - used to simulate human processes, including creative processes. AI can also be used in video for interactive purposes, such as voice recognition.

B-roll: This is the industry term for live footage, usually secondary content to complement a film's story. This can be either stock footage taken from online libraries, or self-shot, and is a great way to keep viewers engaged during long stretches of voiceover.

Camera tracking/motion tracking: Camera and motion tracking are two similar processes for different effects. In order to composite graphics into captured footage, the camera's movements will need to be interpreted so that the graphics move in exactly the same way. Camera tracking follows points in the scene and maps that movement onto graphics. Motion tracking, on the other hand, is not always used for compositing. Movements captured with cameras can be used to affect animations without compositing - for example, character animations created by actors wearing suits covered in tracking points, or physical objects being used as animation reference.

Cel animation: This is an animation technique that involves drawing each individual frame separately and then compiling them together to create the full animation.

Codec: This is the hardware or software that compresses your video on export. The most commonly used video codec is H.264, also known as AVC (Advanced Video Coding).

Colour grading: This is the process of adjusting the colour balance of footage. By changing the vibrancy and tint of shots, the mood can be altered. For example,

a city shot could be made more bright and warm for a happy story, or darker, greyer and more blue for a sad one. Some professionally-shot footage will also look washed-out at first (called 'Log footage'). This gives the most freedom in the colour grading stage, and will be more colourful in the edit.

Compositing/'comping': Compositing is the method of combining different types of video production techniques into a single output. For example, something may be filmed in live action, and then a 2D or 3D animated graphic may be overlaid on the footage to create a composited result.

Depth of field (DoF): This is the name given to the sharpness of objects in the foreground and background on a visual plane. If an image has a small depth of field, it means that there is a small focal point on the visual horizon, so objects in the distance will appear blurry. A large depth of field means that objects in the distance will appear sharp and in focus.

Frame rate/FPS: Frame rate is the number of frames per second in your film. The greater the FPS, the smoother an animation will look, and the fewer, the choppier. Smoother is by no means better; low frame rates can give the appearance of stop motion, and contrast beautifully with higher-frame rate elements in the same scene. For 3D scenes, frame rate will also massively impact render times; a 25 FPS film will take twice as long to render as a 12 FPS one.

GFX: Short for 'Graphics'.

Lower thirds/astons/name strap: This is the name given to title cards that appear on screen (such as an interviewee's name and occupation), as they will often appear in the lower third section of the screen.

Motion graphics: Motion graphics are simply graphics in motion. A catch-all term for animation generally, though mainly used to describe abstract/iconographic animation.

Pre-production: The pre-production stage is where a film is planned out before the animation work begins. This is where the project's budget and timeline are agreed.

Production: Production is when the project's content is created; live footage is captured, and graphics are designed. Voice-overs are an exception; a basic 'guide track' will be created to establish the duration of each scene, and the professional voiceover can replace it at a later stage.

Post-production: Post-production is where all of a project's content is combined; footage, graphics, music, SFX and the guide track are assembled to create the output film.

Resolution: Resolution is the number of pixels wide and high an output video file is. The ideal resolution for each hosting site (e.g. YouTube, Facebook, Instagram) is different, and it's essential to know what you'll need before the production stage. For larger projects (like 3D films), resolution can massively impact render times.

Scripting: A project's script is its narrative; the flow and tone of its story. This can be both the voiceover, and visual direction (e.g. 'The main character jumps into frame'). This informs the storyboard, after which both documents can be used together to create the full film.
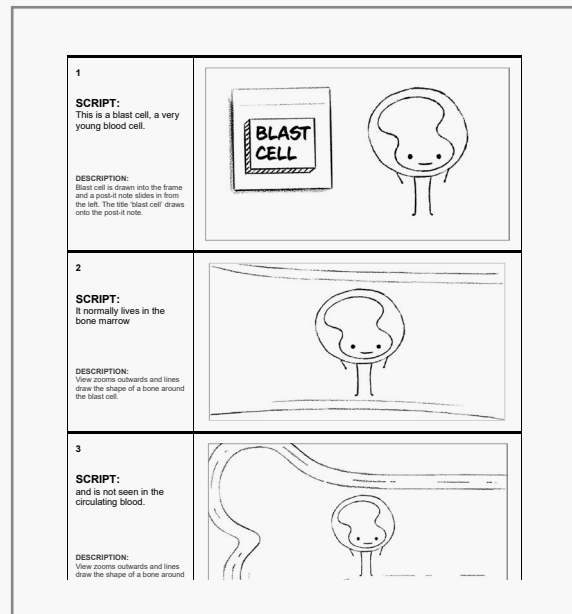

Storyboarding: The storyboard is the foundation upon which the whole project will be built. This establishes the most important visuals at key moments, and what the voiceover will be saying at these points. It can be made in a variety of ways; graphics, hand-drawn sketches, even clipart - so long as the intended content is clear.

Style frames: To make sure that a project's designs are correct, some still scenes will be created for sign-off before the rest of the graphics are produced. These are style frames, and can either be taken from the storyboards, or be separate collections of important assets to demonstrate how they will look together.

SFX: Sound effects.

Presets: Presets are packaged graphics or animations that come with simple control interfaces to speed up an animator's workflow. MoM provides an ever-increasing library of presets to save time and effort!

Rendering: Rendering is the process of creating, compressing and exporting the final video file.
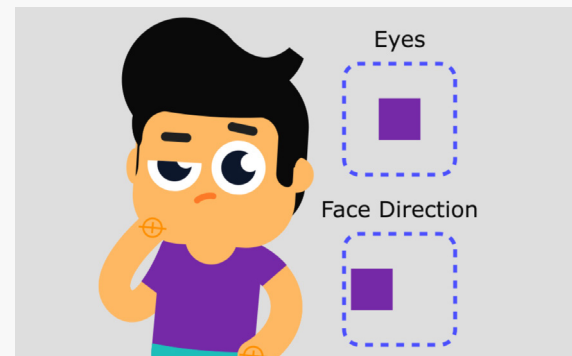

Rigging: This is the process of preparing graphics for animation. Characters, for example, are given moveable arms and legs, and a range of head and body movement for the most efficient animation process and best visual results. There are many different styles of rig, depending on the character designs.

Vector graphic: Many graphics have a set resolution. If you increase their size enough, they will look pixelated. Vector graphics have no resolution, but are instead created mathematically, meaning they can be scaled up infinitely and never become pixelated.

VFX: Visual effects.

Video format: This usually refers to how the file is packaged (shown by its extension, the letters after the period in its filename). The most common video file format is MP4, but films can be delivered in other formats, depending on how they'll be used, such as:
MOV: much larger file size, but higher quality - best for use when compositing.
GIF: these are much smaller and their image quality can vary depending on complexity. These are best for embedding on web pages.
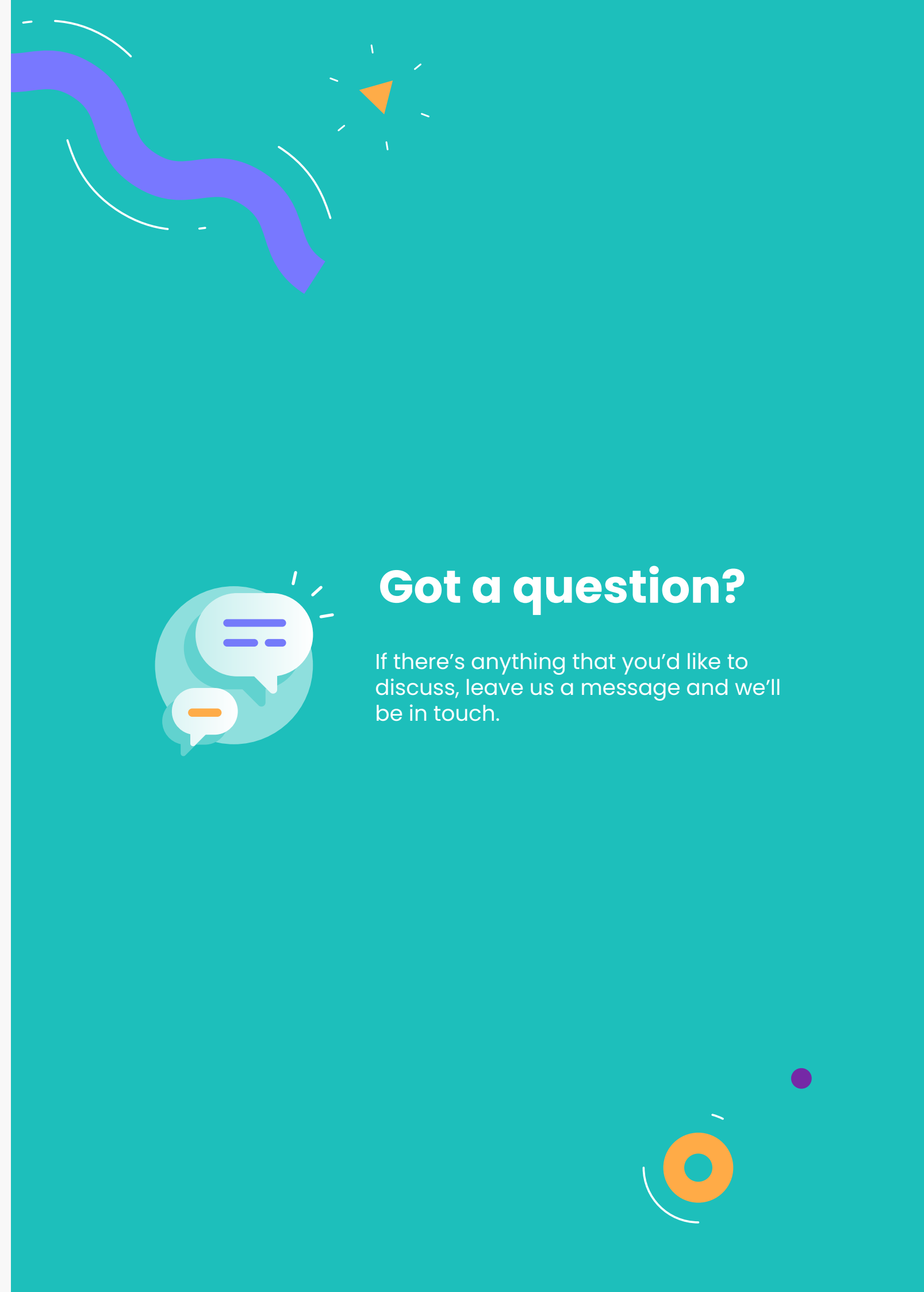
Got a question?

If there's anything that you'd like to discuss, leave us a message and we'll be in touch.

Understanding costs and budgeting

There are a number of factors that will impact the budget of your project. Take these into account when planning how much your video project will cost.

Duration

The length of your final video outputs will have a big part to play in the overall cost of your project. The shorter the video, the cheaper the project will be. It's also important to think about how beneficial the length of the video would be to the intended audience. For example, anything too long on a social media platform could mean that you lose the attention of the viewer, so it might be better to opt for a mini-series instead!

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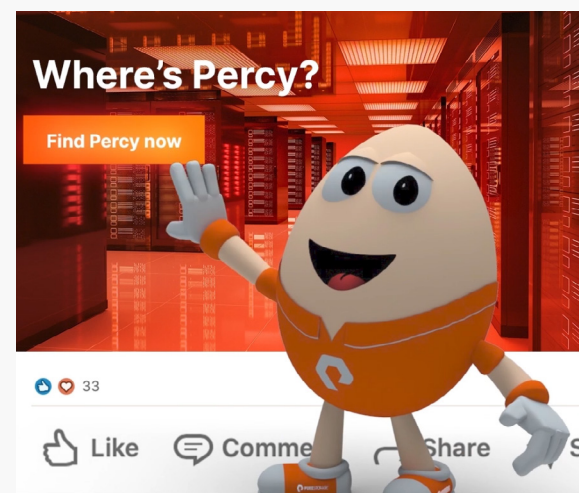
Outputs and usage

One video may require a number of different final outputs, which will add to the cost of your project. Will you need different formats for different final outputs? For example, you may need both square and vertical outputs to reach people on different social media platforms. You may need variations of the video to reach different audiences in different areas of the world. Take these variables into account when calculating the final cost of your video.

If your creatives know the desired outputs from the outset, then they can create the work in a way that's easily adaptable.

Technique / approach

The video technique you choose should be taken into close consideration when planning your budget. For example, a frame by frame animation would likely cost a lot more than a motion graphics video due to the time and effort needed for each.

When choosing a style for your project, consider how this impacts the message of your video, and how it will affect the viewing experience of your audience. If unsure, ask your supplier for advice. They should be able to offer solutions you may not have contemplated.

Filming requirements

Will this project be a single, self-shoot, or will you need a dedicated Director, Producer or other specialist? Do you need multiple cameras and operators to cover different angles and separate speakers? Is there a location you can use, or do you need to hire a space? What lighting will be required to achieve the look you are going for, and what's the best solution for capturing audio in the location? Logistics of travel, storing kit and obtaining any specific shots all need to be considered. Will you need actors, presenters or in house talent? Will they require hair and makeup and even wardrobe? These are all things to consider, depending on what you're looking to achieve.

Complexity

The level of detail and number of visual components will play a big role in the amount of time it takes an artist to create and animate them. How many different scenes will your video need? How many characters will be needed? How much detail will they require in their facial expressions and mouth movement? The more components, the more the time and cost needed.

Complexity of movement will also impact the cost. If a character simply slides into shot, then that is much easier to animate than if you were to have the character walk in. If the character skipped and jumped and spun around, then that would take even more time, as the complexity would be greater. It all depends on what you are looking to invest in your film. Generally, the more complex the animation, the more engaged the audience will be.

Stock assets

Using stock footage, photography or vector graphics may lower the final cost of your video project by saving on production time and equipment costs. Where you plan to use footage, you could further reduce costs by swapping some of these clips out with photography instead.

We would always recommend having tailor-made assets wherever possible, to keep control of the overall look and feel of your project. Tailor-made assets also create precisely the visual that's needed, rather than shoe-horning in something that may not be completely right for the message. However, some projects may not have the budget to allow this, and so may benefit from the use of stock assets.

Learn more about **animation complexity** with our video guide
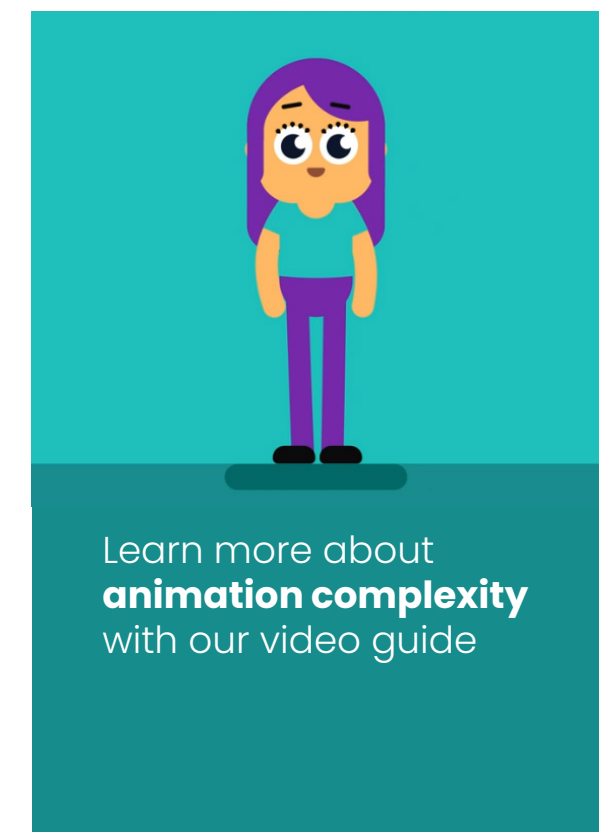
Voice over

The price of voice over artists can vary greatly, based on artist experience and usage. Most VO artists have a home recording studio nowadays, so it's rare you'd need a recording studio, unless working with a celebrity or a uniquely placed individual. With less expensive VO options we would usually provide the script and directors notes, and they would then send back the audio files. More seasoned VO artists have capabilities to allow you to dial in and listen as they record live, in order to direct.

Usage and exposure are also big factors in costs. The broader the usage and increased exposure, the bigger the license usage charge. This cost varies for every artist.

Will you have translations of your video? This would increase the cost of your project, as it will involve translation services, additional VO artist fees and potential re-timing of the animation, where sentences take longer, or shorter, than the English version.

Sound effects

Sound effects can go a long way in contributing to the realism and overall quality of your final output. Sourcing and crafting high quality, convincing sound effects, and applying them at precisely the right moment in your narrative, takes extra time and therefore could incur further costs. Again, when considering the potential value that sound effects could add to your video, think about where it will be viewed and what impact it would have on your intended audience and message.

Music

For the majority of video projects, we would recommend including music in some shape or form. That's not to say it's necessary for each project, however, it comes down to where it will be viewed and how the audience will view it. A video for a looping digital billboard, for instance, will be less likely to benefit from a music track in the same way that a Youtube advert might. If you are using music on your project, the cost will be determined by where the video will be published, and what the royalty/licensing costs are for the music track. If you want 'Hello' by Adele playing in your TV ad, this will naturally be far more costly than choosing a track by a lesser known artist for a video post on LinkedIn.
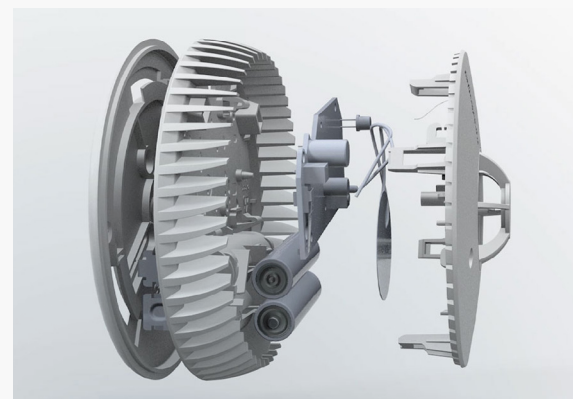
Animation techniques

Different animation techniques have different qualities, and it's helpful to look at which of these would be best suited to deliver the message you're trying to send in your project. What problem is your video project trying to solve, and how can the technique you choose help solve that problem?

Check out these animation styles out in the wild by clicking on the cover photos below!
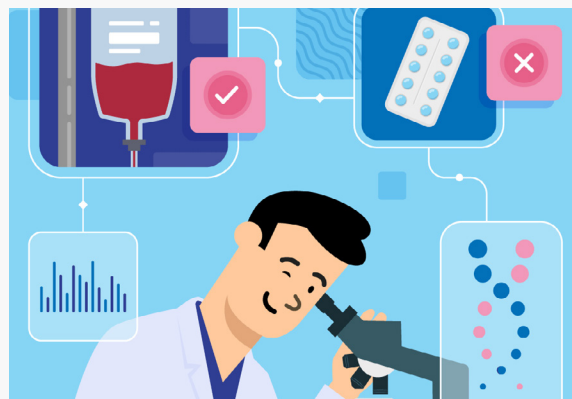
2D

As the name suggests, 2D animation creates scenes, objects and characters using flat graphics. This technique can often be the most cost effective as it can be relatively quick to produce, and doesn't require the use of hand made props, filming equipment etc. It can also allow a lot of flexibility in terms of style.

3D

3D literally adds a whole other dimension to 2D animation. It allows us the ability to move around objects and space, which lends itself to films involving technical subject matter. As 3D is a more natural concept to the human eye, it really gives us the chance to create more dynamic animation with the benefit of tactility and realistic textures.

3D is great, but the more complex nature and added time consideration of 'rendering' means it's often a more costly form of animation and has a greater turn-around time.

This form of animation can't be rushed, but the pay off is well worth it.

Stop motion

Stop motion is the creation of animation through a live set rather than a digital image. Sets and objects are created, gradually physically manipulated, and photographed. The photos are then compiled together in sequence to give the illusion of motion. This can generate a really unique and characterful form of animation that can be very tactile, due to the hand made nature of the objects, with a distinctive quirky sense of movement. Again, though, it can be an extremely time consuming form of animation, and involves the added dimension of physical sets, which take a lot of time and skill to construct.

Creating all these real world assets also means a lot of material and chemical use, which is never good.

Faux stop motion

Faux stop motion is the use of digital animation techniques (2D or 3D) to create the illusion of stop motion. Generally, by trying to achieve the quirky sense of movement that stop motion produces, through the use of a lower than average frame rate and by making things deliberately 'wonky'. The addition of layered digital textures and tactile surfaces can also give the impression of a hand crafted set.

Although faux stop motion isn't always as convincing as real stop motion, it can be a far more cost effective method of achieving a similar hand-crafted, characterful effect.

It also avoids the use of real world materials, meaning no waste.

Cel animation/ frame by frame animation

This technique involves drawing each individual frame separately and then compiling them together to create a full animation. This is quite time intensive as it involves drawing each still frame individually, but can give a lot more flexibility to the compositions and perspective shots of the animation visuals. It can also give a great amount of fluidity to animated transitions. For this reason, cel animation can be a great choice for projects that want to convey a dynamic sense of movement.
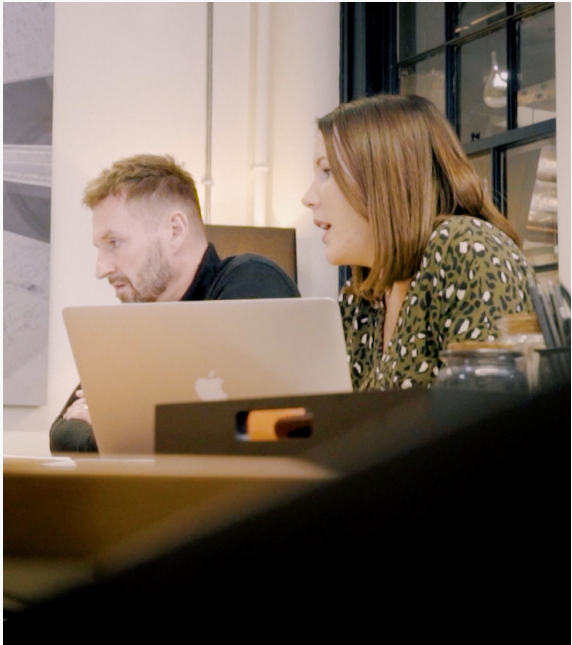
Live action

Simply put, 'live action' is video using real life footage.

This may sound like the cheap option as you don't have to design or animate anything - and it can be, for simple things like set pieces to camera. But standards and requirement can vary greatly depending on what's required.

It may sound obvious, but this is the solution if you have to show something 'real' that cannot be recreated.
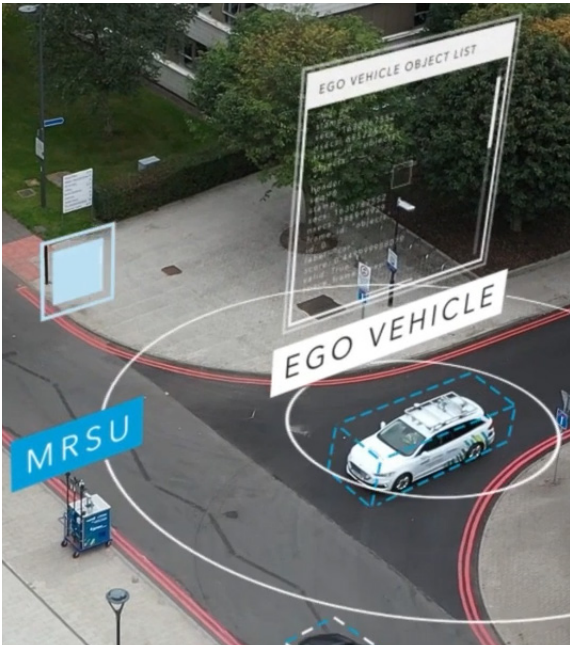
Compositing

Compositing is the method of combining different types of video production techniques into a single output. For example, something may be filmed in live action, and then a 2D animated graphic overlaid on the footage to create a composited result. This technique can be effective for projects that involve screen interfaces or environmental technologies, as we can customise what appears on screens and add graphics to show interactions between objects that filming can not pick up.

Compositing can also be used to add special effects onto live footage, such as glows or explosions.
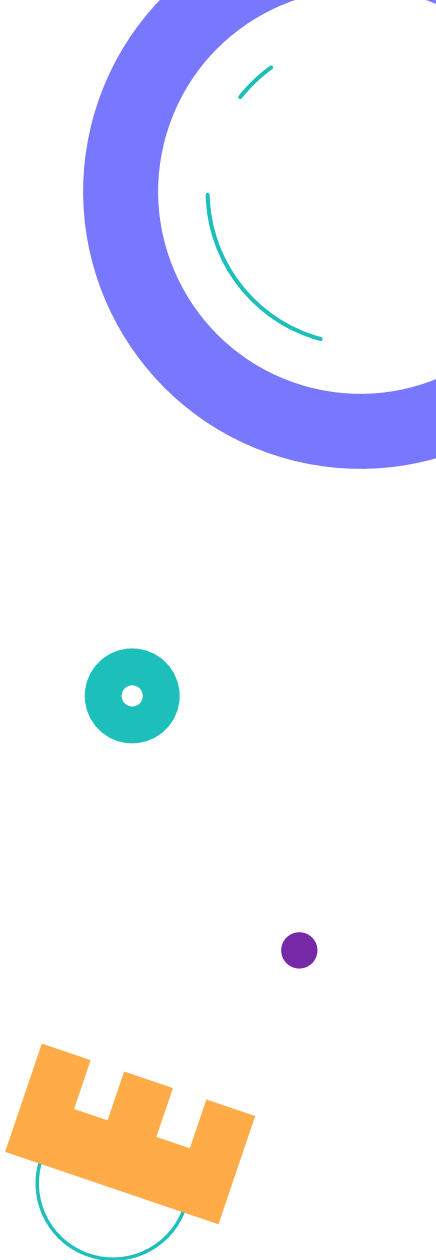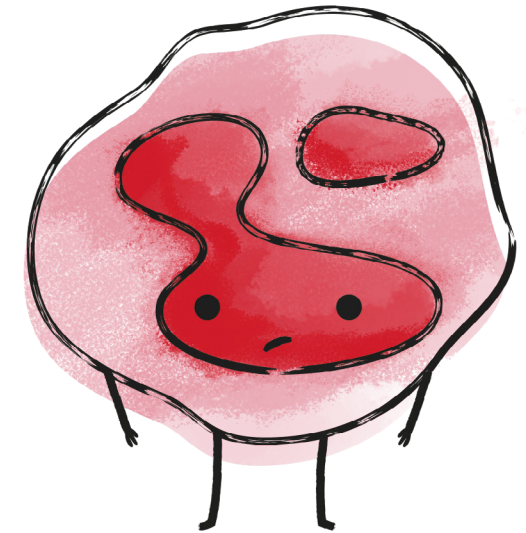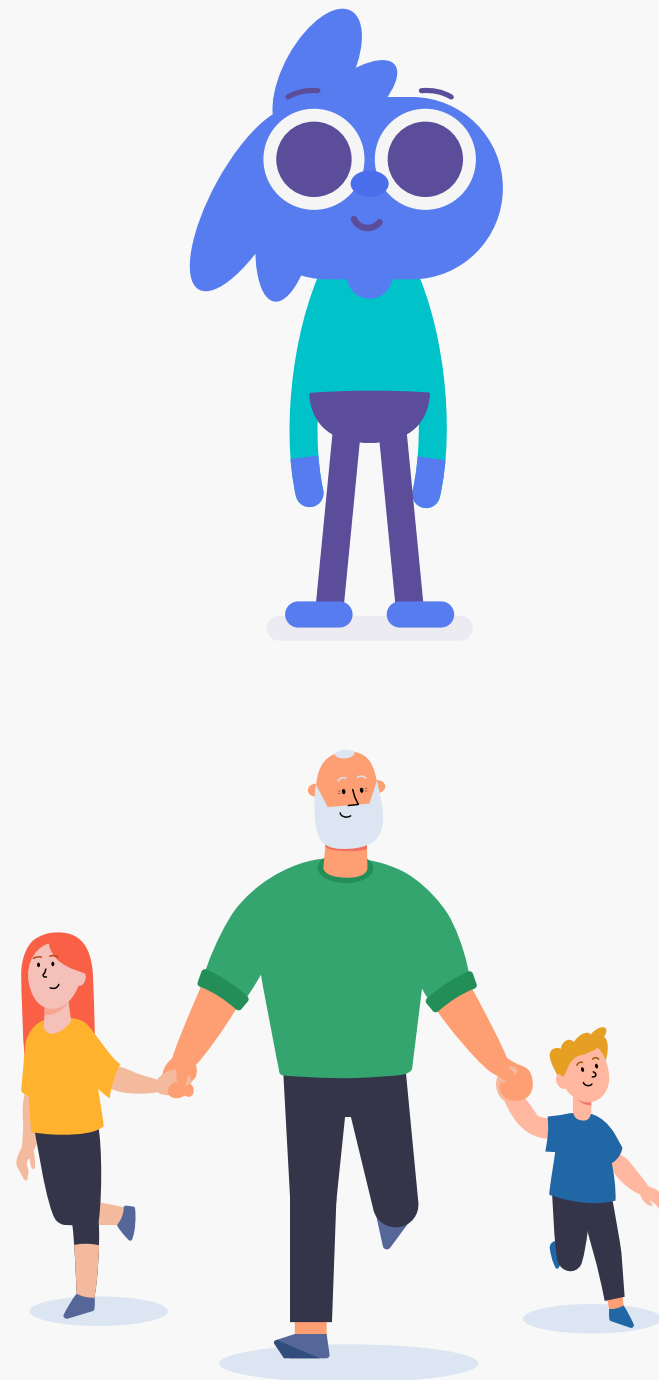
Character animation styles

The style of character animation that you choose will impact the way in which your character will be rigged up and animated. This, in turn, will impact on complexity and cost.

A popular style of character animation is 'rubber hose', so called due to the hose-like appearance of the character limbs. As this style of character has very simple arms and legs, it can be rigged up and animated fairly quickly, which makes it a cost effective form of character animation.

The addition of elbow and knee joints, and other complexities, will increase the complexity of the character rig and the animation process, which means that the production time will be longer and therefore more costly.

Simple block shapes are animation friendly, but adding patterns and textured adds some complexity and even limitations. Details such as glasses, hats, ties, scarfs etc. all add complexity. If, for example, we added a tie and the tie then didn't move as the viewer might expect, it could distract and be detrimental to the animation. The story is what's important and nothing should detract from that unnecessarily.

The addition of extra layers such as textures to your style will further increase the complexity of the animation process.

For highly complex and stylised characters, it may be necessary to use a frame by frame and cel animation process, which would mean drawing out each individual frame of the animation. The benefit of this is we have far greater flexibility than with rigged characters as we can draw the character in any pose or perspective we like.

3D character animation looks great. It does, however, take a significantly larger amount of time to plan, develop, model, rig, and animate. Therefore it can be a costly option compared to other styles.

In our opinion, 3D has to be done right. You cannot cut corners here, as 3D tends to show all faults. And heck, if you're going to invest in a great animation, let's do it right and make it the best it can be every time!

Production process

Video production requires a carefully planned process, to keep on track and ensure resources are used as efficiently as possible.

2D animation

Discovery
The first step is to design a creative brief and set out a schedule to give you a clear path forward.

Scripting & style frames
Style frames are the key visuals that, along with a script, will provide the framework of your project. Both of these need to work hand-in-hand to establish the foundation of your project.

Storyboarding/animatic
Your storyboard will use the script to set out what each scene or visual will look like. An animatic takes the still images of a storyboard and applies them as a sequence into the rough form of a video. This will set out the visuals, general timing and content.

Production
Once you have approved your storyboard or animatic, you can then progress with confidence and bring your idea to life, using your plan as a guide.

Sound design
Following the production of the video visuals, its then time to record and add the professional voice over, mixed with a licensed or bespoke music track and a sprinkling of sound effects.

Delivery
Its now time to export your film and proudly present to the world.

3D animation

The process for 3D animation is very similar to the process for 2D animation. The main difference is the length of time it takes to produce. 3D usually is a lot more time consuming.

The time it takes to render the final high quality video can be very long, which means that there is less flexibility for tweaks or changes once the main framework has been locked in.

Live action production process

The process for live action filming depends on your requirements. If you'd like to discuss your project then get in touch and we can assist you in your journey.
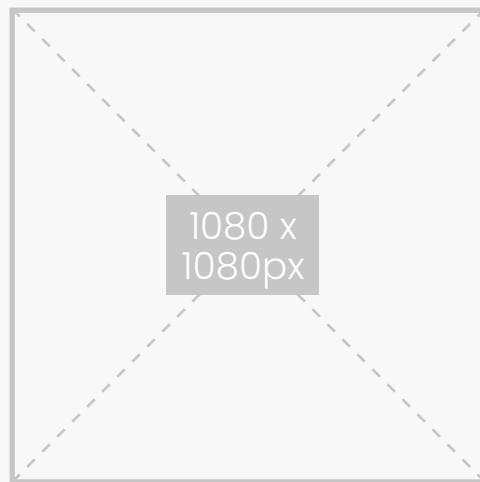
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Video outputs

There are a number of different video output formats which lend themselves to different platforms. Choosing the right format for you will depend on where your video will be seen.


1080 x 1080px

1920 x 1080px

1:1 (Square format)

As the name suggests, this is a square video. This can be great for social media, giving a clearer view on mobile than a horizontal format would.
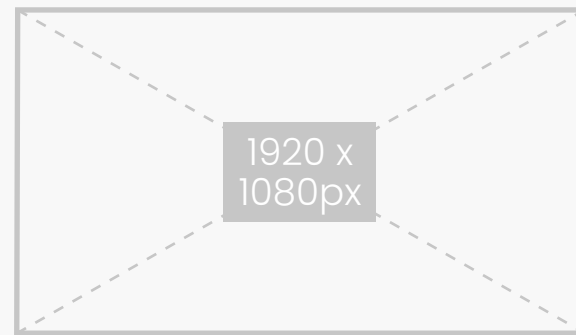
16:9

This is seen as the 'standard' video format, usually measuring up at 1920x1080px. This is what you would see most frequently on Youtube, and is one of the most commonly used video formats.


1080 x 1350px

1080 x 1920px
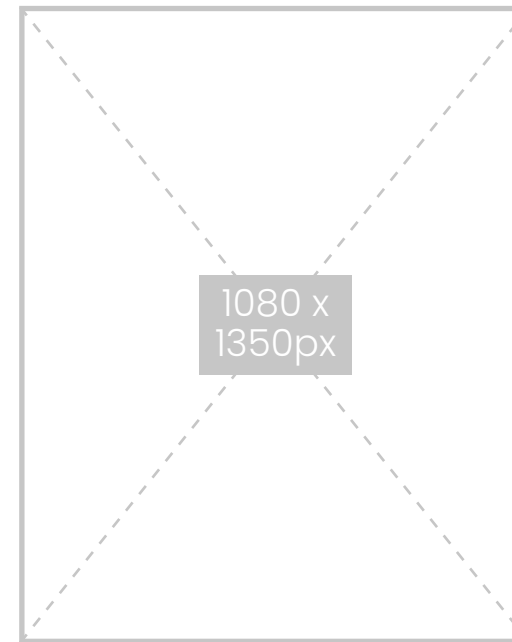
4:5

Also referred to as portrait video format, 4:5 looks great on mobiles, as it fills the screen a lot more than horizontal video formats, and is seen to be on the rise in use on some social media platforms.
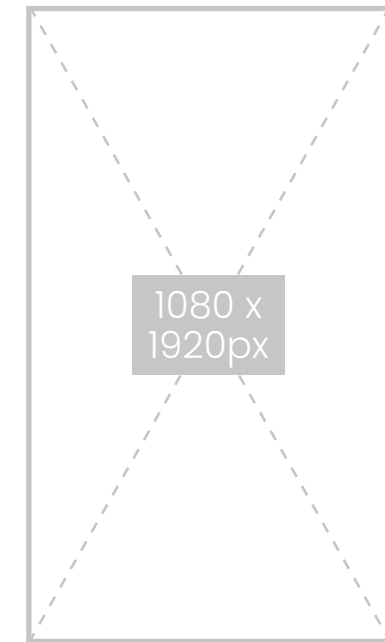
19:6

This is the portrait version of the 'standard' video format, and is also the standard mobile phone screen size, measuring slightly taller than 4:5. Social media platforms like Instagram use this format for their stories due to its similarity to mobile phone screen size.

3840 x 2160px
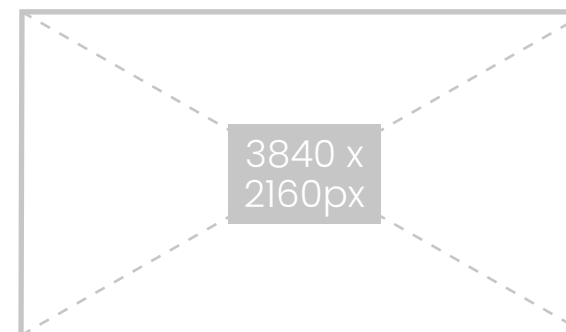
2k/4k

2k refers to a video with the approximate width of 2000px, with a resolution of 2048x1080px. This is the standard format for HDTV and is higher quality than 16:9.

4k refers to a video with the approximate width of 4000px, at a screen size of 3840x2160px. This is also referred to as super HD.

What your agency needs to know

When working with an agency on your project, it's helpful to have some information ready, so that they can plan your project around its requirements and the message you are looking to deliver.

Objective

What is your project trying to achieve? Who is your target audience and what action are you hoping they will take when they see your video(s)? Most importantly, what problem is the project looking to solve? Having very clear and measurable objectives will help you to determine the success of your project once it's published.

Style

When selecting a visual style, keep in mind what your ultimate objective and target audience is, as well as the budget that you have to work with. It's useful here to include any points of inspiration you might have.

Timeframe

How long do you have to produce your project in?

Deliverables

How many outputs do you intend to have at the end of your project? This may vary depending on the platforms you'll be publishing your content on, and any translations or adaptations for different regions.

Budget

What is your budget window and how much flexibility do you have in that?

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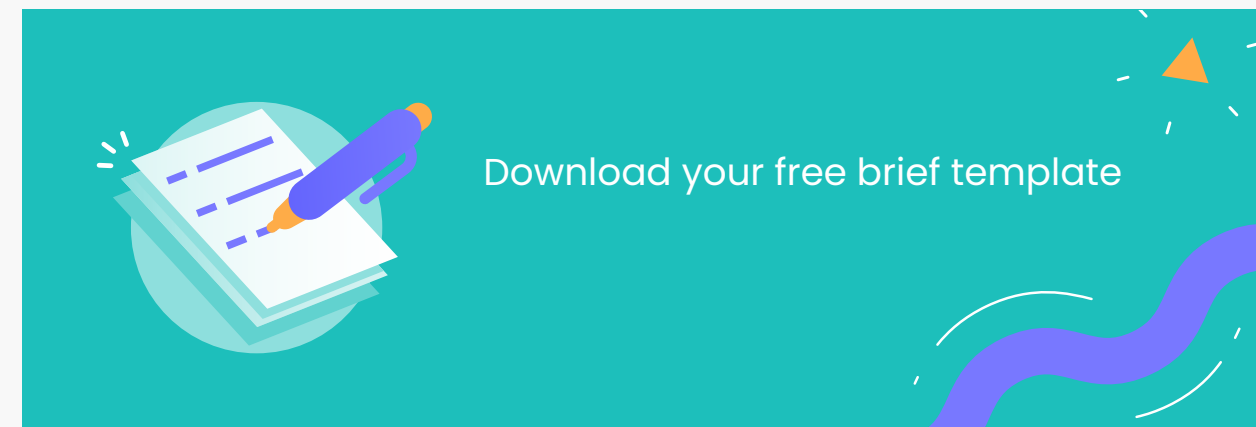
How to choose the right agency for you

The agency you choose plays a crucial role in the smooth running and successful production of your project. At Ministry of Motion, we have a proven track record to show that we have what it takes to carry your project through from conception to delivery.

There for you every step of the way

Whether you need assistance with strategy, full creative execution, or simply help bringing your existing artwork to life, Ministry of Motion fits around your team. For us, it's vitally important that the animations and videos we create provide impactful results for our clients, all whilst doing so in style.

Ministry of Motion has built its reputation on trust for delivering great work whilst offering exceptional value. We're on your team. When you work with us you'll have access to a dedicated team of experts who are always looking to innovate and test new solutions, giving you the creative and competitive edge.

Trust is everything

Every project, no matter how big or small, is treated with the same respect and care. We understand that by working with us, you are putting your trust in us to deliver. A responsibility we do not take lightly and will do our absolute utmost to uphold. Every member of the team understands that we are only as good as our last project. We aim to never let you down.

Let's start a project together

We're experts at communicating complex subjects in simple, digestible ways. Whether you're looking for engaging animations, scroll-stopping motion graphics or the next big thing in video content. We'll bring a fresh perspective to your next campaign, while remaining flexible on timelines and delivering top-quality content to wow your clients. Get in touch today to learn more!

Contact

Do you have a project that you'd like to discuss? Get in touch today to discuss how we can best assist you.

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