THE
COMPLETE
GUIDE
TO
CONCEPT
TESTING
FORMATS
FOR
CREATIVE
PRODUCTION

ASB ANIMATED
STORYBOARDS

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Chapter 1

A CONCEPT TESTING TIMELINE

HERE'S A BASIC EXAMPLE TIMELINE OF THE STEPS IN THE CONCEPT TESTING PROCESS.

(Keep in mind that this is just one example, and your production testing timeline may look different.)

01 After several rounds of creating and revising the idea for the commercial spot, the agency's creative director and copy writers have a high-level script to work with. They send it to the brand for approval.

02 The brand approves the script on one condition—before they will sign off on full-scale production, the idea must be tested to make sure it will be successful with their intended audience. They request an animatic as a way to ensure the idea will work (and to see it before it goes to production).

03 After the agency's broadcast producer contacts the animatic company, the animatic company answers some basic questions, including:

- Are you available during the production timeline?
- What test spot styles does your company do?
- How is the best way to work together?

The animatic company's team responds to the producers—they should be proactive about offering samples and be helpful and supportive in figuring out the best approach for this specific concept.

04 After the initial conversation, the animatic company will prepare an estimate and a schedule for the agency. They may prepare a few different scenarios (different styles, rush vs. standard schedules). In order to economize time, they may suggest that the agency iron out the script while they begin creation of the animatic.

05 Once a project is awarded, the point of contact for the animatic company transitions to the producer. Depending on which style of animation is chosen, various people or teams may be involved.

06 The agency and animatic company kicks off their partnership with a creative brief (this is called stage one). The agency usually has its final creative material at this point, including scripts and a mood board—if not, the animatics company should be able to help them fill in any gaps.

07 Sketchboards are created based on the script.

08 The sketchboards are shared with the agency for feedback, and the animatics company moves into the production schedule. At this point, the animatics company will be busy creating and developing artwork, followed by revisions, then animation rounds, and then revisions again until they are approved. The exact number of revisions depends on the medium and the schedule—for example, the agency and brand may need to see it six times; or, in a rush schedule, there may not be any art stage, and the production will go straight to animation. This is bespoke per project. During this process, the client should have an opportunity to review the animatics before they're final, as well—not just the agency.

09 Once approved by both the agency and client, the animatics ship to a testing facility where the concepts will be tested with focus groups. At this point, the communication between the animatics company and the broadcast producer ends (until it's time to test the next concept, of course).

Chapter 2

CONCEPT TESTING TYPES

ONCE YOU'VE BEEN ASSIGNED THE REQUIREMENT OF TESTING A CONCEPT FOR A COMMERCIAL SPOT AND YOU'VE CHOSEN AN ANIMATICS COMPANY TO PARTNER WITH, YOU'LL NEED TO CHOOSE WHICH TESTING TYPE IS BEST FOR YOU.

We'll discuss the following six concept testing mediums, their advantages and considerations, and recommended use cases:

3D Cinematics

Illustrated Cinematics

Hybrid Cinematics

Boardomatics

2D Animatics

HD Live

3D CINEMATICS

3D cinematics represent both a highly realistic form of artwork and animation as well as the most flexible development tool for an agency. Motion capture technology is used to simulate lifelike movement for the characters in this type.

Benefits

1. You can simulate every shot with complete and lifelike camera movement. You can create a 3D cinematic once and reuse it from any angle and composition, whereas other animatics require redrawing or reanimating when they're changed.

2. 3D cinematics are an efficient production style if you're going into a project with a clear concept but less of a clear vision initially. You can get 3D assets going without waiting for storyline completion, because the artwork isn't dependent on a storyline.

3. It's easy to change this animatic at any point in the process.

4. You can make large changes in a matter of hours instead of a matter of days, so this type lends itself to flexibility and speed.

5. 3D cinematics are true to realistic proportions and camera placement more than the 2D style. You can place things in a way that's true to shooting live action, and scale is reliable. Similarly, because of realism, it's not an issue to maintain recognizability with 3D cinematics.

6. At Animated Storyboards, we can create multiple spots in the 3D cinematics style, and the look and quality of the spots will be consistent.

3D CINEMATICS, CONT.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. Uncanny valley: Some people say this type is so realistic that it's almost too lifelike. Depending on the quality and content of the concept you're testing, this may resonate as a "creepy factor." (Illustrated and hybrid cinematics offer style options that resolve this issue).

2. You can't cheat render time with this type of animatic—it depends on the resources of your vendor.

3. Some people find that 3D cinematics are too detailed, and their clients get locked into the minutiae of the spot instead of focusing on more important parts, which can limit them.

MAY BE RIGHT FOR YOU IF...

1. You need to highlight ideas that can't be properly done in 2D—things like camera movement and choreography—that are important to a story. By using a 3D medium, you can achieve the entire concept with any limitations from the technique.

2. You have a nuanced, fine-tuned idea where detail is necessary to get a point across.

3. You're using celebrities, automobiles, electronic products in general, or liquids.

4. You're testing multiple spots at once. (When you partner with Animated Storyboards, you get an "apples to apples" experience with the final production team working on your spots in this style).
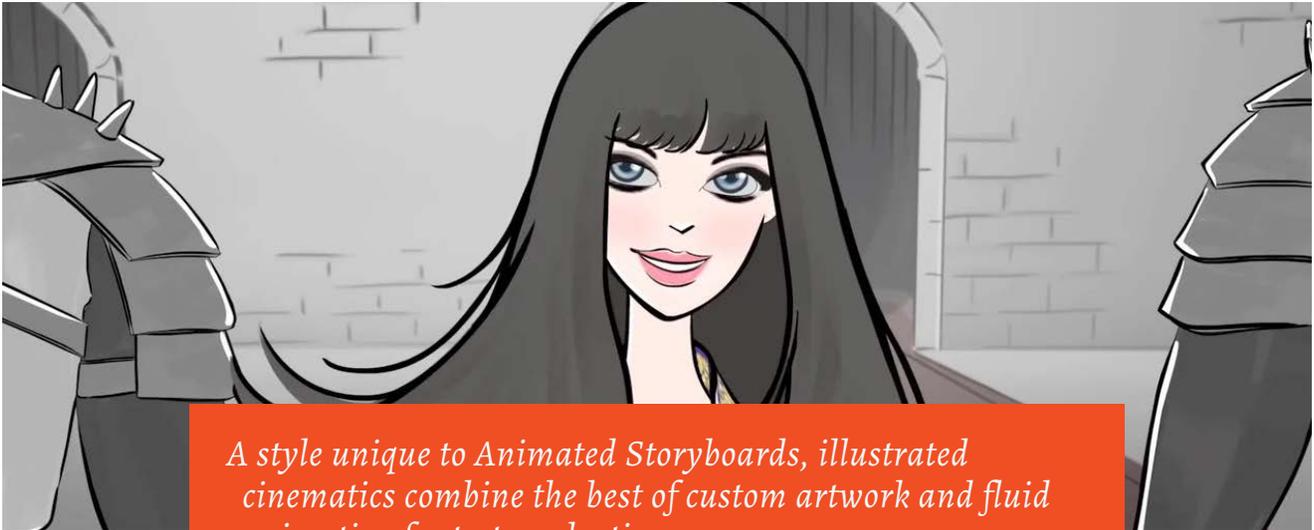
5. You need to review or test variables. Because of their versatility, you can use 3D cinematics to easily apply a control characteristic across multiple spots.

USE CASES

When a client has multiple spots and wants to use them to determine consistency. (For example, making sure a restaurant is a perfect representation.)

ILLUSTRATED CINEMATICS

A style unique to Animated Storyboards, illustrated cinematics combine the best of custom artwork and fluid animation for test production.

Benefits

1. Illustrated cinematics offer all the benefits of 3D plus the aesthetic benefits of 2D artwork.
2. Illustrated cinematics have a fully customized look to all artwork elements.
3. If you've done animatics, illustrated cinematics leverage all the advantages of an animated test spot in one fell swoop. This format doesn't stray from the old-school style people are comfortable with, yet it encompasses 3D benefits of choreography and camera movement.
4. There is no uncanny valley issue (it does not exist in this style).

CONSIDERATIONS

1. Artwork has the potential to be less detailed or less realistic.

MAY BE RIGHT FOR YOU IF...

1. You want freedom of art styles and want to achieve fluid, lifelike animation.
2. Your agency or brand is resistant to 3D. The look of illustrated cinematics assuages the "3D concern."

USE CASES

This style is a good fit for anything. The drawbacks of the other styles are solved with this style.

HYBRID CINEMATICS

Hybrid cinematics are a highly finished form of artwork and animation. Characters look illustrated and move in a lifelike manner within realistic 3D environments.

Benefits

1. The entire process is 3D, so angles can be changed easily and character movement is extremely fluid.
2. They achieve beauty without an uncanny valley.
3. You have more control over the aesthetic (the artwork style) of the characters.
4. Hybrid cinematics offer the same benefits as 3D cinematics, but they differentiate themselves in that you have a precise ability to control the look of the characters.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. Depending on the level of character customization, the timeline is difficult to shrink.

MAY BE RIGHT FOR YOU IF...

1. You are interested in 3D and want more control over the look of the characters.
2. You want to maintain a more traditional style, but you require more physical movement and camera movement.
3. Your timeline and budget are a bit too limited for Illustrated Cinematics.

USE CASES

- Illustrated characters on a realistic background.
- Ideal when you want nonliving things to be more realistic—for example, technology, automobiles, and things you want to look more detailed.

BOARDOMATICS

Boardomatics can be created using 2D or 3D artwork in an edited timeline, using dissolves and cuts instead of animation to show movement.

Benefits

1. Boardomatics are an efficient production style if you're going into a project with a clear concept, but less of a clear vision initially.

2. 3D boardomatics are true to realistic proportions and camera placement more than the 2D style, but less than with 3D cinematics. Because of realism, it's not an issue to maintain recognizability with 3D boardomatics. However, realism is decreased since it's not fully animated, which allows the viewer a greater sense of imagination.

3. After doing a 3D boardomatic, you can move quickly into cinematics because all of the parts are already in place.

4. There's no real render time, and boardomatics are more cost effective and quicker than fully animated spots.

BOARDOMATICS, CONT.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. Realism is decreased since it's not fully animated. While this is a benefit for some, it may be a drawback to others.

2. Big camera movement isn't represented with this style because boardomatics aren't fully animated.

MAY BE RIGHT FOR YOU IF...

1. You want to test multiple concepts for an initial round of testing.

2. You have a short timetable.

3. You have a limited budget.

4. You're using celebrities, automobiles, or electronic products in general.

5. You're testing multiple spots at once.

6. You need to review or test variables. Because of their versatility, you can use 3D boardomatics to decide what you want to keep as a control easily across multiple spots.

USE CASES

- High-volume, campaign-type projects that need to be consistent across spots.
- Multiple artwork assets leveraged across spots.

2D ANIMATICS

2D animatics are fully animated using 2D, custom-illustrated artwork. This artwork can be created by individual artists or an in-house team of artists.

Benefits

1. 2D animatics are a more traditional, time-efficient testing tool.

2. There is a wide variety of artwork styles and possible aesthetics.

3. 2D animatics can have a looser finish, which leaves more room for interpretation.

2D ANIMATICS, CONT.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. Movement is less fluid and less lifelike.
2. Artwork is typically not consistent across multiple spots, unless you have a lengthy timetable for one artist to work on all spots.
3. Unlike 3D, any time you change an angle, it requires a frame redraw.
4. Revisions can be more tedious, time-consuming, stressful, and potentially costly.
5. There is less instant recognizability. 2D animatics are not recommended in situations when you need near-instant recognition, such as celebrities or a specific car brand.
6. You must be thoughtful as to which 2D art style you like, because if you choose an artist or style of artwork that isn't a good fit for your project, it may not be well-received.

MAY BE RIGHT FOR YOU IF…

1. You have a fear of being too locked into a broadcast spot, because illustrated artwork can be treated in a much looser way than realistic 3D assets.
2. You have a spot without a lot of movement, but you have one major focus (for example, a face).
3. You value an artistic style.
4. You're more focused on artwork style and less focused on movement.
5. You want a more simplified test spot.

USE CASES

- Depending on the artwork style, beauty products are a common use.
- 2D animatics are used widely across the board.

HD LIVE
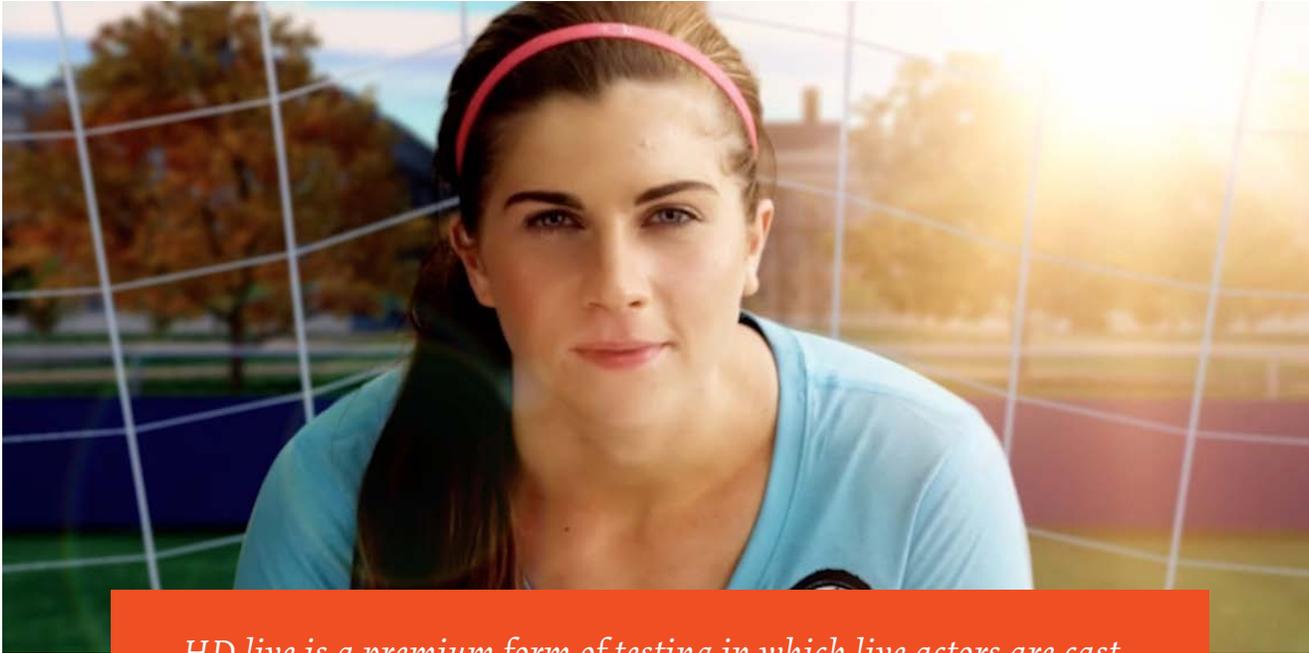
HD live is a premium form of testing in which live actors are cast and shot on green screen and custom backgrounds are created with computer graphics (CG). Movement is comparable to watching full HD video-quality movement (in fact, in some cases it is watching video-quality movement).

Benefits

1. HD live is customized and real—real people, real expressions, and real movement.
2. Quality can be comparable to a broadcast commercial.
3. You don't have to worry about uncanny valley in the characters (because you're shooting real actors).
4. Viewers (from your agency or brand) can supervise the shoot and give live feedback.
5. If people in your agency don't like testing animation or are distracted by it, they will be more agreeable to this type of testing (again, because it uses real people and objects).
6. HD live is as close to the real production as you can get.
7. Environments and backgrounds are fully customizable and created in CG.

HD LIVE, CONT.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. While it is a benefit, being "as close to the real thing as you can get" is also a consideration.
2. HD live is more expensive than any other testing tool.
3. When you shoot live, you do just that. Changes after the fact require reshooting. This will increase costs and slow your timeline.
4. You have less flexibility to change scenes or concept after shooting.
5. Changes are restricted to being minimal when you're in the editorial stage.

MAY BE RIGHT FOR YOU IF...

1. You need a method for clients who need to see things as literally as possible.
2. You want the cost benefit of doing multiple shoots in a style at once so you can leverage the same shoot day.
3. You can kill two birds with one stone: Your video shoot can also be utilized for print ads, digital, or other outputs.

USE CASES

Beauty and food are most common. For example, the natural bounce of hair or mouth-watering tabletop food scenes look most appealing when shot live.

Chapter 3

HOW LONG WILL THE CONCEPT TESTING PROCESS TAKE?

Each of these options have variable timelines depending on the company you partner with. At Animated Storyboards, we can create some of these animatics in as quickly as 2-3 days, but 10 business days are recommended for the most control over the product. The biggest factors in determining your timeline are to know both how much time your agency and brand require for review, as well as the number of people who will need to review them.

THAT'S A WRAP!

Once you know how to choose the right testing type for your spot, you can test different variables—such as main characters, copy, and taglines—versioned into fully developed concepts to test with your audience. Ultimately, you'll be able to save a ton of money by guaranteeing your commercial will be a success before it goes into production.

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ANIMATICS?

See samples, get an estimate, see a timeline, get a recommendation for the best style for your creative needs, create a custom sample, and more.

Let's talk.