

WHAT IS PREMIUM VIDEO?

REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE PREMIUM IN ADVERTISING



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Introduction

Advocating for an accurate definition of premium video is important as it is often misinterpreted. Now is the time to provide additional context and resources for buy- and sell-side decision makers as they make decisions for video programming deals and campaign planning.

In 2018, the FreeWheel Council for Premium Video, defined premium video as “professionally produced video content, delivered via curated user experiences, in a brand safe context to highly engaged audiences.” This definition was articulated in response to a marketplace in which many claimed—yet fewer delivered on—the promise of premium. At the time, the definition was adopted, but with so much change in the media industry since then, now is the time to revisit the term.

On the surface, what makes something premium is in the eye of the beholder. However, in a video context, to understand what really makes it premium, it’s important to consider two elements: the video content itself as well as the video experience it airs within. For example, if you’re watching a show on an ad-supported streaming network and you see the same ad repeatedly during the show’s ad breaks, is that a premium experience? From the advertiser and consumer’s perspective, that’s not ideal. The value the advertiser thought they were paying for is being diminished by a lousy viewing experience. The same is true if you’re watching user-generated content (UGC) on a digital video platform that’s pixelated and shaky—low quality content.

At Comcast Advertising, we believe the modern premium video definition must have clear, research-based defining factors that simultaneously enable advertiser trust and highlight value for publisher inventory.



Premium Video Definition

Research conducted by Comcast Advertising shows that advertisements airing alongside premium video create positive experiences for viewers and fuel positive brand associations. Viewers had 58% higher unaided recall for ads in premium environments.³

The essence of what it means to be premium in a video advertising context comes down to several defining factors backed by data insights and analysis. This report redefines “premium video” with the goals of:

1. Enabling advertiser trust in video content; and
2. Highlighting value in programmer video inventory

Premium video is content delivered transparently, in a trusted brand-safe environment, seen by real people within a high-quality viewing experience.

Buyer, seller, and viewer perspectives combine to form the definition of premium video, with the following defining factors having a strong effect on ad performance.

To qualify as premium, video content should be...

1. Delivered transparently
2. Brand-safe
3. Seen by real people
4. Aired within a high-quality viewing experience

Industry Perspectives

Buyers & Sellers Agree on Premium Video Components

Brand safety, fraud protection, and the quality of the viewing experience are among the factors considered in premium video inventory planning and valuation.

These important components are validated by the transparency buyers desire and assurance their campaigns were delivered as promised with minimal fraud in high-quality, brand-safe environments.

“How important are the following factors when buying (buyers) / pricing (sellers) premium video inventory?”

% of Respondents Cited Important or Very Important ^{1,2}

Transparency

Trusted, brand-safe

Brand safety



Publisher of the content



Seen by real people

Viewability



Audience engagement/
targeting capabilities



Quality viewing experience

High production quality



Demand for content



Ad loads



70%

Differing Priorities Among Buyers & Sellers

Buyers and sellers classify the most important elements of premium video differently based on what aligns most with their individual priorities. Buyers emphasize audience engagement and targeting capabilities, whereas sellers consider the specific publisher of the content as the most important element in how their inventory is valued.

Which factors of premium video are “very important?”^{1,2}

Ranked by % of Respondents

Rank	Buyers (Ad Agencies)	Sellers (Video Distributors)
1	Audience engagement/targeting	Publisher of the content
2	Brand safety	Brand safety
3	Viewability	High production quality
4	High production quality	Demand for content
5	Publisher of the content	Viewability
6	Demand for content	Audience engagement/targeting
7	Ad loads	Ad loads



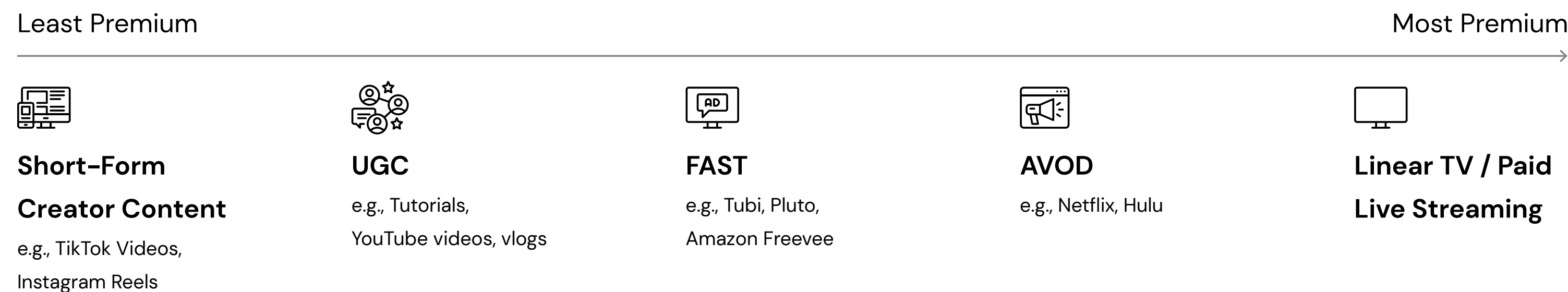


Buyers Think of Premium in Terms of Long-Form, Episodic

While advertisers can leverage different types of video platforms with varying levels of premium aspects, they classify publisher-produced, long-form, episodic content as more premium than short-form, user-generated content or creator-produced content.

And while free ad-supported streaming TV (FAST) offers a linear-like experience, buyers are still trying to understand how it fits into their premium video campaign strategies. Viewers also considered both FAST and ad-supported video on demand (AVOD) as more premium than UGC.³

Buyer Ratings of Premium Video Content¹



There is nothing quite like live TV

“Live” as it pertains to premium video was rated highest by both buyers and sellers, with **70%** of sellers citing **live sports** as their most premium inventory.

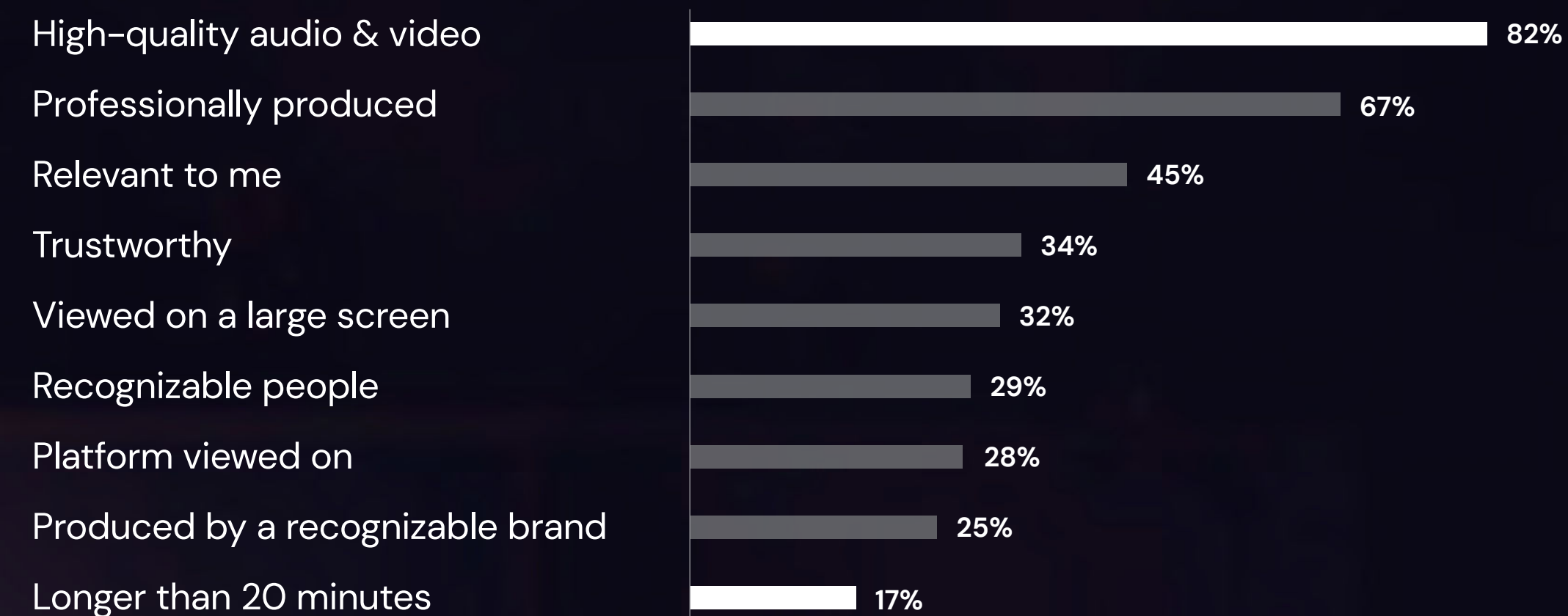
Viewers Appreciate Quality Over Duration

The consumer view of premium video is more about the quality of the viewing experience than the length or platform, making the viewing experience a key aspect of premium.

82% of viewers believe content is premium when it has high-quality audio and video, followed by professional production, whereas only 17% defined premium as being long-form.

“Which aspects, if any, do you think make video content ‘premium?’”³

% of Respondents



We asked respondents what makes a video experience premium...

“It had a high quality of audio and video and was well produced.”

“I consider it to be premium because of the video quality, from audio to how it was put together.”

“It’s just great content and it’s produced. This isn’t shot on a cell phone.”

1. Transparency

Premium video should be **delivered transparently**

What it means

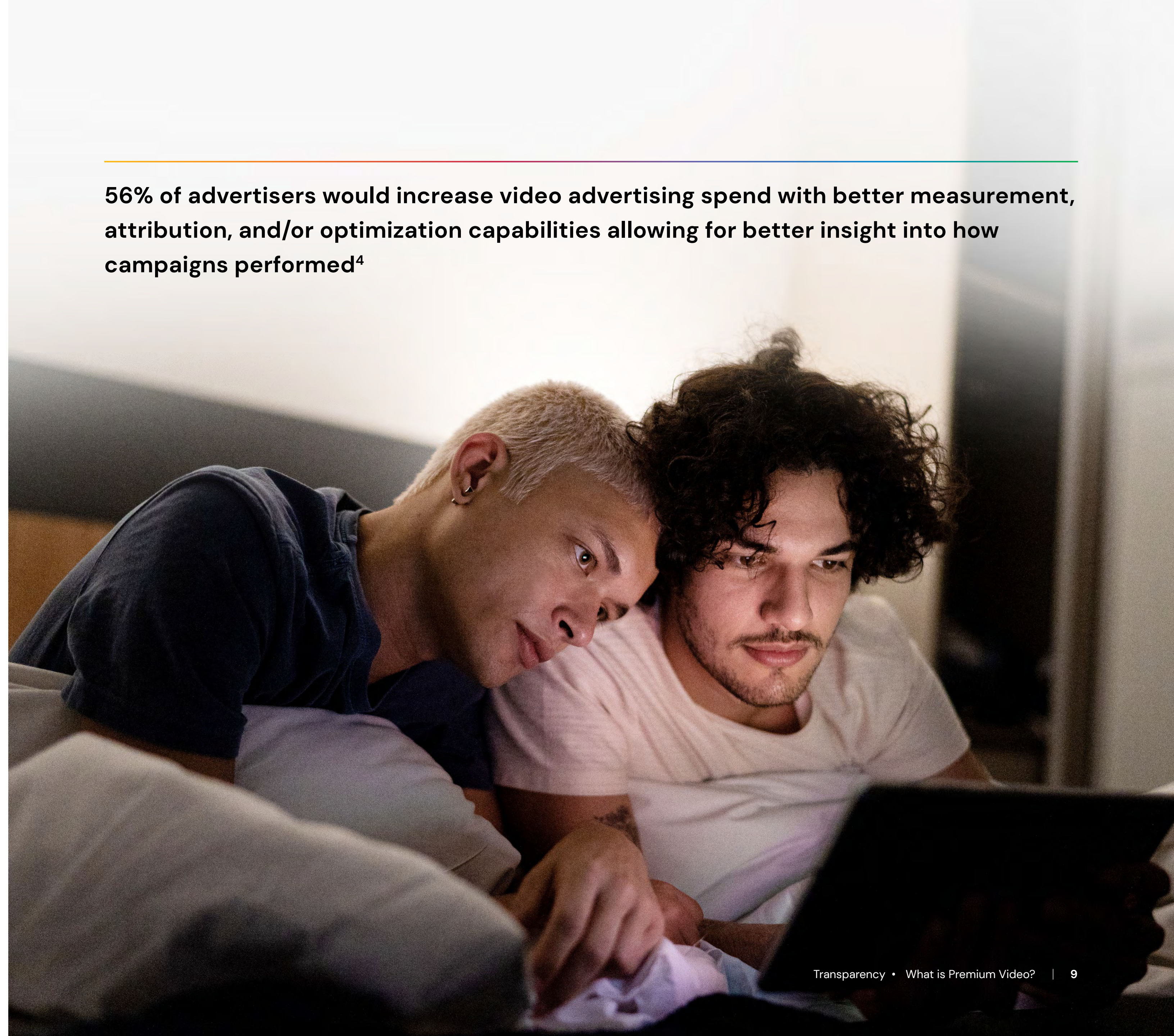
Transparency refers to the amount of information passed pre-, mid-, and post-campaign from the sell to buy side. Maximizing efficiencies and creating connections between brands and audiences are shared buy-/sell-side goals. Transparency is a vital component of making premium video work for all sides.

What the industry is saying

Advertisers are demanding greater visibility over their media spend across all channels. In an era where data is the new currency, transparency in advertising has never been more relevant, especially as buyers look to optimize campaigns. Surveyed advertisers indicated they would increase their spend with better measurement, attribution, and/or optimization capabilities.

When it comes to automation, 42% of surveyed advertisers said transparency is a primary challenge with programmatic transactions.⁵

56% of advertisers would increase video advertising spend with better measurement, attribution, and/or optimization capabilities allowing for better insight into how campaigns performed⁴



Elements of transparency

Visibility (where video will run)

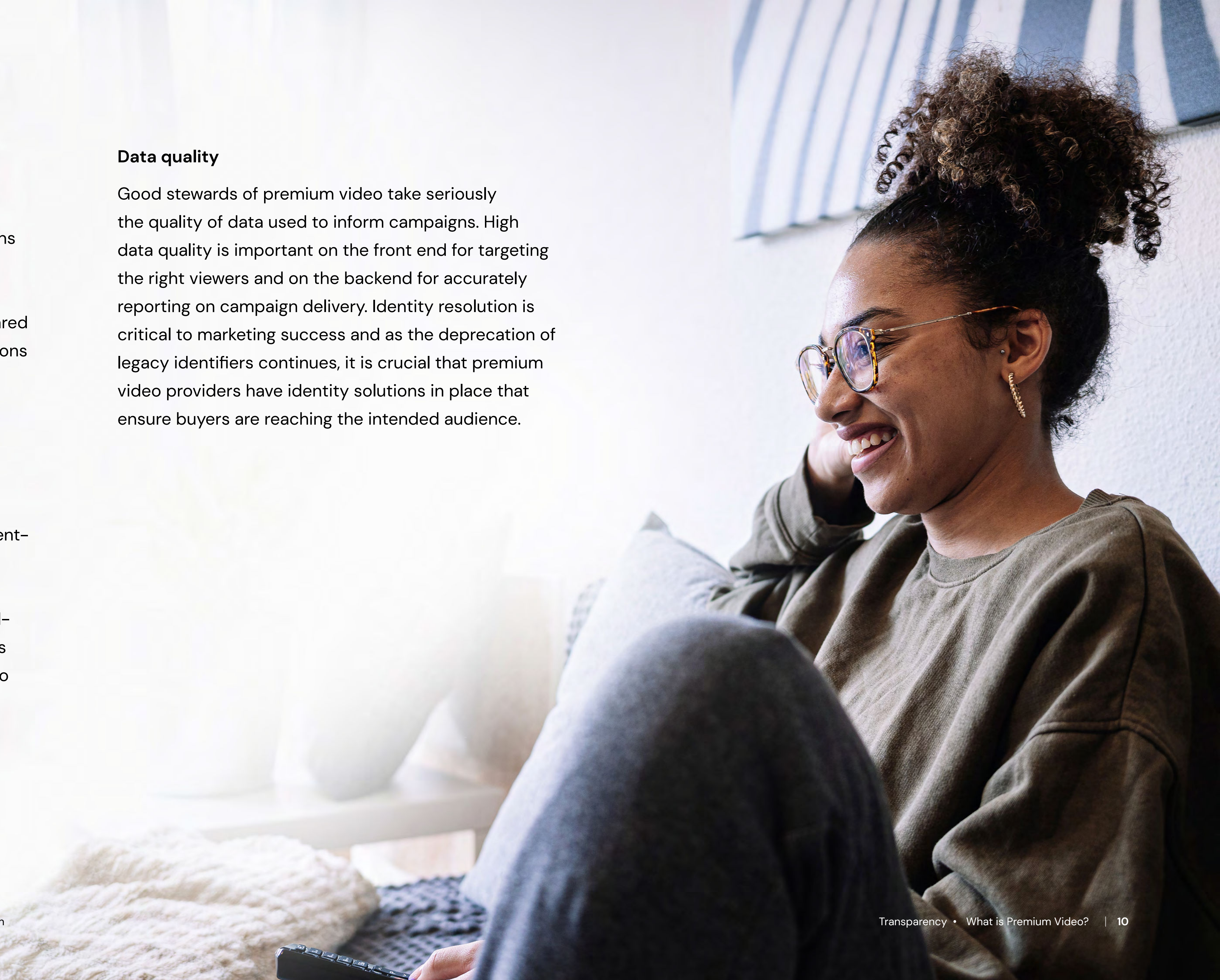
Buyers expect clear visibility into where their campaigns will run. Premium video is often traded through direct sales and private marketplaces, which gives buyers greater control over where creatives appear, as compared to alternative transaction methods such as open auctions and exchanges.

Reporting (where video ran)

A Proxmic study found that the number one reason U.S. marketers are not spending more on connected TV inventory programmatically on open exchanges is content-level transparency (65% of respondents).⁶ Increasingly, the buy side is requesting visibility over where their campaigns ran, what shows they ran in, how many fraud-free impressions were served, and confirmation that ads were delivered to the intended audience. Premium video providers understand this and routinely share these metrics in addition to KPIs like time of day, impressions, and video completion rates.

Data quality

Good stewards of premium video take seriously the quality of data used to inform campaigns. High data quality is important on the front end for targeting the right viewers and on the backend for accurately reporting on campaign delivery. Identity resolution is critical to marketing success and as the deprecation of legacy identifiers continues, it is crucial that premium video providers have identity solutions in place that ensure buyers are reaching the intended audience.





2. Brand Safety

Premium video should be **brand-safe**

What it means

Brand safety is all about protecting an organization’s reputation by avoiding inappropriate or unsuitable content. While what’s deemed brand-safe may vary by company, generally, brand-safe environments and content mitigate any damaging outcomes that could occur from negative associations by viewers.

What the industry is saying

Elements like trustworthiness, brand safety, and content that is produced by recognizable brands/publishers are all aspects rated highly by buyers, sellers, and viewers as they pertain to defining premium video. Brand safety is number one on the list from the sellers’ perspective.

Which aspects, if any, do you think make video content ‘premium?’^{1,2,3}

Top 5 Ranked by % of Respondents

Rank	Buyers	Sellers	Viewers
1	Audio & video quality	Brand safety	Audio & video quality
2	Professional production	Production quality	Professional production
3	Trustworthiness	Publisher of content	Relevance
4	Produced by a recognizable brand	Ad viewability	Trustworthiness
5	Platform viewed on	Audience engagement	Viewed on a large screen

Elements of brand safety

Trusted publishers

Publisher-produced environments tend to be more governed and therefore brand-safe, lessening the chance of advertisers having their ads placed next to unsavory content. The advent of “made-for-advertising” websites (MFAs) designed to poach advertising revenue at the expense of viewer experience and quality content has deceived marketers with outdated targeting strategies. This has led to a lack of trust particularly within programmatic advertising.

Sellers must ensure ad creative meets industry regulations, airs within brand-appropriate content, and is suitable for adjacencies (e.g., competitive separation and/or conflicting messaging). When buyers advertise with partners they can trust to place ads within brand-safe content, it only enhances the credibility of the advertisements and improves brand effectiveness, consumer trust, and audience engagement.



Trustworthiness

was ranked third, just behind “high-quality audio/video” and “professionally produced video” when advertisers were asked to rank aspects of premium video content.¹



1 in 3

viewers cited trustworthiness as an element that makes video content premium.³

Unobjectionable content

Content that could be considered objectionable includes but is not limited to explicit content, misinformation or fake news, and extremist content. These content categories could create negative brand associations in the eyes of video viewers.

A majority of media experts (73%) agree that ad buyers and sellers must actively avoid misinformation, disinformation, and fake news.⁵ A research study validated these concerns, demonstrating that advertisements viewed in a negative context can damage consumer perceptions of brand equity, attitudinal loyalty, and willingness to pay.⁷

Appropriate audience targeting

Audience-first targeting models tout the benefits of reaching specific and sometimes narrow audience segments. Advertisers need to rely on their media partners to protect their investments through rigorous standards and compliance in reaching audiences ethically. For instance, federal privacy laws prohibit serving targeted ads to viewers under 13 years of age without obtaining parental consent and some states have restricted use of ethnicity data for targeting purposes.

3. Audience Legitimacy

Premium video should be **seen by real people**

What it means

Ensuring that video impressions reach – and are viewed by – real, legitimate, engaged viewers is paramount. Premium video is only served by platforms actively minimizing fraudulent activity and bot traffic as well as ensuring content is non-skippable and fully visible to the audience.

What the industry is saying

90% of buyers and 80% of sellers think viewability is important when planning or pricing premium video campaigns.^{1,2}

Audience engagement and targeting is the most important factor for buyers planning premium video campaigns.¹

% of Respondents that Rated 'Very Important' or 'Important' When Planning (Buyers) / Pricing (Sellers) Premium Video Campaigns^{1,2}



Elements of audience legitimacy

Ads are viewable

Viewability measures the ability for impressions to be seen by viewers. The standard threshold is that 50% of the ad must be in view for at least two seconds for video ads (versus one second for digital display ads).⁸ The advertising medium and screen type impact the viewability of impressions as well. On CTV, streaming ad impressions are delivered during ad breaks within content and can be viewed full-screen. This experience is different from many other digital platforms, where ads are placed alongside content and therefore compete for attention.

Ads delivered in episodic streaming content have

+14X

greater view time than the standard two-second viewability threshold.⁹

Premium video impressions that were not viewable should be removed from campaign impression delivery.

Ads are viewed for the full duration

While some video ads can be skipped and still meet viewability standards, advertising recall is what ultimately suffers. A consumer study found that ads viewed in full yielded higher recall than ads skipped after five seconds.

+42%

Unaided recall³

+22%

Brand recognition³

The same study revealed that when viewers can skip ads, they will; 83% of skippable ads were in fact skipped.³

While many marketers have developed creative strategies to get their message across as quickly and early in the ad as possible, eye tracking and neurometrics revealed a fixation on the skip button/ad countdown, causing further harm to ad recall.³

Fraud protected

Ads in high-quality video settings should be seen and heard by verifiably real people, not by bots or those visiting sites created solely for advertising.

Fraudulent impressions are a very real concern for buyers amid a

+102%

increase in malicious bot traffic YoY.¹⁰

90% of buyers think minimal fraud is important when planning premium video campaigns.¹ Premium video campaigns should reach engaged viewers with a genuine interest in the content.

Publishers are using sophisticated tools to put safeguards and protections in place that attempt to eliminate fraud and invalid traffic. The best protection is to buy owned and operated inventory from a trusted source.

4. Quality of Environment

Premium video should be **aired within a high-quality viewing experience**

What it means

Audience receptivity to ads within video content correlates to minimal disruption during consumption which is why a premium video experience is one that provides carefully crafted ad loads in a high-quality environment that is relevant to the viewer. There are three factors that make up the advertising viewer experience including quantity, quality, and relevance of ads.

What the industry is saying

Two-thirds of advertisers say viewer experience is important when planning TV and video ad campaigns.¹¹ Additionally, a key component in a premium video viewing experience is high-quality audio and video, cited as the top aspect by buyers and viewers alike in defining video as premium.^{1,3}

Sellers rated production quality second, just behind brand safety, as to what makes their content premium.²

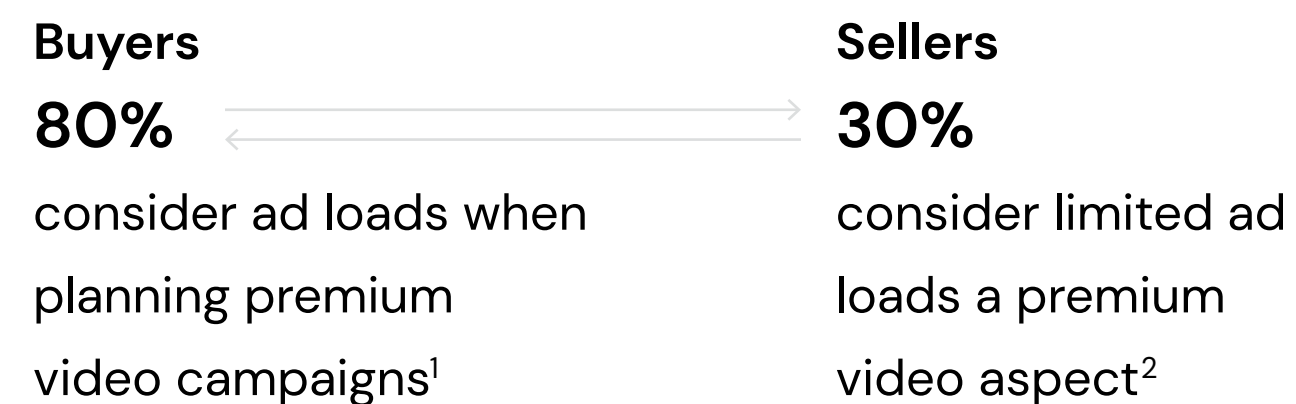
High-Quality Audio & Video Makes Video Content Premium

% of Respondents that Agree^{1,2,3}



Ad Loads

While buyers view limited ads as a premium aspect, just 30% of sellers think limited ads are what make their content premium.



Elements of viewing experience

Quality

Production

Production quality is vital to a high-quality viewing experience. This is evidenced by the fact that it was most often identified by buyers and viewers alike as what makes content premium.^{1,3} Excellent video production, recognizable scenes/people, and engaging storytelling often grab audiences' attention, giving video content a premium feel.

Delivery

The quality of video content should not be compromised by the delivery system; the content itself should be adapted to the screen it is viewed on. Quality in delivery also refers to ad delivery. Latency and slate (a gap in content that is not filled with an ad) are viewer experience concerns that have become more prevalent within programmatic ad serving. Premium video distributors working with ad tech partners that minimize downtime and latency will diminish the risk for these lower-quality viewing experiences.¹²

Quantity

72%

of viewers feel TV ads should be "in line with the content length."¹³

While 66% of CTV ad breaks are less than three minutes (similar or lower to a linear TV viewing experience), nearly a quarter of all streaming ad breaks last four minutes or longer – a long time to keep viewers engaged.¹⁴

Interestingly, buyers find ad loads to be more important in planning premium video campaigns than sellers thought it important to their inventory pricing.¹² Carefully crafted ad loads that account for the viewer can better serve all parties and contribute to a high-quality viewing experience within premium video.

While premium video is less about the platform or content length, the large-screen nature of television viewing can provide a more enjoyable viewing experience.

A Comcast Advertising study found that 67% of respondents felt that ads running on the TV screen are generally less disruptive than ads on mobile devices.¹³ A benefit of this is that the ads are memorable and engaging. Another study found...

2.2x higher unaided recall

for the big-screen environment compared to the mobile digital environment.¹⁵



Elements of viewing experience

Relevance

While it's widely known that advertisers benefit from targeting ads to consumers, studies suggest viewers benefit as well.

73%

of respondents said they prefer ads that are related to personal interests.¹³ Relevance was a top aspect of making content premium to viewers.³

45%

of viewers think relevance makes video 'premium'³

Relevance is a positive for viewers, but there is a downside: with more targeting sometimes comes more ad frequency, as there may be a smaller pool of relevant viewers to reach with any particular ad. Applying targeting and frequency capping can ensure ads are relevant but not excessive.

Engaging, relevant narratives are at the heart of captivating video content. When we asked consumers what made video content premium, several respondents mentioned how it felt relevant to them:³

"I love to cook, so seeing familiar cooking techniques and styles used in different ways was a very good way to catch and keep my attention."

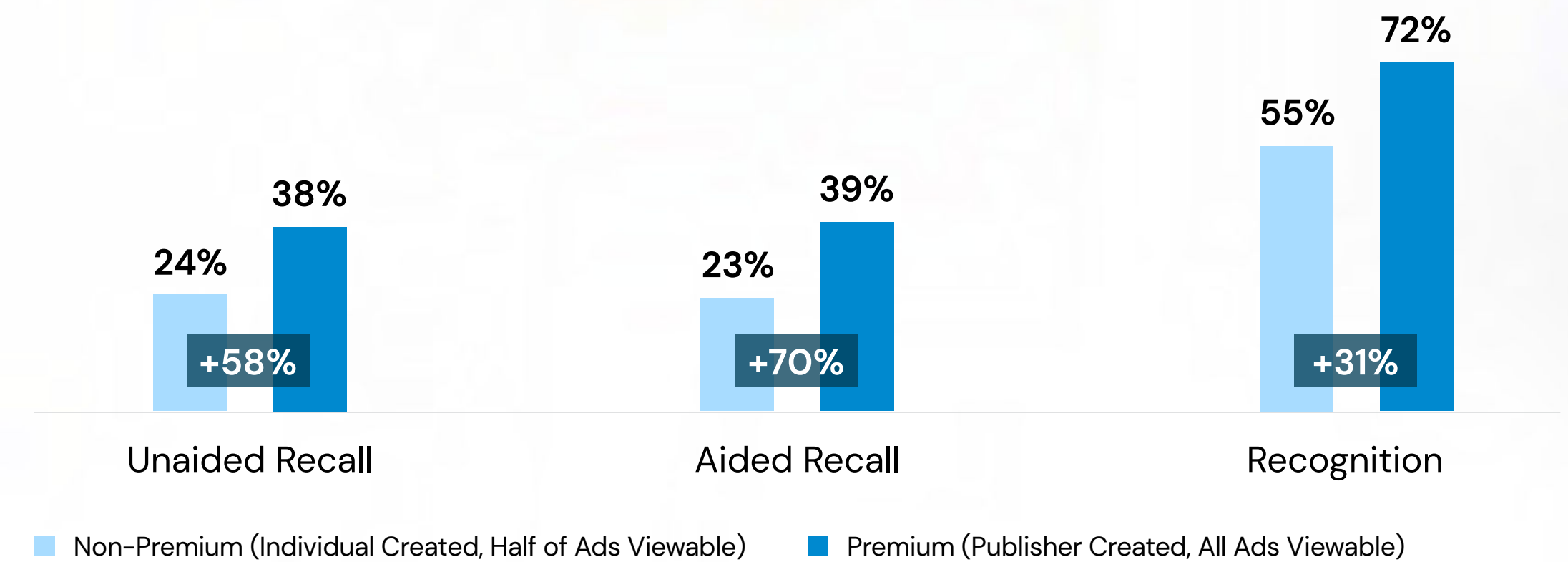
"Premium because it seemed to be somewhat applicable to me."

"The episode was hilarious and I can relate to the cast of characters."

More Memorable Brands are Built with Premium Video

Research indicates that premium video content leads to better brand building with audiences versus non-premium video. After participating in an in-lab viewing session, viewers' unaided ad recall was 58% higher for ads in premium video environments compared to non-premium environments. These findings were true across age groups.³

% of The Ads Recalled after the Viewing Session³



Note: All content was viewed on a TV screen. Premium refers to episodic TV content viewed on AVOD or FAST. Non-Premium refers to user-generated content viewed on YouTube.

Conclusion

When it comes to defining premium video, there are several key elements. Premium video is delivered transparently. It can be trusted by advertisers and is brand-safe. Premium video content is seen by real people, not bots. And it airs within a high-quality viewing experience.

When used as a descriptor, advertisers should be skeptical about the term “premium” and how it applies to their media plans. For their part, publishers with a premium video offering should advocate for such content whenever possible. The premium video content of the day has evolved from its traditional TV roots rich in storytelling heritage to thriving within a modern era full of thousands of endpoints reaching millions of viewers.

Ultimately premium video represents the most compelling way for brand marketers to drive results and reach audiences at scale.

Additional Resources



A Definitive Guide to Buying and Selling Premium Video is resource developed by the FreeWheel Council for Premium Video in partnership with the VAB. Focused on the buy/sell transaction, buyers can leverage this checklist to verify that the inventory they invest in qualifies as premium video.





About the Data

The dataset used in this report stems from Comcast Advertising-led research, as well as third-party and commissioned surveys. Insights come from three primary audiences:



Buyers: online interviews of marketers and agencies conducted by Advertiser Perceptions in September 2023.



Sellers: an online survey of video inventory distributors and publishers conducted by Comcast Advertising in September 2023.



Viewers: a survey administered by MediaScience in a lab setting after a video viewing session in March 2023.

Sources

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