

According to the Answers.com TechWeb entry, rich media is

"information that consists of any combination of graphics, audio, video and animation, which is more storage and bandwidth intensive than ordinary text."¹

However, as this is a medium that "never stops innovating and something even newer is always moving towards us from the horizon" it is hard to pigeonhole rich media with a specific definition.² It is anything that is more than simple animation (such as, video and audio), and has been replaced with other terms such as "rich content," to refer to ads that "pull in additional information from a server beyond what is served up with initial load."²

Since rich media is hard to define, always growing and encompasses a lot of areas of advertising, the Interactive Advertising Bureau's Rich Media Task Force has composed guidelines for rich media advertising "focused on in-page and over-the page ad units."³ With these guidelines, advertisers can create advertising content compliant with the specifications that are recognized by many of the leading publishers.

An in-page ad refers to standard IAB ad unit shapes (such as 460 pixels wide by 60 pixel high banners) that may include:

"advanced rich media functionality, such as embedded games, animation, video, registration forms or interactive marketing brochures, and which may allow for larger file sizes through polite download technology."⁴

A floating ad is an ad that emerges as a layer on top of the user's current page. These are usually:

"free-form ads that can move across the page in a variety of shapes and sizes and which may "resolve" into an in-page ad on the same page or a smaller floating 'reminder' ad unit which continues to float above the page."⁴

Despite these simple descriptions, video has somewhat complicated the rich media definition. An in-page ad (such as a banner at the top of a page) can include a video by streaming content into it on a web page.⁴

As broadband continues its swift entry into both homes and business, rich media can utilize “the Internet's reach and interactivity to deliver video, voice, data and animation on a scale never seen before.”⁵ In the first quarter of 2004, rich media made up over 68% of all ad impressions. For online ad technology providers, such as DoubleClick, rich media generated 4 times the amount of click-through rates than non-rich media. It is projected that rich media ad spending in the U.S. will total \$1.26 billion this year and that in 2007 online video ad spending in the U.S. is expected to triple this year's online video ad spending of \$225 million to reach \$640 million and \$1.5 billion by 2009.⁶ According to David Hallerman, a senior analyst at eMarketer, the “growth of online video content makes the Internet more and more a place for branding advertisers.”⁶ Research has shown that ads that include online video increased “aided brand awareness by 6.2 percentage points” and brand favorability “by 3.0 percentage points.”⁶

Additional studies find that 50% of the information people see *and* hear is retained as opposed to just 10% and 20% of information being retained for what is read and heard, respectively.⁵ To help regulate and improve all facets of online video advertising to ensure continued success, the Interactive Advertising Bureau in collaboration with the American Association of Advertising Agencies released guidelines in 2005. According to these guidelines, broadband video commercials are defined as:

“online ads that appear before, during and after a variety of content, including streaming video, animation, gaming and music video content in a player environment.”⁶

Specific guidelines include limiting in-stream commercials to up to 30 seconds long for pre and mid-roll commercials and establishing the option for publishers to offer custom lengths for post-roll commercials.⁶

The benefits of online rich media advertising include convenience, customization, consistency, costs and current demand.⁷ It is convenient for the consumer because the user can view it at any time he or she desires. With behavioral targeting it can be customized in development and placement to a certain segment of the target audience. If it is particularly entertaining or interactive it will be seen and paid attention to more often. It will also be placed in a way that will make it consistent with the interests of the targeted consumer by being placed on websites that the user is most likely to visit, which also helps make the brand more consistent with the consumer's lifestyle. Finally, if a user sees an ad and realizes it is relevant, he or she has the ability to access it immediately. Without traditional size limitations, rich media provides advertisers the ability to use rich media as a mini-website and unlike its traditional formats counterparts, can track user interactions within the ads.⁸

Despite rich media's recent success, it is still hindered by cost, over-presence, and overuse.⁹ Compared to non-rich media promotions, rich media campaigns are more expensive to create and initiate. While it offers better click-through rates, the current cost of rich media advertising greatly limits itself to companies in the Fortune 1000 caliber. Rich media campaigns can also be viewed negatively by some users as interfering with and impairing Web usability. Although rich media is still novel in some ways for users, as it is increasingly being used and becomes more prevalent, like banners originally, users will increasingly become "blind" to such media.⁹ Finally, while online video is helping transform online advertising, interactive emails are also useful and advertising on mobile phone ads is a budding frontier that has the potential to shake up the advertising industry in the United States in the near future.