

# Converting Horizontal Media for Vertical Platforms

By: Eric Hernandez





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# Table of Contents

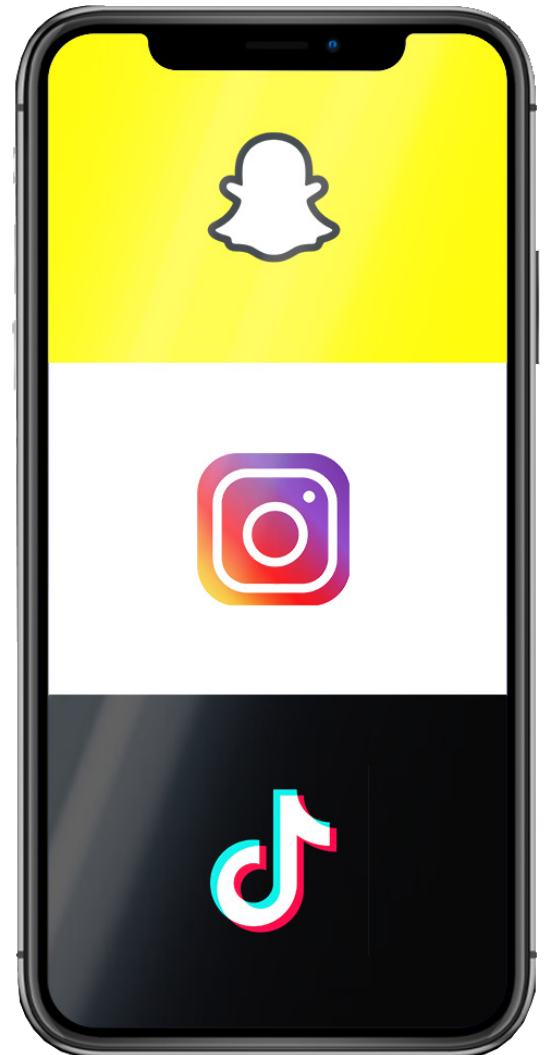
|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>                  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 2 Focusing On What Is Important</b> | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 3 Consideration Of Platform</b>     | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 4 Consideration Of Content</b>      | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 5 What Are You Keeping?</b>         | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 6 What Are You Getting Rid Of?</b>  | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 7 Putting It All Together</b>       | <b>11</b> |
| <b>Chapter 8 Vertical From The Start</b>       | <b>14</b> |
| <b>Sources Cited</b>                           | <b>17</b> |
| <b>Digital &amp; Web Versions</b>              | <b>19</b> |



# Chapter 1: Introduction

Eversince the introduction of smartphones, and more specifically the first iPhone, the shift toward vertical screens has been growing. Applications like Snapchat, Instagram, Music.ly, and now TikTok have further accelerated the popularization of vertical video displays. More people than ever are viewing most of their leisure content on their mobile phones and not classically horizontal platforms like movie theaters, televisions, or computers. The average American spends almost 3 hours on their phone everyday, the same amount of time that they are expected to spend watching television, and in a year the average American will have spent 44 days worth of time on their phones. And the world market has recognized this and shows more and more adoption of vertical platforms as a giant resource for their business. TikTok itself is expecting to bring in nearly \$12 Billion from advertisers using their platform in 2022; that is almost a third of what YouTube made in 2021 and YouTube has an 11 year advantage.

You might be thinking that virtually all mobile phones today have the ability to turn sideways into a horizontal display and the user can easily and comfortably watch a classically horizontal piece of content on their phone horizontally. You would be correct to think that is a possibility, but it has been shown that 72 percent of Millennials don't rotate their phones 90 degrees. They compromise having a smaller image and wasted screen space for the more comfortable vertical display. Researchers think this is because of the burden people feel when using the two hands that are required for



comfortably holding a phone horizontally. You only need one hand to use your phone when it is vertically oriented and the main reason people use their phones is to be comforted by entertainment, communications, etc.

So, people are determined to consume content on their phones, and they are determined to use their phones in a vertical orientation, and there is a large absence of developed methods for presenting classically horizontal media on vertical phones. This manual aims to provide methods for enhancing horizontal media's engagement on vertical platforms through the conversion of their orientation from horizontal into vertical.

## Chapter 2: Focusing On What Is Important

Vertical displays are at a disadvantage in many areas when it comes to presenting content to an audience. A tall and slender display is terrible at capturing lateral movement, multiple subjects, and large environments; or more accurately it is bad at presenting these things to human eyes. We have eyes that are side by side not on top and below, so it makes sense that when people were inventing the first video displays they opted for a horizontal display.

But, Vertical video is superior to horizontal when it comes to focusing on a subject and creating a feeling of intimacy. That is why content like talking heads on TikTok or funny home videos thrive on vertical phone applications. Vertical video is perfect at narrowing the focus of the content and keeping the focus of the viewer. So, when converting a horizontal video into a vertical video you must choose what is important for the audience to see and what can be distracting or a waste of space.

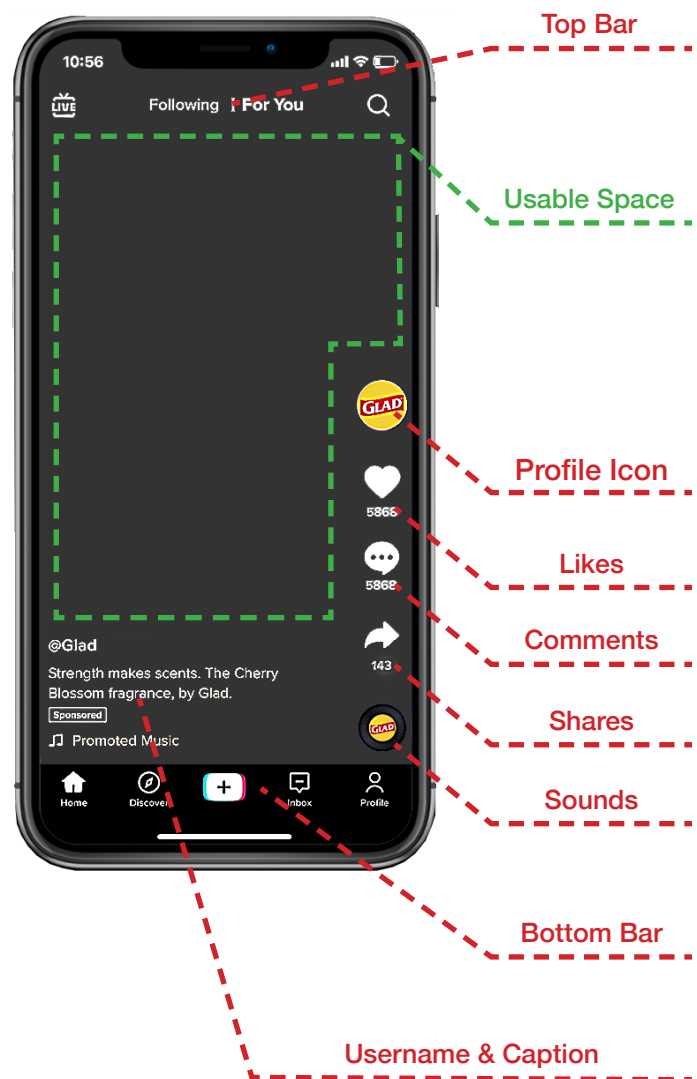




Horizontal content takes advantage of the ability to capture large amounts of subjects, lateral movement, and large environments. A football game is filmed by capturing a wide field of action where almost 10 men are lined up in a line, and that is hard to show on a phone without cutting out some of the important aspects. A television show may have a car chase scene where a vehicle may cross from the left edge of a frame all the way to the right edge of the frame. But, an award show like the Grammys or Oscars may not have a need for capturing the empty surroundings of a performer on stage or the curtains behind a presenter when they read off the winner for Best Actress. So, finding the level of focus the horizontal content requires can help you decide how to better fill a vertical frame

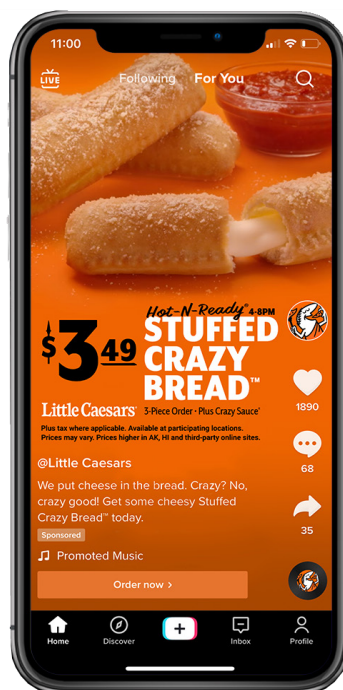
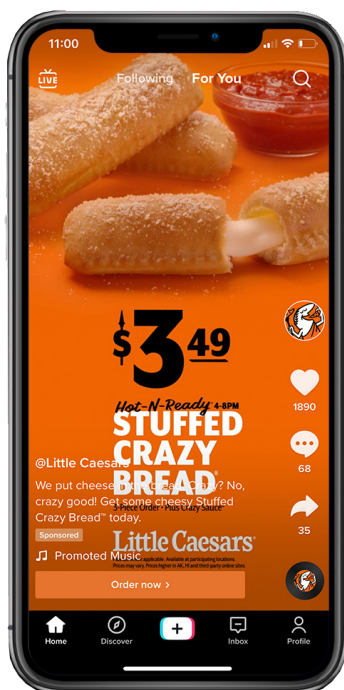
## Chapter 3: Consideration Of Platform

When converting media for vertical platforms, you must consider what platforms those are. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook have live broadcasting capabilities while applications like Snapchat don't. Also, Facebook and Twitter have a large portion of content that is horizontal and doesn't seem to be a mainly vertical platform. TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat are largely vertical platforms with only the rare horizontal content appearing. And all of these platforms have overlaying graphics that block out screen real estate. Usually the display frame is a 16:9 frame with some indentions cut out of the top and bottom for features like usernames, captions, liking, commenting, sharing, sounds, and of course the bottom bar reserved for all the app's pages; feed, searching, posting, messaging, shopping, profile page, etc. So you must design for a frame that is tall and also concave.



It is noticeable in company's advertising on the platforms that they frame the important aspects of a video with the overlaying graphics in mind. The most prominent practice is to put any embedded text at the top of the frame so that the application's overlays don't block or cover the text making it illegible to the audience. This KIND bar advertisement shows this with the text being at the top of the frame and the areas behind the graphic overlays being content that the viewer can infer successfully what is there; background, extensions of subjects, etc.

Corporate and non-corporate creators on these vertical platforms also have figured out how to offset their embedded text so that it is not knocked out by the overlays. There is also the possibility of moving the embedded text over to the left when the overlay covers the right edge of frame; this practice is more common with non-corporate content creators and with companies that want to seem more personal and approachable. Not considering the platforms can prove to be detrimental to getting your message across in the few seconds of screen time that the content has to capture the viewer's attention. This Little Caesars advertisement shows a failure to consider overlay graphics into the design of their content, and this can result in half of their message being lost. A better layout of this specific Little Caesars advertisement could look like this if using offset methods.



There is also a large difference in the layout of the regular on-demand content that appears on TikTok's "For You" page or in Instagram Reels, and that of Live content that has different features. Live features on applications like TikTok and Instagram have features to hide graphic overlays, so you can design live content to utilize the entire 16:9 frame. But, be careful with utilizing screen area that appears behind overlays, because if the content isn't immediately recognizable when a user lands on the broadcast when they are surfing their feed then you could lose possible viewers. So, you can put useful information there while also making sure that vital information is still visible when overlays are not hidden.

## Chapter 4: Consideration of Content

Different types of content can have different types of framing requirements. Sometimes horizontal media doesn't require any framing changes and sometimes it does.

In Chapter 2, it was said that content like award shows don't require framing changes. The Grammys for example is composed of presenting of awards, speeches, and performances. Both of which don't require re-framing apart from zooming in to fill the screen. This is partly because most of the content is audio and the visuals are secondary and also because the original television framing tends to frame the subject in the center; already framed for vertical video. But, you can add offsets that make the video fill a frame that is less slender while also utilizing the offsetting area for graphics.





Horizontal media that require more drastic conversion are more common. Any movie or television most definitely utilizes the entirety of a horizontal frame; it could be easier and more cost effective to simply have the horizontal frame presented in the vertical frame with the black bars. Even then, there can be opportunity to fill the frame with channel graphics, or a zoomed in frame. Any additional usage of the frame is an improvement from the use of black bars.



When there are graphic overlays in the horizontal media there is opportunity to utilize those graphics in ways that fill the vertical frame better. A sporting event for example has a score bug, the graphic that displays the information like the score, player name, and statistics. Graphics like these can be used in new arrangements to better fill the frame. The score bug can move to the top of the frame and be altered to be taller rather than wider. This conversion displays putting text at the top of the frame and reshuffling existing graphics to better fit a vertical frame.



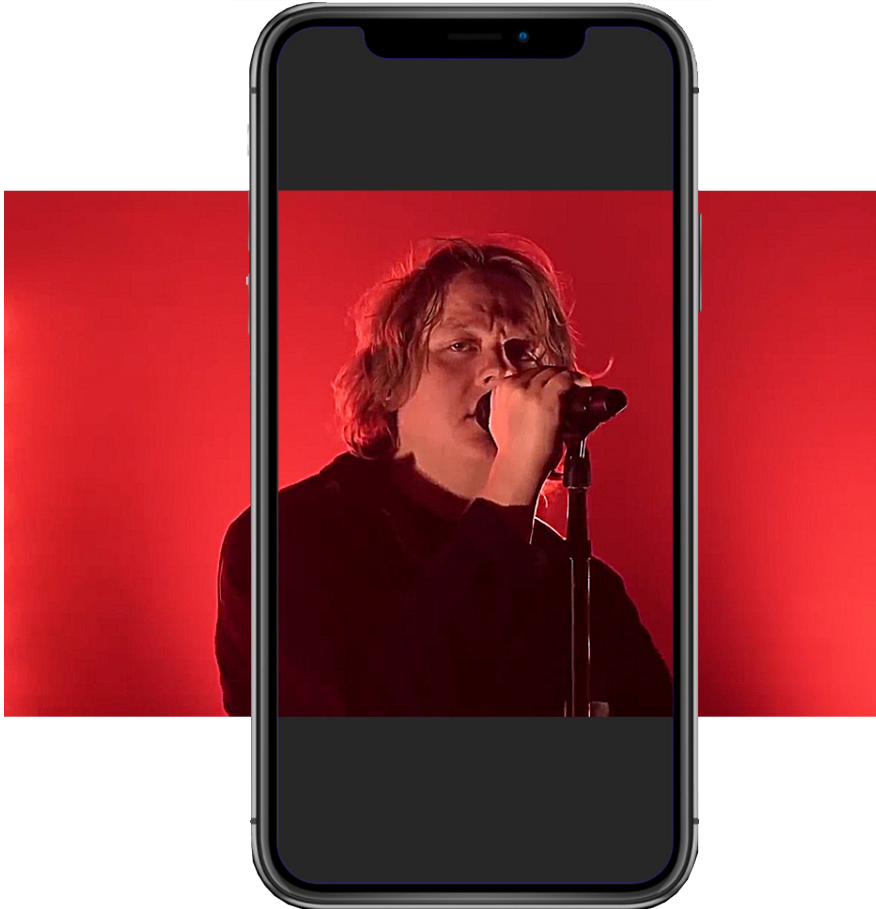
Best case scenario would be a piece of horizontal content that has multiple camera angles or feeds that can be stacked to fill a vertical frame. Not only does this allow for filling the frame with more video, it also gives the viewer more opportunity to comprehend the content. ESPN, along with other sports media, regularly has multi-cam broadcasts like “Command Center” and personality involved feeds like “Monday Night Football with Peyton and Eli”. Multi-cam content can fill a frame that better engages an audience and better delivers the media.

If classic television ever enters the social-media-live-broadcast market then advertisements and commercials need to be considered as well as the main content. If the bare minimum of conversion is enacted, black bars or generic channel/programming graphics, then it is as simple as not doing anything. But if the media is re-framed or redesigned then there can be many ways to convert advertising. First, with the large amounts of different advertisers and commercials it would be easiest to have the whole horizontal frame displayed with black bars or generic graphics surrounding. Alternatively, and preferably, the advertisers could provide vertically conceived advertising that they would use on vertical platforms.

# Chapter 5: What Are You Keeping?

When converting horizontal media into vertical media you don't only have to add new graphics and information you also have to rearrange the assets that come from original content. Aspects of the original content like channel/creator, graphic overlays, etc. can be important for the original platform. Television shows usually have a channel watermark in a corner of the frame and this aspect of the original content may prove to be useless on vertical platforms like TikTok or Instagram where the application puts the company name on the content already. So, you must be decisive when considering what you are keeping from the original source material.

Obviously you need to keep the subject of the content; the ball in a sports broadcast, performers in a musical production, or a news anchor on the news. And you most definitely need to try to include any written text on screen; like news headlines, sports scores/stats, etc.. The nature of vertical video warrants cutting out backgrounds and cropping the image to the point where a subject's body is beyond the frame's boundaries. Media like VMAs can fill a vertical frame by cropping out the background empty space and using the subject to fill most of the frame. Again, vertical frames are successful with creating intimate and focused content so be sure to frame subjects with the focus solely on the subjects.





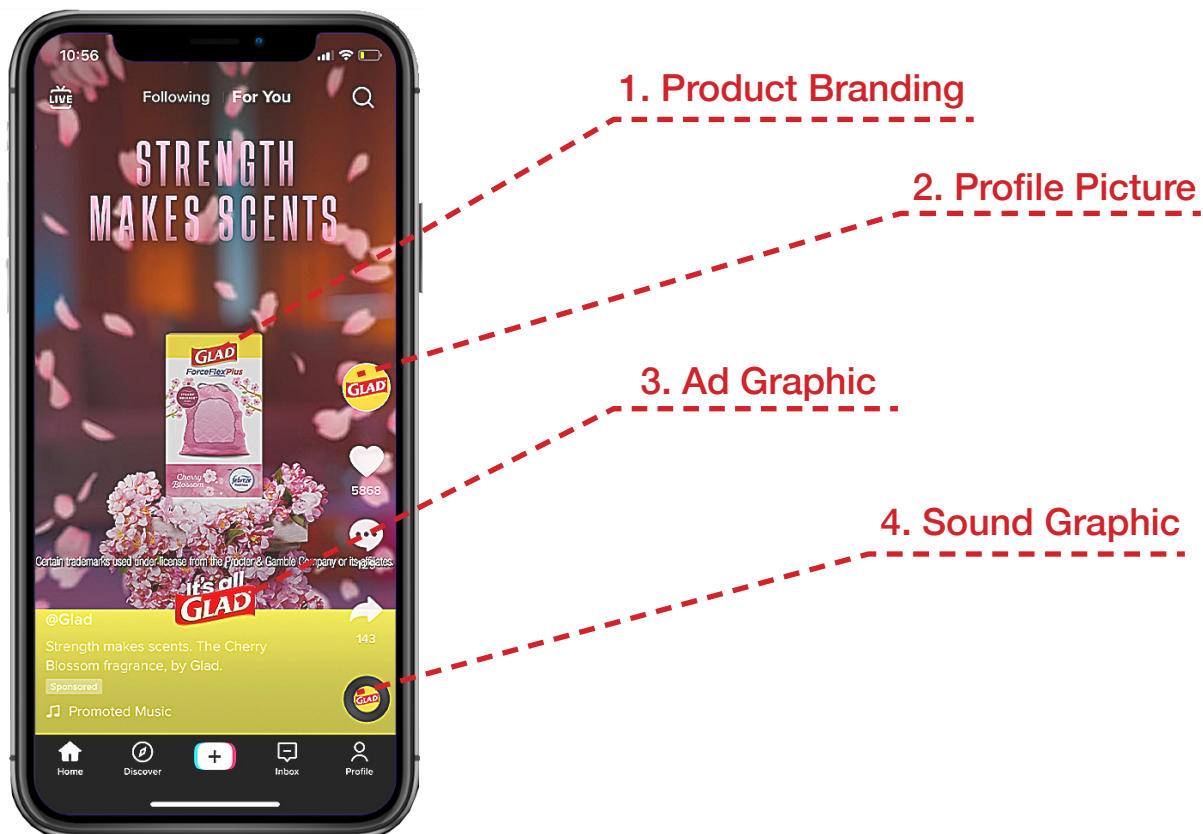
There may be some identifiable aspects of media that can catch the audience's eye and could keep them from going on to the next thing. Things like news channels' tickers that distinguish that media as a specific type of media should be kept in the conversion so the audience can quickly recognize.

You also might be required to include advertisements in the aspects that you keep in the conversion. If you are doing this for a company who has contractual obligations you may be required to bring over the advertisement graphics.

## Chapter 6: What Are You Getting Rid Of?

When converting horizontal media into vertical media you would be forgiven if you include every single graphic or camera angle. There are many reasons for keeping aspects of the original, but there are also many failings from keeping everything.

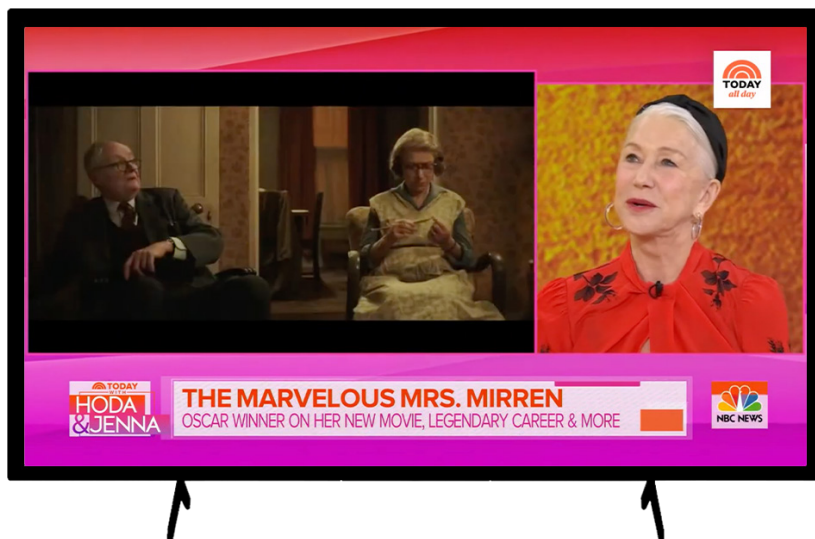
But, including every single aspect of the original content can clutter the converted content and also create repetitive graphics. Companies like to put their branding all over their product, and horizontal media is included. A show can have the channel logo on the watermark in the corner and on the graphics somewhere else. If you include both company logos you will end up with three repetitive logos in the frame, with the application profile picture feature. Shy away from being repetitive and make sure there isn't wasted space because your frame is small.



Horizontal media also tends to have trouble fitting in different content in the frame. On the Today Show when they are having an interview with a movie maker promoting a new film they may show both the interviewee and clips from the movie in the same frame; along with a headline and channel graphics. This causes the professional designers at NBC Universal to use filler background graphics. You should most definitely exclude these background graphics in your vertical conversion. But, these background graphics can be useful for creating a cohesive theme from horizontal to vertical media.



Filler Space





# Chapter 7: Putting It All Together

In this chapter, I will show examples of a complete workflow of converting horizontal media into vertical media, step by step.

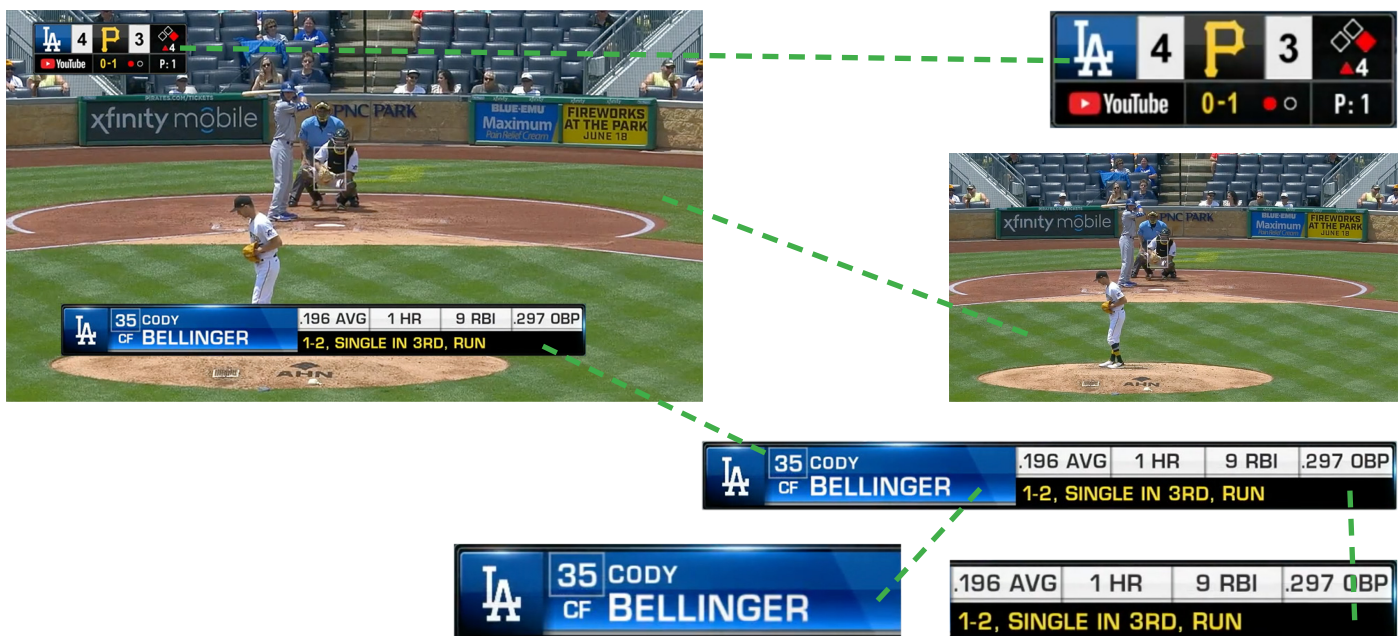
## Step 1: Analyze your Horizontal Media

What does your media warrant in terms of framing. Is there a large group of people or a wide environment? If so, then a design that has surrounding graphics would best suit it. Is there a narrow focus, like a orator or singular subject? If so, then a drastic cropping of the frame is adequate.



## Step 2: Separate The Media's Components

In order to know what your going to make you need to know what ingredients you have at your disposal. Most media is simply a video without graphics, but media like sports broadcasts, advertisements, news channels, etc, have overlaying graphics that should be brought over in the conversion.



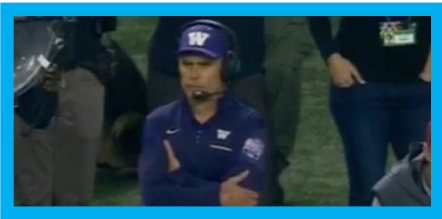
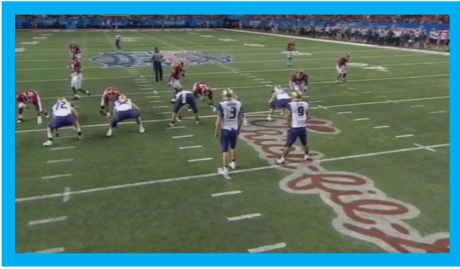
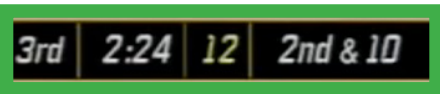
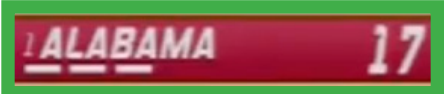
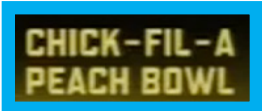
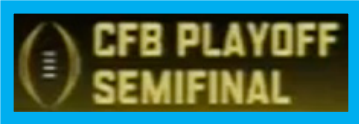
Step 3: Choose What You Use

Most of the time, every graphic in horizontal media is vital for the viewing experience. The score, titling, branding, statistics, etc. But, sometimes with special broadcast there are an overabundance of visuals that play well on a widescreen TV and don't work when seen on a phone. You must decide what is necessary and find a way to use it in your conversion.

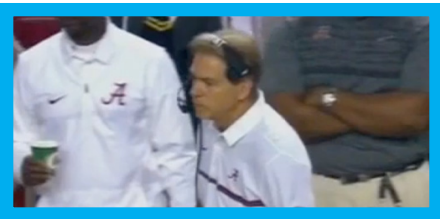
Vital

Useful

Unneeded



| WASHINGTON | ALABAMA         |
|------------|-----------------|
| 54         | Rush Yards      |
| 83         | Pass Yards      |
| 137        | Total Yards     |
| 9          | First Downs     |
| 4/11       | 3rd Down Conv   |
| 1/5        | Penalties/Yards |
| 2          | Turnovers       |
|            | 169             |
|            | 41              |
|            | 210             |
|            | 12              |
|            | 3/11            |
|            | 8/45            |
|            | 0               |





## Step 4: Try Out Different Practices

There are different end results when converting horizontal media into vertical. There are different types of graphic offsetting; top-offset, left-offset, etc. Both may work for some conversions while only one will work for other conversions. You can also prioritize things differently; like putting the graphics in the middle of the screen opposed to putting the graphics at the top of the screen. With the shuffling around of the media's elements, there is a variability in the order of how you place those elements.



## Step 5: Deciding What Your Going With

If you have many options of your developed conversion you will have to decide on a deliverable. A supervisor may make the choice for you, or you may make the decision yourself. Nevertheless, make the choice on your conversion with the new platform experience in mind. These practices were developed with the idea of improving the engagement of horizontal media on vertical platforms; not for improving horizontal media.

# Chapter 8: Vertical From The Start

Now, converting horizontal media into vertical media with these practices is better than simply putting horizontal media on a vertical platform, but the ideal situation is making classically horizontal media vertically from the start. In the future the Super Bowl may be broadcast simultaneously on television and TikTok. So, the hurdles in the conversion path may be nonexistent.

Camera operators at live events would now have vertical displays in mind when framing the events and the graphics of shows will have vertical versions that seamlessly work with the equipment they use for horizontal media. When the headline changes and the breaking news story comes up, the graphics cues sent from the control room will trigger different graphic layouts for the different frame orientations.

More people are using their phones as their main source of content engagement and the quality of this content will most definitely rise to the levels of classic media. Watching silly social media videos is no longer seen as dumb entertainment, but it is now a platform that all professional organizations use and use with great care. Because with the vast amount of people that use vertical platforms and with the quantity of time in which they do so, there is opportunity for business to be done.





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