



Say It with a GIF



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The GIF has evolved from a primitive storytelling format catering to low bandwidth connections to one that offers brands the opportunity to stand out.

Most of us have experienced the limits of the written word when communicating via social, emails and IM. When this happens, we look to photos and videos to express our emotions and reactions.

When 29-year-old Ida Medici discovered the new summer music program at Denmark's legendary Copenhagen concert hall, [Pumpehuset](#), she wanted to tell everyone how great it was. Her first step was to type "excited" into [GIPHY](#), an online database that allows users to find and share animated GIF files. There she found a GIF showing [New Girl](#)'s Zooey Deschanel sitting in front of a computer waving her arms in excitement. It would be the

perfect accompaniment to her tweet about Pumpehuset.

GIFs are part of everyday communication for Ida, both personally and professionally. She uses them in chat and social media instead of images and memes – and sites like GIPHY make the process quick and easy.

GIFs then and now

Using GIFs the way Ida does shows just how far the format has come since CompuServe's [Steve Wilhite](#) launched the "Graphics Interchange Format" in 1987. The thoroughly unsexy-sounding file format represented a huge leap forward, offering new graphical capabilities while retaining a compressed format that slow, dial-up modems could easily load.

It took another two years for the GIF to evolve into the familiar construct of multiple frames that play in sequence within a single image file. The new GIF format won quick success as an ingredient in "under construction" signs, flames, rotating hard hats and yelling dinosaurs. Then there was the envelope flying into a mailbox to call attention to an incoming email. These were the days when companies were still helping consumers familiarize themselves with websites, and the attention-grabbing nature of the format made it a great tool. Marketers soon began adding movement to banner ads, and the GIF became the predecessor to flash.

All of these reasons for the format's early success contributed to its subsequent failure. Internet design matured, and GIFs became the posterchild for a dated feature that was guaranteed to make you look uncool in any conversation.

Today, GIFs hold renewed value. As something between a video and a photo, the format can cut through a surfing experience characterized by limited attention, shrinking screen size and a flood of content. One need only look to GIPHY for signal of the GIF's popularity; since the site's founding in 2013, it has served more than half a trillion GIFs and monthly unique visitors hover around 150 million.

The native format

According to [Nick Hasty](#), GIPHY's Head of Engineering, the most avid GIF users are in

South America and the US, and 80% of all GIFs served (via GIPHY) feature TV, movie and celebrity personalities and/or references. This creates an opportunity for brands to liven up their digital dialogue with consumers. GIFs can be truly mesmerizing and have the ability to tell a story in just a few seconds. The perfectly placed and timed GIF can make virtually any message more visual and expressive.

There are generally three ways that a brand can think about creating and socializing their own GIFs, according to Sabrina Pacheco, Head of Partnerships at GIPHY:

- Turn existing video content into GIFs
- Craft bespoke GIFs designed to express specific moments, emotions or values of relevance to the brand
- Launch GIFs in real time to give attendees at live events something to share quickly and easily (rather than consuming gobs of memory trying to post video)

Each of these approaches can be effective. By swapping out static social media content for GIFs, The History Channel generated a 370% increase in engagement for [Vikings](#) between the show's second and third seasons. And when GSK posted a custom unit to its social channels – a GIF of a glass bottle pouring sparkling water into a full glass – it exceeded every performance metric it had in place. The humble GIF has even become an art form in its own right, with various institutions and contemporary art [museums](#) exhibiting the best GIFs produced by talented young graphic artists.

By nature, the GIF is a small, usually unimposing thing – a tactic of a tactic in the average marketing plan. Just don't forget about it when you're looking for a small, easy way to give an idea just a bit of juice

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