

Production Techniques: Apple iPod Commercial

Natalie Kwong

A human silhouette clutching a tiny white iPod dances energetically against a solid, brightly-colored backdrop. The camera cuts to another shadowy figure, and the wall of color flashes to a new vibrant hue. For thirty seconds, this dance party rolls on to the upbeat tune of “Rock Star,” by N.E.R.D.. The simple advertisement is geared towards a young, hip audience, and its obvious purpose is to persuade viewers to purchase an iPod.

As a production element, color plays a major role in this commercial. At any given time, only three colors appear on screen: the vivid background color, the black silhouetted figure, and the white iPod. Because black and white exist on opposite ends of the color spectrum, the shadowy figures contrast highly with the Apple device. Background colors range from lime green to hot pink to bright cyan blue and change frequently with the beat of the music in the form of a metric montage. These bold, solid backdrops intensify contrasting hues.

Camera techniques are another type of production element used in this commercial. The ad features a combination of close up, medium, and long shots of dancers. Shadows grooving to music across the screen act as directional forces for the eye. In addition, producers draw on editing techniques such as fast cuts and special effects such as zooming in and out. As a result of zooming, the camera appears to trail the movement of the iPod in the individual’s hands. Lastly, Apple presents minimal text in the commercial; rather than providing a lengthy description of their product, the company chooses to display only its logo coupled with the words, “iPod” and “iTunes.”

Production elements serve to direct attention, create mood, and sell a lifestyle. Firstly, a simple, clean color scheme allows the white iPod to stand out like a radiant light as the central

element of the advertisement. The use of shadowing also controls emphasis; the silhouetted figure deemphasizes the importance of the individual in the ad and directs the viewer's attention to the featured product. It eliminates possible distractions such as clothes, faces, and environment, and it highlights—both literally and metaphorically—the iPod.

Camera techniques help to recreate a party-like atmosphere in the commercial. For example, varying fields of view depict dancers from both near and afar. The close-up shots of bobbing heads and shuffling feet transport the audience from spectators in living rooms to participants on the dance floor. In addition to featuring the iPod, vectors and zooming accentuate swift and spontaneous dance moves. Sudden cuts and fast-paced, beat-driven music contribute to a lively mood as well.

The distinct production techniques in this commercial also serve to sell a lifestyle. While not yet recognized among common audiences, N.E.R.D.'s song, "Rock Star," is just cool and catchy enough to gain mainstream appeal. Thus, this carefully selected track speaks to the trendsetters; to those individuals who are always one step ahead of the pack. Furthermore, it suggests that as a consumer, you can join that exclusive club by owning an iPod. By intentionally omitting text, Apple reinforces this aforementioned lifestyle, loudly communicating the message that if you don't "get" the iPod without an explanation, you're probably not hip enough to have one. Using this production technique, Apple also draws on the credibility that lies in its symbolic logo.

Physically, silhouettes in the ad are featureless, but bold hair styles and distinct choreography clearly convey a specific personality: dynamic individuals who are hip, confident, and independent. The ambiguity of these figures encourages diverse audiences to project

themselves into the commercial. In addition, bright splashes of color in the background scream excitement, youth, and fun.

Apple's ultimate goal is to sell the iPod; in this respect, the commercial is highly effective. The ad does not simply generate awareness of a product; rather, production elements operate to create a desired lifestyle that can be attained by buying an iPod. The indistinct nature of the shadowy figures allows the consumer to become one of the "cool kids" with the iconic white gadget—it is beside the point that you've never seen anybody in real life dancing like a maniac with an iPod in hand. Apple's carefully-chosen color palette is arguably the most important production element in its commercial. Color distinguishes the iPod from any other brand; when audiences see bright white ear buds against a harsh black silhouette and bright backdrop, they know that the individual is listening to an iPod without ever laying eyes on the actual device—that brand distinction Apple has created using the element of color is what makes the ad so effective.

"iPod Rock Star (Jason Nevins Remix) - N.E.R.D." 30 Oct 2006. Online video clip. YouTube. 20 Nov 2008 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfRHt1SKF_I>.