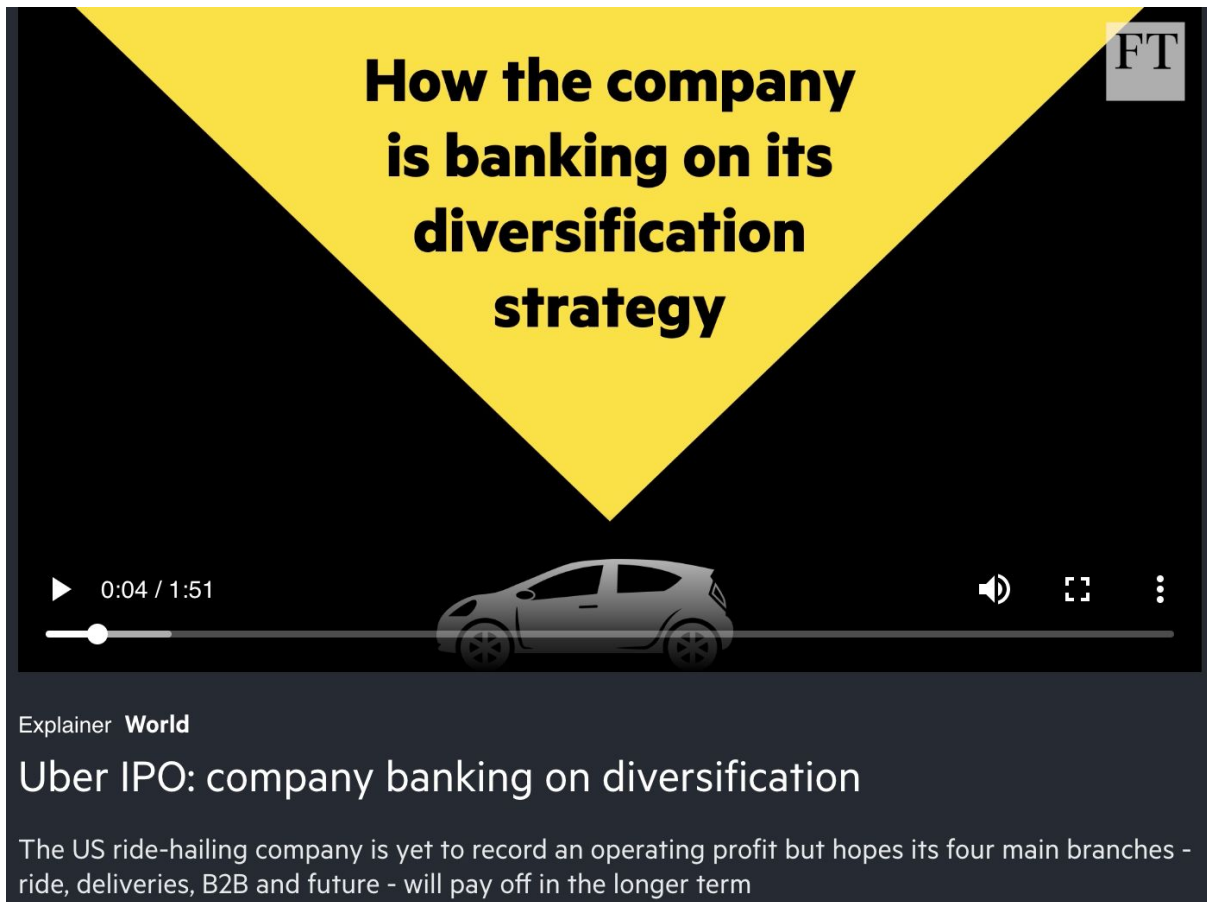# FT Story Playbook: Animated Explainers

([Link to the Uber IPO Explainer](#))

What is it?

Animated explainers are short videos that explain a concept or series of events that can be better understood using motion or strong design.

They can be embedded into Methode stories, and used on social media and on YouTube.

Most do not require narration and can be played without sound, although we do use sound effects and/or music.

They are between one and two minutes long, ideally. As a rule of thumb, that means a script that is about 1-2 pages of a googledoc set at 14 pt (3pt larger than the size you're currently reading)

Don't feel like reading? Watch this instead: [What is an animated explainer?](#)

Where can I find it?

Unlike the other Story Playbook options, animated explainers are not in Methode. You will need to work on a script with the design and video teams: Use the templated script to outline what you would like the piece to explain.

The design team (Kevin Wilson, Kari-Ruth Pedersen, Chris Tosic) will then tell you whether the idea works as an animated explainer, or if there are better and quicker ways to do it. They will also tell you whether the team has the capacity to take on the project.

What is it good for?

The best Animated Explainers are
- Simple
- Structured
- Short

They use illustrations, graphics and brief, punchy sentences. They work well for:

- Timelines/background to a story
- Describing processes, complex transactions or company structures
- Delivering the background to an ongoing story, as they can be embedded in many places to get the reader up to speed
- Any story which involves astonishing numbers

It helps to think of visual explainers as the answer to a question:

For example: What exactly does Uber do besides ride-hailing? How did Amazon decide on its new HQ?. How do Indian elections work? What is the timeline of the Brexit process now?

What is it not good for?
- Very complicated concepts which cannot easily be broken down into steps
- One-off stories

Visual explainers require the time of the busy design team, so please be judicious in commissioning. Ask yourself whether the explainer can be embedded or promoted repeatedly.

What are good examples we have made in the past?

Uber IPO explainer
US-China tariffs in numbers
European Parliament explainer

[Amazon HQ2 explainer](#)

How long does it take to make?

Visual explainers are often multi-day projects, taking into account the amount of work needed on the part of the reporter, editor, design and video teams. However, if all stakeholders are involved from the start, the projects can move faster.

Detailed Production Guide

Who do I need to talk to?

Once you have an idea, it is best to run it by the video team (Veronica Kan-Dapaah, Joe Sinclair in London, or Ben Marino in US and Tom Griggs in HK via _____@ft.com). Once the project is approved, they will work with you on the script and also liaise and work with the design team (Kevin Wilson, Kari-Ruth Pedersen, Chris Tosic).

What do I do?

1. Check with the video team that they do not already have a video planned for your story or other strategy concerns. They can schedule the publishing for the optimum time.

2. Talk to the Audience Engagement team to find out whether there are popular reader queries we can make sure the content answers (and so the animated explainer becomes discoverable in search).

3. Talk to the design team, who can help you work out how to tell the story visually and whether it's worth animating it. They can talk about the kind of images and charts we already have in place and can discuss what else could be needed.

4. Write the script and send it to the video team. Make it as succinct as possible. They will help to make it screen/internet-friendly. Commission any extra charts. Please add links to the stories you're drawing on for the explainer, as extra information often helps build a better video

It's best to have one final storyboarding discussion at this point.

5. Ask someone on digital publishing to revise the script for style and accuracy at this stage.

6. The design team will share the animation with you and the video team for one final pass where we can tweak timings etc.

7. It is passed to the video team, for the addition of music, sound effects, bugs and stings, who will be able to send a video UUID.

A quick note about headlines

Because these are explainers, using formats like 'How' or 'Why' is really the way to go. So 'How Uber is banking on diversification for its IPO' or 'Why car companies are turning green' etc. give a good sense of what the video is about in a clear and simple way.

The other thing to keep in mind is that names of companies, countries or currencies the video is about should be high in the headline for SEO purposes. Hence: 'How **Uber** is banking on …' 'Why the **Canada Dollar** …', etc..

The video team usually writes the headline and description. But feel free to talk to Alice Kantor (_____@ft.com) from audience engagement about the optimal headline to suggest. Remember it will be embedded in FT.com stories as well as appear on YouTube and social media platforms.

If you run into trouble…

Talk to Robin Kwong (_____@ft.com), Claire Manibog (_____@ft.com), Kari-Ruth Pedersen (_____@ft.com), or the creative producer on your desk

Other Story Playbook Templates

[Profile cards](#)
[Charticle](#)
[Timeline Story](#)
[Reader Response](#)
[Photo Essay](#)