

Video Goes Viral

By: John Gartner

Using video as part of your online marketing message should be a given. Here's how to get started.

Thanks to social networking sites such as YouTube, online video has quickly become an everyday part of the online experience. While marketers have been slow to capitalize on video so far, the low cost of producing content and potential for increasing reach will make it essential to performance marketing.

The audience that watches Web video skews younger, but nearly everyone online is doing it. According to market research firm comScore, nearly 75 percent of U.S. Internet users watched video during the month of May, viewing more than 8.3 billion video streams. Consumers are interacting with video more frequently in a wide variety of destinations, from "newspaper" websites to social networking to blogs. The most popular viral videos can garner millions of views, and video ads have proven to be more effective than their static counterparts in prompting user actions.

In 2008, more than half of the total U.S. population will be watching video online, according to eMarketer, and advertisers will spend more than \$775 million in 2007 on video ads, up 89 percent over the previous year.

Since interactive video will catch and hold viewers' attention longer, marketers

are beginning to use the technology in four ways: on their primary websites; on microsites designed for specific campaigns; syndicating them through advertising networks; and releasing them to video search engines in the hopes that they go viral. The first step is to create professional and compelling content.

The Medium and the Message

Video starts with a camera, and MiniDV (digital video) is the industry standard format for recording video on tape. MiniDV or hard-drive-based cameras are the best match for transferring video to a PC. To make it easy to transfer the video to a computer for editing, the camera should be able to record in MPEG 2 or 4 format and pass it through a FireWire (also known as IEEE 1394) or USB 2.0 (universal serial bus) connection.

These cameras range in cost from a few hundred to several thousand dollars depending on the features, including optical zoom; size of the LCD panel to preview the video; and the technology used to steady the image. Sony, Panasonic and Canon offer high-quality digital video cameras at a variety of price points and options.

For companies that want to tell a personal story in a vlog style, Jim Kukral, who blogs about using video at HowToDoVideo.com, recommends purchasing a set

of lights that cost between \$150 and \$400 and a photo background (or green screen) that sells for approximately \$50. Kukral, who produces videos and distributes them via YouTube, also recommends buying a tripod to provide a steadier image than with handheld shooting.

Kukral says videos about a company provide a more personal experience than blogs, and posting them on YouTube can drive traffic to your website. Publishers can "engage customers and illustrate things with video as opposed to [relying on] bullet points," he says. Kukral posted videos on YouTube with tips on creating videos that generated new clients, several of whom commented that from his videos they "got the feeling that I knew you."

Editing software ranges from free to more than

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\$1,000, depending on the sophistication of the special effects. Macs include the intuitive iMovie, which provides basic functions for cutting and splicing together clips, adding titles and controlling sound. Similarly, Windows Vista PCs include a drag-and-drop video-editing application, Windows Movie Maker 6.

QuickTime 7 Pro (\$29.99) is available for Mac OS X and for Windows, and includes more sound- and video- editing features, including the ability to export videos to iPhones. SimpleMovieX (\$30) from Aero Quartet is a QuickTime competitor for Macs that works with more formats and larger files.

Marketers willing to learn more sophisticated programs so that they can add effects such as modifying the lighting, integrating multiple audio tracks and working with more file formats have several not-so-inexpensive options (see sidebar on page 048). Adobe Flash is becoming ubiquitous as a browser-friendly application that enables publishers to integrate interactive elements into their videos.

Kukral says the biggest mistake companies make in creating videos is insufficient branding. Videos should introduce the company at the beginning and reinforce the brand within the content.

For videos that are distributed outside of a corporate website, adding the URL in a title card at the end of the video is recommended. The videos should also be tagged

with the URL and contact information, and keywords should be added to optimize the videos for search engines.

Marketing videos can range from a few seconds to several minutes in length depending on the type of content and target audience. Keeping the message short is essential to retaining the viewer, according to Michael Hines, the U.S. manager for network Zanox. Videos that are to be distributed as ads "can't be 30 seconds long," Hines

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says. He recommends that video ads be no longer than 10-15 seconds in length, while videos that introduce a company or illustrate a technology can be longer.

Publishers looking to create video marketing content without investing in editing software or expertise can refine their videos with a drag-anddrop online tool. Launched in August, Digital Canvas is a Flash-based service from Fлимп Media that integrates interactive elements into a marketing microsite, according to

company CEO Wayne Wall. These customized pages, also called flimps, can be shared as viral content, and built-in tracking mechanisms enable measuring their effectiveness, Wall says. The videos can tell the story of a company, or be used as an interactive component of marketing collateral, he adds.

Companies that lack video expertise or desire the highest-quality production values should consider using a video production service familiar with the optimizing content for the Web. Many of the companies that produce corporate training videos or video news releases are adding online services, with costs ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars depending on the complexity of the shoot.

Putting Videos Online

Putting videos online that have been created on a website is not difficult, but finding an audience for them often requires manually uploading them to other sites or hiring someone to do so for you.

Videos in the most common formats (MPEG, QuickTime and Windows Media) can be embedded on Web pages with a minimum of coding. As a more sophisticated alternative, embedding a Flash player on a site provides access to multiple videos and enables publishers to link to other interactive components or Web content.

For publishers with substantial traffic, adding videos provides an opportunity to retain visitors

and to satisfy those who would rather watch than read content. If the videos become a runaway success, however, you may need to purchase additional bandwidth from your Internet service provider. Although the video quality can be compromised, uploading videos to YouTube and embedding their video on your site can reduce Web-hosting costs, according to video guru Kukral.

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If you want videos to drive traffic to your website, they need to be optimized for search engines and syndicated through a growing number of video-hosting and search sites. As part of the upload process for submitting videos to search sites such as YouTube, Revver, DailyMotion and Blip.tv, and syndication sites including Veoh, Brightcove and Maven, publishers fill out forms on each site and enter tags, descriptions and keywords. This painstaking process can take hours to reach just the most highly trafficked sites.

Companies such as TurnHere and Medialink work with networks of local video production companies to create the content and will also take care of the upload and submission process to sites including Google, AOL, MSN and Yahoo.

Through a partnership with RSS distribution company Pheedo, TurnHere distributes content to sites looking to add video, including blogs such as BlogCritics and AlarmClock, and publishers including Slashdot, Red Herring, InformationWeek and ABCNews, according to CEO Brad Inman. Inman says travel, automotive companies and book publishers are among the early adopters marketing through online videos. TurnHere client Simon & Schuster has created hundreds of videos with authors talking about their latest books, and Inman says the top authors' videos are viewed 50,000 times per month.

Local publishers are beginning to experiment with using video to tell their stories directly to customers. Superpages and CitySearch have recently introduced videos into their local listings. Marketing videos are "... really about long tail – not about a million streams, but [marketers] want 100 relevant streams," Inman says. He recommends local business owners get in front of the camera because "no one can tell their story better."

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awareness and drive traffic to your website. Medialink, which has more than 20 years of experience in connecting companies with print and broadcast media, has video distribution services that start at \$2,500. Medialink will host and present a video online and distribute it to local and national media including bloggers, and will also distribute the videos to aggregation and syndication sites, according to COO Larry Thomas.

In the fall of 2007, Medialink is launching Mediaseed, a Web platform that hosts and optimizes corporate marketing and communications materials for distribution. The platform contains tracking features for measuring a video marketing initiative's reach online as well as on broadcast TV.

While accurately labeling videos will increase exposure on YouTube and the other top video sites, how to optimize content for video or general search engines remains largely a mystery. Google's incorporation of video results into its universal search will increase the exposure of videos, but search engine marketers are still catching up.

Browsing videos and referrals from other users remain the most common methods by which people discover new videos. Being found on video search engines is not that easy, according to TurnHere's Inman. People had a "false sense several months ago that 'I can create a video and have it go viral on YouTube and it will go big,'" according to Inman. The reality is that

most videos submitted to video sites will languish in obscurity. "The key is to start creating and experimenting," he says. Search engines will take 18 months to catch on to the importance of video and properly index the content, according to Zanox's Hines.

This fall Zanox will launch Zanox.tv, where publishers can post videos that will be used to attract partners. "The intent is to allow publishers to do an alternative to a text ad to encourage people to join as an affiliate," says Hines. The video ads will likely pay on a cost-per-action basis, with Zanox and publishers sharing the revenue, according to Hines.

Ad Networks Monetize Video

Advertising networks are matching content companies with publishers large and small who are looking to use video to increase their audience. Startup video ad network Affiliated.net is betting on a new video advertisement form opening a door into affiliate marketing. The borderless videos hover next to content and feature an actor or actress pitching a product or service. Since the video ads reside in the pixels along the edges of a Web page, publishers don't have to give up their existing ads, according to Affiliated.net president Chris Skretvedt.

The videos, which range in length from 30 seconds to 5 minutes and will be paid for by Affiliated.net, are created to prompt user action such as generating leads or making a

purchase, Skretvedt says. The ads launched in August and are to be sold on a CPA basis. The company is pursuing relationships with the major affiliate networks.

Tremor Media has combined forces with video distribution company ClipSyndicate to match content with relevant advertising. Tremor Media inserts in-stream ads with videos from sites such as DrPhil.com and making the content available to publishers, according to

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vice president of publisher relations Daniel Scherer.

Scherer says online video is hampered by a lack of technical standards in how to publish content. De facto standards for formats exist, but there is "no standard that supports integration of in-stream dynamic advertising," he says. Content owners today are stuck in the struggle between controlling the advertising and monetizing their videos,

according to Scherer. "The big puzzle is the upside-down reliance on YouTube," he says. If you want a video to be popular, put it on YouTube, but then you can't monetize it; and if you want to control the ads, then you can't put it on YouTube, says Scherer. Within the next year, YouTube parent Google is expected to roll out a new video advertising service to address this problem.

Another opportunity for monetizing videos is to make them interactive so that the products featured within can be highlighted and sold via performance marketing. VideoClix provides technology that makes areas of a video clickable, according to Brent Stafford, the vice president of business development. "If you don't make [your ads] interactive, you are underutilizing the medium," he says. VideoClix has created ads for Levi's and Honda, and shares revenue through CPA, CPC or CPM campaigns.

Once the science of increasing the search rankings of video has been significantly refined, publishers will rapidly increase their efforts to acquire or produce videos to place on their website. This strategy will be similar to how images of celebrities or top search terms are currently used to attract an audience, and will assure video's place in the spotlight. ■

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