

IPOD VIDEO

HOW TO MAKE YOUR VIDEO GO VIRAL



CONTENTS

IPOD VIDEO	1
HOW TO MAKE YOUR VIDEO GO VIRAL	1
CONTENTS.....	2
INTRODUCTION	
VIRAL VIDEOS, A DEFINITION.....	5
1	
CONTENT: WHAT GOES INTO A VIRAL VIDEO?	
.....	6
<i>TUTORIALS</i>	7
<i>GET TOPICAL</i>	8
.....	8
<i>THE INTERNET'S FUNNIEST HOME VIDEOS</i>	8
.....	8
<i>ANIMALS, KIDS AND BABIES</i>	8
.....	8
<i>STAR WARS</i>	9
.....	9
2	
THE HOOK: GRABBING THE VIEWER'S ATTENTION	
.....	10
THE FIRST TEN SECONDS	11
.....	11
TRIAL RUN.....	11
3	
TARGETING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE	13
STAY INVOLVED	14
STAY TRUE TO YOUR STYLE	14
A BRIEF HISTORY OF MYSPACE	15
MAKING CONNECTIONS	16
GET TO KNOW YOUR FELLOW VIDEO MAKER	17
5	
WORD OF MOUTH: HOW VIDEOS GO VIRAL	
.....	18
FACEBOOKIN'	19

6	
	FLEAMARKET MONTGOMERY: USING VIRAL VIDEOS AS A POWERFUL MARKETING TOOL
 21
	WHAT MAKES SAMMY STEPHENS SO GREAT? 21
	A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD 22
7	
	AN ART, NOT A SCIENCE: WHY VIRAL VIDEOS ARE A TRICKY BUSINESS
 24
	THE LUCK OF THE DRAW 25
	KEEPING AT IT 25
8	
	TALKING REALLY FAST AND OTHER TRICKS TO FIT ALL THE RELEVANT INFORMATION INTO A TWO MINUTE VIDEO
27
	WHAT REALLY IS RELEVANT? 27
	TRIMMING THE SCRIPT 28
	TRIMMING THE VIDEO 29
	SHOW, DON'T TELL 29
9	
	INSIDE JOKES: UNDERSTANDING THE VIRAL CULTURE OF INTERNET COMMUNITIES
 31
	MEMES, MEMES EVERYWHERE 32
	WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT NATURAL SELECTION? 33
	COPYRIGHT LAWS 35
	<i>ESSENTIALLY, HERE'S WHAT YOU CANNOT DO...</i> 36
	<i>AND NOW, WHAT YOU CAN DO...</i> 36
	DEFAMATION 37
	THE FACT OF THE MATTER 37

11

**DOING IT YOURSELF: A CRASH COURSE FOR
THE BEGINNING VIDEO MAKER**

.....39

PRE-PRODUCTION

..... 40

WRITING

 40

FINDING ACTORS

 40

SHOOTING

..... 41

THE THREE LIGHT SETUP

 41

THE AXIS

 42

SOUND

 43

POST PRODUCTION 44

EDITING

 44

FINE TUNING 45

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

..... 45

CONCLUSION

.....47

INTRODUCTION

VIRAL VIDEOS, A DEFINITION

We hear a lot about viral marketing these days, and especially viral videos. This method of exposure is pretty easy to understand, actually; it's just word-of-mouth, but on the internet. "Viral" refers to the contagious nature of successful viral marketing. One person enjoys it and spreads it to two other people, those two spread it to two other people, and so on and so on. This is why someone can post a two minute video on Youtube, show it to a few friends, and within a week have hundreds of thousands of views.

This can make advertising or just making a video for fun and getting it to a wide audience a work-free endeavour. You put something out there, everyone likes it, and they start sharing it with one another, posting it on their blogs and MySpace pages, and, if you're really lucky, maybe it gets featured in a mainstream news outlet or even commented on in a late night talk show monologue.

That is... as long as people do like it. It's actually kind of tricky to stumble upon just the right idea, something that will hook the viewer and inspire them to tell all their friends "You gotta see this!" As such, we can't guarantee any video you make will go viral, since nobody, not even the people who regularly reach millions of hits on their videos, know exactly what that special ingredient is. But, we can send you in the right direction, and you may just get that lucky break into the so-called collective consciousness.

1

CONTENT: WHAT GOES INTO A VIRAL VIDEO?

The actual content of a viral video can be anything from a chimpanzee doing kung fu to a hilariously low-rent TV commercial to a really great guitar solo performed by some thirteen year old in his bedroom. With that in mind, go ahead and develop whatever idea you like. Whether you're marketing a product or service or you're making short movies for fun, just fill your video with whatever you find interesting because, here's the trick: If you find it interesting, someone else finds it interesting, too.

So that's the one thing that all viral videos have in common; they're interesting. There's something to them that leaves the viewer either impressed, or laughing, or, sometimes, even touched on an emotional level. It's not all cute kittens and silly commercials, there are also viral videos like Christian the Lion, where an adult lion is reunited with the humans who took care of him as a cub, and Where in the Hell is Matt?, where a man records himself dancing in beautiful locations around the planet. Actually shot on location in forty two different countries, the video serves as a portrait of some of the most beautiful places on Earth.

So whatever you have in mind, just go ahead and do it. Don't stop yourself and say "Well, who's gonna care about that?" because as long as you care, you can bet that there are thousands of people out there who will care, too. Great ideas always sound crazy until they catch on.

POPULAR CONTENT

Now... that said, we're not going to sit here and give you all this feel-good advice without also giving you some real, solid facts about what kind of viral videos do tend to garner a lot of hits. Even if this sort of video isn't what you set out to do, you can put a link to your website on the vid or just trust that the people who like it will click on your Youtube channel and see what else you got.

So, yes, there are some types of videos that tend to get more views than others. However, none of these are a guarantee. Because it can be so hard to predict whether or not a video will go viral, you really can't take any advice on viral video making as a one hundred percent sure fire, guaranteed, fool proof strategy. Likewise, it's always possible to ignore everything and still get your video going viral.

A lot of it comes down to luck. Really, all the advice we're giving here is meant to increase the chances of your video going viral. Nobody can outright promise that their tips will make you go viral, so we're not going to lie and say that we can.

Anyways, on with the popular content!

TUTORIALS

If you look on YouTube, some of the most popular videos on there are tutorials. The appeal of these videos is a lot like the appeal of How-To books, which always tend to sell very well; people like learning how to do cool things. Heck, that's why you're reading this e-Book, right? If you know some really cool magic tricks, if you can flip a pen around your finger or play a tricky song on the guitar, any skill you have that most people probably don't, you can make a video sharing that skill with the

world and it has a good chance at getting a lot of views, because who doesn't want to learn a new trick to impress their friends with in just a few minutes?

GET TOPICAL

Think of the opening monologues on the late night talk shows. They're always focused on the subjects that are on everyone's minds right now. It's not the only kind of comedy in the world, of course, but it is the kind of comedy that always seems to get a lot of views.

THE INTERNET'S FUNNIEST HOME VIDEOS

As you know, one of the most popular types of video on the internet is the whole funny-mishaps category. Again, this may or may not be the kind of video you're trying to make, but if you've got a hilarious clip of your dad falling into the pool at the last family reunion, you can use that to draw attention to your other videos.

ANIMALS, KIDS AND BABIES

This one's a no brainer, of course. People love cute kittens, cute puppies, cute kids and cute babies. Look at Star Wars According to a Three Year Old. It's just an adorable three year old girl describing the plot of Star Wars, and it's just about the cutest thing you've ever seen. It was posted in early 2009 and currently has quite a few million views, as well as a number of parody and tribute videos, and has been featured on television.

STAR WARS

And that's the other thing that people love on YouTube. Star Wars, Star Trek, Battlestar Galactica, Doctor Who, if it has a huge sci-fi fanbase, then you can dip into that fanbase for some fans of your own. As an example, you've probably heard of Chad Vader, a series about Darth Vader's less successful brother. He's the manager at a grocery store. The internet series chronicles Chad's feud with his rival manager (a regular plot point is their battle for the night and day manager positions). The guys who make those videos have made several other videos, but none that have received the kind of viewership as Chad Vader, which regularly gets a few million views per episode.

2

THE HOOK: GRABBING THE VIEWER'S ATTENTION

Okay we lied. There is one other thing that all successful viral videos have in common, and that is that they grab the viewer's attention within the first few ten seconds. A common saying regarding movies, "If nothing interesting happens in the first five minutes, nothing interesting will happen in the rest of the movie, either". Well, if your video's only two minutes long, then you've really only got about ten seconds to convince the viewer to keep watching.

Think of the whole internet video thing as MTV after a few energy drinks, the audience wants something short, fast and immediately gripping. There are millions and millions of videos out there, and the fact is that most people will just click on something else if they don't think the one they're watching will be worth the time.

There are a lot of ways of hooking the viewer right away, and it really does depend on what kind of video you're making, but essentially you just don't want to take the viewer's attention span for granted. In short, viral videos are the pop song of the iPod generation: Start with a something catchy and don't overstay your welcome.

THE FIRST TEN SECONDS

If you're doing comedy, make sure there's a laugh in those first ten seconds and then keep them laughing for the next two minutes. If you're

doing an advertisement, the viewer should know what you're selling right off the bat; show the product or service right up front and spend the rest of the video explaining what makes that product or service so great.

Not to say that there's no room for subtlety, but subtlety is a tricky thing to pull off in those first ten seconds. Start with a bang and spend the rest of the video getting a little more in-depth.

An excellent example would be The Angry Video Game Nerd, James Rolf. He makes a good living reviewing bad video games on Youtube, regularly getting over a million views per video. His videos are insightful, humorous and nostalgic, really getting into the whole philosophy of game design and why the one he's reviewing stinks, but before he gets into all that, he spends the first thirty odd seconds of the video using very imaginative curse words to describe the game in brief. Crude, sure, but it's turned out to be an incredibly catchy hook for his viewers.

We're not saying you need to start swearing like a sailor in all your vids, but within the first ten seconds, you should let the viewer know what you're all about, and then spend the rest of the video getting a little more in-depth about it.

TRIAL RUN

Now, before putting your video online, show it to some friends. Make a note of how they react. Tell them to be brutally honest with you and ask... was it funny? Did it make sense? Were there any boring parts?

The main thing is cutting out the parts that are boring or confusing. When you're just starting out, that may leave you with a pretty skimpy video, less than a minute in length, but you know what? That's a good thing. The shorter the better. If it's possible to get all the information across in five seconds, then go ahead and make a five second video.

People tend to share the shorter videos via social networking sites and iPod texting more often than they do the longer videos, so you really do have a better shot at going viral if you cut out everything that's not needed. So, in short, just trim it down to the best parts and leave everything else on the cutting room floor.

3

TARGETING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

We said before that, no matter what you're into, there's always going to be somebody else who's into it, too. Well, if you really want to capitalize on that, then you need to get to know your audience.

This doesn't mean selling out and just making whatever you think other people will like. Don't worry, you'll have plenty of time to sell out later when you're rich and famous. What this means is just bringing a sense of focus and purpose to your videos. Remember, the golden rule of making anything, be it a video or a sandwich, is to make what you like. That said, keep up with the communities that revolve around what you like.

Say you're doing a video blog about movie news. Obviously, you don't want to be reporting as fact something that was debunked as a rumor several weeks ago, nor do you want to be reporting "Breaking news!" a month after it was already reported by everyone else. So basically all we're saying here is; know your stuff and stay up to date.

The same goes with using viral videos for marketing. Looking at it from a business perspective, when high speed internet became more accessible to the common user, a lot of dial-up moguls went out of business because they didn't expect high speed to be as big as it wound up being, so they stuck to good old 56k and wound up losing a lot of customers that way. The same can happen to any business owner or marketer who doesn't keep up with their industry.

STAY INVOLVED

Join some online forums relevant to your subject. Besides being a great way to keep up on what's new, you've also got a guaranteed audience right there. Even if you're already making some news sites a regular part of your day, it's tough to keep up on all of it all by yourself, so reading the message boards can help fill you in on what you missed.

This would tend to apply to a lesser degree if you're doing videos just for entertainment, but, again, this is where your test audience comes in. If a joke is funny, you'll laugh whether you're a coin collector a video gamer or a movie fan, so there's no real news to keep up with if you're just trying to make people laugh, but showing it to your friends to get some test audience reactions can be immensely helpful. Once more, this comes down to the golden rule of making videos: If your friends like it, someone else will, too.

STAY TRUE TO YOUR STYLE

It's not about changing the content of your videos to please the masses.

It's just about getting focused and serious on what your videos are all about in the first place. Don't think that, because movie review videos are big, you need to make movie review videos, or that you need to make any major changes at all, really.

So if you want to target your target audience, the main thing is to just remember who your target audience is: Yourself.

This is true whether you're trying to entertain or market. What makes you laugh? What would get your attention and make you want to support the company? Start from there and then see how others react to the results.

If you don't like it, chances are, nobody else will, either.

4

FROM LIVE JOURNAL TO TWITTER: USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES TO GET YOUR VIDEO OUT THERE

Social networking is really the key ingredient to getting a regular audience for your videos. The whole phenomena of these sites has been around since before Livejournal, and has since gone through a gradual evolution... We'll start with MySpace.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MYSPACE

Yeah, MySpace pages are kind of annoying. They autoplay a really bad song for you as soon as you load the page up, they're loaded with flashy graphics and they're mostly just a bunchy of photos people took of themselves at a party. But! It's still worth looking into, because that's actually not what the site was designed for.

The site was actually created for the purpose of letting musicians promote themselves, with or without a talent agent. On that level, it's been an incredible success. Many musicians who might never have had a shot at getting signed before MySpace have gone on to have incredibly lucrative careers by selling their own CDs over the site, and in fact, most of today's record producers are constantly sifting through MySpace with a fine tooth comb to find the next big thing.

It just so happens that it was also a great way for people to meet others with similar interests. If you look at the fact that many on MySpace have thousands of "friends" listed, then it also becomes obvious that a side effect is that a lot of people simply collect friends almost as a form of points...

MAKING CONNECTIONS

The whole idea of "friends" on MySpace is a little weird. When you look and see that someone has over one thousand friends... well, nobody has more than one thousand real friends, but a friend on MySpace is just someone who regularly looks at your site to see what's new. For an artist, a musician, a video maker, this is great. This means that you're getting a bigger audience than most independent filmmakers get.

MySpace is still around, but it seems that their glory days have passed. Today, everyone has moved on to Facebook and Twitter, and what's more, YouTube has adopted the social networking of MySpace to allow video makers to skip that process.

You can now "friend" people on YouTube and similar sites, and there's actually something of a community on the site now. More than just a place to dump your videos and forget about them, the site's focus has shifted to connecting video makers to one another.

And here's the thing... if you want your videos to go viral, you really want to get involved in that social aspect.

The video channels with the most subscribers on YouTube usually have a lot of subscriptions and friends, as well. So the trick to getting a lot of YouTube viewers is to watch a lot of YouTube. Leave a lot of comments on popular videos, because people will often follow those comments back to your channel. Subscribe to any video channels you like, send a friend

request to the ones who cover similar subject matter.

GET TO KNOW YOUR FELLOW VIDEO MAKER

If you ask any of the most popular YouTubers, they'll tell you that being an active member of the community is a bigger part of getting views than anything you actually put in your videos themselves (of course, a bad video won't get many views no matter what, but you get the idea).

Using Twitter and Facebook is another great way to get your stuff recognized. These are basically blogging sites have character limits, so you can't post more than 150 words on Twitter, for example. Back in the Livejournal days, somebody might have, say, twenty or thirty friends, since their posts were longer so, any more than thirty and you'd be spending all day catching up on the posts.

Now, since the posts on Facebook and Twitter are always pretty short, most people on those sites have hundreds of friends who they actually do make a point of keeping up with. On Twitter, it's actually quite easy to read a list of several hundred friends posts. While the character limit is set at 150 characters, most posts are actually shorter, usually being less than ten words in length, and it's actually quite easy to breeze right through, say, three hundred friend updates in an hour. That's fewer than three thousand words.

So the point is that you can easily get on these sites and start exploring. Friend every user you like, and then start posting your videos. If you friend, say, ten people a day for a week, that's seventy people. For two weeks, that's one hundred forty people. That may not seem like much, because what's a mere one hundred forty regular views? But... that brings us to our next chapter.

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