



SEE ME,

FEEL ME,

WATCH ME

CONSUMERS ARE
FINDING A DEEPER
CONNECTION WITH
BRANDS THROUGH
VIDEO CONTENT —
AND TECHNOLOGY
ALLOWS THEM TO
GROW EVER CLOSER

BY SARAH STEIMER

THE EMPLOYEES AT GREENHOUSE, LEO BURNETT'S IN-HOUSE PRODUCTION STUDIO IN CHICAGO, LOOK RELATIVELY RELAXED.

THEY WEAR JEANS AND DECORATE THEIR WORK AREAS WITH BRIGHT CARTOONS. THEY CAN TAKE THEIR BREAKS AT A FOOSBALL TABLE. THE ATMOSPHERE IS COMFORTABLE, A FAR CRY FROM THE HIGHBROW MADISON AVENUE DAYS OF ADVERTISING.

It's a sign of the times. Admen and women of yesteryear spoke to their audience from on high, telling them what to do or how to think via print advertisements and television commercials. Greenhouse is quite literally more grounded, located on one of the bottom floors of the West Wacker Drive building.

The most successful marketing videos today—like those created by brands, agencies and studios such as Greenhouse—are representative of the people making and watching them: accessible, and maybe even familiar. The nearly instantaneous videos are intended to engage with the audience, not talk at it.

"The videos that work, work because there was strategy behind them and they have a purpose" says Sarah Gitersonke, business development director for Explore Media, a branded film and commercial production company. "There is a call to action or something that is leaving the viewer with a feeling. And that could be a feeling of, 'I absolutely want to purchase whatever it is they're talking about,' or, 'I feel like I connect with this.' There are so many different ways that you can get to that point. But I think that point is what matters."

Gitersonke says when she started in production a decade ago, a brand made a video, uploaded it to YouTube and waited to tally the "likes." There was no real rhyme or reason to the video, she says, but now brands are sitting up and taking note of what the consumer yearns for online. They're realizing that consumers want to see a story and feel a connection. They want to know why they should care.

For a long time, Gitersonke says, if producers were "doing content," they were heading in the right direction. "That's changing now."

Just as the video medium itself can be used by amateurs and professionals alike, the agencies and brands that see the most success may be those with a flattened, flexible hierarchy. Allowing team members who are relatively low in rank to run with an idea is the sort of dexterity that can really work with videos on the web, where the audience reacts in real time and seeks a connection with the publisher or brand.

"It's innovating deliberately, allowing creatives at all levels to be accountable and to have a say in the work and to create the work and not to be micro-managed," says Vincent Geraghty, executive vice president and director of production for Leo Burnett USA. "Because we have such a massive amount of content to fill, we can't just rely on the old model of having it approved through a chain before it gets out. We've got to be OK—[albeit] a little uncomfortable—with people at very early stages in their careers actually making work and putting it out there."

In the case of video marketing, the gap between the brand and its audience is starting to close, maybe more than ever before. The audience expects videos that are tailored to the channel, they expect authenticity and they expect the brand to move as quickly as they do.

MAKING THE LEAP FROM PLATFORM TO PLATFORM

Video marketing thrives online, particularly on social media platforms, including YouTube

Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat. Marketers can no longer create a single video—such as the traditional television commercial—and expect it to perform well (or even get noticed) on each channel.

“Nowadays, to take a YouTube video and put it on Facebook doesn’t work,” says Mark Robertson, founder of ReelSEO, now Tubular Insights, a resource providing analysis, tips and trends for the online video and internet marketing industries. “In addition to thinking about what your story and your content is about, you also have to think about the format of the video.”

Internet users don’t view videos on different channels in the same way. For instance, multiple publishers say about 85% of all videos on Facebook are watched without sound—making captions crucial and music less so. Many people are watching these videos while on their commute, and Gitersonke says the first few seconds of a video are crucial for catching a viewer’s attention.

“You’ll have to know what formats and aspects work for each one and the lengths and time and the tone of each piece,” says Carla Marshall, editor-in-chief at Tubular Insights. “We’re still hearing marketers say, ‘Video’s not working for us.’ Well, it won’t work for you if you produce a 10-minute clip and try to upload that in as many places as possible. You’re not investing in the research to find out what your audience is going to respond to.”

Tubular’s own research has found videos posted natively to Facebook generate more engagement than YouTube videos; however, it takes fewer views for YouTube videos to generate the same engagement rate. The research also shows the engagement rate for Facebook video is a more reliable metric, compared to view count. In terms of engagement, short-form video performs better on Facebook, versus longer video on YouTube. Viewer engagement research from 2015 by Visible Measures says a video only has 10 seconds to catch a viewer’s attention, and 33% of viewers have been lost by the 30-second mark. Visible also found that online viewers on average watch about 54% of a typical video ad on major social platforms. The payoff for keeping a viewer engaged is critical.

Unskippable Labs at Google says the more time viewers spend on video ads, the higher the impact on brand favorability relative to control.

Which channels a brand decides to utilize depends on their goals. David Murdico, creative director and managing partner at online video and content production agency Supercool Creative, says that the benefits of each platform vary: YouTube is the go-to for posting because of its SEO benefits, and Snapchat wins in terms of timing and audience targeting.

GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT: AUTHENTICITY

It isn’t, of course, as easy as hopping onto a channel and posting a video with the right length, with or without captions or inspiring music. Authenticity matters as well, Geraghty says, and young people especially will take note.

“Folks under 20, especially, will call B.S. on you pretty quickly if you’re ruining their experience online or what they’re seeing on Facebook,” Geraghty says. “If you have something that gets in the way and doesn’t really play in that space, it doesn’t work. When we’re creating things on Facebook, you don’t want to interrupt.”

Geraghty says marketers struggled with authenticity on the now-defunct Vine. Companies were over-producing content for the video platform, which featured six-second clips from users’ cell phones. The high-quality clips from brands didn’t fit in with Vine’s homemade feel.

Brand videos need to meet consumers’ expectations for a channel. Shooting a highly produced piece of content on a smartphone can come across as inauthentic, as can a video that tries to tell the audience what to do rather than conversing with them on a social media channel. This two-way conversation began, to some extent, with comments on YouTube, and it has grown to include conversations between brands and their audience on social media videos, where consumers can choose to engage by simply “following” the brand.

“It’s a lot more work for a brand to keep up with that two-way street, even if it’s just managing the social media platform,”

WHO,

WHAT,

WHERE,

WATCH

Knowing what videos to post and where comes down to a better understanding of the channel itself. Here is a breakdown of video on some of the most popular social media platforms. (Content from AdAge and Veed.me)

FACEBOOK

What counts as a view:

3 seconds

Auto-plays:

Yes

Auto-loops:

No

Default audio state:

Muted

Max length:

2 hours or 4 gigabytes

Best for:

Informative or fun videos that can play without sound

YOUTUBE

What counts as a view:

30 seconds

Auto-plays:

Yes

Auto-loops:

No

Default audio state:

On

Max length:

None

Best for:

Educational content, FAQs, product demos, weekly series

Gitersonke says. “It’s important to have a two-way street. Video is a huge door to start that conversation.”

When watching videos online, viewers often have the opportunity to “skip” ads, which makes engagement and immersive experiences online crucial for brands.

“I’m in the industry, and I take any opportunity I have to skip a pre-roll ad,” Geraghty says. “I have an agenda when I’m online. I’m not a captive audience. I’m my own programmer, and I can watch whatever I want.”

What marketers are working to pinpoint is the “what I want” piece within their engagement with the audience, and the answer tends to be transparency. This could result in a change to influencer content in particular. Robertson says he doesn’t expect this type of marketing to disappear any time soon, but he does predict that audiences will expect more transparency in why influencers are promoting a product or brand.

Marshall says influencer marketing is a catch-all phrase, and the digital-first companies such as BuzzFeed have arguably become part of that culture—one that brands could be well-served by joining. As an example, Marshall points to Tastemade’s work with a variety of food brands. The video recipe publisher has incorporated branded products into its content fairly seamlessly.

“The audience belongs to those digital-first companies and not the brands; the brands are having to tap into that audience and then hopefully open the market up,” Marshall says. “Influencer marketing has a horrendous name and some brands look at it so staggeringly wrong that they’ve damaged their campaigns. But if done right, there’s a potential there to really win more customers.”

Partnering with publishers may be the first step some brands take toward becoming publishers themselves.

“The biggest opportunity I see marketers missing is the ability to become self-publishers by experimenting and creating a consistent stream of video content, rather than trying to hit it out of the park with one video here and there,” Murdico says. “I’d rather see shorter videos created at a more consistent pace, even at lower budgets if necessary, with a focus on how to get the videos in front of the right people—people in a position to buy their products and services or share the videos with the right people.”

DATA-BASED AND REACTIONARY APPROACHES

Staying conversational and engaged with the audience is time-consuming, but it also allows for real-time data collection and reaction.

WHAT THE EXPERTS PREDICT FOR 2017

While most agree that video is king in 2017, there’s uncertainty as to what, exactly, the industry can expect. Here are some 2017 video marketing predictions.

DAVID MURDICO, SUPERCool CREATIVE

- An increase in creativity put into experimentation with the types, lengths, messaging, styles and platforms of video production and marketing.
- An increase in planning for both paid and organic distribution/promotion.
- An increase in attention given to analytics and results.

VINCENT GERAGHTY, GREENHOUSE, LEO BURNETT

- Continued push into virtual reality (VR).
- A continued push and a better understanding of programmatic and how that can be utilized and measured to benefit brands.
- A tighter connection between measurement, content creation and content strategy.

MARK ROBERTSON, TUBULAR INSIGHTS

- Increased investment in successful media.
- Increased authenticity to the platforms that marketers are distributing on.
- Live video and VR.

KEN GILBERG, GREENHOUSE, LEO BURNETT

- Showing things on small screens and less so on big screens.
- Brands wanting more content for less.
- Creating video that can work anywhere in the world.



Producing video content based on feedback can better resonate with an audience, compared to a more programmatic approach. But what does resonance mean for ROI? How does a “like” or a comment on a video translate into sales? Often, it doesn’t.

“It used to be that you could make a video and not worry that much about the story. You put it on YouTube and it ranks in Google, you put annotation links on the video for your website and all of a sudden you’re seeing people buying stuff off your website from your organic success,” Robertson says. “I’m not saying that doesn’t still happen, but it’s certainly much harder than it used to be.”

Today the ROI for videos includes a stronger community and greater brand awareness. In fact, some channels’ formula for social success somewhat thwarts sales. YouTube’s algorithm, for example, is built on watch time, meaning the more a brand links off the channel and the more that people follow those links, the worse the video will perform.

Gitersonke, however, cautions against simply counting views to measure success. When it comes to audience participation—be it views, comments or “likes”—quality can be more important for a brand than quantity.

She says 10,000 viewers from the target audience can be more valuable than 1 million people who may never buy the product or service.

Determining a metric for success is a top concern for many video marketers. Geraghty says the future of video marketing has a tighter connection between measurement, content creation and content strategy. He says brands feel as though they’re throwing a lot of content into the world, but they can’t quite get a sense of how it’s doing or how it’s influencing sales. A good starting point, he says, is determining the proof of performance.

Brands are looking for an opportunity to quickly tell if something is working, and replace or shift the strategy if it isn’t. As Geraghty explains, marketers need to start simple. They should ask, “What are we trying to achieve and how are we going to gauge whether it’s performing the way we want it to?”

Murdico says video campaigns are often launched for awareness, likes, subscribers, followers and other soft goals, but they do eventually need to positively impact the bottom line.

“By measuring video and social media analytics against sales increases, marketers are able to be more vigilant in determining what works and doesn’t work, developing better creative and focusing on promotion,” Murdico says.

Such an effort, he explains, means marketers will need to take note of current sales across all marketing initiatives for that product or

SNAPCHAT

What counts as a view:

When tapped

Auto-plays:

Yes

Auto-loops:

No

Default audio state:

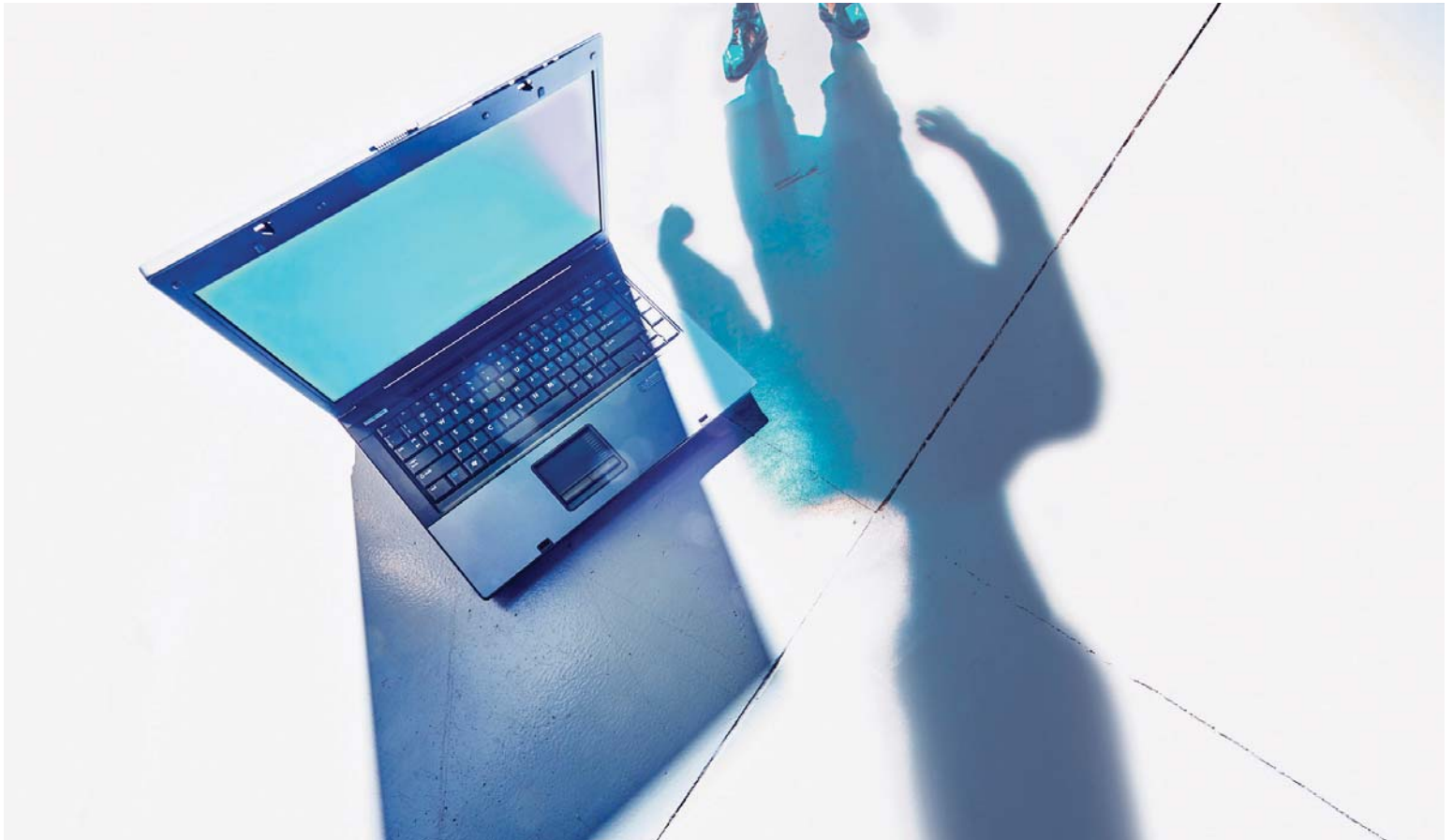
On

Max length:

10-second clips or multiple clips as a story

Best for:

Fun, timely content such as behind-the-scenes, unique events, day-in-the-life stories



service before launching a video campaign, then define the parameters of the campaign. Once the videos have run, marketers need to review the analytics to see where sales clicks and social media activity originated. Then they have to connect the dots.

“THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY I SEE MARKETERS MISSING IS THE ABILITY TO BECOME SELF-PUBLISHERS BY EXPERIMENTING AND CREATING A CONSISTENT STREAM OF VIDEO CONTENT.”

WHAT IS THIS GOING TO COST?

Marketers have two internet powers working for and against them in video: More content is now expected of them, but the most authentic of it can be simple and (relatively) inexpensive.

Brands are pressing Leo Burnett and others to produce more for less, says Ken Gilberg, vice president and executive producer at Leo Burnett. Clients that once farmed out 100 commercials a year now want 500 pieces of content at no greater cost. And immediacy is key. “They’re not going to wait eight weeks for a commercial ... or six months to come up with a campaign. It’s, ‘Hey, something just happened, and we need to react to it,’” he says.

Gitersonke argues that there’s a bit of a disconnect between what brands or agencies expect and what the final product can cost. She says everyone needs to be on the same page with expectations and where they need to make amends.

Marketers have learned to play with their budgets, shifting some broadcast allocation over to web video production. Web videos often fall under the social media

resources of a company, and many companies have started moving funds in that direction as well. Marshall says a company can absolutely create one piece of video content and slice and dice it according to the platform, but expectations for unique content based on the channel and audience have caused many brands to rethink their budgets.

“When you have stats from YouTube itself that say more 18-to-34-year-olds are watching YouTube than they’re watching U.S. cable channels, then if you’re a smart marketer and that’s your target audience, you have to at least think about taking a chance and allocating some budget into reaching that audience,” Marshall says.

Geraghty says campaigns with a large amount of media and paid impressions should have a lot of money behind them, whereas more real-time content that requires less time and fewer resources should have a far smaller budget. It comes down to remaining authentic to the channel.

Over-produced content doesn’t work on some channels, Geraghty says, because it may not fit that platform’s aesthetic. Snapchat, for example, can be a great format for quick behind-the-scenes shots that feel intimate. A few seconds of highly produced content feels less natural for the platform, but can fit much more comfortably on longer-format channels such as YouTube.

Aside from the initial cost of production, Murdico predicts an increase in planning for both paid and organic distribution and promotion.

“Marketers are realizing that counting on videos being shared with no plan to make that happen isn’t working” Murdico says. Instead, he predicts they’ll focus on distribution or promotion plans that get the videos in front of the right people. These tactics involve paid promotion on social media sites, paid influencers, increased use of their own social media communities, e-mail lists and more investment in media outreach to get videos placed on high-profile and niche blogs and publications to reach new audiences.

THE FUTURE IS HERE, AND IT’S LIVE

Video on the web is moving so quickly that some of the most popular content is being filmed and broadcast live. This mostly unscripted content is uncharted territory for most companies, but it lends itself incredibly well to the authentic voice consumers seek.

One of the easiest places for brands to begin with live video, which has been popularized on Facebook and is being integrated on Instagram and Twitter as well, is major events. Think of Apple releasing a new product or GM featuring new vehicles at a car show.

Geraghty says more of Leo Burnett’s clients are asking for live video, and it can be an impactful medium. Greenhouse produced a live video for McDonald’s during National Burger Month, during which an artist used condiments to paint pictures of McDonald’s hamburgers. In an entirely different approach, Greenhouse created a “live” animated video for Kellogg’s that featured a Keebler elf giving a tour of the cookie factory.

“Having the live video be a more authentic and spontaneous type of event, as opposed to reading from a script, is really important,” Robertson says. “It’s also a great place to play for brands that have a smaller budget. There’s a lower barrier to entry with live video.”

In addition to live video, some brands are even experimenting with virtual reality. While it’s currently out of reach for a great number of marketers, largely due to cost, the trend could explode sooner than later. Look no further than Google, PlayStation or The New York Times’ interest in the space. Geraghty says his young daughter spent about an hour in a virtual reality experience offered by the Times, roaming the family home as if on the streets of Paris.

Live video and virtual reality may be the apex of where the audience and the brand come together, sharing immersive experiences that strike at the heart of what consumers have come to expect from companies. To reference one viral Kleenex video featuring a dog and his adopter, brands and consumers are possibly becoming “unlikely friends.”

“It’s really not about one-way communication anymore, with, perhaps, the exception of paid advertising,” Robertson says. “It’s about having a conversation.” **m**

INSTAGRAM

What counts as a view:

3 seconds

Auto-plays:

Yes

Auto-loops:

Yes

Default audio state:

Muted

Max length:

60 seconds

Best for:

Micro videos such as teasers, behind-the-scenes and looping video

TWITTER

What counts as a view:

When clicked

Auto-plays:

Yes

Auto-loops:

No

Default audio state:

On

Max length:

30 seconds

Best for:

Teasers to full-length content or to a website