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Making Your Online Video Viral

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Abstract: Online video venues, such as YouTube, make it possible to upload a video and make it available globally. The key to a successful video is the number of "views" it receives from the broad community. This article identifies a number of tips for the user to follow to help make an online video "viral," or widely viewed.

The Reach of YouTube and Online Video

Millions of people today are accessing information through social media such as YouTube. Since its launch in 2005, YouTube has gained tremendous global viewership. In May 2010, The Associated Foreign Press (2010) reported that YouTube was delivering more than two billion videos a day, or almost double the prime-time audience of all three major U.S. television networks combined. YouTube has become very popular because users can watch unlimited numbers of videos, and once registered, users can upload an unlimited amount of their own video content.

Using video can be a hook to attract people to the message (Case & Hino, 2010). A brief online video can easily be viewed by larger numbers of people than outreach educators could reach by scheduling face-to-face meetings. According to Sobrero (2008), "We now have research findings that demonstrate the capacity to use online technology to increase social learning." Although there is a learning curve to use online technology, the time invested is worth the effort, when considered alongside its vast dissemination potential.

Software Recommendations

Before purchasing a camera, video recorder, or movie software editor, experiment with some of the free or inexpensive methods of creating videos from photographs and movie clips taken with a video camera. Some common free examples include: iMovie on a Mac, Picasa (available for either Windows or Mac at picasa.google.com), and Windows Live Movie Maker (requires Windows Vista or Windows 7, download from microsoft.com if it's not already on the computer). Another option: experiment with the downloadable trial version of more expensive software offered by many companies such as Pro Show Gold. Often, it is the complete version and will remain operable on the computer for 15 to 30 days.

Tips for Making a Video Viral

After creating a video for upload to online venues, it is important to attract as broad an audience as possible. The video may not achieve the thousands of hits generated by a rock star. However, an increase from 200 views to 2,000 views represents a significant leap forward. Here are a few simple tips for making an online video "viral."

- Start with interesting and relevant subject matter for today's audience. Aim for a unique approach through content and images. Use a title such as "Ten Simple Ways to Save Money at the Supermarket" to capture the attention of potential viewers.

- Keep the video short. A 2- to 5-minute video will capture and keep the attention of potential viewers. Brief videos are more often viewed than lengthy ones.

- Make the video colorful and eye-catching to the viewer. Avoid distraction in the video, and use intense colors and objects to capture and maintain attention. Include lively music to add pizzazz to a video. Check with your universityâ— many media departments can provide access to free music that won't violate copyright restrictions.

- Choose an interesting title that also accurately describes what the video is about. This helps people find it and want to watch the video. If the current title isn't attracting viewers, change it.

- Develop a plan for uploading the video to highly visited social networking sites such as Twitter, YouTube, TeacherTube, and the local Extension website. Create "special announcements" on the local website to draw attention to the video link.

- Share the code for embedding a video with other colleagues who might consider embedding the video on their blog or website. Consider posting the code for embedding the video below the video on the website.

- Distribute messages with the video link as broadly as possible. Send a message to colleagues, email address mailing lists, friends, and family. In the message ask readers to distribute the message to their email mailing list.

- Include a link to the video in your professional email signature setting, ensuring the message is readily available to the receiver of the message. A link in PowerPoint and other presentations can also be used.

- Report video view data on the curriculum vitae and other reports. If the video reaches a milestone consider celebrating it by sending out an email reporting the information and including the video link.

Tips for Promoting a Video on YouTube

Use the following dissemination tips when promoting educational video on the YouTube network.

- Choose an interesting thumbnail to represent the video. Images can be created by the author or downloaded from websites featuring free graphics. YouTube offers three choices directly from the video.

- Take advantage of YouTube's AudioSwap feature that will add music, but beware that it will wipe out any existing sound and may add commercials to the video.

- When embedding a YouTube video on the website, be sure to "uncheck" the "include related videos" option. Otherwise the selection may provide access to all types of videos on the website.

- Encourage others to subscribe to the YouTube Channel (users automatically create a channel when setting up a YouTube account) to automatically receive an email every time a new video is added.

- Track the number of views your video receives. If using YouTube for video distribution, be sure to use tracking data provided by Insight. Insight provides demographic data, location of views by country and state, the attention of viewers (i.e., how long they watched the video), and how a video was discovered (through email, Web link, YouTube Search, or other means of locating the video). This data can help fine-tune video distribution methods.

Summary

Video content and language should be easy for the viewer to understand. Plan to speak in simple terms conveying a brief message. YouTube's accessibility and popularity make it a potentially useful tool for Extension educators searching for a wide outreach in today's global information community. Once created, a video needs an initial distribution boost to help it gain momentum. A video uploaded to YouTube can be tracked using the Insight tool for collecting data reflecting the use and self-propelled dissemination of the video as it is viewed.

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