

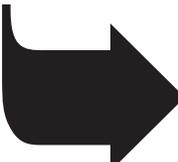
Communicating in the YouTube Era: Using Video to Reach Employees

By Brant Skogrand

One of the main reasons behind the increased use and acceptance of online videos to reach employees is the third most-trafficked site on the Web: YouTube. The impact of YouTube has its pros and cons, though.

“What’s been great about it (YouTube) has been the ease and how people are used to watching videos or gotten in the habit of watching videos online,” says Perry Cowen, owner and operator of Maverick Productions.

While YouTube—and improved Internet technology—has worked in favor of video acceptance, the quality has not. “YouTube has helped make poor quality video acceptable,” says Gene Smacz, director of creative services at Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.



Video also can be quite effective to reach employees in various locations when in-person messages are not viable.

Just because the quality on YouTube is often sloppy does not mean that corporate videos can be as well. Videos presented in an amateur way are not taken seriously and that is not the impact that you want videos to have with your organization’s employees. Getting employees to watch a video during a busy workday can be challenging in itself and you want their time to be worthwhile.

Paying—and Getting—Attention

The most successful company videos are ones that are well thought out in the first place. There are many questions that need to be answered before

starting a video production, such as:

- ▶ What is the “hook?” How will the video draw in employees?
- ▶ What is the “spinal cord,” or element that holds the entire video together?
- ▶ Who will be interviewed?
- ▶ What shots are necessary?
- ▶ What messages need to be communicated?
- ▶ How will you keep employees’ attention throughout the entire video?
- ▶ What lighting and sound elements will be incorporated into the video?
- ▶ Who will need to approve the video?
- ▶ In what format will the video be?
- ▶ Where will employees access the video?

Cowen recommends three preliminary steps that should help to answer the above questions: Do your research, talk to the intended interviewee and figure out what to show for each topic. If you want employees to pay attention to your video, the first step is for you to pay attention to the subjects whom you interview. Cowen suggests making (and keeping) eye contact and giving the subject your full attention. “If people feel like they’re not being listened to, you’ll never get a good interview,” he says.

Think of the videos that you like. Do you like a

talking head rambling on and on? Probably not. Do you like a video that seems to be scattered all over the place? Probably not.

The key to a successful employee video is to inform by entertaining. “People love entertainment,” says Cowen. “When trying to make a video that’s truly informative, it has to be entertaining, but not wacky. It just has to be fast-paced. I don’t really go for funny because it takes away from the seriousness.”

In terms of video length, the shorter, the better is the general rule. If a video is too long, employees will not take the time to watch it—but they will watch a long video if it is entertaining throughout

its entirety.

“If [employees] can be entertained, we get good feedback,” says Karin Munksgaard, director of corporate communications for the legal segment of Thomson Reuters. “If it’s too information-heavy and long, then we get negative feedback. They say, ‘Why didn’t you just send me the transcript?’”

After you have put all that work into producing the video, it would be a shame if nobody watched it, right? Work with the department that runs your company intranet to ensure prominent placement of the video.

Best Practices for Using Video in Employee Communications

- 1. Find the hook.** Employees will decide in the first few seconds whether they will watch a video or not. Draw them in with an interesting hook.
- 2. Entertain.** People love entertainment. A fast-paced and visually interesting video will keep employees’ attention to the end.
- 3. Keep videos as short as possible.** Use only the minimal amount of time necessary to get information across—in general, the shorter, the better. On average, videos for employees should range from two to five minutes.
- 4. Synchronize with the IT department.** Know what the capabilities are of your company’s computer network and of employees’ computers. Employees will not watch even the most exciting video if technical problems make it difficult to view.
- 5. Remember that video is a visual medium.** Go beyond the talking head. Explore the palette of options that video provides to “show” the story.
- 6. Think small (in size).** Most employees do not watch videos in full-screen mode on their computer. Use close-ups and ensure that the images are clear even in a small format.
- 7. Draw attention to the videos.** If possible, place videos on the intranet home page. A video needs to be within two clicks for employees—buried videos will not get the message across.
- 8. Provide alternative ways to get the content.** To reach employees who do not have computers, also offer the information in text form, on a DVD, or work with their managers to communicate the information to them.

Timeshifting and Beyond

One of the best benefits of video is that employees can watch the content on demand when it is convenient for them—in essence, timeshifting.

“In general, video is a convenient way for employees to see and hear a corporate leader on a topic without having to be at a live meeting,” says Smaciarz. “Employees appreciate that, and that’s a selling point of video.”

Video also can be quite effective to reach employees in various locations when in-person messages are not viable. In fact, Smaciarz predicts that mobile video is the next stage on the horizon. “It’s coming quickly,” he says.

Just be sure that every office is fully capable of receiving video. For instance, Munksgaard relates that the legal segment of Thomson Reuters initially had difficulty communicating to the employees at its UK businesses via video because of bandwidth issues.

How can you tell if your video strategy is successful? Look at viewership numbers. Provide employees an opportunity to rate the video on a scale of one to five. Keep an ear to the ground—are

people talking about the video?

“The video should not stand out over content,” says Cowen. “It’s not a good video if people are too impressed by special effects or the people in it. Only if the content is what they’re talking about afterwards, then you have succeeded.”

If employees pay attention to a video, that will draw the interest of company management as well. For instance, Thrivent Financial developed videos for the organization’s investments division. The chief investment officer, naturally a numbers-oriented person, became convinced of the importance of video when he received the viewership numbers for his videos. Now he wants Smaciarz’s team to explore more video opportunities for his division.

After all, some messages still are more suitable in person. **PRN**

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