

Using Online Video to Engage Your Audience

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It's no wonder that publishers are jumping on the online video bandwagon to increase traffic on their sites. But why should circulators care?

According to a study conducted by Advertising.com, approximately 66 percent of respondents view streaming video content at least once a week. Forty-four percent of video viewers are between the ages of 18 and 34, while 56 percent are age 35 and older.

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"A few things happen," says Guy Nouri, CEO of Dragonfly, a Hillsdale, N.Y.-based online video network. "Not only is there an increase in online traffic, but there's also an increase in the amount of time that people are spending with the content. Plus, you can attract great sponsors. [Online video] lifts up the image of the entire magazine."

While circulators currently aren't the ones behind the implementation and production of Internet video, they can use it as a metric and as a tool to strengthen their audience's brand affinity, which can be especially difficult to do in today's saturated media market.

In this report, we look at what three companies and one association are doing with online video in order to deepen audience engagement.

ESSENCE

This past August, 37-year-old Essence announced that it partnered with parent company Time Inc. to launch Essence Studios, a new division that is focused on developing and distributing multimedia content (online, mobile, TV, video) with the first project being an online video reality series called "30 Dates in 30 Days."

But "30 Dates in 30 Days" is not the first video series Essence has developed—the magazine has been creating online videos since the beginning of the year. In fact, some of the videos have been direct extensions of articles that have appeared in the print magazine.

Another online video feature called "Do Right Men," where users were able to watch interviews, vote for and compete to win a date with their favorite eligible and

community service-oriented bachelors, originally stemmed from a feature that appeared in the April 2007 issue of the magazine. The series also included exclusives that weren't available in print, including additional "Do Right Men" like soul singer John Legend.

Readers have also been given access to their favorite entertainers via online video. In a partnership with VH1 and Hidden Beach Records, Essence.com provided an online video package that featured a behind-the-scenes look at R&B singer Jill Scott's cover shoot for the August issue and clips from one of her live concerts.

"We don't see video as a stand-alone [product]," says Lesley Pinckney, director, digital development, Essence. "We see video as a way to enhance and extend the brand as part of the online experience. We are trying to provide original video programming that we believe the current landscape doesn't offer. And some of the ideas for these online franchises have been incubated on the editorial side."

While Essence hasn't been able to track video usage specifically (the magazine switched to Brightcove as its online video provider in August to rectify that issue) year-to-year online traffic has increased by 400 percent, according to Alison Ehrmann, Essence's marketing director.

The Web site and all of its many offerings do not negate from the print but rather enhance it, according to Ehrmann. "The Web site is not the magazine and vice versa. The two are complementary, but stand on their own individually. All of these offerings together complete the user's experience," she says.

Audience Determines the Outcome

The magazine's next and most ambitious online video project, "30 Dates in 30 Days," will go even further to complete the user's experience by leaving it up to the audience to determine the show's outcome.

Starting on Sept. 17, "30 Dates in 30 Days" will pair five single women with six bachelors each for a week's worth of dates. Each Webisode will feature one of the six dates, including post-date "tell-alls."

Viewers will be asked to vote each day on which bachelor a female contestant should go out with, what she should wear, where the couple should go on their date, and whether she should go out with the bachelor again. The show wraps up with a group-date event featuring the viewer-matched couples. Cover Girl has already signed on as an advertiser.

This wasn't Essence's first video series where users were asked to get involved either. The title's very first foray into online video was "Will You Marry Me?" where, for the February 2007 issue, men were asked to write to the magazine if they wanted

to make a surprise proposal to their significant other. The proposals were secretly taped and viewers were asked to vote on what which proposal they thought was the best. The winning couple was given a honeymoon to South Africa.

“This is so interactive,” Ehrmann says. “The consumer is such a part of the experience. This could never live in-book. Doing it online really gives you the space that printed page couldn’t provide.”

As for what Essence Studios will be focusing on in the coming year, Pinckney says it’s all about using “edit-driven videos” to feed the market.

“I can see in the future our site providing a cover shoot video before the issue even gets out on newsstand in order to drive traffic in that respect,” she says. “We’re also focused on figuring out where we are getting traction, whether it’s through the user-generated content or from the other kinds of videos we have.”

“Another thing that we’ll be looking at for next year is making better use of our in-house talent so that we figure out if some of our regular magazine departments translate to online video, for example, offering two-minute interstitials with our book critic talking about the book of the week. It would be good to get faces of people our readers trust online.”

Video Drives Other Platforms

Pinckney also mentioned plans to create an online component to the annual Essence Music Festival, which doesn’t have much of an online video presence at this time.

“We’re not just interested in showing the performances. We also want to show what’s going on in New Orleans during that weekend and really allow the entire experience to live online.”

She adds that online video is just one platform in the company’s cycle that will be used to drive the other platforms.

“You have to be everywhere if you want to compete,” Pinckney says. “Our advertisers as well as our audience are really sort of leading the charge in the next generation as far as what Web presence should look like. We want to be where the market’s going to take us.”

“It’s hard to say where we’ll be a year from now. It’s just all about Essence’s ability to extend our online presence—to talk to our readers daily as well as monthly. And it could be video or mobile that takes us there, we’re not sure. But we are looking at the whole mix as far as integrated media properties are concerned. The opportunities are wide open.”

CONDÉNET

Few publishing companies are more visible in the online video space than Condé Nast Publications. The company's online arm, CondéNet, has rapidly expanded its online video offerings— producing 200 videos in 2006 and doubling its library in 2007—for web sites including Epicurious and Style, and even created a social networking space (Flip.com) where teen girls can upload their own video “flipbooks.”

One of the company's latest video series appears on Concerige.com, the online companion to Condé Nast Traveler. Fifty-seven online video “Insider Guides”—offering tours of hotel, restaurants, nightlife and attractions in New York City, Paris, London, Miami and Rio de Janeiro—launched in the beginning of August with another five currently being produced.

In the month since they launched, Concerige.com's Insider Guide videos have led to a 44 percent increase in number of video plays on the site in July 2007 vs. June 2007.

Epicurious.com's collection winks at the ever-popular genre of reality TV with “Inside the CIA,” an exclusive look into the halls of the Culinary Institute of America through the eyes of a few of its students. Over the last six months, Epicurious.com has seen a 67 percent increase in video plays on the site in July 2007 vs. January 2007.

And on Style.com, cameras are taken backstage each year during New York Fashion Week—which the magazine calls its own personal “Super Bowl”—so that users could get the inside scoop on their favorite designers, like Vera Wang (cameras followed her while she went ice skating), and Christian Louboutin (who was shown trapezing).

Style.com set a record for CondéNet in October 2006, when its users played videos more than any other CondéNet site ever in any other month.

According to Richard Glosser, executive director of emerging media, CondéNet, online video is a natural progression for the company.

Video as Entry Point

“With the amount of people connected via broadband and [having access to] video, consumers are looking for this,” says Glosser. “What we set out to do is to try and interpret our brands in way that stays true, but still extends to include the sights, sounds and motions aspect.”

He adds that the key to getting and keep users to the site to watch these videos is search engine optimization. “We work to make our sites as SEO-friendly as possible because this allows another entry point to the site,” he says.

Powered by The FeedRoom, all of CondéNet's video platforms have channel navigation, which allows users to create their own video playlists, which Glosser says

“gives people a very engaged video experience where they’ll watch four or five videos per session on average.” The user will also be subject to promotional call-outs with subscription offers to the related print publication. The can also embed any CondéNet video into an email or even their own blog, which Glosser says, “promotes viral activity.”

CondéNet announced in August that it has taken some of its video content beyond its Web sites by providing pre-show videos for Emerging Cinemas, a high definition network of digital screens in leading independent film and cultural centers.

The ten-minute pre-shows—taken from video content produced especially for Concierge.com, Epicurious.com, Style.com and Men.Style.com—will run before the start of each feature film screened in the Emerging Pictures cinema network. The future of video as a platform for CondéNet is all about enhancing what consumers already expect from the company, says Glosser.

“We really take quality seriously,” he adds. “It’s really important for us to hit that bar, and that’s reflected both in overall production value and the choices we make [in the types of videos we create]. Everything must be done in the right context with the right structure. We are not trying to be a wide-open aggregator. We want to stay within the context of what our site definitions are.”

ONLINE VIDEO IN THE B-TO-B INDUSTRY

While it’s been easier for consumer publications to jump on the online video bandwagon, b-to-b companies are finding a little bit more of a challenge, citing high costs, lack of advertising and lack of experience. But two b-to-b companies offer a look at what’s possible.

“The adoption of video among b-to-b has been slow, and advertising on videos has been even slower, but being early-to-market is better than being late,” says Wright Ferguson, chief revenue officer, Adweek Media Group. “The market is burgeoning and it’s one we want to be front and center on.”

Nielsen-owned Adweek Media Group, which publishes Mediaweek, Brandweek and Adweek, has turned to online video platform provider *Dragonfly* to help them introduce professional online videos to these titles’ Web sites.

Mediaweek, in particular, has made available two specific events via online video: the annual Media All-Stars luncheon, where cameras were present to cover the actual luncheon as well as one-on-one interviews, and the 4As Media Conference, where several “on-the-fly” interviews were conducted straight from the convention floor.

“It was really a fun and different kind of way for us to flex journalistic skills,” says Michael Burgi, editor-in-chief, Mediaweek. “Our journalists got a lot out of it, and we enjoyed doing it.”

Up next is coverage of the first annual “Mediaweek 50,” which highlights 50 of the best media executives “who make their bosses look good.” To view a video sample from “Mediaweek 50,” go to <http://channels.dragonfly.com/mw50.rino/>

Improving Web Site Metrics

But what can online video do for a Mediaweek’s circulation both online and off?

“We are clearly doing video to generate online traffic—to get people to spend more time on our Web site,” Burgi says. “We use it to get people who may not have visited our site before because we offer so much other information. Time spent on our site ramped up dramatically since adding video. We averaged just a couple minutes before. Now we get people spending 15–18 minutes on average with videos.”

Burgi adds that online video gives readers more forms of digestive content. “Some people aren’t very excited to read a long Q&A in printed format,” he says. “So if we can offer them a 3–4 minute video instead, they’ll take a lot more away from it. We believe that this is an option that our readers enjoy.”

Even American Business Media, an association that serves the b-to-b media industry, has turned to online video to increase Web traffic. The association’s Web site, which has also chosen *Dragonfly* to provide its platform, has increased its traffic by almost 10 percent every month since the association started using it, according Steve Ennen, VP, digital business strategies, ABM.

“There are times when traffic will spike just because of the videos we provide,” Ennen says. “The interview that we did with [CMP’s president/CEO] Steve Weitzner saw very large increases in traffic not just at the time it was released, but days after. To quantify it is tough, but it’s clearly a situation where valuable content will spike traffic and increase reach to audiences.”

Bringing Videos to Mobile

AmericanBusinessMedia.com’s Video Network offers about 20 different online videos featuring one-on-one interviews and highlights of various summits, conferences and meetings. The site has a video library called Video Vault, which houses 30 more videos. The association is now concentrating on translating these videos to handheld devices, such as the iPod.

“We’ve already worked with Podcast Dough to format our videos for handheld devices,” Ennen says. “But content-wise, we’re continually evolving. We’re moving

more towards a news format, and then, in the long-term, we are going to do what we can to contribute video to the overall experience. Providing more user-generated opportunities is a longer term goal for American Business Media because our users are ready for it.”

Ennen adds that making online video is one of the keys to extending a brand’s reach, making the concept of circulation obsolete. “What we’re really talking about here is audience development.”

When it comes to viability, Ennen says online video is not only viable, but it’s vital. “The format itself is very conducive to business information companies because it’s a great format for how-to’s, show coverage and product introductions,” Ennen says. “And it’s a great way to get the users involved—it sort of enhances the whole community aspect.”