

Selling the sizzle.

Even in times like these, video engagement is still marketing's hottest tool, a recent study shows. Here's how to maximize your investment – and virtually close the sale online.

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For marketers, the latest Google “this” or the newest YouTube “that” seem to offer a new sales-generating magic bullet every week. Yet according to *Advertising Age* (February 23, 2009) there is “a growing body of evidence which suggests not only that TV advertising still works, but that it may be working better than ever.”

The lesson here isn't that every company or association should be on TV – placement costs are prohibitive and specific markets are nearly impossible to target efficiently that way. But the study *Ad Age* cites does point out a fact that hasn't changed in the last half century of advertising.

“If engagement with your audience is important, the most effective communications approach is still the combination of sight, sound, intellect and emotion.”

Even champions of the online industry are struck by the interactive world's inability to fully engage consumers by itself. Randall Rothenberg, CEO of the Interactive Advertising Bureau, recently said, “We need a creative renaissance in interactive advertising. We have ignored... the role that esthetics play in creating brand engagement and brand affinity.”

He added that, “Whatever form it takes, great creative... engages the consumers' intellect and emotions in ways that create bonds between consumers and advertisers...”

In other words, he wishes that interactive media could be as engaging as video.

So do lots of others, apparently. The use of video on the web is exploding, some by marketers who think their home cameras will do the job, and others who take the

medium more seriously. The intent is clear in both cases – combine video’s engagement with the web’s ability to reach millions.

Forward-thinking marketers are creating their own web “newscasts.” Individually personalizing online-delivered videos by recipient’s name. Capturing and sharing the glowing recommendations of their clients. Introducing their company’s unique brand at prospect meetings. Consolidating training programs. Saying “welcome” to thousands of new employees, one online meeting at a time. Re-purposing existing video so it’s exactly the right message for their website.

The challenge, as with every business and marketing situation, is cost vs. benefit. It’s the rare organization these days that *isn’t* struggling to find the proper balance between how much is necessary to spend on a professional video production to present the organization beautifully – without breaking the bank.

Obviously, not every production company or idea is right for your situation. To get started, though, here are 25 guidelines to help you make sure your next video hits all the right notes with all your audiences – in-person, online and throughout your organization.

Engage viewer interest.

At its heart, video that works tells a story. Viewers want you to touch their hearts, tickle their funny bone, engage their interest visually, aurally, intellectually and emotionally. Videos that work well employ the following guidelines instinctively.

1. Get real.

Studies still confirm that most of us buy with our heart, not our head. So it’s important for your video to establish a *personal* connection with the viewer. Hint – utilizing real people is a good start.

2. Tell a story.

Nothing entertains and engages like a well-told tale. Try telling yours by imagining first and foremost what your viewer would like to hear, not what you’d like to sell them.

3. Use video’s emotional power.

Ever wonder why “How did that make you feel?” is often the first question a TV reporter asks? It’s simple. Video is by far the most powerful medium for conveying emotion. For marketers, that equals engagement, and that means sales.

4. Entertain.

Each of the many elements that comprise your video will be critical to its success. Your choice of actors, company spokespersons, testimonials, voiceover, music, pacing, length and “tone” can all support your video’s goal and brand – or compromise it. Choose carefully.

5. Leave humor to the professionals.

There are limited ways a joke can be told well – endless ways to tell one badly. Treat your audience as you would talk to them face-to-face. Respectfully.

6. Write to the picture, not your sales plan.

TV news covers thousands of fires and natural disasters every year, but budget debacles rarely. Why? Fires and natural disasters make for a more dramatic visual story. Build your script from the visuals up.

7. Sell first, educate later.

“Say one thing and say it well” has long been an axiom for success in advertising. You only get one chance to make a first impression. Stay focused on the single message you want them to remember.

8. Assume that your mother cares – but no one else does.

There’s a battle for your audience’s attention every minute. Creating your video is the first step in getting it seen. Pay attention to how you plan to promote and distribute it as another key factor in its success.

Optimize for online.

Video on your website finally makes affordable what was once limited to expensive and inefficient advertising on TV – viewer engagement. Even better, it’s targeted toward just the right people, measurable and relatively inexpensive. Keep in mind, though, that it offers its own set of unique viewing challenges.

9. Edit for interactive viewing.

Porting video over to your website is relatively easy. But remember that online audiences are *actively* seeking specific information and have no time to spare. Make sure your online video gets to the point.

10. Re-purpose to meet each audience’s interest.

Corporate videos are often seen as “one-size-fits-all.” But what interests one audience can be irrelevant to another. When planning your video, consider all the audiences you might want to eventually reach.

11. Remember that people respond to other people.

No matter how dazzling the technology you use to present your message, there's no substitute for sincerity. Heartfelt, unscripted sales messages and testimonials can be invaluable for putting a human face on your organization.

12. Engage in a way that's online-friendly.

Home made videos can be uniquely charming – but often miss the point. When you have a lot of *internal* audiences to please, a surer path is to develop content that's both entertaining and relevant to viewer interests, and aligned with your organization's brand.

13. Make it Google-optimal.

As video's popularity on the Internet has skyrocketed, the latest algorithms from Google weight videos' relevance more heavily in searches. Make sure your meta-data is comprehensive, and that your file naming and architecture makes your video easy to find.

14. Consider the viral possibilities.

While corporate videos are great for getting the message out, it's rare to find one that's so absorbing that millions will pass it along. Want to try? Go for the bizarre, amazing, unusual and truly newsworthy. If you're just not there yet, go for the heart. Hit that and you can't miss.

15. Make it easy to share.

Video on the web makes a great conversation starter. Promote the possibility by making sure your video can be embedded, emailed, downloaded and posted to social media sites like YouTube, Viddler and Blip.tv.

16. Track your ROI.

At least one survey shows it's not unusual to find that adding video to a site can drive 36% more clicks, 20% more inbound calls and more than double time spent on a site. Track your video's performance online by giving it a unique call to action, trackable URL, coupon, discount code or its own phone number.

Sell your CEO.

We've saved the most important steps for last. Because it's far easier to kill a video production than see it through to the end, it pays to pay attention to gathering support from the very beginning. Here are some ways to get everyone on board.

17. Get buy-in at the highest levels.

Remember that the goal isn't to create a cool video. It's simply a great vehicle to promote the company's brand, increase sales, recruit more of the best and brightest, train associates more effectively and efficiently, or *quantifiably* improve the organization's position.

18. Emphasize ROI and marketing potential.

Advertisers' huge investment in TV commercials is bottom line evidence that video's approach works. Its inherent potential for drama and audience engagement, reasonable cost and easier-than-ever distribution means that kind of power is available to departments *within* organizations as well.

19. Everyone else zigging? Zag!

Times are rough everywhere now. But unless you're planning to be out of business, keep in mind that studies consistently show that organizations that continue to market through downturns end up with increased share when times improve.

20. Budget smart.

It's amazing how production companies can meet your needs when you're clear upfront about budget limitations. Ask them to show you how they can meet your needs with clever scripting and "workarounds."

21. Leverage your investment.

Consider adding shots or even another day of taping to meet down-the-road needs. Even though you may have thought of your initial video as "decoration" for your tradeshow booth, consider giving it online legs too, or as an adjunct to other divisions' video efforts.

22. Plan – to accomplish more and spend less.

The key to efficient video production is in the planning. Discuss your expectations with your video producer, and make sure everyone involved is prepared on the day of the shoot. Once the crew has arrived at your site, enabling them to move efficiently from shot to shot can eliminate heartburn later.

23. Stay loose.

Successful corporate videos depend on tight planning. Brilliant videos result from a combination of planning and a touch of genius, which rarely arrives at a convenient time. When possible, leave room for last minute inspirations, whether in your budget or deadline.

24. Choose your video production partner wisely.

Your checklist of questions should include the following: Are they just shooters or scriptwriters too? Do they know your market? Will they help you meet your sales or communications goals? Do you like their work? Do they present themselves well? Can they help you sell the video up the chain of command? Are they recommended? Do you like and trust them?

25. Take a deep breath. Relax. And begin.

You'd be amazed at how many ways there are to address budget and production issues in the hands of experienced videographers. With your clear vision of what you want to accomplish, you'll be better able to get the best performance from your on-camera "talent." And you'll be able to more fully utilize the expertise of the partners you choose to produce your video.

So go ahead and get started. Get in touch with a few video production companies and compare notes. You're likely to find that with a phone call or two, you can get a lot of your questions answered – and your concerns relieved – a lot faster than you might have expected.

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