

Video SEO: Marketing and Promoting Online Videos

We've written about producing videos for corporations, but there are loads of small, locally owned, entrepreneurial companies that want to expand and need your help. Many have turned to websites to market themselves, but few are savvy enough to leverage the opportunities in internet marketing. Now that online video has been shown to help boost the Google PageRank for websites, video producers have a new market for their services.

These services need not be limited to video production. If you can put together a distribution package of your clients' videos via user-generated content (UGC) sites and social networking sites, these forward-thinking small companies may soon grow and prosper.

In the June/July 2009 issue of *Streaming Media*, Nico McLane wrote about VSEO (video search engine

optimization). In the quest for the "secret sauce" for search engine strategy, she discussed several techniques for optimizing the use of video on websites to achieve a higher place in search results.

She encouraged filmmakers to use YouTube and other UGC sites to host their videos. McLane wrote:

It's faster to get a video indexed when uploaded to YouTube or an existing site that is already in Google and the other major search engines. When a site is submitted manually, it takes at least 90 days to begin showing up in search results, but YouTube, MySpace, and other established sites can list the same site in less than 24 hours. Just make sure you don't rely solely on an upload of your video, but create a full 'channel page' for your videos; those weigh more in Google and others. Make sure you clearly indicate the link back to the site

you want end users to go to, include links in the channel pages, and include a lower-third graphic in the video itself with text advertising your site.

McLane also recommends that filmmakers use Google Analytics to track video-embedded webpages. WordPress, Drupal, and Joomla offer free plug-ins to upload video and track usage.

MARKETING STUDIES

A recent study conducted by Forrester Research, Inc.'s Nate Elliott and reported in *BusinessWeek* concluded, "Videos are 53 times more likely to appear on the first page of search results than text pages." According to Elliott, "On the keywords for which Google offers video results, we found an average of 16,000 videos vying to appear on results pages containing an average of 1.5 video results—giving each video

about an 11,000-to-1 chance of making it onto the first page of results. By comparison, there was an average of 4.7 million text pages competing for a place on results pages with an average of just 9.4 text results—giving each text page about a 500,000-to-1 chance of appearing on the first page of results.”

BusinessWeek reported that in November 2008 there were 12.7 billion video views and 12.3 billion online searches in general. Video viewing seems to have surpassed website searching! Given the fact that there are fewer videos than webpages, sites with video have a greater chance of being found than those with text pages alone.

PermissionTV asked 400 corporate executives what the focus of their digital marketing campaigns would be. The results of the PermissionTV survey (www.permissiontv.com/pdf/ptv_survey_results.pdf) showed 67% starting online video and 42% planning to include social media in their campaigns. More than 77% said that online media would be an important strategic initiative for their companies.

VIDEO SEO

Nate Elliott recommends that you optimize video placement to take advantage of “blended search” (what Google calls “universal search”), where search engines show videos, news stories, photos, and maps as part of their search results. Insert keywords into the file names of the videos on a site, use keyword-rich captions and annotations, and create an online video library. See Google Video Sitemaps (<http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2007/12/introducing-video-sitemaps.html>) for help with this.

Elliott also suggests that you host your videos on YouTube and embed those YouTube videos in your own site. According to Elliott, “Google says its algorithms consider how many times a video is viewed, and any views embedded videos receive on your own site get added to the ‘views’ tally on YouTube.” Elliott adds that his study indicated that “nearly

every video we saw Google blend into its results came when you embed videos from YouTube into your own site.” Elliott recommends that you put them into the relevant text pages on your site. “The context provided by the text on those pages (which is hopefully already optimized for search as well) will help the search engines figure out what your videos are about.”

ReelSEO (www.reelseo.com) is a website chock full of articles from internet marketers and online video experts. It’s the creation of Mark Robertson, who specializes in online video marketing and search engine optimization (SEO). ReelSEO is loaded with tips and techniques to help get your website and the websites of your clients increased exposure.



Results from the PermissionTV survey posted online show pursuing an online video strategy as a key initiative for the majority of the corporations surveyed.



Another helpful Google page on the value of sitemapping for getting your videos (and your clients') seen is <http://googlevideo.blogspot.com/2008/05/video-sitemaps-how-we-find-great-videos.html>.

We spoke with Robertson to get his take on how filmmakers can help their clients by not only producing videos, but also optimizing them for major search engines such as Google. He differentiated between a standard “organic” Google search for text and a universal or blended search where Google displays video, news stories, and other media.

Robertson points out two keys for search engine optimization for Google. “First, it’s important that your website and web pages can be easily indexed by Google and that those pages contain the keywords and phrases that are important to you,” he says. “This is called ‘on-page SEO.’ Secondly—and this is the innovation that really led Google to break out as a leader in the search space—Google looks across the web at other websites and how they relate to each other. Google has developed a proprietary algorithm that looks across the web at how other sites link to and describe one another. You can think of these links as votes from other sites. This calculation is known as ‘Page Rank,’ and off-page SEO is optimizing your site towards a greater Page Rank.”

Google’s PageRank system gives priority to websites and webpages that have the greatest authority or weight according to Google, measured by the number and quality of links to them. “Google also looks for topical relevancy,” says Robertson. “The more quality links, the higher [the] rank. If people link to a URL that has video, that URL will develop a higher PageRank, thus giving it increased opportunity to rank within search engine results pages.”

Robertson explains that “engagement objects” are another feature that Google looks for when determining a site’s ranking. Engagement objects include video, audio, interactivity, and maps. They enhance the user’s experience and therefore engage them. Robertson adds, “In order to get higher rankings within Google, you need to focus on both off-page and on-page SEO.”

He included another good tip: Don't use the term "click here" for a link to video. If you perform a Google search for click here, you get Adobe coming up first, followed by www.clickhere.com, followed by Microsoft and Apple. It's better to utilize a descriptive title of your video that contains relevant keywords as the anchor text for a link, rather than using terms such as "click here" and "watch here." An example of relevant keywords would be "Watch How to Install a Screen Door."

Social networking sites are good places to post your videos, but keep in mind that you need visitors to those sites who will copy your link and post it to their blog or website for Google to apply more weight to your video URL. The reason for this is that Facebook and other UGC sites often use a "no follow" rule that tells Google not to count those as links for added PageRank. The key is to encourage other people to link to your video clips or to your website, rather than trying to build inorganic links by yourself.

Encourage your fans to also bookmark your site. While Vodpod (<http://vodpod.com>) is used primarily for musical, political, and humorous videos, your fans can join the Vodpod community to bookmark your videos and help you leverage that site's PageRank. The Vodpod plug-in allows you to collect videos from thousands of sites on the internet and put them on your blog with an interactive gallery.

Rather than hosting your videos on your website, you automatically enjoy higher rankings if you let YouTube be your host, since YouTube has a high PageRank to begin with. Then embed the videos on your site using the embed



ReelSEO's Online Video Marketing Guide



Vodspot's VodSpot (<http://vodspot.tv>) enables you to publish your video "collection" on your own customized video site.



EveryZing's MetaPlayer leverages speech-to-text technology to enhance video searchability and displays a transcript of a video alongside the clip itself.

code that YouTube provides. YouTube embed code acts the same way as a link: When you embed your video on other websites, Google counts those embeds as "link juice" for the YouTube video URL. You then share some of the high ranking that YouTube receives from

being a portal website with so many links to it.

In addition to YouTube, it is a good idea to post your videos to other UGC sites such as Vimeo, Metacafe, Dailymotion, and blip.tv. You can leverage the PageRank that those sites already have to show up well within Google's universal search. A service called Tubemogul enables you to upload your video to several video sharing sites with ease. By posting your video to multiple video sharing sites that have high Google rankings, you will have a greater chance of the search displaying a thumbnail of the video as well as text. Visitors are more likely to click on a thumbnail image than on plain text.

For example, Google "seo media sales training." Naturally, rankings will shift over time, but when I did so while writing this article, the first, second, sixth, and ninth entries were all the same video, but the second and ninth entries had video thumbnails.

If you post videos to your site or to your clients' websites, be sure to submit a media RSS (MRSS) feed or a video site map to Google. Robertson favors using the video site map www.reelseo.com/google-mrss-xml.

According to Robertson, "Just as important as links is on-page text which tells the search engines what your video is about." Together with the video on your YouTube page or on your own page, include a description of the video, relevant text, and perhaps a transcript of the video. Robertson also advises typing in lower-third keys during the video and adding a URL and phone number at the end. Unique URLs or phone numbers can help you gauge the responses from that particular video—another way to measure its effectiveness.

Filming Local Online Commercials at TurnHere Films

Thousands of videographers in the U.S. and abroad are producing online commercials for local stores and service businesses.

AT&T's www.yellowpages.com now posts local commercials online, and user-review companies such as Citysearch are getting into the act. You can contact businesses yourself, or you can become a freelancer for TurnHere Films, a production company across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco. AT&T contracts with TurnHere to produce online commercials for small businesses that advertise on the Yellow Pages site. The online ads range from 45 seconds to 1 minute and 15 seconds; the runtimes are not constricted by broadcast length requirements. Marc Prager, VP of TurnHere's Filmmaker Network, says, "They are a fantastic partner because they are everywhere across the country."

And TurnHere seems to have cast as wide a net, with reportedly more than 8,000 filmmakers working for the company. This network of filmmakers extends beyond AT&T and the U.S., to scores of countries abroad. As production volume can spike at any time, Prager is always on the lookout for new filmmakers. He encourages filmmakers in any city to complete a filmmaker profile.

In addition to AT&T video business profiles, TurnHere produces promotional videos for large corporations such as Pottery Barn. TurnHere got started with the travel industry, and one of its larger customers is IHG (Intercontinental Hotels Group). It uses the concierges as on-camera talent who show off the individual cities they are in. The company boasts a library of 20,000 videos that they have produced in their 4 years in business.

A typical shoot begins with TurnHere's staff members making most of the production arrangements with the client. They contact the local filmmaker, and the filmmaker schedules the

shoot. According to Prager, most shoots take 60–90 minutes of time on location. While you won't need to bring a light kit, TurnHere does require that you have a wireless lavalier microphone. At dark locations such as a bar or restaurant, Prager suggests you use an LED camera-mounted light.

Videographers who visit TurnHere's website can read the company's requirements to join its Filmmaker Network. The first piece of equipment it wants all filmmakers to bring with them on a shoot is a tripod. Next, it specifies a lavalier microphone that TurnHere states "is MANDATORY to assure quality audio."

TurnHere provides release forms for the filmmaker to get signed by the client, and it has a variety of checklists and production planning guides to help with the process.

While most of the videos are in standard definition 4:3 aspect ratio, some of the filmmakers produce in 16:9. In addition to shooting, TurnHere wants you to perform the editing yourself, and, at least for the Yellow Pages videos, it wants four versions of the commercial: One is the "master full version" with music and graphics. Next it requires what it calls a "clean full version" with no music, no graphics, and no lower-third keys. It also asks for a "master trailer," which is about 15 seconds in length with music and graphics, as well as a "clean trailer" without music and graphics.

TurnHere maintains a library of music, but if the filmmaker wants to provide his or her own royalty-free music, or music he or she has the rights to, TurnHere wants a copy of the music track along with a simple release form. The company wants you to put the edited versions on a data DVD, and it wants you to send the field tapes or raw files. It provides the FedEx number and packaging for shipment.

In her *Streaming Media* article, Nico McLane discusses the potential of search engines such as Google searching for video using speech-to-text technology. For now she recommends using EveryZing's MetaPlayer (www.everyzing.com/solutions/metaplayer), which displays a transcript of a video alongside the video itself. According to McLane, "EveryZing's optimized page first came up with a set of keywords versus what I would most likely enter organically."

Robertson stresses that optimizing for video alone is not the Holy Grail of search engine optimization. Applying standard SEO techniques such as getting links back to your page, adding your website or your clients' sites to Google

maps, and making use of universal search, are some of the keys to upping your Google PageRank and hence, your rankings within Google search.

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTS

Earlier we mentioned engagement objects. An engagement object is an element or multimedia component that you can add to your website that is engaging and causes users to interact with your website. Bruce Clay (www.bruceclay.com), internet marketing advisor, writes in his book *Search Engine Optimization All-in-One Desk Reference For Dummies*, "Engagement objects are applications like video, audio files, pictures, maps, charts, macros, or polls that you can

stick on your Web site in order to actively 'engage' your user. They're important not just because of the need to embrace blended search in your SEO strategy, but also because objects like videos and images enhance the user experience."

Another engagement object is live streaming. According to Clay's site, "This past fall, one of the biggest internet phenomena was the Shiba Inu puppyscam from Ustream. Ustream (www.ustream.tv) is a site that allows users to stream live video to their sites. A couple in San Francisco used the site as a means of keeping tabs on a litter of newborn Shiba Inu puppies, and wound up becoming internet superstars. Other

sites use the technology to stream music concerts or live events. Using live streaming video is like uploading a video with all the pitfalls of live television."

Clay also talks about variables that are important to the Google search algorithm, and he discusses how the introduction of universal search has resulted in a change in the number of variables that are considered for ranking. Previously, it was accepted that Google used 120 variables to rank websites. Since the introduction of universal search and the increased use of engagement objects across websites, Clay believes that Google has increased the algorithm variables to 200 variables, most of which can be attributed to these engagement objects.

"In the case of video, we believe that, as one of the more important engagement objects, Google has actually started to build it into the algorithm," Clay says. "To us, that means if your website has engagement objects on it—video or MP3 ... it is going to be received by the algorithm better, and your site will actually have an opportunity to rank better."

"Now today, we haven't seen it much as an incidence of ranking, mostly because not everyone is doing it."



A still from a TurnHere commercial shoot for a pet grooming business

... I don't think we've yet seen even the tip of the iceberg. I think that a year from now, we are going to be sitting here saying, 'If you don't have video, if you don't have engagement objects on your website, you are just not going to rank.' It will make you last among equals if you don't have it."

VIRAL VIDEO

You may have read about the guys who put an iPhone in a blender, filmed the process, and posted the video on the internet. The humorous nature of the video paired with the human curiosity of the visitors, resulted in viewers sending links of the video to their friends, which made this an instant sensation. The video earned more than 7 million views, and the website www.willitblend.com became a partner in selling \$400 Blendtec blenders online.

"The Human Skateboard" is a 30-second stop-motion animation of one guy riding another as a skateboard. Clever camera angles and tricks not possible on a regular skateboard earned it 1.7 million views. The end of the video displays the website www.sneauxshoes.com, where you can purchase \$70 skateboard shoes.

These enterprising filmmakers didn't just upload their videos to YouTube and enjoy overnight successes. They posted links in blogs and forums. They posted the video on as many UGC sites they could. They encouraged everyone they knew to include links in emails to their friends and colleagues.

You may not need to destroy an iPhone or inflict road rash on your

TurnHere: The Videographers' Perspective

We spoke with some TurnHere filmmakers to learn about their experiences. Sandy Buller, a filmmaker in the Houston area, says he has produced more than 50 Yellow Pages and Citysearch videos for TurnHere. He has also produced other types of videos for companies such as LexisNexis, a legal education organization, and FrontDoor, an online real estate firm.

"My experience with TurnHere has been mediocre," Buller says, "but my in-the-field, quick scriptwriting, producing, directing, and camera-operating have resulted in muscles that are stronger and better for having gone out and done these shoots. The more shoots you do, the more experience you have as resource for future shoots. Also, they've asked me to become one of their wedding filmmakers. I won't cross that line, though. I'll work during the weekdays and perform commercial-type video work for them, but not those low-budget wedding videos." (Buller runs a cinematic wedding video outfit called Sweet Spirit Productions with his wife, Janet.)

Alabama's Jack Temple says he has produced about 30 videos for TurnHere during the 15 months he has been working with the company. "The shoots have ranged from plumbers to Lasik surgery. I've videotaped dentists, a tire store, restaurants, and hair salons. These have been for yellowpages.com." Temple says that TurnHere arranged the shooting appointments for him; he just needed to call the client to confirm. He says the shoots usually take about 90 minutes on location and 3–4 hours in postproduction. Temple says that TurnHere wants a 48-hour turnaround, and he sends everything to the company by FedEx.

For the Yellow Pages commercials, Temple says that he gets about \$225 per shoot—about half his normal rate. How has it been working with TurnHere? "They are easy to work with," Temple says. "They have been A-one from day one."

Video Site Maps

People who want to get serious about SEO for a site that they administer need to create an account at Google Webmaster Tools. This will give them access to some great analytics tools as well as configuration and diagnostics tools that report on how Google and their sites interact. There is also a tool for uploading a site map directly to Google.

A site map gives Google information about pages and content on your site that Google might not otherwise discover through the robot crawlers that index the web. Standard site maps are written in the XML file format, which can be created with a simple text editor. Google Webmaster Tools has information on how to organize the XML code.

Relevant to video SEO, Google also accepts a more specialized video site map file upload: "Google Video Sitemaps is an extension of the Sitemap protocol that enables you to publish and syndicate online video content and its relevant metadata to Google in order to make it searchable in the Google Video index" (www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=80471).

There are many modalities for embedding video in webpages, and the Google bot might not understand that your page is displaying a video. Submitting a video site map is a way for you to tell Google that video is on a particular page.

You will have to prepare a video site map XML file that points Google to each video on your site. It must include the following information:

- Which landing page the video is on
- Location of the video player
- Location of the video file
- Location of the thumbnail file
- The title and description of the video

Google includes a disclaimer that this may not guarantee the video's inclusion into the Google Video index, but it is something that will definitely put it on the radar. In the end, it is up to Google's secretive methods of determining how relevant your content is that will decide how well it appears in search results.

Here are some helpful websites:

- www.webanalyticsworld.net/2007/12/video-sitemap-intro-google-webmaster.html
- www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/topic.py?topic=10079
- <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com>
- www.google.com/webmasters

—Jara Queeto, web manager, Audio Visual Consultants

buddy to get noticed online, but with some brainstorming with your client you might be able to come up with a clever angle to promote the product. Viewers want to be entertained, and an internet commercial with the right doses of humor and personality can go viral.

TURNHERE FILMS

Just across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco resides TurnHere, Inc. (www.turnhere.com). This video production company has developed a network of filmmakers around the world who produce short online commercials for hotels and restaurants. Its business model includes distribution of clients' videos to YouTube, MySpace, Yahoo! Video, and Dailymotion.

Not content to call itself a video production company, TurnHere says that its clients "get a complete video marketing program that drives new business, connects with customers and increases your company's visibility on the Web." Part of this marketing program is applying search engine optimization by naming videos with

relevant keywords and providing its customers with embed code so they can post the videos to their own websites and to social networking sites. TurnHere also helps its clients get listed on Google Local, Google Maps, and Google Earth.

While the company client list includes such big corporations as Pottery Barn and IHG (Intercontinental Hotels Group), TurnHere reaches out to such local businesses as "a pizza place in Brooklyn ... a cake-maker in San Francisco ... an Alabama church," according to its website. Small, local businesses can get started with TurnHere with a 60 second "Business Profile" priced at \$499.

The outfit has a deal with AT&T to produce online commercials for customers that purchase advertising on www.yellowpages.com. TurnHere has set up a network of videographers across the country to help with production. See the sidebar "Filming Local Online Commercials at TurnHere Films" to learn more about TurnHere's Filmmaker Network.

TurnHere reports on a www.marketingsherpa.com video marketing survey

in which it was a research partner. The results of the survey show the following:

- 52% of viewers take action after watching
- 30% of viewers visit a store
- 30%–40% increase in clicks for more information
- 16%–20% increase in phone calls

This is the kind of research data you can show prospective customers in addition to showing them your demo videos. In these days of tight marketing budgets, small businesses want to see results. Together with your video production skills, search engine optimization skills, and marketing savvy, you should be able to approach nearly any kind of business in your area and help it increase sales with your online video production and marketing services.

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