

What Online Video Can Do for Your Small Business

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Whether it's YouTube or embedded on a Website, video has become an integral part of consumers' research and Web surfing, which is why small businesses have to follow their larger brethren and embrace this medium. Done right, video can put potential customers at ease, and at the same time create a huge and loyal following without having to spend any money on advertising and marketing.

"The ability to put out a video is very easy today," says Ashan Willy, senior vice president of product management at video conferencing company Polycom. "It's as easy as using a smartphone to record yourself and putting it on your website."

Even if you want to be more professional, a video camera with HD quality can cost less than \$2,000 -- and the pay back to the business is immeasurable in terms of reaching thousands if not hundreds of thousands of potential customers.

Video comes in many flavors, from the embedded ones found on Websites to stand alone videos created for YouTube. There are informational videos, tutorial clips and even tongue in cheek ones. While they all serve a different purpose, they share one common denominator: the content is short and compelling.

"We live in an ADD society. No one has time," says Shawn Prez, CEO and founder of Power Moves, Inc., a grassroots marketing company. "You've got thirty seconds to get in and get out."

According to experts, small business owners should view video as more than just another marketing tool. Instead of using video to showcase a new line of skis, you should film real people using those skis. Or take a restaurant as another example. Rather than hire actors to praise the food and service, film real customers genuinely enjoying the meal and experience.

Willy points to one customer, which makes hydrogen cells for emerging markets, as a company that has successfully embraced video. While the company has a corporate video explaining the business and technology, what really resonates with people are the technology videos it puts out from its chief technology officer. Those videos, says Willy, have created a cult following among the company's buyers and customers, and has made their CTO an industry expert.

"Video allows them not to expose the corporate message but expose key personal and key talent within the company," he says.

Before creating a video, you need to have a clear understanding of who the audience is. After all, you don't want to spend time making a tutorial video only to find out your customers want to see the product in action.

"You have to know who you are speaking to first and foremost," says Prez. "You don't want every message to feel like 'I'm being marketed to'," he says. Consumers are savvy, particularly the ones watching online videos, and will quickly see through all the marketing fluff. Because of that, the content has to be compelling and honest.

One of the most attractive aspects of video is the ability for it to go viral, reaching thousands of existing and potential customers. For evidence, you need only look at the countless homemade YouTube videos that are viewed by millions of people around the world in a short period of time. Often those videos are outrageous, but even the more mundane ones can garner a lot of attention if they are done right.

Because of the chance of a video going viral or even reaching people beyond the local market, you must be careful about the content you create. Business owners should stay away from anything offensive, political or that would otherwise turn off existing or potential customers. Remember, any video you put out is an extension of your brand and will live on the Internet long after the product or service, says Willy.

"When things become easy (like making videos) it's easy to put out sloppy work," he says. "Regardless of the informality of the video, it's important to know they are always on stage."