



BIG IDEAS

Video Killed the Radio Star (The Sequel): Using Video on Your Web Site

Joe Walsh | February, 2009

If video killed the radio star, online video will eventually beat down the slumbering mix of text and photos on most modern Web sites. Thank goodness.

The evidence is everywhere.

- Overall, growth in online video is robust, increasing 45 percent in 2008 from the year prior to 13.5 billion total monthly views. Thanks, YouTube!
- B2B and B2C marketers in the U.S. will take a closer look at online video in 2009, according to a survey conducted in December 2008 by *PermissionTV*. Most place it first on their digital marketing to-do list, topping social networking, podcasting and the like.
- More than two-thirds of respondents said they would focus their budgets on online video this year.
- More than one-half of respondents are also expected to be implementing or extending an online video project in Q2 2009. Less than one-third said they were doing so currently.
- Roughly one in four top 100 law and top 50 accounting/consulting firms use video on the Web today (mostly on career sections of firm Web sites or recruiting specific sub-sites).

Speaking of recruiting, it's important to note that videos are not only for the young and young of heart. While Generation Y (ages 18–32) has the highest percentage of people using the Web for watching and downloading videos, *Pew Research* reports that nearly the same percentage of Generation Xers (ages 33–44) and almost half of Young Boomers (ages 45–54) watch online video.

So more online video is inevitable. Getting yours watched and remembered is not.

It certainly is déjà vu all over again, Yogi.

The wide majority of professional service firm videos we've looked at are uncannily similar. They are long, winding video narratives with firm talking heads discussing early responsibility, collaborative environments, challenging work and "people making the difference." Most implicitly reference a "no A-H" policy (leaving us to wonder which firm welcomes the A-Hs, but that's another article). In other words, most professional services videos look and sound oddly similar, like the interchangeable firm brochures of yore. That is, firms are investing in the same difference, or lack thereof.

Accountants, consultants, lawyers and those that sell to them are not the only ones driving into this rut. In an article calling for Web video innovation, *Wired Magazine* writes: “Marshall McLuhan pointed out that whenever we get our hands on a new medium we tend to use it like older ones. Early TV broadcasts consisted of guys sitting around reading radio scripts because nobody had realized yet that TV could tell stories differently.”

So beyond adopting the new media on our sites, how can we use it to make our firms unique?

Some fundamentals (and examples) of breakthrough video:

1. *Unearth a driving concept and a unique creative idea.* The best definition of a brand is “a unique identity based on a promise of value different from others.” To be engaging and memorable, you’ll need to dig deep to articulate that difference—especially when it may be only a few degrees different than the next firm. Boston-based Choate Hall & Stewart’s YouTube inspired site, choate.com/careers, is a clever, interactive joust that positions Choate as a smart alternative to its larger competitors, by any measure.

2. *Be authentic, but in a very practiced way.* Cheesy hucksterism will be sniffed out and even derided on the Web. So using your own people can be a plus. However, authenticity is tough to capture, especially when your people are not comfortable in front of a camera. Even some of the best trial lawyers we’ve shot—all very comfortable story tellers—can freeze up when the light turns green. Yes, you want to be authentic, but that doesn’t mean you can wing it. Practice, along with multiple takes, does make perfect—ask any professional actor.

3. *Connect right brain to left.* Substance is rewarded as much as form on the Web. And so it goes for Web video offerings. Deloitte Consulting’s Born2Consult.com does a very entertaining job of previewing its interview process and its culture (comfortable, fun, self-deprecating). One could say Deloitte is in rare form with its 12-year old interviewer, Billy, but they also offer real substance: concrete tools for preparing to be your best in the interview.

4. *Seek talented professionals who know video, people and good creative.* While your brother-in-law may be an excellent wedding videographer, that does not mean he’s a big idea person. If he’s on your short list of providers, make sure he also has a keen creative point of view and an ability to drive it from thought to finish (see item 1 above). Also be sure he can coax a performance out of your people. Capturing the open-bar-fueled personality of your uncle at the reception is different than putting your managing partner at ease under the bright lights in your reception area.

5. *Brevity is a common courtesy.* Many online videos play like feature length documentaries, minus Ken Burn’s gift for the craft. Our rough rule: Five minutes of online video is probably four minutes too long, and many of the professional service videos we see run to up to ten minutes. Houston’s Andrew Kurth LLP does a nice job of cutting the sentiments and straight talk of its people into bite size chunks with a sharp concept and good editing. See for yourself at andrewskurth.com/recruiting/.

Don’t limit video to recruiting.

While many of the examples shared here are recruiting efforts, limiting the online video discussion to recruiting is, well, limiting. The wide-open space for first movers is video on the rest of your site. How so? Less than a handful of top professional service firm sites use video on their home page, practice pages and attorney bio pages (three of the most trafficked portions of your site). That’s a missed opportunity to engage and impress. The next frontier:

- Video case studies that not only give a sense of who you’ve worked for and what you’ve accomplished, but also capture how you go about your work and what it might be like to work with you
- Attorney profiles that become attorney viewpoints. Taking the attorney bio to another level, this approach features your industry or service experts talking about developments in their area of expertise
- Video distribution of thought leadership, downloadable as podcasts, are another way to go.

These are just a few of the areas ripe for innovation. But first you are probably dealing with a threshold challenge: leadership teams who ask why professional service firms should embrace the video-centric Web that YouTube, ESPN, the *New York Times* and others are making mainstream. Why bother, they

ask? The best answer is video gives you a better medium for building relationships because your visitors can see and hear people they can relate to and connect with.

Isn't that the point of professional services marketing?