

13 ways to take advantage of YouTube

By: Jennifer Kavur, ComputerWorld Canada (16 Oct 2009)

YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world and Canada is the YouTube capital when it comes to audience reach, but Canadian businesses are slow to take advantage of the possibilities for ads and marketing. A Google spokesperson, social media expert and IT analyst offer advice.

[YouTube, LLC](#) reaches a greater percentage of the Canadian population than the U.S., the U.K. and Germany, but Canadian businesses aren't taking advantage of its reach.

According to numbers released by [ComScore Inc.](#) this spring, YouTube reaches 42 per cent of the U.S. population, 56 per cent of the U.K and 48 per cent of Germany.

Meanwhile, 84 per cent of Canadians are spending time looking at video and 70 per cent of Canadians are doing so on YouTube, said Andrea Wilkie, retail account manager at [Google Canada](#).

"It's up 86 per cent year over year, which is huge," she said. "Back in June 2008, the average was about 132 minutes and now we're up to about 247, so not only are people online or on YouTube ... they are spending four hours a month."

While Canadian consumers are embracing YouTube, according to Wilkie, Canadian businesses aren't. "Businesses just aren't there to sort of mirror their actual behaviours and leverage that opportunity that people are spending so much time," she said.

Canadians are starting to think about search "a little bit more" when they launch campaigns, but "understanding the power and actually leveraging YouTube is not happening in the same way that consumer consumption is happening for the actual medium," she said.

"YouTube is the most searched site after Google," Wilkie pointed out.

Some Canadian businesses "have been very smart by jumping on the bandwagon," but others "are really, really slow to get started," said Michael O'Connor Clarke, senior counsellor at [Thornley Fallis Communications](#) in Toronto.

It's important for a lot of businesses to have a well-established presence on YouTube, especially considering its standing as the No. 2 search engine, said Clarke. "There's more search traffic happening within YouTube than the whole of Bing and Yahoo search and everything else put together," he said.

"If you are a business that has any kind of profile at all and you're not managing your presence on YouTube, you are making a big mistake because people are going in there and searching for information about you," said Clarke.

Businesses who haven't established a strong presence on YouTube will find the conversation go on without them, Clarke pointed out. "When people go on search, people are finding all the stuff, which in some cases, is going to be negative information about you," he said.

YouTube offers benefits if video and audio both add value in trying to sell or market or deliver your message, said Tim Hickernell, lead research analyst in Enterprise Applications at [Info-Tech Research Group Ltd.](#)

“We see some companies will create videos just so they can say they have something for YouTube ... you need to make sure that the audio and video multimedia aspect of it actually adds value to your messaging of the product,” said Hickernell.

1) Don't rely on U.S. brand interpretations

Canadian brands with headquarters in the U.S. may attempt to leverage what the Americans are doing, but this often results in losing the ability to talk to customers at a local level and missing out on key Canadian holidays, Wilkie warned.

Canadians are also a little slower in the online retail space, may not have the same product offerings and usually have a price differential, so relying on an American brand interpretation on YouTube can result in mixed messaging and risk alienating Canadian customers, she said.

Another downside of relying on American YouTube marketing and advertising campaigns is that traffic gets directed to the U.S. “Even though you have a YouTube brand channel, you've got traffic from that going to the .com and not to the .ca, so I think we lose a lot of opportunities,” said Wilkie.

2) Learn from U.S.-based campaigns

While YouTube reaches a smaller percentage of the U.S. population than Canada, U.S. retailers do a “much better job” of leveraging YouTube, according to Wilkie. “One, they'll mirror offline campaigns better than we've done ... two, they're integrating with offline events,” she said.

“In the U.S., you have all these great examples of people doing awesome integration, but in Canada, it seems to be very, very siloed in terms of how the media buys are happening and how they are lining up with campaigns we are seeing,” said Wilkie.

Wilkie's suggested looking at [Cadillac](#), [Crest](#), [Clinique](#) and [Johnson's Baby](#) for examples of YouTube channels; she pointed to the [NFL](#), eBay, Rogers and Volvo as companies with creative YouTube advertising campaigns.

Use YouTube as an always-on brand conversation by setting up a brand channel with rotating creative that can be monitored, leverage products, how-to and do-it-yourself information and compliment offline campaigns, suggested Wilkie.

3) Avoid brand-heavy content

Clarke referred to the [Home Depot](#) as one example of a company that posts “nice, smart, how-to videos” that will come up on a Google or YouTube search. “You find videos up there that take you through the steps of how to build a patio ... what they've found is something that is of interest and resonates with their audience and create videos around that,” he said.

The Home Depot has done “a genuinely smart job,” according to Clarke. “Because they've created a lot of video and have a bunch of subscribers, you just search within YouTube and one of the first results that comes up is their channel ... I'm sure if you went further into it, you'd find those ‘Home Depot sucks’ videos, but they've got their brand videos up front and centre.”

4) Don't use ads made for TV

Clarke advised businesses not to post the same videos they use for TV ads. “That's wrong because it's entirely the wrong kind of medium. You've got to provide better value than TV advertising,” he said.

5) Assuming video is expensive is a mistake

Arguing that U.S. companies do a better job with YouTube than Canadians sounds like a “bit of a sweeping generalization” to Clarke, but the social media expert “can’t argue with it entirely” either.

One factor may be ad budgets, which are bigger in the U.S. “If you look at the larger brands out there, particularly U.S.-based brands, they’ve done well to establish a decent presence on YouTube,” he said.

Companies may think “we’d love to do something interesting on YouTube, but we just don’t have the money for video,” said Clarke. But assuming video is expensive is a mistake. “You still want decent production values, but it doesn’t have to cost a fortune,” he said.

6) Don’t be afraid of video

Canadian businesses might not be ignoring YouTube, but rather just “don’t know what to do” when it comes to video, according to Clarke. “In some ways, it’s treated as a relatively new medium. It’s not text-based ... and people aren’t quite sure what to do,” he said.

Building a YouTube channel is “not that hard to do nor is it particularly expensive,” according to Clarke. Some may have had the experience of building a viral video and found it didn’t quite work out, so they dropped the idea, he said.

Clarke suggested keeping the first precepts of video-based communication in mind. “You’ve got build something that’s visually appealing and engaging and something that’s going to interest people,” he said.

7) Optimize, index and tag properly

While businesses shouldn’t be scared off by video, they do need to make sure they are optimizing, indexing and tagging their videos properly, noted Clarke. Creating YouTube videos, posting them and hoping for the best is not enough, he said.

“Don’t just throw them up there and expect that your audience is going to show up,” said Clarke. A number of clients will say, “We’ve done a number of YouTube videos and we’ve put them up,” but they haven’t thought about YouTube optimization, he said.

8) Take advantage of share-to-social features

Consumers are far more likely to be into the sharing aspects of YouTube, said Hickernell, and share-to-social features can lead to better hits and clicks for the owners of YouTube videos. If you want consumers to share with their friends and build more buzz, Hickernell suggested adding share-to-social bugs like “share to Facebook,” “post to Digg” and “add to Delicious bookmarks.”

“This is one area where companies are really starting to understand how important it is to leverage social networks for people to forward product information and offers and specials to their friends through their social networks,” he said.

The same applies to company Web sites, he added. “If you are posting to a blog on your company or product Web, or any other type of product support Web site, you still have to have those share-to-social features so people can share that URL or a particular blog post through their social network, which will get you better propagation than people simply e-mailing around links,” said Hickernell.

9) Encourage consumers to create media for you

Businesses can also encourage their customers to create media, Hickernell suggested. "Since YouTube started as a user-created media site, that's one way to exploit the specialties of YouTube," he said.

"Encourage people who are product users to do testimonials or videos they create on their own and submit to you. You don't have to allow them to submit and post without editing, they can submit to you," he said.

10) Establish YouTube followers like you would on Facebook

YouTube and Facebook both sell traditional search engine and banner ads, which are used heavily, but "we are seeing more usage of Facebook for marketing and YouTube as well by putting up your own pages," said Hickernell.

Businesses are encouraging their target segments to become followers and keeping the pages updated so there is something interesting for people to follow, said Hickernell. With Facebook in particular, most people will see the updates and be able to follow what's going on, he said.

11) YouTube versus Facebook and Twitter

YouTube is different in the type of content you can post, allows for larger character counts, includes searchable content, the ability to link back to pieces of content within your Web site and maintains a continuous two-way conversation with users, said Wilkie.

12) Start with YouTube search

For businesses that have no experience with YouTube, the easiest way to "dip your toe in the water" is to leverage content you already have and become part of the search network, Wilkie suggested. "Definitely just showing up in the search results are huge," she said.

13) Build a channel and purchase ad buys

"Any business that has a reasonably well-established brand that has any kind of prominence at all, if they are not including YouTube in two different ways, then they are making a mistake," said Clarke. The first is to make sure their corporate presence is well established, and second, to talk to their media buying firm to make sure that YouTube is included in their ad buy for appropriate searches, he said.

Best Buy and Home Depot are examples of what "some rather smarter organizations" have done, said Clarke. "They've built fully customized, on brand YouTube channels so that when people go into YouTube and start searching around for information about you, they are not just finding a couple random videos. They are finding an actual footprint, an established branded presence on there that makes sense," he said.