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[TradeOnlyToday](#) > [Columns & Blogs](#) > [Marketing Insight](#) > Case studies that validate the power of online video

Case studies that validate the power of online video

Posted on September 29th, 2014 Written by [Wanda Kenton Smith](#)



Just how important is online video in today's marketing mix? More important than you might think.

Fellow marketing columnist Michael Sciulla recently addressed this topic, but from a different perspective. Let me share some personal experiences that validate my belief that online video marketing should move to the top of the marine marketer's food chain.

I was collaborating on a targeted, online banner campaign for BoatTrader.com with Rob Bowman, my advertising rep from Dominion Marine. Because this was a new program for my client, we decided to initially test-market a particular concept and monitor the results over a short period to see how it performed, prior to a major rollout. (One of the best aspects of online advertising is the ability to quickly adjust and tweak if it's not working.)

I had already worked closely with the client to develop a marketing strategy designed to move outdated inventory. We had fleshed out an enticing call-to-action message, along with a specific timeline, to create that critical sense of urgency. We rummaged through the client's image banks and found the best available photos. The preliminary execution featured a very strong pricing incentive via rotational messaging, along with a mix of static product images.

The results of our launch test fell short of our hopes. In fact, they were dismal. We were perplexed. The ads were geo-targeted and strategically positioned to achieve maximum impact among a well-defined buyer/prospect and competitive brand profile. The offer was compelling, with tens of thousands of dollars in discounts and pricing that gave us a significant advantage over the competition. The timing was good — right in the heart of the primary buying season. A veteran digital designer was point-on with the creative. What to do?

We revisited the entire strategy. We determined that the offer was sound. We decided to retain the offer, but charged up the creative. Instead of using static imagery, I took the rep's advice and reached out to the manufacturer for available video. Luckily for us, the company had some excellent video footage. We swapped out the static imagery for some powerful action clips shot in rough-water conditions that showcased the product to its full advantage. Voila!

We had found the magic bullet. Everything else in the original strategy remained intact. However, the use of killer video footage delivered the goods — we tripled the click-through rate from the original static design. The new test run served up qualified prospects and serious buyers. In this case study, video paid dividends. It broke through the clutter of traditional banner offerings and commanded viewer attention.

I'm convinced that when used effectively, video works. And I'm not alone.

In an article on smallbiztrends.com titled "3 Key Business Marketing Trends for 2014," author John Follis chose online video as his No. 1 pick of trends to watch this year. He cited three primary drivers for what he believes is the most important marketing trend going.

First, "the continuing surge in video-friendly mobile devices." Second, "the fact that Google has made video much more search-friendly." And lastly, "the simple fact that video is the most engaging of all media." Loved his closing remark: "You've heard the saying, 'You can never be too thin or too rich.' For 2014, add: 'or have too much video.'"

Widely published author Lisa Marie Mercer, writing in Top 10 SM Social Buzz, agrees. In an online article highlighting her picks for the top 10 emerging social media marketing trends, she ranked video marketing at No. 5, noting that more than half of all online traffic is currently video-based. How to use video successfully? "For best results, keep [it] catchy, short and simple because you are demanding attention from a world full of people with increasingly shorter attention spans."

While researching this topic, I discovered a series of intriguing columns by Carla Marshall, managing editor of the online site ReelSEO.com (a source for online video marketing courses and conferences). She provided statistics that further validate the enormous growth and success of online video in today's highly saturated marketing landscape.

A study by her firm revealed that 18- to 34-year-olds are watching 53 percent more video now, compared with the same time frame in 2013 — a total of 35 minutes a day. By comparison, boomers are watching 60 percent more and the 35- to 49-year-old segment has boosted its online video viewership by a whopping 80 percent. Online video primarily is viewed on PCs and laptops, but there has been a notable leap in viewing on smartphones and tablets.

Marshall also shared the latest YouTube stats, and the results are mind-numbing: 6 billion hours of video are watched via YouTube each month and a billion folks worldwide view YouTube monthly. YouTube scored the coveted top Google video site honors with 153 million unique U.S. viewers in July. Another milestone: 100 hours of video are uploaded every minute.

So what is the relevance for marine marketers? According to Marshall, YouTube videos directly influence the purchasing decision of 53 percent of all consumers in the United States. To repeat: More than half of all consumers in the nation are influenced by YouTube videos during the buying decision. Want to bet that many of those are your prospective customers?

One of my biggest challenges of the past several years has been persuading clients to invest in original video production. I'm not talking about that pricey commercial-grade stuff we used to produce in my ad agency days, with full camera crews, helicopters, photo boats, paid talent, makeup artists, stylists and the like. There's still a place for that, but what I'm advocating here are simple, smart and inexpensive YouTube videos shot with your smartphone.

Two years ago, I presented such a plan to my largest client with a goal of beefing up its YouTube

channel with more video offerings so we could then cross-market across online and social media platforms. I was conservative in my initial approach, hoping to add a minimum of just two videos per dealership location per month, which would have amounted to 60 new videos over the year. I expected this would be a snap to achieve, as several departments could rotate in the production — sales, service, marina, boat club, yacht club, rentals, etc. Despite my hopes, the results fell far short of the vision.

A year later, I revisited the concept. This time, however, top management bought in, which helped stimulate sales management to make it a priority. Teams and assignments were made, and accountability was built into the system. The sales guys knocked it out of the park.

But did it work? Here are the facts. Draw your own conclusions.

Compared against the previous year, 48 new original videos were produced and uploaded to the YouTube channel. Analytics revealed that video views overall increased by 26 percent and total minutes watched soared to 37,427 — an increase of 364 percent from the previous year. The videos were used by members of the sales teams and emailed directly to prospects. Marketing featured them regularly as links on our online ads and website inventory, as well as in multiple social media posts.

Using videos strategically helped attract and engage a great number of prospects. The dealership enjoyed its second-biggest sales year in history.

Here's another unsolicited testimonial that came during my first meeting with the corporate sales team of Freedom Boat Club. I shared the importance of staying abreast of developing marketing trends and applying them to your business. When I finished, Dustin Tidwell, manager of the Naples, Fla., club, shared a story. He had been working to close prospects in the pipeline and decided to shoot and send out a video. He used his phone, recorded a brief personal greeting and captured a sweep of the boats in the fleet.

He included time-sensitive messaging regarding a nearing deadline for a major sales promotion. He emailed the video to his prospects via his cellphone. Within hours, responses began to roll in. Although previous phone calls and other emails had gone unanswered, the video spurred a burst of activity. Within days, he had closed 10 additional new memberships, posting one of his best months ever.

Today's consumers — in virtually every important age segment — have proved they are hungry for information. They have a ravenous appetite for video. I hope this column — and Michael's previously — have provided food for thought. Let's get cooking and bring home the bacon.

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