

Is Your Viral Video Contagious?

By Jim Staylor of Staylor-Made Communications, Inc.

What makes Internet video spread like a pandemic?

What do the most watched viral videos have in common? It's the fact that they touch our emotions. Think of any recent web video you have sent or received. If it was a good viral video, you likely experienced a strong feeling accompanied by some sort of physiological or behavioral change while you watched? Your jaw dropped, you cringed, you cried, you smiled, you gasped, or you laughed out loud. This physical reaction triggered by an emotional stimulus is mostly what gives these videos such traction.

We've all seen videos with fluffy animals doing something cute or stupid humans doing something compromising. These get passed around the Internet mostly as a diversion. This article addresses how to achieve the potential business benefits of having your brand associated with a "must see" video that captures the hearts and minds of viewers and leaves them feeling so good about you and your products or services, that they have a fever to tell others.

In addition to experiencing the serendipity of capturing a magical moment or actually working purposefully to achieve a certain level of production value to elicit emotions, what else can you do so people will find your video and get your message?

What emotion do you want to elicit?

Humor, Pity, Fear, Compassion, etc. Pick one and be sure to focus everything you do during the production process on driving the viewer to that emotion.

It's not easy to produce an obviously staged video and have it be respected and watched. Your best bet is to at least start with decent quality production values. This means the writing, directing, acting, and all technical aspects such as camerawork,

lighting and audio all have to be good. A few small things can make a big difference (e.g. - compelling writing, where you position the camera, which microphone you use, lighting for effect, timing of edits, etc.)

How Important is it to you?

You wouldn't hire an orthopedic surgeon to perform coronary bypass surgery. Sure, he or she may have done a cardiac rotation and could try to do the heart surgery. Wouldn't you rather have the feeling of confidence that comes from knowing your heart surgeon went to medical school to be a heart surgeon, spent years of residency under the tutelage of other well-known heart surgeons at a hospital that specialize in heart surgery, then, before you, he or she performed thousands of successful heart surgeries on other happy patients? It makes much more sense to hire the right trained, experienced professional for the job. The same is true for video.

Emotion plus Motion - the right Potion.

In addition to achieving a certain level of production value, you must then get lots of people to find your video to get your message. Besides emotion the other key ingredient is motion. Multiple sites host web video: YouTube, Revver, MetaCafe, etc. YouTube is most accessed and therefore most important for spreading viral videos. Then you must work to create massive movement among the various on-line channels of communication - email, blogs, social media sites, comments on video sites, etc.

It may be a good start to ask your family, friends, and Facebook fans to take a look and pass it on. But after that, your video must stand on its own merits.

Basic tips for achieving the best possible results with web videos:

- Keep it brief - close to 30 seconds is ideal, but no more than 3 minutes. People's attention spans are very short. Also, a shorter video loads into the video player faster and will keep viewers from bugging out while waiting to view your video.
- Use a professional producer and production crew - or, at least, consult with a pro willing to give you advice. Though people are quite forgiving of Internet video quality because the standard has been set so low, you send a subliminal message about the level of professionalism you are willing to accept. They'll wonder, "For what else are you going to take shortcuts?"
- Avoid making it an outright ad. Sophisticated viewers see right through any ploy to push products in their faces. You can gracefully position products within the story and certainly leave them feeling good then end on your logo. "Brought to you by..."
- Appeal to sex and other emotions. Philosopher and Psychoanalyst, Erich

Resources:

Wall Street Journal Article - ["Recipe for a Successful Viral Video Campaign"](#)

TechCrunch Article - ["The Secret Strategies Behind many 'Viral' Videos"](#)

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Fromm said, "A vast sector of modern advertising... does not appeal to reason but to emotion; like any other kind of hypnoid suggestion, it tries to impress its objects emotionally and then make them submit intellectually." And, actress, Ingrid Bergman said, "No form of art goes beyond ordinary consciousness as film does, straight to our emotions, deep into the twilight of the soul."

- Spread the word through numerous sites and methods. You want people to StumbleUpon your video Digg it and find it Delicio.us. Go to all the share sites you find and tell them about your video. Write articles about your video and post them everywhere. Send a press release and call the local media... find a hook and tell the world.

Do you want to go viral with some video? You might consider doing it yourself or playing with a video student, relative or hobbyist. But, if your business message is important, get some professional help so you will be much more likely to hear the doctor say, "*I'm afraid you have a serious condition... your video is extremely contagious.*"