

Maximizing Your Video Content

By Andrew Rodrigues

SEO Manager, Geary Interactive

As many Internet video creators are aware, it is a difficult task to continuously remain up-to-date in the volatile web industry that provides a medium for countless competitors. With constant advancements in everything from social-networking to streaming video, the surge in demand for online applications has begun to demonstrate a growth in user behavior. As broadband Internet connection speeds have increased and become more widely available, it has allowed for technological advances in streaming media and video applications. These new technologies are creating the need for video editors to come up with innovative ideas to boost their content.

Google's recent purchase of YouTube and MSN's partnership with Blinkx.tv is starting to paint a very clear picture of the direction that search engine marketing and online advertising are headed. Statistics highlighting "YouTube's average session time of 13 minutes 20 seconds" (according to Hitwise), demonstrate the high level of engagement that online video and rich media are providing. So with all the signs pointing in the same direction, the creation of video content for your Web site is becoming an important part of your online strategy for the near future.

Whether you manage your online advertising strategies in-house, or use an agency, this emerging interactive medium introduces several challenges. The main objective of this technique is providing a user experience that promotes your product or brand. However, the obstacle of generating a message that is engaging to the viewer not only via your content substance, but also aurally and visually stimulating, tests online advertisers. Expertise in offline video production is becoming a more valuable skill set for advertisers in the online space.

The final, and possibly most important, constituent is getting your video in front of potential consumers. With a plethora of companies competing for the video search and indexing marketplace, it can be difficult to obtain optimal exposure for your video. Despite the hurdles that exist, there are a number of hints to employ that will allow for premiere visibility on some of the major video engines, including the top five: YouTube, Google Video, Yahoo Video, MSN Video (Blinkx.tv), and Myspace.

Provider Commonalities

Comprehensively, most of the online video service providers supply several feature commonalities that enable ease-of-use for both the content provider and the user. One obvious, yet overlooked, feature is the ability to create your video file with a descriptive filename. Similar page file naming conventions to web site search engine optimization can help with video indexing.

Every online video provider permits (or requires) you to create a profile to submit content to their service. If you submit multiple videos under the same profile, consumers have the option to find videos by profile name. Additionally, when uploading your videos, most providers give the option to create a video title, description, categorization, language, location, country and zip code, and some will allow you to enter tags describing the content of your video. A helpful tip is to take the time to accurately fill out all of the necessary options, making them as descriptive and valuable as possible for users searching for your content.

Additionally, “end buttons” are a simple way that some aggregators provide to enable the video to be added to your Web site. An example of this is how YouTube provides a simple method of pasting code on your site to include the video and present it to your users. Alternative formats for uploading your video on others’ sites are also available and generally dependent on the provider’s site design and regulations. The risk with this, however, is that you lose a degree of control of the content surrounding your video.

Another option that services typically let you control is allowing users to respond and comment on your videos. Again, this can have both positive and negative affects on your videos, but if you subscribe to the “any press is good press” theory, then I would recommend enabling this option.

For all online video services, it can be extremely useful to recruit your friends to help. The more positive ratings, subscriptions and favorite lists your video achieves, the more likely it is to be served more often and to a broader audience.

The last general suggestion, regardless of video service provider, is to make your video interesting. This seems obvious enough, however, do not underestimate the power of a humorous or unique video. Having a video spread virally or via word-of-mouth in some instances has had the greatest impact of any technique. Making your video stand out from others warrants a higher likelihood that it will be seen more often, recommended to others and thus searched for more frequently.

Major Players

YouTube

YouTube is a video search engine that allows users to upload videos in different formats through a choice of methods, including directly from your mobile phone. YouTube has, by far, the largest share of the online video market (around 43%), and was just recently acquired by Google for the hefty sum of \$1.65 billion. YouTube, as a well-known and highly-used provider, helps users find specific online video content through a variety of practices. The first way to help people find your videos is to create a descriptive username and submit all of your associated videos under the same name. This will allow users that enjoyed your videos or were interested in their topics to find and view more of them. YouTube has options to subscribe to all videos uploaded by a specific user, group, or a specific user’s favorites and receive e-mail alerts when new videos appear.

In addition to creating a profile with the specified attributes, if you choose to allow your videos to be re-posted on external sites, you are more likely to get higher visibility for your video, however, remember the risks involved.

With the recent purchase of YouTube, it will be very interesting to see how Google Video and YouTube coexist together, however, Google has stated that for the time being they plan to have both services continue in their current state.

Google Video

Google Video is another service that allows for video aggregation by uploading your video for hosting on their site. One important feature to remember when creating your account is to make sure you fill out your business information accurately to help categorize your videos.

The next step to successfully presenting video content on Google is to create your video with a descriptive filename. As mentioned earlier, including keywords in the filename, just as you would in standard Web site search engine optimization, positively contributes to search and placement efforts. Keep in mind that Google Video uses its own “player” to present videos on their site, and that all uploaded videos will be reviewed by a human for accuracy before they are made live to the public.

Another useful feature of Google Video is that it allows for adding labels and ratings to videos. Again, it is a good idea to recruit friends to help utilize these features. In addition, Google Video provides downloadable reports with traffic statistics pertaining to your videos, allowing you to accurately track your content.

The most innovative and differentiating piece of Google Video is its ability to allow for captioning and subtitling. “Users will be able to understand and find your video more easily if you add captions or subtitles to each video file you’ve uploaded.” This quote, taken directly from the Google Video site, gives an idea of how Google could use the transcription of a video to rank it against a competing video, similar to the ranking system Google uses for text web pages. This is a fairly new feature that leaves much to be desired (compatibility with more formats, automation of the process, etc.), however, if you have the knowledge and time, it would be valuable to take advantage of this feature.

Yahoo Video

Out of the major players, Yahoo Video (also used by Altavista) seems to be the least robust solution. Yahoo requires files to be less than 100 MB and in wmv, asf, qt, mov, mpg, or avi format. In addition, Yahoo will not process videos that do not contain audio.

Similar to the above, when using Yahoo Video, you will need to create a profile, and when uploading a video you have the option to include the descriptive attributes. Use the aforementioned suggestions to fill out these options to be the most beneficial for potential viewers. Yahoo also allows you to include a transcript of your video that will accompany its search listing. Yahoo does advise that they scrape other sites for video content, but recommends using media RSS if you want to be certain that your multimedia gets included in their index.

MSN Video

MSN Video has been in Beta for a couple months now, however, they just recently forged an agreement with Blinkx.tv to provide their video services. For this reason, it is unclear if MSN will do away with their own services or run the two in conjunction as Google and Youtube are currently executing. As of yet, there is no direct way to include your video on the MSN search engine, though their Product Team expects to add this feature in the near future. In the meantime, you have the option of going to soapbox.msn.com to try a Beta version of a video service that they will offer once Beta testing has ended. Additionally, the new deal with Blinkx.tv provides ample video service which is suitable for all adults. We will continue to follow this service feature to see how it develops.

Myspace Video

Myspace video came along to compete with the abundance of YouTube videos on Myspace. Myspace allows you to enter a title, description, category, tags and whether the video is public or private. Same rules as above apply when filling out these fields.

Up-and-coming Players

While the previously mentioned sites will more than likely provide over 90% of visibility to your video content, you may also want to keep in mind the up-and-coming services, including AOL Video (powered by Singing Fish), ScoopVid, Flurl, Pixsy, vsocial and Dailymotion.

One newcomer that specifically looks to have some promise is Turnhere. This site offers a very unique, useful and specialized proposition. They claim to offer “assistance to both travelers and locals in exploring cities, neighborhoods and destinations.” Just as recent trends in social networking appear to be driving more niche sites, it is becoming likely that the video search industry could mirror this user-generated content trend.

Broadly looking at all the online video service providers, it is apparent that each service has similarities to its competitor, while also independently providing users with unique features on its own. Ultimately, it is the decision of the user which service they utilize, but the competitive race for popularity and traffic paves the way for many cutting edge advances in this evolving industry. It will be interesting to watch how the on-going battle among the online video service providers plays out, but meanwhile be sure that you are maximizing your video content!

Andrew Rodrigues (andrew.rodrigues@gearyi.com) leads SEO operations at Geary Interactive, an award winning full-service digital marketing firm with services in Web development, media buying/planning, search engine and E-mail marketing. Geary Interactive is headquartered in San Diego and has offices in Las Vegas and New York City, and is ranked one of San Diego's top five advertising agencies. For more information, visit www.gearyi.com or call (619) 239-5953.

