

Commercialising the YouTube experience

 By [Mike Silver](#)

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YouTube's first-ever video upload was of Jawed Karim (the site's co-founder) looking a little awkward during a trip to the zoo. Since then, we've seen fly-kicking cats, small American boys begging for cupcakes, bigger Asian boys breaking 1 billion views and a whole host of other (at times) shareworthy content. And it's the last bit that has gotten brands really excited.

Back in the day, YouTube was arguably 'America's Funniest Home Videos' meets 'MTV' (when MTV actually still showed music videos). From a brand perspective, at most we could expect to see an upload of a new TV commercial, poorly shot footage of an event or a random interview with some celebrity ambassador. This was all OK when YouTube was garnering a few million views per day. Fast forward to today though where YouTube garners a staggering 4 billion views (yes that's supposed to be a 'b') per day and it's a whole different story.

So, YouTube now owns the world's biggest TV channel; and it's free for brands to upload content! There's a catch though, a rather big one.

Experience is everything

While brands can upload an unlimited number of videos without paying a cent, so can some self-centred pimply brat in his late teens. The worst part is that the 'born free' might even win the battle for eyeballs with pieces to camera about his first kiss or how to dance to dub step. Why? Because that's a relevant (and more importantly real) experience this his market can relate to.

In a nutshell; experience is everything and the challenge for a brand is how to ensure that what they create can stand up against the hilarities and humour of everyday life.

Consumers want to not only consume this type of content themselves but they also want to be the first to be able to share this kind of social currency. What this means is that it's simply not good (or valuable) enough for a brand to just stick in a celebrity endorsement or expensive CGI graphics ad. The dreaded 'and then we want to make a viral video' proclamation from clients often neglects the very insights and strategies that encourage shareability.

One such agency, Fake Love in the USA, is for lack of a better term a 'YouTube Agency'. It specialises in the conceptualisation, execution and seeding/advertising of bespoke activation-based made-for-web videos. Key to its strategy is how and where to seed it. While it might cost a little cash (for blogger exposure or YouTube ads), this nominal investment can be the momentum needed to get the sharing going (assuming of course a strong enough concept exists).

Budweiser decided to boldly lead with an activation-based concept for its Superbowl Commercial where Ian was asked if he is 'Up For Whatever Happens Tonight' before deciding to accept a bottle of Bud. This real-life drama then unfolded as 'everyday Ian' was turned into the type of superhero that men can only dream of (including a ping pong bottle with Arnie and an encounter with twins, Basil).

Heineken still remains top brewer though when it comes to made for YouTube content and hits. Similarly what started off for Coke as a happiness truck has evolved into countless number of vending & machine interactions.

From a brand perspective, YouTube shareability might even provide the Holy Grail when it comes to high reach, low investment experiential campaigns. Often challenged as an expensive medium, a well-shared activation might only need to take place in one location and amplified to millions through the power of digital. This is something Stretch stumbled upon when we uploaded our Lipton Ice Tea: Tea-Mometer campaign from a single activation location (CT) on YouTube. While 'stoked' with a few thousand views, we forgot about it. After re-visiting the post a month later we were amazed to see we were almost up to 30,000 views with no PR or blogger engagement. Scary to think where we might have ended up if YouTube sharing was the sole objective!

As the online and offline worlds converge further, brands will do well to look over their shoulders (or screens) as talented domestic pets and performing babies fight for their audience's online attention.

ABOUT MIKE SILVER

Mike Silver is the founder of Elevator, a brand experience agency now part of the Smollan Group. Mike has been working in the below-the-line and brand experience arena since 2000. Current clients include Lipton Ice Tea, Old Mutual and Pernod Ricard.

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