

Channel hopping

So you've produced a sensational piece of corporate video. The question now is: where to put it? On a video sharing network or in the cosy confines of the corporate website? **Neil Gibbons** reports

You can hardly blame them for being excited. Turkish Airlines had just produced a new commercial starring (wait for it) *Kevin Costner*, and it wanted the world to know.

The brand benefits of this partnership were obvious - this sprinkling of Tinseltown stardust would boost awareness of the airline among lucrative Western audiences. So what better medium to flaunt the ad than video sharing phenomenon YouTube?

A month later, something happened to tarnish the video's lustre. A Turkish Airlines plane crashed at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, killing one and injuring 20. Days later, on the right of the YouTube screen, next to the glossy video of Costner, was a list of 'Related videos'. Five of the six were about the crash.

Like it or not, the online commercial was actually alerting Turkish Airlines followers, casual observers and fans of Costner (if any) to the crash. The result was the diametric opposite of the intended consequence. But then, social media can do that.

Of course, none of this should take away from the enormous benefits of online video. But companies are having to think seriously about the most suitable receptacle for their lovingly-produced video content.

As Lou Mains, of video-friendly public relations firm Tribe PR, says: video is an accessible, inclusive and emotive form of communication. So why is its use raising concern in corporate communications?

"Perhaps it stems from the fact that technology is changing so quickly and that our own learning doesn't always keep up," she says. "Or that we've realised that it's a very public way to fail: a mishandled press release or leaked email feels less embarrassing than an ever present YouTube video. Maybe it's just a little too personal and 'not corporate'."

So where should you place online video? "That depends upon the people you want to reach and the reaction you'd like to engender," says Mains.

It also depends on the specific requirements for each project, believes Marcus Brennand, managing director of Digital Marmalade. "There are benefits to creating and utilising a YouTube channel as there are with custom building video into a corporate website, you just need to be clear about what the objectives are at the start of the campaign."

It's not something that should be weighed up casually, mind you. "It can actually be more damaging to post content that is inappropriate for that particular channel," says Jonny Stark at digital consultant at comms consultancy 3 Monkeys Communications, "as users can write negative comments about material they think has been misplaced."

The biggest fundamental, Stark adds, is for companies to think more strategically, rather than just creating content and then uploading it willy-nilly to multiple platforms.

"There needs to be a plan and programme in place," he says. "It seems that any time a video is created, organisations want to stick it on YouTube! The truth is that you need to think of exactly who your audience is - YouTube is a site where the majority of content is still people captured on camera in a funny or bizarre situation. A viral video works well on the platform, but an extended interview with the CEO talking about the latest financial results does not."

Selecting the proper home for video content is also important for demonstrating a decent return on the investment. "It is like 1997 all over again," says Jake Ward, director at online video production company Broad-View. "In 1995-96 every corporate built a website and in '97 actually began to look at how they were going to get some revenue from it. In 2008, a lot of corporates began to produce video for their websites and they are now looking to develop models which prove the value of the content they are producing."

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He adds that most RoI models tend to be based on either viewership or conversion rates. "These different RoI models are having a significant influence on which channels are used to distribute content based on where the appropriate audiences congregate."

So what are the respective benefits of YouTube-hosted content compared with placing video on the corporate website?

According to Brennand, YouTube is fast, cost

Turkish Airlines newest commercial with star guest Kevin Costner

Thyollari
30 January 2009
(more info)
You feel like a star, if you fly with Turkish Airlines a member of StarAlliance network.
URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vAJox4I>
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Hijacked: Turkish Airlines managed to attract a Hollywood A-lister but couldn't prevent unwanted links appearing on the page.

effective and easy to use. "It also has the huge benefit of being a widely recognised social media network which allows people to stumble across your video from user searches or be recommended the content by a connection," he says.

Its usability is cited in glowing terms by Jane Shepherd from Shepherd PR, an agency that set up its own web film department last year. "YouTube still delivers the best in terms of speed of download," she says. "Flash players don't seem to have the search engine function and footage needs to be carefully coded for the best viewer experience."

She maintains that video quality – a one-time weakness of YouTube – is now high. "An upgrade by YouTube means footage is now much clearer, with better quality and definition," she says. "The days of grainy video and tacky graphics are over. The increasing sophistication of YouTube means that film production needs to be of a high standard."

Broad-View's Ward points out that YouTube introduced a facility to upload better quality files and built an option into the player to play these back in 'HD' quality around September 2008. "I don't think it was a game changer but it certainly improved confidence amongst corporates about the quality of what could be presented," he says.

However, as Turkish Airlines will attest, posting videos to YouTube involves a leap of confidence for those concerned with protecting the brand. "Any company engaging with video sharing platforms should do so aware that there is a risk of damaging their brand based on the content they share," says Jonny Stark.

Marcus Brennan counsels that, despite the many advantages of YouTube, without considering a bespoke YouTube channel, "it is possible to miss out on the full power of the web".

Turkish plane crash in Amsterdam - The Great Escape of 100 passengers

He says: "By creating video channels you have complete control of confidentiality, who has access to your communications and the ability to quickly and easily add subtitling. In addition, custom-made video channels provide a perfect platform for communicating presentations to the masses."

There's still something to be said for the safety of hosting the videos on the corporate website itself though. "It allows a greater degree of control, but lessens engagement (as very few corporate sites are interactive in the same way as video sharing sites are)," says Jonny Stark. "It does mean the messages you are trying to communicate are less likely to be diluted, which can be of benefit in a crisis situation, for example, but you need to remember that if you're sharing information through your website, you need to ensure that people know it's there."

Besides, it can also be a way of attracting users to the corporate site.

"A recent article in BusinessWeek said that video content is supposed to be 53 times more likely to appear on the first page of search results than text pages," says Thomas Cowle from public relations firm Aspectus PR. "So in terms of SEO, the benefits of online video are pretty clear."