



understanding
media metrics

YOUTUBE BASICS

for Journalists



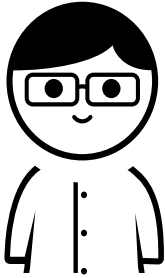
SECOND IN A SERIES

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INTRODUCTION



THIS IS BEN. HE WORKS AT A PRINT-BASED MEDIA ORGANIZATION THAT HAS just started exploring the world of digital video. Ben has already created his organization's YouTube channel and published a few videos. But he wants to master the platform in order to expand his organization's reach to new audiences, and better understand the staffing and resources necessary for a successful YouTube channel.

YouTube Basics for Journalists will help answer these questions and give Ben the information he needs to both build a successful YouTube channel and measure that channel's effectiveness over time.

This guide is intended for journalists who have some experience publishing content on YouTube. In this booklet, you will learn how to use YouTube metrics to maximize the number of people going to your work.

YOUTUBE BASICS

Here is a brief overview of the YouTube terminology we will use in this guide.

The YouTube Channel Page

A YouTube channel is a brand's digital video portal on the YouTube platform. The channel is comprised of all videos that have been uploaded to YouTube by one account. Once Ben logs into his company's YouTube account, he can view his sample page by clicking on the **MY CHANNEL** option in the menu bar.

Here is a view of a sample **CHANNEL PAGE**. This page is essentially a storefront for your YouTube channel, where videos can be organized into playlists for easier consumption.

The image shows a screenshot of the USC Annenberg YouTube channel page with several blue arrows pointing to specific features. The annotations are as follows:

- CHANNEL BANNER**: Points to the top header area containing the channel name, logo, and associated website link.
- CHANNEL AVATAR**: Points to the channel's profile picture.
- ASSOCIATED WEBSITE LINK**: Points to the USC Annenberg website URL.
- SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS**: Points to the social media icons for YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.
- CHANNEL TRAILER**: Points to the featured video at the top of the main content area.
- PLAYLIST**: Points to the 'Trending now at USC Annenberg' section.
- YOUTUBE'S CURATED CHANNELS**: Points to the 'Featured Channels' sidebar.
- ORGANIZATION'S FEATURED CHANNELS**: Points to the 'Popular channels on YouTube' sidebar.

The channel page itself displays the following information:

- Channel name: USC Annenberg
- Channel description: School for Communication and Journalism
- Stats: 3,172 subscribers, 394,373 views, Video Manager
- Navigation: Home, Videos, Playlists, Channels, About
- Featured video: USC Annenberg: Communication at the Center (633 views, 3 months ago)
- Trending now at USC Annenberg: A grid of five video thumbnails with titles like 'Annenberg Students Thank USC Annenberg' and 'A place like this doesn't exist anywhere else in the...'
- The Third Space: A grid of five video thumbnails with titles like 'The Third Space' and 'Join Ineta of IBM Speaks About the Importance of...'
- Wallis Annenberg Hall: A grid of five video thumbnails with titles like 'Wallis Annenberg Hall Grand Opening' and 'Visions and Voices - Voices of South LA'.
- Featured Channels sidebar: Lists channels such as USC, USC U.S.-China In..., USC Architecture, USC Athletics, USC College, USC Gould School..., USC ICT, USC Marshall, USC Price, USC Rosier, and USC Rossier.
- Popular channels on YouTube sidebar: Lists channels such as BuzzFeedVideo, BuzzFeedYellow, BuzzFeedViolet, BuzzFeedBlue, VICE News, VICE, and Univision Noticias...

The YouTube Watch Page

Below is a **WATCH PAGE**, the place most viewers will encounter your channel. If viewers find your video in search, via their subscription feed or a link on a website or another social platform, this will likely be their destination.

The image shows a YouTube video player interface with several annotations. The video player itself is at the top, showing a video titled "AP Top Stories of the Day - October" with a thumbnail of Earth and the text "AP NEWSMINUTE". Below the video player, the video title "AP Top Stories October 30 P" is displayed, along with the channel name "Associated Press" and a "Subscribe" button. The view count "1,944" is shown next to the video player. Below the video player, the video description is visible, starting with "Published on Oct 30, 2014" and "Subscribe for more Breaking News: http://smarturl.it/AssociatedPress". To the right of the video player, a "PLAYLIST" section is visible, showing a list of videos. Below the video player, a "SUGGESTED VIDEOS" section is visible, showing a list of recommended videos. Annotations with blue arrows point to the video player, the "Subscribe" button, the view count, the video description, the "PLAYLIST" section, and the "SUGGESTED VIDEOS" section.

VIDEO

SUBSCRIBE BUTTON

VIEW COUNT

DESCRIPTION

PLAYLIST

SUGGESTED VIDEOS

YouTube also offers a comprehensive analytics suite that publishers can use to glean audience insight and improve the performance of a channel's content. We'll talk more about that later.



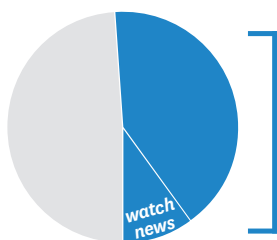
WHY YOUTUBE WORKS FOR JOURNALISTS

YOUTUBE IS A POWERFUL PLATFORM AND TOOL FOR JOURNALISTS. NEWS publishers can use YouTube to grow audiences, engage with viewers and find and curate citizen-created videos.

Ben is already using YouTube, but the following platform strategies will help inform goals for his organization's YouTube channel.



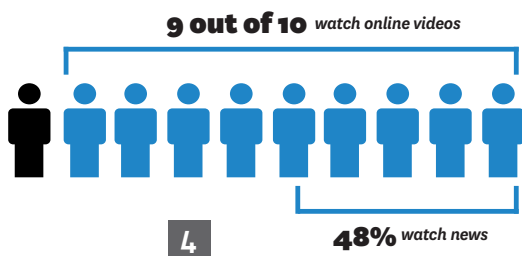
GROW YOUR AUDIENCE. The most powerful argument for building a YouTube channel is audience aggregation. More than 1 billion unique users visit YouTube each month.¹



Fifty-one percent of U.S. adults watch YouTube videos, and one-fifth of those users watch news videos specifically. That's **10 percent** of the adult population that uses YouTube for news.

The stats get even more impressive for target demographics that are a bit younger.

Nine out of ten 18-to-29-year-olds watch online videos, and almost half of those—**48 percent**—watch online news videos, Pew Research Center reports.² That's 24.5 million Millennials. As a news organization looks to attract new audiences, YouTube is a great place to start.



Ben is impressed. *That's a lot of people!* He knows it's important for his publication to continue to attract new audiences, and YouTube is a great audience aggregator.



AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT. YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world after Google, which creates many opportunities for substantive engagement with new audiences. News organizations can create a bond with subscribers as viewers share and engage with their content.

Engagement with YouTube videos can take any of the following forms:

- Viewers can **SUBSCRIBE** to channels they like; videos from these channels appear in “What to Watch” and “My Subscriptions” sections of YouTube.
- A YouTube channel is **INTERACTIVE**; viewers can ask questions of the news organization and get cogent responses to their questions in videos themselves or in the comments section.
- YouTube audiences **SHARE** videos they like rather than passively consuming; it's a social media platform at its core, so sharing is an integral part of a YouTube user's experience.
- Viewers can **ADD** videos to playlists.
- Like and Dislike buttons indicate viewer **SATISFACTION**.

Organizations can use the following methods to foster audience engagement:

- **BREAKING NEWS** is a great opportunity to capture YouTube's search traffic.
- Use the YouTube **PLAYLIST FUNCTION** to show a story's evolution, creating video updates and demonstrating responsible reporting as the details of a story change and context becomes clear.
- YouTube also offers **LIVESTREAM** capability via *Google+ Hangouts On Air* if a channel wants to broadcast live video.
- A **YOUTUBE CHANNEL** is an additional vehicle for discovery of your website or platform. YouTube allows channels to drive traffic back to an associated website, exposing new audiences to your work.

Hmm...YouTube is a great place to build the “know, like, and trust” relationship with our audience, Ben thinks. He’s interested in using playlists to track a story and is looking forward to interacting with his organization’s emerging audience.



CURATE CITIZEN-CREATED VIDEOS. YouTube plays a role in many significant news stories as a repository for evidence. Amnesty International has built a toolkit called the *Citizen Evidence Lab*³ to help journalists authenticate YouTube videos.

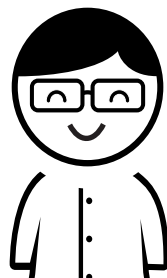
A YouTube channel allows a publisher to guide a viewer through the primary evidence of a story by playlisting citizens’ videos or on-the-ground reporting. Interstitials, which are short video segments that act as connective tissue between each video, allow the news organization to contextualize each clip and add substantive reporting to the playlist.

Ben wants to use YouTube to curate citizen videos during election season on the campaign trail. He is planning a different playlist for each candidate; the playlists will show citizen-captured video from campaign stops to provide “boots-on-the-ground” coverage that his organization wouldn’t ordinarily have the resources to execute.



GENERATE REVENUE. YouTube is the only major social media platform that allows content creators to generate revenue. *The YouTube Partner Program* distributes advertising revenue based on watch time, viewership and audience retention. YouTube takes a 45 percent cut of channel revenue and this high percentage has been the subject of much debate. However, the revenue distribution allows channels to create YouTube-specific video content and recoup some production costs.

Ben thinks, *Great! We already create platform-specific content for both Twitter and Facebook, but don’t see any direct financial return.*





BEST PRACTICES

Components of a Successful YouTube Channel

There are a few elements that most successful channels have in common. Here are some best practices that are key for growing an audience on the platform.

1 REGULAR UPLOADING AND PUBLISHING

Timeliness and frequency are crucial. All successful YouTube channels upload and publish videos regularly, with very few exceptions. Viewers subscribe to channels that are dependable, so determine your programming schedule and stick to it. The frequency of uploads is dependent on your goals and brand. If you are aiming for higher-quality, production-intensive videos, plan to publish once a week or once every other week.

2 PLATFORM-NATIVE, COMPELLING PROGRAMMING

YouTube programming strategy is quite diverse. Some channels use evergreen content that will continue to pull traffic over time, with videos about popular search topics or subjects such as health, education and science.

Other channels try for a timely or topical programming strategy, making videos about news that people won't be actively searching for next week or next year. Think election coverage, sports, games, etc. Tentpole programming focused on holidays or big events also works well on YouTube.

Overall, traditional news publishers have found success on the YouTube platform by creating specific, focused videos for YouTube, rather than uploading general news content or packages made for TV.

3 OPTIMIZATION

Channel optimization is crucial for content discovery. You could be making the best, most compelling videos—but how will your audience know if it can't find them? Pay attention to the following elements when you publish videos so that content is discoverable.



METADATA. Make sure each of your videos has a good title, description and tags. Front-load appropriate search-friendly words to improve SEO and discoverability.



THUMBNAIL. A quality thumbnail has a high-quality, visually compelling image that accurately represents your content.



ANNOTATIONS. Include an end card that has annotations (links within the YouTube platform) to other videos on your channel.



CHANNEL ART. Your channel art should reflect your brand and the personality of your channel. Remember that it will be seen on devices ranging from a mobile phone to a TV.



PUBLISHING BEST PRACTICES. After you've posted your video, respond to any comments you receive so that your audience knows you are engaged.

Since his organization publishes a monthly magazine, Ben thinks that higher-quality evergreen content makes the most sense. They'll upload new content each Tuesday at 9 AM Pacific Time.



AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

NOW YOU'RE UPLOADING HIGH-QUALITY, WELL-OPTIMIZED NATIVE YOUTUBE programming. What's next? Audience development, of course. Audience development strategy is crucial to Ben's channel-building mission.

- 1 GREAT CONTENT.** Compelling YouTube programming is focused and catches the audience's attention in the first five seconds. A good thumbnail and title sets expectations for the content and delivers on that expectation in the video. Pay close attention to your analytics to see how long viewers are watching each video (that's your audience retention rate), how many viewers are converting to subscribers, and any feedback you receive in the comments section. Note: Understanding comments is useful in the aggregate, *i.e.* are they positive overall? Negative? We'll dive more deeply into analytics later.
- 2 COLLABORATIONS.** Partnering and engaging with other creators is a great way to grow your audience. Perhaps you develop a video that is hosted by another YouTuber. Maybe you can integrate with that channel's content by appearing on screen or contributing content.
- 3 DIRECT THE TRAFFIC.** Drive traffic from other platforms to your YouTube channel. Embedding your YouTube videos on your organization's website is a great way to introduce a current audience to your channel. Depending on your website's traffic, embedded videos can also be a great viewership driver. When you tweet a video from your YouTube channel, make sure to tweet the video in a playlist link. This will encourage viewers to keep watching more videos.

Collaborations are brewing in Ben's mind. He'd love to work with the *Vlogbrothers*⁴ or *VSauce*⁵ on a science video. He'll want to work closely with his organization's social media manager who is a crucial part of the YouTube channel's strategy.



MANAGING WORKFLOW AND IMPLEMENTATION

A YOUTUBE CHANNEL IS ACTUALLY A COMPLEX COMBINATION OF EDITORIAL, social media, and marketing. The most effective channels, including *SoulPancake*⁶ and *What's Trending*⁷, have created a new position dedicated to YouTube called YouTube Channel Manager.

The YouTube Channel Manager's job description typically includes:

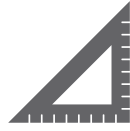
- Development and production of YouTube-specific videos
- Channel and show strategy
- YouTube video uploads and optimization
- Day-to-day channel audience engagement
- Partnership and collaborations management
- Asset and copyright management
- Analytics reports



It's best if the channel manager is **YOUTUBE CERTIFIED**. YouTube certification is offered by YouTube to its partner channels and ensures a base-level of knowledge about the YouTube platform, programming strategy, and asset management. The program is currently invitation only, but you can contact your organization's YouTube partner manager for more information.

Ideally, the YouTube channel manager is a trusted member of your team with video production experience, a thorough understanding of your organization's editorial voice, and an eye for data and analytics. If your organization doesn't have the resources for a dedicated YouTube channel manager, the employee currently handling video operations is the next best option.

Ben's organization has identified him as the best candidate for the Channel Manager position. He's happy with the job description—it satisfies both his right and left brain!



MEASURING SUCCESS AND IMPACT

SUCCESSFUL YOUTUBE CHANNELS USE METRICS AND DATA ANALYSIS TO create successful videos. In the following section, we'll review YouTube's standardized metrics to measure success and we'll also discuss how to use YouTube analytics to improve channel programming.

How do we define success?

View and subscriber counts are only a superficial measure of success on YouTube. In fact, YouTube as a platform optimizes for **WATCH TIME**, or the amount of time a viewer spends watching your content. This means that YouTube itself considers your channel successful if it can hold viewers' attention. More watch time=more revenue and improved performance in YouTube's algorithm. It makes sense: The platform's goal is to maximize ad revenue, and YouTube can do that by assessing your content's ability to consistently retain viewers.

How do we measure success internally?

The health of a YouTube channel is generally measured in views per month and in overall audience engagement. The following sets of questions will help you measure success and plan for future programming.

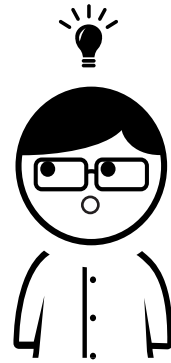
When thinking about your views per month, ask yourself:

- *Do most of my views come from one video or from videos across our library?*
- *Do tweaks to my upload schedule increase overall monthly viewership?*
- *Is my viewership on an upward trend or downward trend?*

When thinking about progress around audience engagement, ask yourself:

- *Are my viewers converting to subscribers?*
- *Does my audience watch our videos all the way through?*
- *Do my viewers share our videos with their friends?*
- *Is the audience engaged enough to comment or click through to another video on the end card?*

I need to focus on engaging the audience while we grow our channel, thinks Ben. He starts to brainstorm formats that fit his organization’s brand and also stimulate conversation, similar to the educational science format “Sci Show” or The New York Times’ video format after “36 Hours”





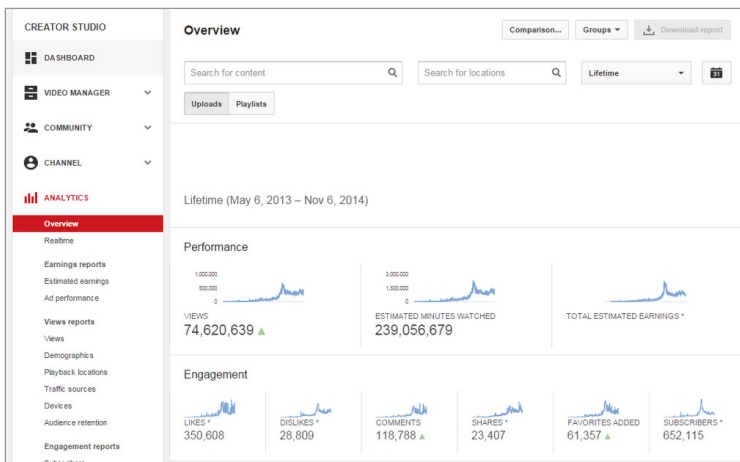
ANALYTICS OVERVIEW

UNDERSTANDING YOUR YOUTUBE ANALYTICS IS CRUCIAL TO YOUR SUCCESS. The data gleaned from audience interaction on your channel will help you tweak upload schedules, adjust programming content and grow your viewership. To access your analytics:

- 1 Visit My Channel > Video Manager > Analytics
- 2 Search for the video, playlist or channel you want to view.
- 3 Adjust the dates using the calendar.

Here are some examples of graphs you might see in your YouTube analytics, paired with the questions you should ask yourself when measuring success:

The Overview:



This is an overview of a channel's lifetime performance. You can see the number of subscribers accrued over the lifetime of the channel, as well as shares of all videos.

Questions to ask: *Are viewers converting to subscribers? Do viewers share our videos with their friends?*

Channel Demographics:

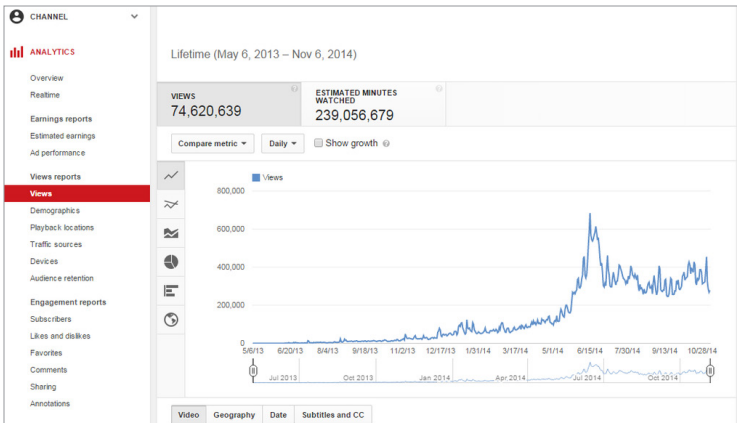
Understanding your audience begins with gathering information about them, including their demographics.

This channel's audience is heavily male and stays largely male across all countries. The target demographic is men aged 18-24, followed by men aged 25-34. This channel's audience is heavily focused in the United States, with Mexico a distant second.



Questions to ask: *Do the channel demographics match my intended audience? If not, how can we change our programming to attract more viewers in the target demographic?*

Viewership:

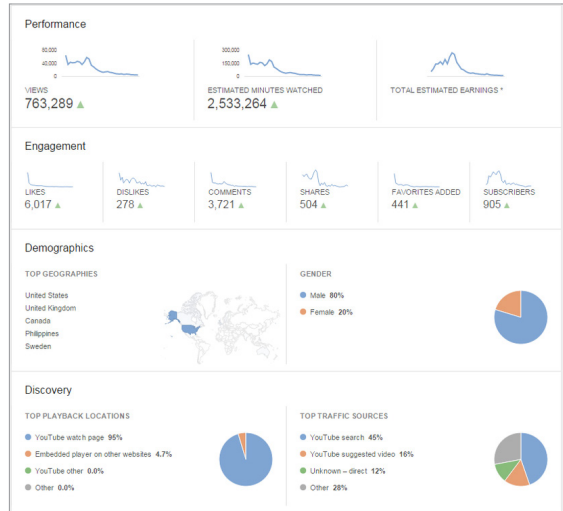


This channel's viewership is on an overall upward trend, although its aggregate views are down significantly from the spike in June and July of 2014. What did the channel do to cause that viewership spike? It might have been more frequent uploads, a collaboration, or a viral video.

Questions to ask: *Is viewership on an overall upward trend or downward trend? Do tweaks to the upload schedule increase overall monthly viewership?*

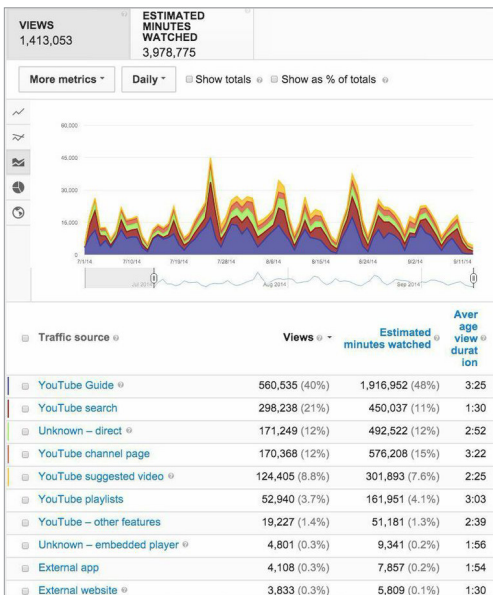
Video Overview:

This is an overview of an individual video's performance. You can see how many subscribers and shares were driven by this particular video. Comparing metrics from one video format with another video format is useful to determine which formats your audience likes best.



Questions to ask: *Are viewers converting to subscribers? Do viewers share our videos with their friends?*

Traffic Sources:

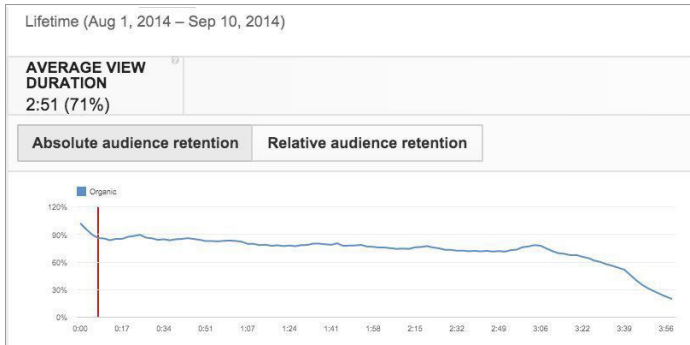


Viewers are finding this channel's content via their subscriber feed (YouTube Guide) and via search. When people find this content via their subscriber feed, they watch for twice as long as they do if they discover via search (see: Average View Duration). This means the channel is doing a good job of programming for their subscribers. Because search is the second most popular method of discovery, having a good title and thumbnail are especially important.

Question to ask: *How are viewers finding our content?*

Audience Retention:

This channel is doing a fairly good job of retaining the audience's attention in this video; 71 percent is good. The little “bumps” in the audience retention graph show moments where the audience is rewinding—where they saw something particularly compelling and wanted to watch again.



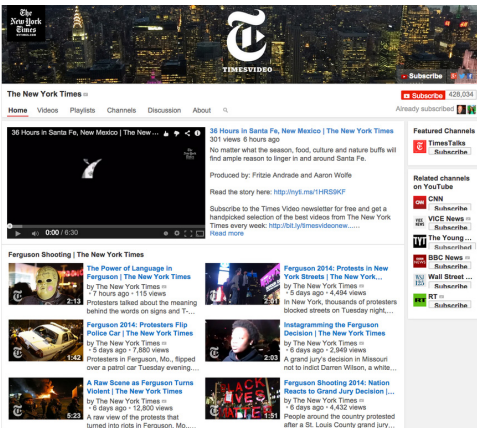
Question to ask: *Does our audience watch our videos all the way through?*

There may be a bit of a learning curve, but understanding YouTube’s analytics is useful when trying to grow a channel.

What journalism organizations are doing it right?

In order to optimize his own channel, Ben researched journalism organizations thriving on YouTube. The following organizations have combined solid programming strategy with good channel optimization and audience development.

Traditionally print-based publications:

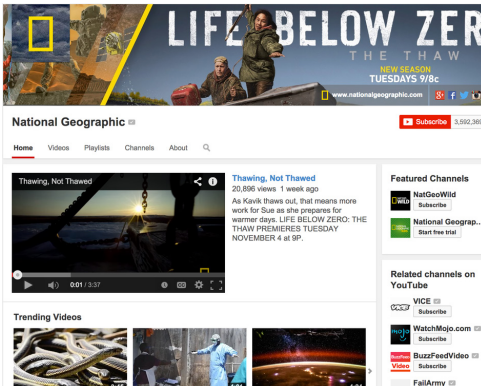


The New York Times

The New York Times has stayed tonally consistent with its print publication, but has chosen specific “verticals”, or subject types, to focus on. Their channel page currently shows an emphasis on three topical news stories: Ferguson, Immigration Reform, and Ebola are all explored in playlists featured on the channel

page. They alternate harder-hitting coverage with videos about cooking,

travel and entertainment. They are also using a library volume strategy and uploading frequently (sometimes four or five times a day) to gain a higher volume of viewership across many videos. Videos occasionally “pop” with higher viewership, but generally hover between 2,000 and 6,000 views. While individual video viewership is low, the library volume strategy has allowed *The New York Times* to garner 5.2 million views per month.

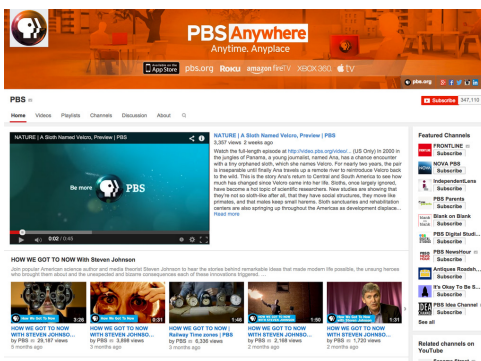


National Geographic

National Geographic began as a print publication but has been producing TV since 1997. They are using the platform largely as a marketing platform to drive viewership of TV programming. Clips from the shows are packaged using YouTube best practices and are succinct segments that focus

tightly on one subject. The videos are optimized for the YouTube platform and appear to be YouTube-native programming at first glance; they are titled well, feature visually appealing thumbnails, and don’t over-emphasize show branding. Nat Geo is using G+ Hangouts On Air to stream live programming. *National Geographic* is currently racking up 14.2 million views per month.

Broadcast-based outlets:

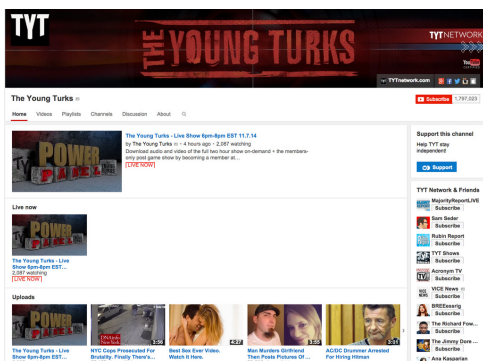


PBS

PBS has a suite of successful YouTube channels and we’ll focus on their main hub channel. PBS uses a strategy similar to that of National Geographic. The platform helps market TV shows. PBS also segregates some full episodes behind a paywall, providing an additional revenue stream. Their

most popular recent programming is a kids' show called "ODD SQUAD," showing the power of content that caters to a younger demographic native to YouTube. PBS is pulling in 5 million views per month.

Digital native channels:



The Young Turks

The Young Turks (TYT) is an entirely different animal: a digitally native news-focused YouTube channel. TYT uses the G+ *Hangouts On Air* to broadcast a live news show. Other uploads focus tightly on a single, usually timely issue. Video titles are compelling and sometimes pose

questions. The thumbnails are created specifically for YouTube and sometimes feature text or provocative images related to the subject matter. TYT places an emphasis on community building, uses verbal calls-to-action, and is tonally distinct from a more traditional news publisher. The Young Turks have a truly impressive audience: over 41 million views per month.

As Ben watches videos from each of the channels above, he begins to understand the interplay between a successful channel's videos, branding, and audience engagement. Since his organization is similarly print-based and making moves into digital video, Ben will take a tip from *The New York Times'* programming strategy and create playlists around timely news topics.



SUMMARY

The YouTube platform is an excellent tool for journalists. This guide explained the audience opportunities available to journalists using the YouTube platform. It also delineated the first steps to building a successful YouTube channel.

We covered the following material:

- YouTube basics
- The components of a successful YouTube channel
- Audience development
- Implementation
- Measuring success and impact
- Analytics overview
- Successful YouTube channels

This guide will be helpful as you build your organization's YouTube channel. The best way to truly master the platform and harness its potential is to dive in. Publish YouTube videos on a consistent schedule and iterate from there. Evolution is not only the story of all YouTube channels, but also the story of the platform itself. For additional resources, visit the *YouTube Creator Playbook*.⁸

FOOTNOTES

1. www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html
2. www.journalism.org/2014/03/26/news-video-on-the-web
3. citizenevidence.org
4. www.youtube.com/user/vlogbrothers
5. www.youtube.com/user/Vsauce
6. www.youtube.com/user/soulpancake
7. www.youtube.com/user/Whatstrending
8. www.youtube.com/yt/playbook



The Media Impact Project is a hub for collecting, developing and sharing approaches for measuring the impact of media. Based at the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center, we seek to better understand the role that media plays in changing knowledge, attitudes and behavior among individuals and communities, large and small, around the world. For more information, please visit **www.mediaimpactproject.org**.

Text by Sarah Ullman, a writer and creative consultant focusing on the YouTube ecosystem. She specializes in helping traditional media clients transition to the digital landscape, and writes a weekly newsletter about the business of YouTube called “The Jungle.”

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