

PR Video Upstart
The Efficacy of Video Usage in Digital PR

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Interview Transcript:

Q: If you could just start off by stating your full name and your current career position(s)?

A: Hilary Topper and I am an adjunct professor at Hofstra. I'm also an author of three different books, two of which are social media marketing books, and I am a blogger, podcaster, and an influencer on social media!

Q: What inspired you to pursue a career in public relations?

A: It was back in 1979. I was in high school and I had seen an ad: an article in a newspaper in the New York Post, stating that Woody Allen was having a New Year's Eve party and that anybody and everybody was going to be there. So, my friends and I went to the Harkness House, scoped it all out, and we ended up coming into the house dressed as caterers. As soon as the coast was clear, we hid out in the shower room and we got changed. We met and mingled with all these famous celebrities, which was really cool. Like you know, Liza Minelli, Jagger ... We came home that night and I called up the New York Post and I told them what happened and [that] we had left our clothes there. So, they checked on the story and we were on the cover of the New York Post the next day: "Teens Crashed Woods". I thought if I could do this for myself, I could do this for other people, and that was really my start.

Q: How has your experience leading up to now informed your current views on video content, specifically in the digital marketing space?

A: Back then, right when I did go into public relations (and that was back in 1980), we just wrote press releases and sent them out. We followed up a lot, but that was it. I mean, we only had a limited resource of papers and magazines and that kind of thing. So, when social media marketing became prevalent back in like 2006-2007, to me, it was like a whole new world. It just opened it up for us as professionals, and, at first, it was just really written content. You know, with Twitter and Facebook: you'd post pictures and that type of thing. But I knew that gradually it would go in the direction of video. And now video is so prevalent. I mean, Instagram's algorithm has completely changed. It gives much more to the video than it does to pictures. Something like TikTok is getting better return on investment on the video components than it is on the actual verbiage. So, it's changed a lot. It opens up the door for so many possibilities. I did a little promo video for my new book and I put it on YouTube. If you don't have [video] as part of your marketing plan, you're not being realistic. It's really important because that's how people take in information, by watching videos and stuff. Today, it's just been huge. The other thing that I want to note is that Instagram also started paying content creators for videos. That's why you're also seeing a lot more because if they didn't do that, I don't know that the platform would have changed so fast, but because they've been doing that, it's been changing rapidly.

Q: Do you think YouTube, being the first video-sharing platform that started the monetization program, has been a catalyst in turning video media into the market that it is today?

A: Absolutely without a doubt. The thing about YouTube is that you're getting long content and short content. It doesn't really make a difference on YouTube about the algorithm as opposed to, you know, TikTok or something, where you only have 60 to 90 seconds or whatever to promote something. All of the brands are jumping on. I mean, Chipotle is doing some really cool stuff on on TikTok. They were, I think, one of the forerunners in the beginning and they've just exploded in their market share.

Q: How have you employed video content in the public relations workplace and how effective has that been?

A: First of all, we do it constantly on Instagram and TikTok, but we're also sharing content on Facebook, promoting different events and different things that we're doing. In addition to that, we've been sending out video when we have it to the media, and that seems to be much more effective than an actual press release. But you got to keep those short because [the media's] not going to watch a long [video]. If you keep it short and succinct, it really is much more effective than a press release or pitch. I just got a really weird one today I'm going to share. I've got one client who's website is mostly video. He's a lawyer and he does estate planning law and it's a pretty big firm. Lawyers, associates, and partners have been doing a lot of work on TikTok and they're seeing it's explosion. I mean ... even on TikTok. This is an estate planning elderly firm. It's not going to be for that particular market, but the people who are watching TikTok, the 20 to 30-year-olds, are all starting to think about their parents, right? What's going to happen when my parents as they get older? How is that going to impact me? So, it's been working. They're getting thousands of views on TikTok and they've been incorporating a lot of video into their website. When somebody asks me about what to do with a website, I always say you definitely need to incorporate video, especially if it's hard to understand topic. You can explain it a little better than the written word.

Q: In your opinion, how effective is the creation and production of video media content as a tactic for digital marketing and social media campaigns?

A: Absolutely huge! I think that it's got to be part of anybody's integrated marketing plan. I mean if you have a business, you need to have video and you need to be on one of these platforms, even if it's Facebook and you're on there and doing reels. I've been seeing so much. There's one woman who I know through social media. She started the social media association about almost 20 years ago. She was on my original board and she's a jewellery designer. She's been rocking it out on Instagram, on Facebook. I don't think she's on TikTok, but those two she's posting constantly and it's making me want to buy something.

Q: How does video content specifically compare to other forms of media (graphics, verbiage, etc.) in terms of engagement, return on investment, and reach on socials?

A: What it does is it personalizes the experience, you know, like on my feet in an instant. Really, there's a connection that I'm building with people: I am talking to the person watching the video and I'm telling them about my day. I'm saying "How's your day doing or what are you doing? When are you working out or whatever?" And I find that I'm getting a ton of engagement doing that. And, you know, people really respect you for being real because they get to see the real. It's not like a phony thing, it's not vague. This is what you're getting. So, I think in terms of the

return on investment, it's huge. I've done that for my lawyer that we represent. I would absolutely have that as part of my marketing plan for the client.

Q: How can companies in general leverage the use of video media to help improve their brand identity and enhance their overall reputation in the workplace?

A: A lot of companies like the Wall Street Journal, even the New York Times, or some of the bigger publications have been on TikTok, showing the back end of what they're doing and how exciting it is to work there. I think that gives people a sense of what they do in a behind-the-scenes video. It gives you a sense of what it's like to work in a place like that and it makes it really exciting. You know, a lot of places have been doing that type of work and I think that really drives people to potentially work, potentially visit, or potentially frequent there.

Q: How do you feel public relations practitioners can use video media to manage a crisis or negative publicity?

A: It's probably one of the best tactics today for that. I'm going through that with a couple of my clients, and I told them: "You know, let's be prepared in case it happens. Let's film a video of you talking about the situation and how you were able to rectify that situation." You know the problem occurs when you have somebody you know was a good example. I mean if they had come forward as soon as the news broke or even before the news broke, then it would have maybe squashed it a little bit, but instead, they waited, and that escalated the whole thing. I think the point here is that it's really important to be prepared, for a crisis and video definitely takes you to that. You feel like you're in their living room. You feel like you have some type of connection with them and by having that connection with them it goes a long way.

Q: Do you feel, in response to a crisis utilizing video media as a strategy, that it's almost giving the audience a venue or a channel to better sympathize with the company going through said crisis?

A: Absolutely, especially if that person you know comes across as sincere. It's not like you're sitting there reading a statement. You can be reading a statement, but make sure you practice that statement and it sounds like you're not reading that statement.

Q: How do you typically integrate video content into your broader public relations and marketing campaign?

A: As I mentioned earlier, I'm using them for social media marketing. For most of my clients. I'm using them for websites to just personalize the website experience. We're using them to pitch media. We just got a new client and he's got this hydration formula that you mix with water and it was originally developed by NASA. For hydration for astronauts, the whole thing is that if it's good enough for the astronauts, it's good enough for you. It'll rehydrate you when you're working out. So, we have video for that pitch. I would say those couple of things is what we've been doing to integrate it more into our whole practice.

Q: Do you have any specific tips or best practices for maximizing the impact of video content in your digital integrated marketing plans?

A: I think one of the best practices would be to be real and if you say "like, but, um ..." it's okay if you leave it in. That's the way we speak right? It doesn't have to be completely polished. Also, I think they work best when you're in an interesting location. Not too much going on, but enough

that it keeps your interest. I also think that very slight music really helps to keep the attention of your audience. I do also say that I would keep them relatively short. It's difficult to do. You think it would be easy, but that's going to draw the audience in and capture their attention. You want to be animated in some way so that it keeps the attention. If you're just still and you have no expression (and I've seen videos like that right where it's just the person talking very stoic), that's not going to do it. You need to be a little bit animated. Sometimes I go a little bit over the top of my videos.

Q: How can companies measure the effectiveness of their video content in terms of driving brand awareness, identity, leading generation, and customer acquisition? What metrics do you think they should be tracking?

A: I think that they should be looking at how much engagement they've got and how many people have viewed the video in relation to the amount of followers they have. I feel like it's a series of different things. It could be video and then what [viewers] will see, like an article or something else that will spur their attention. That's why retargeting works so well, because you keep seeing it over and over and over again and then you end up buying it. I end up buying the stuff and I'm like: why did I buy that?

Q: What do you think the future holds for video content in public relations?

A: I think it's going to get more intense as we go forward. I think that more and more public relations practitioners are going to use it. I think that more and more public relations practitioners will also act as influencers for the brands that are hiring them. So, there's a lot of possibilities and it's really exciting to see where it's going. But, I definitely see it. Google Glass was just the start of it and it's just going to be flourishing moving forward.

Q: Are there any emerging trends or newer technologies that you believe will shape the ways that companies approach video content in the near future?

A: Immersive headsets. Wherever you are, you can just film everything around you in first person as the person's going places, almost like when you're wearing an Oculus Rift and you're feeling like you're there and you can touch things. You'll have the same sensation when you're wearing a headset and seeing what's around. I think it's very exciting. I was talking about this in my class the other day with certain things like journalism. You know, it's starting to shrink and publications are going online. It's less and less in the journalism field and also in the advertising field ... although they've been trying to get into video and social media marketing. But for PR people, it's opening the doors for us because it gives us so much more. If you can't get a great [advertisement] placement for a client, you could do a video and that video [could go] viral. That's even better than having it in, you know, Glamour Magazine!