

Lessons From A Bucket Of Ice And A Camera

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was a true Internet phenomenon. Who would have known that people dumping icy water on themselves would be the biggest viral video sensation since the Harlem Shake? But now that the craze has more or less petered out - and most importantly, well over \$110 million in donations to fight Lou Gehrig's Disease has been raised - what lessons can we take away from this as video marketers? What does the Ice Bucket Challenge teach us about harnessing online video to market a business?

Keep it concise

Notice I didn't say "keep it short." There are many who will say a video needs to be no longer than a minute or two - no exceptions. As we see viewing habits shift from traditional to online video, longer-form video is becoming more accepted. That said, a video more than a couple minutes needs to have a good reason for being so. Know your purpose, keep it tight. Video that meanders or drags on will lose an audience.

Inform and entertain

The videos that tend to get the most traction online are those that inform or educate, and those that people find entertaining. Of all the videos I've posted to YouTube, the most popular by far has been a simple how-to video that has garnered well over 115,000 views. It comes up in Google searches when people with a similar problem need solutions, and many have shared it because they found it helpful. People crave knowledge, and video is a great way to not only share what you know, but establish yourself as an authority on the subject.

And who doesn't love a good adorable cat video? Admit it, you've secretly watched "Gangnam Style" dozens of times. Videos that are clever and entertaining get shared. A lot. The video "How Animals Eat Their Food" has been viewed well over 100 million times. Even parodies of the video have scored millions of views.

Make it creative

Practically everybody did the ice bucket challenge. Most people just dumped the water on themselves, and that's fine. As long as it helped raise money for ALS, it served its purpose. But think of the videos that really stuck with you. Remember the ones that appeared over and over in your Facebook feed, got picked up by the news, or your co-workers couldn't stop talking about? Those videos, by and large, had something really creative about them that made them resonate. My personal favorite was the remake of Carrie done by Dave Grohl and the Foo Fighters.

The other Ice Bucket Challenge video that struck a chord with us was that of Anthony Carbajal, whose "Uncensored & Sexy" video combined humor and a powerful personal story and accumulated more than 16 millions views.

Aim for quality

I'm a huge stickler for production value. Sure, anyone can make a video with their phone, but paying attention to a few basics can be the difference between a video that gets noticed and a video that gets dismissed. Good lighting, clear sound and steady camera work - these things all matter. Even remembering to hold your iPhone sideways so your video fills out the viewing frame on YouTube makes a huge difference. You'd be surprised how a little attention to detail can set a video apart from the competition.

Call for action

One of the biggest components of the Ice Bucket Challenge premise was calling out a number of friends or businesses to participate in the challenge and/or donate money to ALS. That's what made it a viral smash, after all. The same goes for your marketing videos. If you want a viewer to take a particular action after watching your video, you need to clearly define that action. That could be sending them to your website, subscribing to your YouTube channel, filling out a form, or whatever it may be. You can also use the annotations feature of YouTube, or the call to action button on a Facebook video to help the viewer take that cue.

Share your content

What good is making great content if people don't know it exists? Sure, YouTube is the second largest search engine on the planet and a nicely-optimized video can get it seen, but sharing your video across your social media channels, blogs or other outlets will give it a great kick start. People who subscribe to you on social media or read your blogs are already willing listeners to your message, and sharing great video content with them is a great way to get it seen by a larger audience.