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5 Tips for Creating Meaningful Video for Your Startup

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leaders from Rhode Island's entrepreneurial community. The series touches on technology, techniques, and ecosystem developments that are transforming our local, regional, and national startup communities.

There's a secret about online video that no one ever talks about: No one -- absolutely no one -- is looking for ads on the Internet. Truly viral videos are playful kittens, sneezing babies and wedding accidents. That's not to say you can't make a great video, but you have to do more than just make a video and throw it up on YouTube. If you want to make a video ad that has viral potential, create a conversation with your customers instead of expecting them to passively watch your content.

Analytics Should Already Be Part of Your Plan

Before you begin, have a way of measuring your video's success. Services like YouTube and Wistia have powerful analytic tools, but those are only useful if you know what you're analyzing. Millions of views are nice, but make sure those viewers were in the demographic you set out to reach and bought what you were offering.

At the end of the day, your video isn't about popularity -- it's about sales. Research your potential customer base, target those customers, and then analyze the results to see if you got their attention. Plan and research before going into production. Videos can be an expensive proposition; measure twice, cut once.

Find Them, Entertain Them and Inform Them

The most important question to ask about your customers is, "Why are they watching a video?" There are three options: to find information, to be entertained, or both. To appeal to your customers, find out why they're online and put you and your message in their path. Even your most loyal customers don't want to see pretty ads about dish soap; but they might be interested in five new uses for dish soap.

Whether your video is a pre-roll (an ad before a video) on YouTube or featured in a blog post, you need to know where your audience is headed and why, and meet it there with a related message. If you're meeting your customers in their space, you can connect with them more effectively than if you have to lure them to your own site first.

Don't Bore Your Audience

There is no optimal length for online videos. Use long-form videos for smaller more engaged audiences looking for in-depth and technical information. Consider shorter videos for larger audiences you're looking to attract. Can't make it all fit into one video? When in doubt, break up your message into smaller chunks so that you catch customers before they click away. Books have chapters -- videos can, too.

Make a Connection

If your video bores you, think what it will do to your customers. Video is an emotional tool that helps connect customers. Few things are more valuable in business than an emotional connection between your customers and your brand. An emotionally invested customer is not just a loyal buyer, but can convert others to your brand by sharing and promoting your product for you. Venture to make such customers laugh; warm their hearts; and don't be afraid to bring a tear to their eye.

It's Ok to Start Small

Do some shorter, simpler in-house videos, and test the waters. Get some feedback from your existing customers on what messages resonate with them. Don't be afraid of experimenting: Audiences are very forgiving of lesser-quality videos if they find the content important. Partner with a video firm to take your content and style to the next level -- but only when you know how you want to move forward with your video marketing.

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