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Jonathan Booth's TV and radio career spans 25 years, and in that time he has written, presented or narrated hundreds of TV programmes for the BBC, ITV, Discovery, National Geographic and others. He was an early pioneer of online video, believing that business TV would be the dominant marketing medium of the future. He founded The Internet Video Company in 2003 - since then, IVC has created over 1,000 films and filmed in over a dozen countries.

White paper

Why Professional Online Video Is An Absolute Must

Within the next three years, most companies will have their own TV station - online.

That might seem like a startling claim, but the phenomenal rise of internet video means that the world's most powerful medium is now available to companies of every size.

Websites are set to rapidly evolve into online TV channels - but the question that companies need to ask themselves is whether their programming is going to resemble the professionally produced broadcasts we're accustomed to seeing on mainstream TV, or look more like the output of a poorly-funded community channel.

Your visitors are now viewers

A company's website is the most important public face of its business operations and is increasingly the first point of contact for both customers and the media. For example, in sectors such as travel, over 80% of customers start their relationship with a brand online.

It follows then that if the website is the shop window of the 21st century, the most engaging visual display possible should be used to attract and retain the browsing visitor.

Yet Lord Bell, the UK's leading marketing guru, says that, "the majority of websites are extremely dull... the biggest problem is that it's a TV screen and they're using a print format".

Static photos and text-heavy pages are no longer enough to engage, let alone retain, today's sophisticated online user, while Flash-based animations more often than not simply irritate.

Users increasingly expect a richer experience across all the screens in their lives - TV, web, PSP, mobile,



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DVD etc - and also expect to be able to move seamlessly between them. ComScore says that 90% of the UK's online community now watch video online, so it's clear that your visitors have now become viewers, and want to be told about your business in an easy-to-consume and utterly familiar way - television.

Don't short-change your brand

Currently, the most viewed video content online is news, entertainment or the crazy world of YouTube, but forward-thinking companies are beginning to realise that this is an important new way to communicate with their customers, partners, shareholders, staff and the media.

Internet video or television - the terms are interchangeable - is already being used by companies across all sectors and sizes, though the depth of toe-dipping in these

exciting new waters varies. Recent research shows that only 23 per cent of videos on the sites of FTSE 100 companies are for general corporate comms, with most being dull webcasts of investor briefings.

However, whether it's a short clip of the MD welcoming the visitor to the website or a tour operator offering online videos of every hotel they use, all companies must learn that, while the medium is easy to use and needn't be expensive, it does need to be produced to the same quality as their existing corporate comms or marketing collateral.

Companies that have experimented with a YouTube-grade production, shot on a domestic camera by someone in IT, have quickly realised this approach is unable to match existing levels of brand quality and presentation. However, this doesn't mean you have to make an investment of TV commercial levels (£200-300K+) and it doesn't mean there isn't a role for a trained in-house video person.

While you shouldn't expect to do everything on the cheap, the power, effectiveness and return on investment of high-quality internet video should far outweigh cost worries.

So what's possible?

You're aware of internet video and want to get started. But what's the first step? What main benefits would it have for your business? How difficult is it to obtain? And what does it cost?

Here are just some of the types of programmes that can be made and their uses. Also bear in mind that any video footage you produce may have several uses across many formats – internet TV, VidEmails, online PR, TV B Roll, DVD mailouts, trade show displays, vodcasts, vlogs (video blogs) and virals.

PROGRAMMES	USES
A narrated, 3-5 minute TV style mini-documentary about the company – who you are, what you offer, interviews with key people, a tour of the premises.	A main film for the front page – your central message. Ensure that all visitors watch it first, as they'll quickly discover a lot about you in a memorable and emotive way. They'll feel good about staying on the site and will want to find out more.
TV-style interviews with the CEO and key management.	Relevant quotes and statements, both standalone and for use in longer programmes. Good for offering to the media as expert opinion, and for internal reinforcement of corporate culture etc.
Product and Service Films. Short programmes about specific products or services.	Add to menu of programmes that viewers can watch after the main film. Short and relevant to their interest. Also good for PR announcements, internal comms, training etc.
Testimonials. Interviews with your clients, featuring quotes about their experiences of you as a supplier/partner, recommendations to others.	Great collateral for adding to the main film, product/service films, and case studies.
Case Studies. A short TV mini-doc about a specific client's success. Includes interviews with you and client, footage of products/services, evidence of success etc.	Very powerful endorsement of your company – add to menu and use everywhere. Also good for PR placement in online publications.
B Roll. Industry term for general video footage and images about a subject – unedited, unvoiced, ready for broadcast media to use to make their own TV story.	Invaluable resource for media – a bank of sexy B Roll and 'off the shelf' quotes. They don't have to send a crew, and you've controlled the images and messages.
Training. All video can be repurposed for training.	This could be for training staff or instructional videos for customers – much easier and more effective than a manual which nobody reads.
Sales Presentations. A series of brief promotional films about your products and services.	Made for your sales team to use in live presentations or online. Control how your business is being sold.
Vidcasts. If you attend events and shows, you could do a live VidCast onto your site – "here we are at CeBIT and this is what's currently happening and newsworthy".	To be integrated with the corporate blog – regular, compelling content, and a way of delivering new announcements direct to your core audiences.

Professional Vs Amateur

Your company's reputation and image can only be enhanced with this new medium, providing you don't risk everything by displaying something that looks amateur. You wouldn't use a photo that was grainy or poorly framed or text that was badly written – and this is why your video has to be professionally-made.

This isn't to say that your programmes shouldn't be placed strategically on YouTube and other video sharing sites – in most cases they should – but your films should NEVER be displayed on your site in the YouTube player.

The appearance of the YouTube player and logo on your site immediately marks you as amateur. Your TV channel has to match and blend seamlessly with your own site, and you have to maintain brand control rather than handing it over to a site that's still most well-known for skateboarding cats.

YouTube is only one of the many ways you can further distribute your films. Facebook, MySpace, Metacafe, and many others can have a strong commercial value in passing along your televisual messages. These should be used carefully and strategically, but their reach can be huge.

Making your programmes

You don't have to hire Spielberg and a huge film crew to produce quality online video – there are several different options available that can give you the appearance of TV, but at a fraction of the cost.

ALL PRO

All films produced by an outside production company, who create the films, design the look, feel and

brand elements of the channel, and possibly host and stream it onto your website if you don't have the resources. If you can afford it, this will give you the best results – the producers should be experts in creating TV and displaying it for you, their material and programmes will be more likely to be used by the media, and they will generally manage the various resources and outputs for you.

PRO and SEMI PRO

Your production partner will create the main films and branding elements for you on an ongoing basis, but they will also train one or



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more of your personnel to be able to capture footage using new in-house cameras. This will generate a large and useful archive of material at a very low acquisition cost that can then be professionally purposed by the production partner.

And in the medium to long term:

SEMI PRO IN-HOUSE

Your production partner is commissioned to build an in-house production facility for you – spec camera and equipment, possibly small Video Room, train personnel and set the new department on its way. Partner may be retained as consultant for first year. It's also very beneficial if your production partner provides an efficient and low cost hosting and streaming service. Then there'll be no IT demands on your site, just some simple web integration taking a

couple of hours.

DIY

You can of course opt to do it yourself. You can buy a camera for £299 from Dixons and some editing software, and you're away. Providing you hold the camera steady, today's domestic cameras deliver pretty good image and sound quality.

But you have to think about how you want to be perceived by your viewers.

If you use professional photographers and writers/PRs for

your print work and messaging, and all collateral has to cross the Marketing Director's desk for sign-off, then why use non-professionals for this? As I've said above, your own personnel can provide an excellent low cost resource, but they have to be directed and trained in the basics in order to be effective.

What does it cost?

Your own TV channel on your website will quickly become the focal point of your public face, so this has to be thought of as investing in the future, starting now.

It isn't a huge investment, even for smaller companies, but internet video is a new medium that isn't on the radar yet, so there isn't a budget line. The budget has to be found and corporate buy-in obtained, but we're not talking the hundreds of thousands that each 30 second TV ad costs to make.

Companies are starting to realise that the static web is dead and transitioning to their own online TV channel is a step they must take. My message is that it needn't be difficult or expensive to do this, but as with all other aspects of their business, brand consistency and professionalism are imperative.

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If you're a small company, you could have a nice 3-5 minute main film, and some elements from the table above, for as little as £10k. For medium to large companies, you should be looking at the £20-50k range for a full service channel start-up. Ongoing costs need not be high, and could be virtually nothing depending on required refresh rates and service levels.

The Way Ahead

Online video is one of the holy grails of corporate communication in the Web 2.0 world, but if you want to turn your visitors into viewers, they'll naturally expect the same quality of screen content, whether it's TV or web. It's still the message that matters – but production quality and delivery will become a major issue if they're poor.

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