



Putting the V Into AV Marketing

Why you should use video in your online marketing program.

BY DON KRESKI

Jeremy Cleek, director of Tightrope Creative, does postproduction work on Tightrope's inhouse videos for its browser-based digital signage system, Carousel, and CableCast, a TV station automation system. The company embedded these videos on its website via the YouTube player and produced a DVD of the content to give to potential clients.

With our industry tied so heavily to video display, you might expect video to play a prominent role in AV marketing programs. Not so. It's rare that an AV contractor, dealer, staging company, or even a manufacturer produces any video materials.

Yet there are many reasons to consider video production.

"One good reason is that video can help you build a presence in the search engines, especially Google," says Tim Grant of web optimization firm Lunavista Communications. "We've had great results with online videos."

"A picture is worth 1,000 words," says Steve Israelsky, vice president of sales and chief marketing officer for Tightrope Media Systems. "It was easier and more effective to create videos that show what our products do than to work in any other medium."

"We have had nothing but success from our video program," says Kip Davis, president of Audio Video Systems (AVS), an AV integrator based in Angola, Ind., that works mostly in residential markets. "Not only do the videos drive people into our business, but we can tell exactly who has seen them because they ask very specific questions about our work and what we can do for them."

A GREAT WAY TO SHOW WHAT YOU DO

According to Israelsky, Tightrope Media got started with video production in order to explain its two core products: Carousel, a browser-based digital sig-

nage system, and CableCast, a TV station automation system.

“We had found that it’s hard for a person to understand all that Carousel can do by reading about it,” he says. “So we created a beautiful 3-minute video called “Carousel in Action.” If people watch this video, either on our website or during a dealer presentation, they instantly understand what it’s capable of and how they can use it.”

Tightrope went on to create several more short videos explaining the basics of its CableCast product plus longer training videos explaining CableCast and Carousel in detail. “We know from our site reporting package that a large number of people watch these videos, including many who do not own the products but are using the training videos to get detailed information about how they work.”

Davis says he decided to produce the AVS videos—a series of nine 5-minute segments explaining the basics of residential AV, security, and other systems, including central vacuum—to provide something for the builders he works with to hand out to potential clients. “We produced a DVD that explained things that potential buyers

were intrigued about so they could learn about them in their own homes without pressure,” he says. He also included a large number of photos of jobs his company has done. “Most of the time, people can’t visualize what they want because they really don’t know what they want,” he says. “But nine times out of 10, someone will see a picture and say “That’s it.”

Once AVS had the videos, it used them to redesign its website (*avsinstall.com*) and made them extremely prominent there. The videos actually reside on YouTube, but they play within a window on the site. That helped in two ways: AVS’s web provider could house the company website on a server with a slower connection because YouTube handled the videos, and AVS gained viewership from people searching YouTube and Google.

STALKING THE SEARCH ENGINES

Davis says he is not sure how much of the benefit he’s gained from the videos has come from the DVDs, from people viewing them on his website, or from people viewing them on YouTube. “We do know that the traffic on our website has quadrupled in the last eight months,” he says.

Grant suggests that placing videos on YouTube has a lot of value in and of itself. “No matter how well you optimize your website, you’re probably going to get only one or two listings on the search results page,” he says. “A big advantage of putting a video on a third-party site like YouTube is that it can give you an opportunity to get an additional listing or even a first listing for a term that’s important to you.”

Suppose you have optimized your site for the term “audio video systems.” You may land a page on the first page of the Google search results for that term, and you may have bid on the term in your Google AdWords pay-per-click campaign. That’s two listings on page one, and that’s great, but there are other categories people can search and they do, including videos, news, and shopping.

According to web research company comScore, watching video on the Web is becoming extremely common. It reports that 81 percent of U.S. Internet users watched some video in June, American online video watchers averaged about 11 minutes of video each day, and YouTube had the largest share of videos seen, almost 39 percent.

Not everyone who watches online videos finds them through the video search tabs. In many cases, search engines list video results on the results page, just as they do news, shopping, and local search results. "A well-qualified video can make the Web results if optimized properly," Grant says. "In general, the more popular and general a key phrase, the harder it is to get a video optimized on that term to appear in web results, but it definitely happens. We have also had good results with longer, more descriptive key phrases and less competitive terms." (For example: "whole house audio video system" versus "audio video.")

When you place a video in YouTube, you need to make sure that your web address and phone number appear prominently. YouTube will not link from your video to your website; your video message will need to stand on its own.

NOT NECESSARILY BROADCAST QUALITY

If you watch the AVS videos, you'll find they were shot simply and inexpensively in the company showroom. Still, they move quickly, keep your interest, and impart good information. The Tightrope pieces, on the other hand, hold to much higher production values.

So one question, if you're considering producing your own video, is how much to spend. You need to look at least as good as your competitors, and you will likely need to invest more if you compete in a large or national marketplace.

In this case, neither firm spent a fortune on its videos. Davis hired a local video producer, Trent Lewis of Fremont, Ind.-based Tel All Productions, who also happens to be his web service provider. Lewis shot with a Canon XL2 MiniDV

camcorder and edited with Apple Final Cut Pro on a Mac.

Israelsky says Tightrope hired two people, Jeremy Cleek and Amber Ward, and brought all of their services in house. Ward builds images for animated segments in Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator and hands them off to Cleek, who works in Adobe After Effects, Flash, and Final Cut Pro. When they shoot live video, they rent HD cameras and edit using the same packages.

In any case, production values are not all that important to the search engines. "From an optimization point of view," Grant says, "the real emphasis is not so much what you put into your video, but how it is implemented within the video site. That is to say, when you post a video, you need to incorporate well-targeted key phrases into the tags and descriptions on the video page."

All of this begs the question, how much is a video production worth?

Davis says that just over half of the 37 percent revenue growth he's experienced so far this year is directly attributable to the video program. "It's been a stellar year," he says. **SVC**