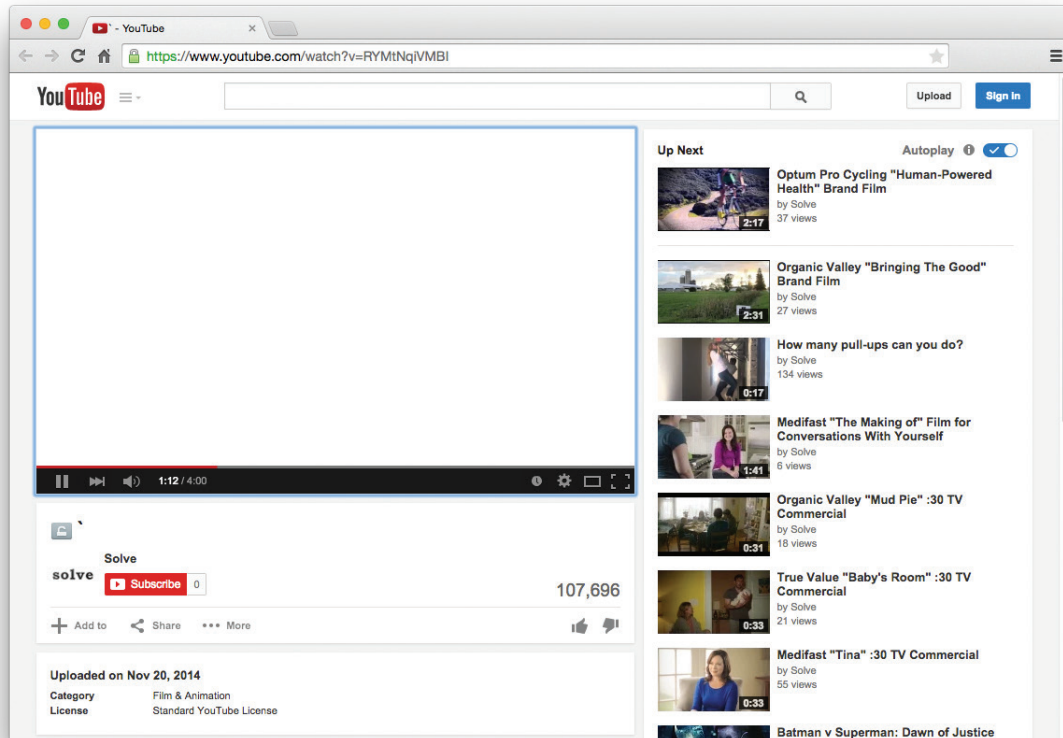


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www.solve-ideas.com
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HOW DID THIS BLANK, FOUR-MINUTE VIDEO GET 100,000 VIEWS?



For years, YouTube Views were the strongest indicator of an online video's cultural impact. Sure, you could deduce the popularity of Dramatic Chipmunk based on how often he turned up in your Facebook news feed. But YouTube's sacred ticker has long been the gold standard for determining whether or not something has "gone viral."

It was only natural, therefore, that marketers (and industry press) gravitated towards YouTube Views as the almighty KPI for social video efforts. In an ROI-driven economy, View counts corroborated the influence of powerful films like *Real Beauty Sketches* by Dove on our culture.

But just as tales of winners belie the true odds of winning the lottery, the attention paid to viral hits fails to impress how successful branded videos tend to be statistical outliers.

According to YouTube, 300 hours of content are uploaded to the platform *every minute*.¹ In such a competitive environment, it's inevitable that the majority of branded videos will simply disappear into the vast, unwatched ether.

CMOs, however, aren't particularly receptive to "the numbers game" as rationale for why a campaign's flagship video only received 1,000 Views. Consequently, marketers are increasingly turning to paid services designed to place branded content in front of sharing-minded audiences. So integral are these services to marketing campaigns that eMarketer now predicts online video ad spending will surpass 10 billion dollars within three years.²

The rising popularity of online video promotion raises an interesting question – do video views alone still represent

success? Can creative excellence be inferred from the YouTube ticker if a million Views can be obtained for a modest media investment? And if Views are no more valuable than a run-of-the-mill impression, what criteria *should* be used to judge online video campaigns?

Our Experiment: The Blank Video Project

To prove the inadequacy of Views as a key performance indicator and to learn which metrics best reflect content quality, we created a four-minute blank video. The video had no motion, sound, title nor description. It consisted of nothing but a blank, stationary white slate. A click-through URL was added, driving visitors to our agency's website, www.solve-ideas.com.

To prove the inadequacy of Views as a key performance indicator, we created a four-minute blank video with no motion, sound, title nor description.

We then promoted this video using YouTube TrueView In-Stream advertising. Our four-minute blank video was served as pre-roll to US-based YouTube viewers. Per YouTube's advertising policy, we were only charged if a viewer watched at least 30 seconds of our four-minute blank white video. All viewers had the option to skip the video after five seconds.

As a result of our promotion, we were able to generate over 100,000 Views of our four-minute blank video for only a \$1,400 investment – or 1.4 cents per View. The ad itself was served 227,819 times, meaning that the View threshold was reached nearly 46 percent of the time.

Surprisingly, the video demonstrated strong engagement metrics in spite of its blank content. On average, viewers made it through 61 percent (or 2:26) of our four-minute video before leaving or skipping, and 22 percent made it to the end. Nearly one percent of viewers even clicked through to our website from the video! As would be expected, however, our blank four-minute video did not earn any likes, shares or new YouTube channel subscribers.

Although it's impossible to know, it's unlikely our blank video was *actually* viewed 100,000 times in the traditional sense. In reality, most of the Views were probably attributable to inadvertent plays – pre-roll streaming in the background while multiple browser tabs were open or people mistakenly believing their intended video was loading. In either case, the deliberate intent needed to legitimize the View as a proxy for video quality is conspicuously absent.

22%

The percentage of those who started the blank video that made it all the way to the end.

2:26

The average amount of time (m:ss) that a viewer spent watching our blank video.

Key Takeaways

It's important to note that these findings are not an indictment of YouTube or the TrueView advertising service. We at Solve and many others have used these platforms as they were originally intended to successfully achieve bona-fide business objectives.

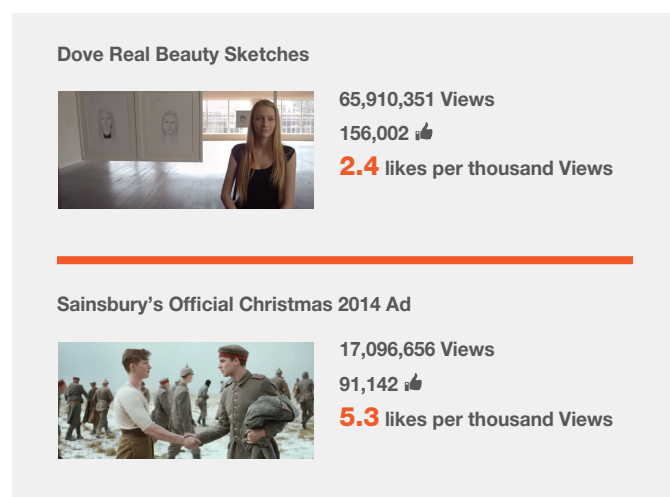
But if a modest investment is all it takes to get a blank video over 100,000 Views, it's clear that YouTube View count in and of itself is an unreliable indicator of quality content. To fully leverage the unique opportunities afforded by online video, marketers need to adopt a more sophisticated approach for evaluating the quality and performance of their content.

Choose Better Benchmarks

Lamenting a lack of Views relative to a competitor's video is a fruitless exercise, as it's impossible to know to what extent their View count is attributable to paid media. If you want to truly evaluate the performance of your branded video in the context of competitive offerings, you need a better set of benchmarks.

A good starting point is to evaluate the number of “likes” (on YouTube, “thumbs-ups”) that a video has received. The more your video resonates with audiences, the more people will endorse it. If your competitor’s video has ten times as many Views but only one-tenth the likes, you can be relatively certain your branded content was more impactful.

An even better competitive benchmark is to divide the number of likes by the number of Views. Calculating the likes-to-impression ratio gives you the clearest line of sight into comparative creative excellence. For example, Sainsbury’s 2014 Christmas Film received 5.3 “LPM” or likes per thousand Views, whereas Real Beauty Sketches by Dove achieved only 2.4 LPM, despite earning almost twice as many total endorsements. This suggests that, compared to Sainsbury’s, Real Beauty Sketches relied more heavily on paid promotion to attain its View count.



Measure Behaviors

It’s all too easy for brands to forget that content consumption is a means to an end – not the end itself. Branded content that fails to favorably change the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of target audiences cannot be considered a success regardless of how many millions of Views were accrued.

Thankfully, even marketers with small budgets have many means for measuring their video’s ability to influence desirable behavior. At a base level, tracking shares can determine the effectiveness of creative messaging – after all, people are not inclined to

share boring videos with their social circles. Most platforms also allow marketers to incorporate click-based calls-to-action into their videos. Measuring these actions, which can range from browsing a campaign microsite to completing a lead generation form, also provides insight into online video’s ability to drive meaningful results.

Marketers with larger promotional budgets can measure the effectiveness of their online video campaigns using more traditional means. Tracking pre- and post levels of awareness, favorability and sales allows brands to determine online video’s ability to move the needle on a mass scale. Measuring consumer sentiment also helps determine the appropriate role for online video in the media mix relative to broadcast, cable and spot advertising.

Branded content that fails to favorably change the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of target audiences cannot be considered successful regardless of how many millions of Views were accrued.

Just because the YouTube View doesn’t signify creative excellence as it once did doesn’t mean it’s a useless metric, nor does it mean promoting online videos with paid media is an ignoble strategy. It does mean, however, that the View should be treated like an impression: it’s the *conduit* that connects the brand to the consumer, not the message that’s transmitted.

Online video incorporates both the one-way broadcasting of traditional advertising and the interactive nature of the web into a medium that is familiar yet unique. But despite its novelty, the key to success in the online video space is wholly rooted in the basic fundamentals of marketing – identify your audience, develop a strong messaging strategy, deliver excellent creative and refine based on outcomes.

1 YouTube Statistics – April 2015 - <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>
2 eMarketer – December 2014 - <http://www.emarketer.com/Article/YouTube-Owns-Nearly-20-Share-of-US-Digital-Video-Ads/1011191>