

COLUMNS

## Stop doing video for the sake of doing video

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The rush to video can be likened to the gold rush: an influx of people rushing to money, a few smart moves and a few winners, and a lot of dumb moves and even more losers.

With today's mass shift to video, similar behavior has taken shape as publishers rush to follow the money trail without much thought as to whether the video they are pushing out aligns with their content and, above all, resonates with their audiences.

And with eMarketer **reporting** that spending on digital video in the United States will reach more than \$16 billion by 2020, it is no wonder brands and media outlets are feeling pressured to invest exorbitant amounts in video to capture fleeting attention spans albeit with little regard for the reader.

As a result, we are seeing a proliferation of video advertising. Lots of bad video advertising.

Survival mode

Take those 30-second ads of unrelated video, which continue to stand between readers and the video or article that they actually want to consume. Or many publishers' insistence on forcing at least one video ad within each article sound familiar?

This short-term cash infusion strategy or lack thereof to place irrelevant video wherever possible, even when it does not add meaning to the story's narrative, showcases that publishers are in survival mode, focused on staying afloat rather than long-term sustainability which comes from one thing: reader loyalty.

In what could have been meaningful engagement via video let us be honest: publishers could have baked in relevant video ads to video content that did not stray far from the editorial topic they have now made video somewhat meaningless by sticking it in places it does not belong, thus somewhat lessening its value in the content food chain.

So how do we get readers to come back for more, while still relying on video as a means of engagement and simultaneously, monetization?

We must undo what we already did.

#### Amending widespread content fatigue

When publishers resort to meaningless content and video, and sacrifice their users for immediate revenue, their readers notice. That is one of the reasons said readers are spending an underwhelming **15 seconds** or less, on average, on a piece of content, rarely consuming a story from beginning to end.

And no publisher can successfully drive revenue via their content when readers experiencing FOMO are moving on to the next piece of content so quickly.

The above consumption patterns are clear when you look closely at video view stats.

Though viewing stats may look stellar at first, most views occur on Facebook rather than publishers' domains, represent poor viewing times, and are not generating as much revenue as we are led to believe. Not to mention, according to Facebook, a view is **three seconds** or more.

This widespread content fatigue and skim-heavy culture can only be reversed by prioritizing readers first, creating content that is relevant for them, and engages them in a meaningful way.

This does not just serve the readers' need for great storytelling, but caters to publishers' revenue strategies: if users are truly consuming the content, they will spend more time on page, scroll deeper, and will be exposed to more ads.

#### How to strike gold

Serving your users video in the right context means that you need to produce more of it, which does not necessarily require as many resources as you think.

We must shift the inaccurate industry perception that video production for both editorial and monetization purposes calls for a huge team and an even bigger budget.

In 2018 we will see more traditional journalists who do not typically encompass the skillset to produce video content on their own begin to work with third-party tools that enable quick and easy creation and monetization of attractive video content. Doing so will help them uphold their commitment to the narrative, rather than to the bottom line, while still bringing home the bacon.

But video is not the only way to bring visual, interactive experiences to stories.

The advantages that video brings in increasing user engagement and dwell time which simultaneously contributes to effective monetization can be created by adding a question, a poll, an image you click to unblur and other elements that keep your users active in their consumption, and diversifies the experience of simply scrolling through text.

IN THE LONG RUN, the excessive reliance on video will highlight the winners and losers of the video rush.

The publishers who survive shifting audience preferences, align their metrics of success with truly meaningful numbers, and familiarize themselves with the newest storytelling tools, will be those who stay true to great, engaging storytelling, and continue to **pivot to readers**, rather than to video.

Perhaps at the end of 2018 we will no longer see irrelevant video where it does not belong.

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