

Impact Of Video Sharing On Social And Internal Communication

You may dismiss it as a website for attention-deprived teenagers with an interest in strange cats, but YouTube, and other video sharing services like it, have the potential to change the way you communicate.

As well as opening up a new and exciting channel for corporate communicators, these sites are part of an online revolution that will place great demands on organizations over the coming years and will, for some, threaten their very existence. Think I’m exaggerating? Read on…

YouTube, the king of the video sharing websites, is a phenomenon. Just look at the numbers - every day 100 million videos are viewed and 65,000 new clips are added to the website. It boasts 20million unique users every month and is estimated to account for 60% of all videos watched online. And before you dismiss it as a site for American kids, note that more than a third of the site’s users are over 35 and upwards of 3.5million of them are British.

Those statistics are reason enough for communicators to sit up and pay attention.

Another reason is its enormous impact. The site has been around for just few years and, during that time, has shown millions of people what to do with a packet of Mentos and a bottle of Diet Coke, turned a lonely teenager into a global celebrity, been used by unions to attack big business, embarrassed the Scottish First Minister and claimed the scalp of a US senator. Whilst much of its content may be pure titillation, some of it is very serious indeed.

In less than two years YouTube has gone from being a bright idea at a Silicon Valley dinner party, to being named Time Magazine’s Invention of the Year for 2006. And although the business has yet to make a profit, it has already made two twenty something guys very rich indeed - in October YouTube was sold to Google for a staggering \$1.65bn. Not bad for a new media toddler.

It’s a viral thing

So what has made YouTube such a runaway success?

For many, the answer is its viral nature – people discover obscure videos they like, alert their friends by email and these messages are then forwarded again and again, driving impressive viewing figures. It is this ‘virtual chatter’ between contacts that keeps the internet buzzing.

YouTube is part of a phenomenon that has become known collectively as the social media or ‘Web2.0’. The buzzwords are used to describe the current generation of web-based services that emphasize online collaboration, user-generated content and file sharing. In contrast to the static, brochure-ware web of the past, the new style ‘conversational web’ is being created and driven by ordinary people. As such, video sharing is an extension of the same trend that has seen an explosion in the number of blogs (written word) and podcasts (spoken word) that are being produced.

The popularity of online video has been fuelled by the rapid growth in broadband internet access (about a third of UK households currently have broadband access, with that figure set to more than double by the end of 2009) and the availability of increasingly sophisticated mobile devices (video-ready iPods and mobile phones are now becoming commonplace).

These developments show no signs of slowing down and it won’t be long before web-based content begins to threaten the traditional/mainstream media (one of the reasons Rupert Murdoch recently forked out \$580m for the social networking site MySpace). Make no mistakes – online video is here to stay and it will quickly become a core communication channel for all sorts of organizations.