

Creating a Video Series for the
School of Journalism and Mass Communication

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Introduction

Video is a powerful medium that many experts believe may be instrumental in creating relationships between an organization and its publics. This is particularly the case when the video is placed on an organization's website (Orrell, 2008). It is also important for a website's video content to be accessible via mobile devices, as mobile viewership of online videos has increased massively in recent years (Pham, 2013). When proper care is given to producing a video for a website, that video can help establish a brand, sell products, or motivate viewers to carry out specific actions. Experts suggest that when an organization uses certain features, such as video, it will have better success engaging its publics. (Orrell, 2008).

A university or its academic units are good examples of organizations that could greatly benefit from the use of video. In this project, I will focus on the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Kent State University. The School has determined that, through a new website, one of its top priorities will be engaging prospective students and their parents. This proposal focuses on how the School can use an ongoing video series on the website to help accomplish that goal.

The Project

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication could better reach its target audience of prospective students and their parents by incorporating more video into its online presence, as video is a medium that appeals to the School's target audience. Parents of millennials grew up watching television. One author points out that members of that generation "spent more time watching [television] than they spent in school" (Morton, 2003, 43). While that generation may have grown up watching a television, there has been a massive shift to viewing video content

online. One author reports that “Tablets last year had a 110% surge in video viewership, while smartphones experienced an 87% increase” (Pham, 2013).

I have created the foundation for a video series featuring topics of particular interest to millennials who are considering applying to a university and their parents. The videos consist of footage from interviews, photos pertaining to the subject matter, photos of Kent State’s School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Franklin Hall, and the Kent State campus. This video series should be posted to the School’s website in a format that is also compatible with mobile devices.

For this project, I chose the subject of global education because it demonstrates information that is appealing to both parents and prospective students. Parents would be interested in hearing how a global education experience may lead to internship and employment opportunities. Prospective students would be interested in the opportunity to travel. It also shows a very exciting aspect of a JMC education to appeal to millennials. There are a few different global education opportunities offered by JMC through the College of Communication and Information, and I chose to treat those opportunities as one concept rather than focusing on a particular trip.

I used the topic of global education as a means of exploring the best ways to produce a video for the series, not necessarily as a topic that would launch the series. Through the topic, I examined the different approaches the videos might take, what a production schedule should be, and how easily a video of this type can be produced quickly.

I produced videos representing three different approaches to the subject matter. The approaches are different in that they feature different interview configurations of professor and student. One approach features one professor discussing what students might gain from a global

education experience, the second approach features one student discussing personal experiences in a global education course, and the third features both one professor and one student discussing their experiences with global education. This provides the School with choices. Two of the examples feature a student because research shows that millennials are influenced by their peer group and by someone they perceive to be as a “person like me” (Dodd & Campbell, 2011). The videos will feature interviews rather than scripts because members of the generation to which parents of millennials belong tend to respond more to stories than to sales pitches. “They love to hear true stories about other’s lives. It gives them connection and identity” (Morton, 2003, 45).

There are four elements to this project. First, I developed a template for the videos. Second, I produced three sample videos on one topic. Third, I organized an informal discussion group to gain reactions to the videos. Fourth, I wrote this report discussing and analyzing the sample videos, and suggesting how similar videos could be used on the School’s website.

Audience

For this project, it is important to determine what appeals to the target audience. The target audience includes two groups: high school students who are beginning to apply to universities, and the parents of those students. Individual topics within the series might appeal more to one group than the other, but both groups are still considered target audiences. There may also be an external audience, made up of those who are interested in the featured topic, but not considering applying to a college. Members of the external audience might include Kent State exploratory majors, alumni, professors at other universities, and people who are interested in the featured topic. Through the secondary audience, the videos would serve the purpose of raising awareness of the School.

Most of the prospective students who are beginning college searches are referred to as “millennials.” Many parents of millennials belong to “Generation X.” Dodd and Campbell define a millennial as anyone born between 1982 and 2001, representing 27 percent of the U.S. population (2011). Members of “Generation X,” also referred to as Gen Xers, were born from 1965 to 1978 (Morton, 2003). As it is the School’s goal to attract and engage potential students and their parents, using tools that appeal to those audience groups is essential. Morton says that Gen Xers are “media savvy. They know the value of the media; they understand its power...” (2003, 45). Pearson, Carmon, Tobola, and Fowler point out that “the millennial generation...view technology as a functional necessity, not a modern convenience” (2009, 45). They also say “Institutions that are not equipped with the most recent technological services will not be able to recruit and maintain healthy student bodies” (2009, 45).

Cortez-Antig defines a parent as “anyone who provides the needs of a child in his/her growing-up years until adulthood” (2011, 54). In providing for a child, many parents view education as one of the most important financial decisions. “When a child is able to acquire the highest educational background, a parent can rest assured that his/her future is secure” (Cortez-Antig, 2011, 55). A 2012 study examined how extensively parents interact with their children when researching universities (Myers & Myers). This study identified different stages in which parents and students research universities. “The first level occurs when students and parents engage themselves separately in social networks and relations that include college preparation activities. The second level occurs when parents and children come together to discuss college planning” (Myers & Myers, 2012, 302). This video series should appeal to both parents and students so that when they come together to share their separate research, both parties will be interested in the videos.

The videos I produced hopefully will function as a recruiting tool. The videos feature the type of information that millennials and their parents look for when researching the decision of which university to attend. Millennials and their parents may not always be looking for the same type of information. Dodd and Campbell found that “83 percent of [millennials] knows what product they want before they leave the house to go shopping because they have already looked up all the available options on the Internet” (2011, 5). This implies that millennials extensively research a university before they visit the campus in person. A 2008 study determined that “Millennials are practical, caring deeply about concrete results, grades, and achievements” (Connaway, Radford, Dickey, Williams, & Confer, 2008, 125). Prospective students want to see how a school can prepare them for the workforce, but they also want to see that the experience will be enjoyable. They want to know what the other students are like, and whether the professors seem friendly.

Parents mostly look for practical information. They want to know that they are making a wise financial decision. Parents want to see information about how a school will make their child marketable in the workforce. Parents are also concerned about safety, how quickly a student can graduate from the program, and how successfully past graduates have found jobs. Myers and Myers indicate that parents research universities before making the final decision with their children (2012).

Video Template

To create the title for the video series, I had a conversation with Stephanie Smith, JMC Interim Coordinator for Marketing and Media. She and I agreed that the title, as well as the nature of the template, should be broad in order to allow the School some flexibility in deciding content (personal communication, May 2013). Following that conversation, I decided to title the

video series “JMC Insight.” This would allow the School to feature opportunities offered by the School, School news, or other topics related to the School. The series provides insight into what students are experiencing during their JMC education.

For help with editing, lighting, audio, and filming I asked a JMC student, Matt Petrunak, to assist me. He has experience in the specific areas I needed. Petrunak is a junior, and an Electronic Media major.

For the first element of this project, I produced a template for an introduction. The music I chose for the template has an upbeat tempo and a light rock feel. I used videoblocks.com as a resource for royalty-free content such as music, stock footage, and files for the program Adobe AfterEffects. If the School should want to use further content from the website, it is important to note that the website requires a membership, which allows the user to access and download any of the royalty-free content on the site. A seven-day free trial period is available upon submission of credit card information. After the seven-day trial, membership costs \$79 dollars per month, or \$474 for a six-month membership. Downloaded content may still be used after a membership has expired (Video Blocks, 2013).

I chose an AfterEffects file that will be flexible enough to suit any topic that JMC might choose for a video. The template shows the inside of a spinning cylinder of photos. The cylinder stops and focuses on three photos before transitioning to the title screen. The three photos that are highlighted are captioned with the words chosen by JMC to represent the School’s mission. These words are “Respected, Relevant, and Real.” I discussed with Smith what types of photos would be consistent with the School’s branding, and she said that pictures of students engaged in an activity would be best (personal communication, May 2013).

As the cylinder spins, other photos are seen but not highlighted and captioned. These photos depict JMC students doing various activities. The images are not specific to a particular topic within JMC. After the third photo is featured, the title screen appears with the words “JMC Insight.” I chose the photos to include in the template, and Petrunak edited them into the file.

Following the final fade of the template, a screen should appear with a “call to action,” or suggestion of further action the viewer may take. This makes viewing the video a less passive experience, by giving the viewer a way to continue his or her engagement. One call to action is for the primary audience of parents of potential students seeking more information about the School, and the other call to action is for the secondary audience seeking more information about the topic. This screen should always include a link to the JMC website. For the sample videos, there is a link to the global education information on the CCI website, as well as links to the course sites containing student work.

Sample Videos

Petrunak filmed each interview, as well as set up the lighting and audio, while I conducted the interviews and directed. I then chose the segments of the interviews I wanted to use, and put the segments in the final order. Petrunak edited the segments together, utilizing the B roll I supplied. I oversaw all editing.

I produced three sample videos, each approximately two minutes in length. Smith said that 90 seconds or less is the best length for a web video. She said that if a video is much longer, the viewer starts to lose interest (personal communication, May 2013). For these videos, however, I decided to limit the videos to two minutes. Extending the time limit allows for more depth of discussion in the videos. I wanted to keep the videos short so that they would be consistent with any other videos found on the JMC website and its associated social media pages.

I am using the sample videos to demonstrate three different approaches to a single topic. My goal in doing this was to determine which type of video of video is most appealing to both prospective students and their parents. By creating three different approaches to the same topic, I was able to have different options to show a discussion group, and ask them which approach was most appropriate for this type of series. The School may choose the best format for continuing the video series. I worked with my interview subjects to compose questions that would pertain to the topic of global education. Then I conducted and filmed the interviews, with the assistance of Petrunak, who is skilled with lighting and audio.

The professor I chose to interview is Dr. Danielle Coombs, who is one of the professors of the Global Advertising and Public Relations course, in which Coombs and another professor take a group of students to London to conduct individual research. I chose Coombs because she is very relatable and personable on camera. She is also comfortable being filmed, which makes the result look more natural.

For my student interviewee, I chose Katy Coduto, a student in the Plus 24 program. Coduto took part in the Global Advertising and PR class previously as an undergraduate student. At the time of the interview, she was enrolled as a graduate student in that same course. I chose Coduto because she had such a positive experience the first time she traveled abroad with JMC that she felt it was valuable enough to repeat. As a student in the Plus 24 program, Coduto is younger than many other graduate students, and is a relatable age to prospective students. Coduto is active in TV2, JMC's student-run TV station, and as such, is comfortable in front of a camera.

Following the template and before the interview footage begins, I produced a short introduction to the topic. I provided the voice for the introduction, in which I introduce the

interview subjects, as well as say the name of the series again. The primary B roll for this introduction consists of photos that pertain to the words I say.

As I reviewed the interview footage to determine which quotes to use, I kept in mind what the literature reveals about what millennials and their parents want to see. Millennials want to see “someone like me” (Dodd & Campbell, 2011), while parents want to see “true stories” (Morton, 2003). I chose comments that revealed what students gain from such an experience, such as internship opportunities and marketable skills.

After choosing the comments, I asked Petrunak to edit them in the order I specified. I also provided and instructed him on the appropriate B roll. The video was layered with photos from students’ global education experiences. These photos were used to hide cuts as well as to illustrate points. Most of the transitions I instructed Petrunak to use were fades and cross dissolves, as well as some pans and zooms. I wanted the pace of the B roll to coincide with the pace of the interviews. Both interviewees spoke at a relaxed pace, which the B roll matches.

The graphic for the lower third, which identifies the interview subject, is orange with a spinning globe. I chose to include a globe in this graphic to parallel the subject of global education. The text is white, and the remainder of the graphic is orange. Orange is a complementary color to the blue globe. Smith also informed me that orange is the newly designated color of JMC (personal communication, May 2013). The School may choose to create a new lower third for each new topic, or it may choose to use the same one for each video. I liked the idea of creating a lower third specific to the topic because, through imagery, it helps reinforce what the interviewees are saying. The animated globe was obtained from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration website, which allows commercial use of some of its content (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2013). I had originally included the

JMC logo in the lower third, but removed it when I realized that there were too many visual elements and the viewers would be overwhelmed.

Discussion Group

For the third element of this project, I organized an informal discussion group. I asked two members of the millennial generation, two parents of millennials, and two JMC alumni to participate¹. I showed the three videos on a television screen, and then discussed them with the group for 45 minutes. Quotes from this discussion group are unedited and may contain colloquialisms or grammatical errors.

The group's consensus was that the video featuring only Coombs was the most effective for the sample topic. One parent participant said that, because Coombs talked about JMC's global education courses more generally, it was easier to imagine how the participant's own child could study abroad. "I could see how all of the students improved, how all of the students benefited, so I could picture my child as being one of them" (Discussion Group, 21 June 2013). One of the alumnus participants noted that Coombs presented the information very well. "Everything she said was well stated, and one statement led to the next" (Discussion Group, 21 June 2013).

Dissenting from the rest of the group, one of the students thought that the video featuring only Coduto was the most appealing. The student said, "As a student, I would much rather listen to a fellow student telling me their experience rather than a professor telling me what my experience should be like" (Discussion Group, 21 June 2013). The rest of the group thought that Coduto did not speak as well as Coombs. However, one participant pointed out that what

¹ Participant 1 (parent): Caucasian, female, aged 50's. Participant 2 (alumnus): Caucasian, male, aged 50's. Participant 3 (current student): Caucasian, male, aged 20's, senior at Kent State. Participant 4 (current student): Middle Eastern-American, male, aged 20's, junior at Kent State. Participant 5 (alumnus): Caucasian, male, aged 20's. Participant 6 (parent): Caucasian, female, aged 50's.

Coduto said would appeal to both students and parents, even if she did not say it as well as she could have. “Katy says good things for parents as well, with talking about getting the internship” (Discussion Group, 21 June 2013).

None of the discussion group participants thought the video featuring both Coombs and Coduto was the most effective. They thought the pace lagged. They also thought the video lacked a natural flow. They also noticed that, in order to allow both Coombs and Coduto enough time to say what they needed to say, the video was longer. The participants said they found it harder to pay attention to a longer video.

I asked the two students and the younger alumnus if their parents had helped them research schools during their own college searches. Their responses differed from the research I had found about parents of millennials. The three participants said that their parents had played very small roles in helping them research schools. One did say that he would share information he found with his parents, but that his parents did not seek out the information themselves. The parents who participated in the discussion group echoed this sentiment, saying that they did little research themselves, and had told their children to choose a couple schools to go visit. However, it is important to remember that this small group of participants was not a random sample, and their responses do not negate previous research.

All of the participants thought the template was very effective, and is consistent with their perceptions of the JMC brand. The participants noted that, coming from a school that teaches video production and journalism, a video on the School’s website should be professionally produced and tell a story well. Some of the participants also mentioned that the sample videos fit the recent branding efforts of the School, with the tagline “Respected, Relevant, Real.” One of the alumni said, “I think it plays in real well with this marketing thing

of ‘Respected, Relevant, Real.’ It does show that this is a very concrete example of something students are doing that plays right into that” (Discussion Group, 21 June 2013).

The group was also pleased with the professionalism of the videos, starting with the introductory template. One participant said that immediately seeing that someone has put care and effort into the production makes him want to watch the entire video. “I think the first couple seconds matter most. I’ll watch a longer video as long as the first couple seconds get me. I thought it was good. The intro was really cool. You see it and think, okay, this is a legit video and not something somebody shot on their iPad” (Discussion Group, 21 June 2013).

The participants also agreed that video is an appropriate medium for this type of project. One alumnus participant said that when he has participated in recruiting activities, prospective students respond well to videos. “I think, too, from what I would do recruiting at national conventions, we would bring footage with us, usually of student media type stuff, and kids would come up to us and we’d tell them about all these things we have available. But once they would watch the video and see what goes on in TV2, and the kinds of things they could produce, they were a lot more hooked in” (Discussion Group, 21 June 2013).

Although the participants said that the videos are an effective way of showing what type of global education JMC can offer, they also said they did not feel like they were being sold something. One participant said, “I did get a feeling that the student and the faculty enjoyed the experience. They weren’t just telling something for a video” (Discussion Group, 21 June 2013). Another said, “They were sincere” (Discussion Group, 21 June 2013).

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on my research and the responses from the discussion group, I have some recommendations. Of the three approaches, I think either a video that features an interview with one professor or a video that features an interview with one student are the best options. Featuring a professor and a student in one video creates some difficulties. It is a challenge to interview both subjects in such a way that their responses can be edited into a video that flows naturally from one conversation to the next. Using two subjects also creates a video that is longer than featuring only one subject.

Future topics that the School might use to continue the series include student media, student awards, and JMC events. Examples of some appropriate topics are as follows. JMC finished eighth in the national Hearst Journalism Awards program. A team of JMC PR students placed second in the Public Relations Society of America's Bateman Award competition. Those two topics would show that students producing quality work with the skills they learn, and that they are recognized for their achievements. Every fall, the Poynter Institute hosts a media ethics conference in Franklin Hall. Every spring, PRSA hosts a social media workshop in Franklin Hall. Those two topics show that JMC students have opportunities to network with professionals. Alumna Brooke DiDonato's photo was selected as the cover of an issue of Photographer's FORUM magazine. That topic demonstrates how students continue to find success after graduating with a JMC education. When the School is choosing a topic, it needs to carefully consider what visuals might accompany that topic. Photos or video may be used as B roll, but those visuals have to be available to the School to use.

It depends on the topic whether to feature one professor or one student. If a topic appeals more to students, a student should be featured if one is available who can present the information well. If a topic appeals more to parents, the School should consider featuring a professor if the

topic allows. Regardless of whether students or parents would be most interested in the topic, the interview subject should be appropriate to the topic. For instance, if the topic is a student award, it would be more effective to hear the information from the student winning the award than a professor.

I think it is important to use interviews for the videos. I believe the discussion group thought the interview subjects were sincere because of the interview style. Interview style is less likely to make a viewer feel like they are watching a sales pitch. Memorized scripts can make a subject's delivery stilted and unnatural.

Based on the responses from the discussion group, I would also recommend that the School maintain a high level of professionalism with the production of videos for a web series. When a video looks professional, a viewer is more inclined to continue watching.

As a web series, the content should be updated often. The participants of the discussion group suggested posting a new video at least once a month. Updating the content every two weeks would be better. Prospective students and their parents generally research schools for a year or less, and when they return to the website to continue research, they should see fresh content. The old video should also be archived in a way that makes them easily accessible to website users. By archiving the videos, a user can view those videos that appeal the most to that individual, regardless of whether the video is the featured content at that time.

To keep such a strict schedule, the School should create a position for someone to update the content. One way of doing this would be to appoint a graduate assistant to the task. The challenge with using a graduate assistant is that the School would need to make sure there is a graduate assistant skilled in video production. Another way would be to appoint someone with the task of creating the videos for the series. A combination of both of those suggestions would

also work nicely, with a graduate assistant working with a video director to create the videos. The video director could tell the assistant which topics would be keeping with the spirit of the series, as well as helping to schedule interviews. The graduate assistant could then produce the videos.

Conclusion

The School could use this video series as a recruiting tool, by featuring topics that prospective students and their parents are interested in when researching schools. These topics may include preparation for the workforce, student success, awards, and social aspects of the School. Displaying the videos online, particularly in a format compatible with mobile devices, follows the trend that shows a huge increase in mobile video viewership (Pham 2013).

The video series can be used to help establish JMC's brand, as well as to function as a recruiting tool. Prospective students and their parents both research a university before applying. That is why the School needs to appeal to both prospective students and their parents. The School can accomplish that goal by choosing topics that appeal to millennials and their parents. Depending on the topic, the School should choose to focus the interview on either a professor or a student, and allow the interview subject to tell his or her story. The videos should be no more than two minutes in length, and should be professionally produced. With the help of this video series, the School will be able to accomplish its goal of engaging prospective students and their parents.

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