

PR Video Upstart
The Efficacy of Video Usage in Digital PR

Austin Satinsky
Code3 Senior Social Strategist

Interview Transcript:

Q: If you could just start off by stating your full name and then your current career position?

A: Absolutely, my name is Austin Satinsky and I work as a senior social strategist at Code3. It is a digital advertising agency that works on about one to two accounts that are spending upwards of seven to eight million dollars a year and I am running their paid social campaigns.

Q: What exactly inspired you to pursue a career in communication and public relations?

A: Well, the long and short of it is. I got a degree in the theatre, but I was, like you know, I can't just do that. So, I picked up a second major and it was through my studying that I just really gravitated towards the world of social media marketing, and I fell into this position, really the agency culture, in 2019, after doing a little bit of freelancing and digital marketing on the side.

Q: I would love to hear more about agency culture. What led you to want to work in a more corporate atmosphere?

A: You know, working in an agency was a really great way to get my foot in the door with doing a lot of different paid social and organic social tactics for marketing. I like to think of the choice to go into the agency world to really broaden my horizons even further because you know, when I was graduating college back in 2017, the landscape of the marketing program at my college was not like it is today. There's a heavier focus on social and digital advertising, which is great, but you know, for a long time it's really been focused on that split between traditional and digital media.

Q: How has your experience informed your current views on the digital marketing space, specifically focusing on video media content and how it works regarding social media campaigns and digital integrated marketing plans?

A: If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that people spend time on their phones in large quantities and video advertising is what came through as the victor for a lot of companies. You know, formatting their paid content to mimic organic material is really what helped them stand apart. And if you look at a lot of pieces of advertisements that go out on even television, they have that same sort of natural, handheld style of shooting, just a little bit more elevated in certain lighting, makeup, and camera quality. But everybody knows that the kind of advertising that works is that user-generated content style of video. All these methods of just creating content that can also sell something is what brands are after, and a lot of them, unfortunately, miss the mark, but the ones that are doing it right are doing it so well.

Q: Do you feel the pandemic and shifting to an almost predominantly online world is what is really pushing video content, or do you feel that there are other contributing factors to it?

A: I definitely feel like the COVID pandemic kick-started a lot of that, but for the last couple of years, I think we've been gradually moving further and further into handheld, mobile-first content. I mean, in another lifetime, the [vertical streaming service] Quibi could have been the most successful thing of all time. One of the most popular forms of social media in most Asian countries is that kind of like long-form, mobile-first video content. People are on their phones more than ever now and kids younger and younger are getting access to smartphones. Let's be honest, we all lied about our age so we could join some website or some social media platform when we were growing up. So, the fact that it really kind of all came together within the last three years is really kismet, because it was really slow at first. Then we all got stuck inside and, all at once, people were just glued to their phones because they had nothing to do.

Q: In your personal experience, how has your company, Code3, benefited from the implementation of video content and how effective has that strategy been for your clientele?

A: That's a great question. I would say it really depends on the client. For a lot of our clients that are running a lot of mobile-first, creative [content], they are running in the right verticals, meaning they're using the right formatted video for Snapchat story placement versus what reels or TikTok placement needs to be, versus even what Instagram/Facebook feed placement needs to be. You know, all of those videos, even though they can be the same piece of content, need to be formatted differently and in a lot of cases the mobile-first (as in that vertical 9:16), that ratio, that sizing. That content always works the best, but it works for the industries that have the largest connection to Millennials and younger age generations because they are the ones who are going to be clicking out of an ad that they may come across in their Instagram story feed or something that they now come across while scrolling through TikTok.

Q: How effective is video media content as a tactic in digital marketing and social media campaigning for public relations?

A: Video-first content, and video content in general, is imperative for the success of most of the campaigns that we're running. If I'm pulling a weekly report or doing an audit and I'm looking at performance at a level of granularity, that is: How is this creative content competing against something else that we're running within this campaign? I would say nine out of 10 times the static imagery is what is passed down or what is identified as ineffective, just because with the algorithms of social media. That system can understand what works and what doesn't and when it figures out what works, it's going to put more money into it. Therefore, it's going to be able to be delivered to all of the people that this ad is structured to go out to. Meanwhile, the one that isn't as strong, which nine out of 10 times again is static imagery, (unless something is done to it) it needs to be interactive for it to be impactful. And that's the benefit of video because it's interactive from the beginning. Because it's telling you a story or conveying a message that you're going to have to watch to completion to fully understand.

Q: In comparison to static or text-on-background media, how does video compare to other types of media in terms of return on investment, warranting engagement, and overall reach on associated media platforms?

A: Video that includes some other type of optimization, whether it is animated ... Let's say we're running a TikTok ad [and] it has a countdown sticker on it. We usually see a higher return on investment there in terms of engagement, whereas if it's just a piece of static imagery with really nothing else done to it. We're going to see the least engagement and likes there. But aside from that, if you can modify the video anything further (like adding a text overlay or some sort of eye-catching graphic, putting your call to action in the first two or three seconds) you're getting their attention. Those kinds of content are what are going to achieve the engagement that the clients are looking for.

Q: In your work at Code3, how have you gauged the importance of involving accessibility in video media?

A: Well, aside from putting in the purpose of the ad if it's a video within X amount of seconds, just to allow the user to properly understand what they're engaging with. We're also encouraging clients to approach their video with a sound-off mentality, because some people may interact with your piece of video content without the sound for the first five seconds. So, if you're not using subtitles, text, overlay, or audio description: you're missing out on obtaining a customer because there's something about your ad that is inaccessible.

Q: How can companies in general leverage video content to create a strong brand identity and also enhance their overall reputation in the global marketplace?

A: A lot of that comes from understanding the demographics that are your target audience. So, if you're a brand like Chipotle and you're running a campaign to get people to download the app, you're most likely going to be advertising to Gen Z up to millennials. You know, old people don't like apps, but the important aspect there is understanding your target audience when building. Not only are you creating content that is designed to mimic and attract the people that you're going after, but you're also designing content that aligns with how you position your company amongst competitors and how you position your company and your brand in the global marketplace.

Q: Should larger corporations be pushing video as a promotional technique to the forefront of their communications strategy?

A: Yeah, absolutely, because at the end of the day, their company is most likely going to be found through a piece of advertisement that was seen on their phone, whether it's on Facebook, Snapchat ... even something seeing something of interest, standing out in that form. Make video first. Otherwise, it's easy to get lost in the mix and become forgetful.

Q: How do you feel public relations practitioners can use video media to manage a crisis or negative publicity?

A: Video content, for that kind of fate of marketing, is going to be the most crucial because in a lot of instances hearing somebody speak regarding an incident (whether that be any of the executive team representatives of the company), having a piece of media or a piece of video content to convey your brand's apology is going to make you more memorable than putting out a piece of a document with a logo letterhead. People can at least watch the video and see what is being said and form their own opinions.

Q: Do you think that also creates a level of personability that wouldn't otherwise be there in, as you've mentioned, a logo letterhead response?

A: Oh absolutely. At the end of the day, those kinds of videos are to cushion the blow of some event and the most important thing is coming off as personable: not being cold and mechanical or calculated. A piece with a logo letterhead: that's not going to feel genuine, but a video apology or a video explaining the situation there, that's going to do we more way more for the brand than not running video.

Q: How can companies measure the effectiveness of their video content in terms of driving brand awareness, leading generation, and customer acquisition and what metrics do you think those companies should be tracking?

A: For brand awareness, you're going to want to pay attention to the video views. You can get as granular with that as possible. On certain platforms, you can identify the people who have watched at least three seconds of the video, and then you can retarget to different audiences. You should absolutely be looking out for the video views you're getting as well as what your CPM. If you have a low CPM for a piece of video content, you're doing really well. If [it's] pretty high, you might want to reshoot that video. You're going to want to look at that more actionable event: whether it be a link click or click-through rate. If you have a two percent click-through rate, your video probably didn't get enough attention to inspire people to make that choice. Look for landing page views, site visits, and what got them off the platform in which they were engaging with your content for conversions. It's going to come down to whatever conversion you're looking for. If you have a piece of content that's generating a high conversion rate, chances are that that piece of content worked really well for you. Obviously, there's ROA and value. Those are things that you should be looking out for.

Q: How do you typically integrate video media content into your broader public relations and digital marketing schemes?

A: It all starts when the campaign is being planned. We look to plan our campaign around video content. I've been fortunate enough to work with a lot of video-focused clients in my current position. Another way to utilize that is by taking organic content. I think brands suffer a lot when

they don't utilize that because a piece of organic content without money behind it could achieve two million likes or 100,000 comments.

Q: How do you work with internal stakeholders and external partners to create effective video content that resonates with your target audiences and supports the broader marketing and PR goals of both yourself as a practitioner and your agency?

A: It varies in a case-by-case instance, I would say, if we're fortunate enough to be working on a client that utilizes creative services, we have a bit more of an impact in enforcing how they should be delivered and created by us. In dealing with stakeholders outside of the agency on the client side that we really don't work with, a lot of that has to come from the justifications and the reasonings that we present to them. It's making sure that when we deliver reporting, we're really being granular with the data that we're presenting because we can just give numbers all we want. Unless they're aware of what the numbers mean, they're not going to care. We should look to mimic a certain style [in our video content] because we have seen that it works. As long as we can present the client with reasoning like that, I would say nine out of 10 times, they're willing to go in that direction.

Q: What do you think the future holds for video media content in public relations and digital marketing? Are you starting to notice any emerging trends or technologies that you think are going to shape the way that we approach video content in the coming years?

A: Looking ahead, video content is really going to lead the way in how things are announced. I see it now with our current presidential administration. Every time Biden announced that something has happened, he put out a video in which he's explaining it. That's good, even despite whatever somebody's opinions of Biden will be or any presidential administration; seeing that the government themselves are aware people need to have digestible information in the form of a piece of video. Content like that speaks volumes for the power of video content. Some emerging technology that I think will shift to video is a lot of social media that is without advertisement. I tell all of my brands to get on-the-ground floor because you don't want to be in the position where TikTok is now; where it's so hard to become a successful TikTok advertiser because everybody's trying to advertise [there]. I mean, look at your Instagram feed. When was the last time you saw four static images in a row? The algorithm doesn't want you to see static images. It knows it doesn't work well.

Q: Do you have any final thoughts or last-minute things you want to add?

A: You know, the digital landscape is just going to keep changing and it's going to change faster than we think because it's changed faster than we thought in the last three years. So be ready.