

**PR Video Upstart**  
*The Efficacy of Video Usage in Digital PR*

**David Henne**

**Director of Content Strategy and Student Media Engagement at Hofstra University's  
Lawrence Herbert School of Communication**

**Interview Transcript:**

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

A: I am David Henne. I'm the Director of Content and Student Media Engagement at the Herbert School at Hofstra University.

Q: What inspired you to pursue this current career path?

A: I was inspired to pursue this career, basically as a corollary, because of the evolution of this type of work. When I started 15 years ago in 2008, it was primarily, you know, writing and editing. So, I was a copywriter and a web editor, then evolving to more content management when social media kicked off. I'm more interested in the kinetic activity of content, less so in producing one thing every month, but more so daily/weekly content, telling stories, and being creative. When this opportunity arose at Hofstra, I kind of jumped [on it]. I like the title. I like the location and the school here itself is really active with energy, students, and creativity. So, I'm glad it all worked out where I could be here in this capacity.

Q: How has your experience in the field informed your current views on video content, specifically in the digital marketing space?

A: My experience working in this field has given me a unique perspective on the use of content as far as video and digital. I sort of always knew that video was going to be the difference-maker for content and for companies. Precise video was always a thing and when I say "precise" I mean more like the formalized interview set-up (staging with lighting and stuff like that). The type of content we would do at my old job, my first university, where you do these stand-up interviews with subjects and questions. But then I would shoot something totally offhand, something impromptu with students, and that would outperform the video that we spent six months on. So, I always think that creative, original ideas and something quick and compact will always have a marketplace against video that costs time, effort, and a lot of energy to produce. Not saying one is worse or not as important. Doing this day-in/day-out over the course of more than a decade, I kind of I could see the value in digital content. I could see the value in video and more importantly, I could see the value in effective storytelling.

Q: What brought you to want to implement video content of this capacity (specifically vertical video media) as part of the school's digital marketing, and how effective has that been?

A: Part of my decision to lean harder into vertical (and also, just horizontal video), was seeing what students were creating here at the Herbert School. We have the HEAT Network, which is

Hofstra Entertainment Access Television. We have our Film Club and we have all of these students that seem to be interested in video and film. Seeing the work that they were producing was kind of guiding me down that path. To say, “Hey, we have to tap into this!” We have massive studios here. Our facilities are basically catered towards video. So, not knowing a tremendous amount about production or editing, I kind of just try to pick up as much as I can from the students. And then, around 2019-2020, through our Dean, we basically repurposed the space where I am now in the vertical video lab. The impetus behind that was, I mean, I was kind of encroaching on studio spaces that were meant for classrooms and productions. To have this designated space with great lighting and great audio was everything. And then I could do these interviews. I could do these stand-up, funny, little productions. That was huge for me and that helped us kick off a couple of series. We did weekly programs like HofstraNow and the Herbert Rundown to kind of inform people of what was going on at the school. I'm really proud of those projects, especially winning the Telly Awards. The evolution of video after has been interesting from this perspective.

Q: With the creation of the vertical video lab that you're in now, how are you seeing the students utilize this in terms of both quantity and quality? Are you seeing more videos being pushed out? Are students, staff, and administration taking advantage of it? How is this helping inspire students to create more vertical video media?

A: I mean with the rise of Instagram Reels, Tik Tok [...] I mean, the amount of content you can produce on your phone is just overwhelming. So, the ability to shoot in this room is something we tried to promote and impress upon students; even those who aren't television or film majors, are shooting content on their phones. We wanted to give them space: to say you could still shoot those sorts of stand-up videos, but you know you could really polish them up in here. It took a little while. That's why we wanted to make a big push with content in here week-to-week with our own series. But now what we're seeing is, a lot of productions will use this space for promo videos. We'll see Thursday Nite Live (which is our Saturday Night Live program equivalent) or Hofstra Today (which is our morning news show equivalent). They'll do their little intros here. They'll do little packages in here, really starting to use the space. Even professors, like you mentioned. I will give tutorials to classes here and I will give people an introduction to the space: basically a 32-second introduction of how to use it. You flip on some light to adjust some levels and you plug in your phone. It's really quick and easy to pick up. I'm really happy with the progress and the evolution of the space, seeing more and more people come in than out of it. Now, it's being booked more regularly.

Q: How effective do you feel the creation and production of video media in digital marketing and social media campaigning is for public relations specifically?

A: I think video is essential to any campaign in public relations. When you're trying to rebrand, when you're trying to market a new product, when you're just trying to drum up business for an existing product ... there are so many ways you could go with video. It's just the easiest

entryway into telling a story. In my opinion, it grabs you immediately and provides you with information. It's a kind of medium where you're not asked to do an extraneous amount of work, to get information and it's more accessible than ever. Anybody can shoot video now and that's what makes it so great. It's because a lot of content creators really don't have a lot of refined experience. I mean, a ring light and an iPhone are all you need! The biggest thing in campaigning, storytelling, and public relations is to me a sense of honesty and being genuine. I think now that video is universal, you can really tell these stories that are honest and open and it doesn't feel like you're being sold. Something makes it feel like you're just seeing someone in their native space. Over reading a story or seeing a picture, I just think video is instant and it's accessible in any variety. I don't see an alternative to it that's superior yet, but I mean we'll see.

Q: I want to elaborate more on your discussion of brand storytelling and identity. How can companies, businesses, and even individuals that are looking to get started with video media content in their social media campaigning leverage this type of media to create a strong brand identity and enhance their overall reputation in the global marketplace?

A: When you have a brand or you're creating a brand, you need to use some element of video. To do that, you can always roll out what you want to promote to the world about who you are, what you stand for, and what your brand does. But even an unspoken video (a teaser into who you are) there are so many effective ways as a creative you can visualize. You can be your own director, you can be your own production person when you think about this type of stuff, more than just a targeted advertising tagline or something like that. I mean, marketing copy is great. Images are great, but I don't know ... nothing tells a story like a movie. There's a reason that films are so popular. It's like people are compelled by movies. People are compelled by moving images. When you're branding yourself, when you're pushing out a marketing strategy, you have to involve video. There's just no way around it. You can't get away with not doing it.

Q: How does video in comparison to other forms of media (graphics, verbiage, etc.) compare in terms of engagement or return-on-investment and the reach it has with audiences on social media platforms?

A: Well, the thing that you have to remember about video is that it's universal and that it doesn't need to be translated. Whereas a lot of campaigns use language, images, and captions, maybe it doesn't connect with an audience every time. I think it doesn't need to be translated. I think the engagement will be seen. Essentially, video will autoplay on your feed, and within the first five seconds, you've made an impression right there. Engagement can exist with a click to expand a video: to just read the caption, to hit the link underneath it ... the call to action. I think it's easier to get sucked in and absorbed into that campaign through the entry point of video than most other mediums. But, I do think there's an effective way to balance it all. I mean, if I just had a wall of video on my Instagram feed for my product or brand, I feel like that might be a disservice. I think a nice blend and balance to achieve a kind of harmony or cadence in your

social media feed is desirable. But again, to not have video or just omit video from your campaign is a disservice.

Q: How do you think video media can be used to navigate crises and help better the reputations of businesses that may be going through said crises?

A: With crisis communication, I think the first thing you have to think about is: Are you really being specific with your messaging or are you really making an effort to say this affected you personally and this is how we're apologizing? It's interesting to think about video being a response to this because I think that's a really narrow tightrope to walk. If your video response is coming from the perspective of somebody who maybe, you know, committed the act, that's a controversial subject point. I think it's really shaky to put that person on camera for an apology. If you're the CEO or somebody in charge of that brand or company that was affected and you go on camera ... I feel like you have to be very effective on film. The thing is like we were talking about. If you're using video as a medium, you can't fabricate ... you can't exaggerate. I think I remember seeing Donald Trump issue a couple of video messages after some controversies definitely after January 6. To me, those video replies was just awkward. It seemed a little hollow. I mean, that's the last thing you want to see: somebody having a breakdown because of the reaction to what they did. It's a sensitive issue. It's really hard to find a happy medium for an apology like that on video. I'm curious to see if there's an ideal example because, right now, I can't find something like that.

Q: How can companies measure the effectiveness of their video content in terms of driving brand awareness, leading generation, and customer acquisition?

A: You have to be sensible and aware of what kind of content you're creating, how much of it you have, and how frequently you're posting video. You have to build the world that you want to study first because a lot of places want to tap into video. But, maybe they're only posting one video a month which isn't a big enough data set. Once you have a data set that you could study, then you can break into testing. There's a reason that people lock you in with the first five seconds of a YouTube video. They'll show you the highlight, like a Hot Ones interview where the guest reacts to the hottest sauce and then they do the intro because they need that hit. They need that impression. They need that engagement in the first five seconds. So, weigh that against the user that's scrolling. Will you have to hit them right away? Because a thumb stopper is quicker than a click on YouTube. You're going to see all sorts of bright, dazzling things on your feet as far as video is concerned, I can't tell you. We have to hook you in. If you're not doing captions on your social media videos, you're missing out on a huge opportunity for engagement. There are a lot of ways to package your content on video, depending on the platform you're using. And there are also ways to respond to the analytics that you see. If you see that you're not really picking up views, maybe you're not doing anything interesting in the first 10 seconds of your video. There's a reason that influencers and people get high hits. They get high numbers because they're immediately in your face. Do you see them? You're not seeing a logo. You're not seeing some animated, Adobe After Effects introduction that's 10 seconds long. You're immediately getting into something I feel like the audience is looking for and that's usually a reflection of what they are.

Q: Should companies pay more attention to accessibility since that's something Gen Z crowds appear to call out a lot (ie: captions and readability, colors in general, making sure you have trigger warnings, etc.)?

A: I think people are a lot more informed and knowledgeable about the digital space now. Native users who are now, a 20-year-old somebody who's looking at colleges, they've lived in this space for their entire lives, whereas adults like me, we've basically grown into the space. We started using it later in life. But as with anything, a native user will always be better than somebody that learned it later. So, when you're producing something and you're presenting it to somebody who is a native user (who's been around social media and video for 18 to 20 years) if you're not optimizing it, you're not doing it in the right way. You have to put captions on. The best-produced video is the most effective content. It doesn't matter if it's some Marvel trailer or it's something from somebody with 10 followers. It's accessibility. Beyond that, it just makes sense. You have to be careful with what you produce, what you put out there. There are just way too many sets of eyes on things nowadays. The more accessible it is to everyone, the better results you're going to see with the message being spread.

Q: In your experience, what are some of the biggest challenges associated with creating and distributing video media as part of a broader marketing strategy and how do you overcome those challenges?

A: It's the bandwidth needed to produce consistent video that is of a high quality you're proud of. Granted, there's that element of down-and-dirty, quick, and easy video. But, if you're working for a brand or a really prestigious company, you want to put out a polished product. Even if it seems down-and-dirty, you still want to put some branding on it. You want to put some effects on it. So, the biggest challenges to me are the manpower required to do consistently polished, good, compelling video. It's not like an article [or] photos where you could just run outside, take a picture, hop online, and post it. I mean, I could. I could do a quick video on my phone, turn around in a half-hour and put some effects on it. But yes, to do a series of that, to do it consistently, like I said, to build a cadence where you have a big enough data set to publish enough video: it ultimately takes dedicated video production staff which a lot of places don't have, especially smaller firms doing client services. I always think it's best to start with video as your main focus when you're hiring or when you're looking at investing in staff, because somebody who knows how to produce video, who understands lighting and audio: that pays off so much. It's much better to have that knowledge yourself and I think it's a much better investment, especially seeing the positive reactions to video and how much it makes a difference.

Q: Looking ahead, what do you think the future holds for video content in public relations and digital marketing?

A: I still feel like it sounds high-tech to say, [but] I see virtual being the next, new frontier. But yeah, where does video go from here? You have to be more immersed in some respects to it. I mean, there are already so many things that advertisers can glean from you. Just biometrics. If I'm watching a video ... [they can track] where my eyes are going. There's a scary amount of data that can be extracted just from video ads and stuff like that. But, I do think the next step is some sort of interactive element. I mean, think augmented reality: where you watch a video and actually move and distribute stuff. You know, a sort of metaverse or something where ads are built-in and branded content is all of a sudden video that you're living within. I think it sounds less safe than you think. It seems like something that will be the next space we have to figure out

how to properly break down and distribute those messages because the reality is: our attention spans are shorter than ever. We really don't have a lot of patience for video that is trying to get us to buy something or understand what a brand is. There's just too much stimuli if you look at the amount of static we are exposed to: the clutter of any sort of advertising space when you look at it. So yeah, if there's a way to kind of clean it up and reset everything as far as branding, promotions, marketing and make video this immersive space. It sounds too hypothetical and hippie-ish, but I feel like that's where we need to go now if we want people to buy our stuff.

Q: Are there any emerging trends or technologies that you believe are going to shape the way companies and businesses approach the creation of video content in the coming years?

A: I kind of react to what I see. I don't know if I've seen anything that's breaking the mold necessarily, or maybe I'm not exposed to it, but I teach a class, so I'm always getting sort of little feelers out there based on what students are telling me. What's always interesting? I mean, it's happening already. It's not "emerging" or something, but it's how quickly a student will trust a brand or product just based on the messaging of somebody on TikTok. To package an ad, as we know it, I think is dead. I think it's just authentic, native content that's lived in, that these young people feel like they can trust and align with. Besides that, I don't know, I don't know what stuff that's out there coming up. Have you seen anything?