

PR Video Upstart
The Efficacy of Video Usage in Digital PR

Nicole Franklin

Documentarian, Independent Filmmaker, Producer, & Storyteller

Interview Transcript:

Q: If you could just start off by stating your full name and telling me a little bit about your career?

A: I'm Nicole Franklin and I'm a storyteller. I use all types of media to do that. I started in television news because I could quickly get productions into play, broadcast as well. I started at 20 years old because I graduated early from college with my bachelor's and was interning at a station in the middle of Illinois. Eventually, my new editing career took me to Los Angeles for about five and a half years and then to New York for more than 20 years. In that time, my real passion of wanting to be an independent storyteller led to independent filmmaking because in news television I was editing. I'm a video editor of 30 years for news television. So, I was always a part of the storytelling in the fastest way possible because we had to quickly put together packages. I taught as well and I would tell my students: if you get a job in post [production], you're always working. I always knew what you needed out in the field, so that helped me when I pursued my passion: directing, producing, writing, and so, in my career, I got into podcasting, and who doesn't love radio? That's our oldest broadcast medium and I ended up broadcasting out in a radio station in Los Angeles. Now, I am moving my latest project "Before You Go" into a museum and we're excited about this launching in 2024 and in every type of space. I feel that I can contribute something and I've been so fortunate to have done so.

Q: Because you've had such a vast experience in the multimedia space, how has your experience in the field informed your current views on video content in the digital marketing space?

A: Digital marketing is interesting because I'm always wondering where everybody had their training. You know, video is going to capture attention probably forever. I think seeing images is just like being IRL: in real life. Video will always be there, and so the idea that people can create content and say: let's add a video and do it so quickly, and I'm talking interactively. Videos, now, in the digital marketing space include animation. They include a lot of title designs. It's not just, you know, a camera pointed at a subject. The marketers have actually advanced our storytelling tools as independent filmmakers, because if you don't have things popping and moving and, you know, blowing and wooing, you're going to be boring. Like I said, I'm always curious about the training that people who are working in video today [have had] because we literally had to build that stuff. We had to go and shoot every element when we didn't have these tools that the computers are able to assist with. And now, I don't know what that does to creativity, but it's very interesting. I guess I'm studying the younger generation and they may or may not have had to study me: my generation.

Q: How do you see video content being utilized as a tool for brands to engage their audiences and have you yourself utilized short-form video and other aspects of current work for promotions?

A Short-form is what we've been waiting for. I grew up in the 70s and 80s and I guess I started my career [in the] early 90s. We could barely afford to make a feature, but we could afford short-form film. [Back then] people wanted to see feature films and that's like at least 72 minutes. Those who made short films were not appreciated and that was terrible because what you can do in a short, three-act film is amazing, but they were overlooked. I wish that it were more celebrated back then. So, here we now come through the years where technology allows for a less expensive way to do even more high-profile, quality production. The feature and the short, really, I think, are guided by how much quality you can put into the production. You could film forever and then work forever to put together a two-hour feature, but would the quality be there? The highest quality is more likely going to happen on a short versus the feature, right? But now, that we have the ability to have higher quality instantaneous [video] with digital, it's so wild. The shorter form is now more attractive I believe because of attention spans. It's very interesting. I do enjoy short form because what people can convey in 15 minutes [or] 5 minutes, makes such a huge impression. I mean, that's creativity. It's manageable at that. Like I mentioned earlier, marketers who are doing that: it's popular work now. I guess it's all a tease. It's very short, you know, and you want more. You've got multilayered storytelling now and if you were going to hang on to a piece of video that was longer than you know 10 minutes, then you've ruined all the prospects of what you could do to get people more involved in leading them down the rabbit hole.

Q: How well do you think storytelling in the modern age of 2023, has adapted to short form? Do you think it's adapted well? Are there things that you would change?

A: People say our best years were back then. You know, experience now: what is happening, what's still exciting. These are still great years for all of us because of what the younger generation is bringing and [that is] shorter form media. What I feel is happening is that we're into a surround, immersive media space now, and that's what I'm excited about ... full emersion. We are in it. You know, we're experiencing it through our bodies, actually being in a different space just because your headspace is taken somewhere else. Augmented reality, is always being surrounded by information and visuals/sound. I'm enjoying the immersive exploration that's happening and those who are taking the tools from the past and have those of us who are classic ourselves for lending. The story is always going to matter. What is the story? How are you conveying it? How was it written? Does the message say what you want to say? Is it clear? Is it moving? Is the subtext there and does that come through it and grab your audience? But like I said, I'm enjoying this new technology. I'm so glad that audiences are accepting of the short form because shorts are getting their due. Therefore, you get more voices behind the content.

Q: How can companies in general leverage video content in any format (vertical, horizontal, etc.) to create a strong brand identity and help them enhance their overall reputation in the global marketplace?

A: I definitely think that companies are trying to make an impression. They're trying to establish who they are and have you remember that and refer to them. It's identification. You can do this just with a visual. I guess that video will always be their number one way of communication. But can they afford it? It's very interesting. We've democratized the way through technology: the way

that stories are told through video. There is a whole business behind producing videos, in writing the story. It's just, I think people began recognizing it as a business, probably much later than they should, and then those of us who are independent, we have to start treating it as a business and people have to respect us as a business. It's interesting to see how long it's going to last. I'm curious about that with corporations hiring out if they want a certain style.

Q: Would you say that in releasing an edited video to your audiences that that transparency can be a little bit more respected by them? Or do you think it would be something that would push them off?

A: I believe in media literacy, and I believe that everyone should be exposed to some form of media literacy; that they have been taught properly about media and how the media is there to manipulate, persuade, entertain, or inform. I want the public to know the difference. And if you feel a certain way because you've just seen something, I want you to be able to recognize that you know and give us feedback. If millions of people see the same unedited video, they're still going to [have] different opinions. Again, feedback is very important and I think we need to recognize and honor that feedback. That's the point where we are now. What's next? I'm curious about all of these reactions that come because now we've had videos of how people react to video, right? We've had massive protests. The reaction of videos being released, maybe one of the earlier ones, was a story that came out years ago in the 90s and was part of the news team that covered a man named Rodney King who was beaten in Los Angeles. And again, it was on video. I was in my twenties and it was wild to me [to see] the different reactions. You know, he was beaten live on-air and that was unedited. We saw it mainly because we would run it as a news station and, if it were edited, the top and the bottom were off. It wasn't like the middle edited out. He was standing up and then he was on the ground or whatever like that. It's just, you know, for time. But, that [had] a massive reaction. There were days of riots in Los Angeles. That was happening when I was living [there] and the night the riot broke out, I was in that part of town. I saw everything on fire, you know, right in front of my face and we were there because people reacted to the video differently. I definitely try to listen to all sides of an issue. When we worked on Hurricane Katrina, I was around the clock working in New York and the colleagues that were broadcasting sending us the video and the stories put together from ground zero were there in New Orleans. The government would not have come to these people's rescue if the video weren't there. Everybody saw it did happen. I was so proud that the news networks were there and that we captured that for, you know, forever. People were starving. People were dying and the government was caught with its pants down and people died in something that should have had a disaster plan at the ready. If it weren't for video of what was happening and capturing this story as it unfolded with the bravery of the people who were down there to tell it, we would have written that out. Nobody would have heard about it. "An informed soldier is an effective soldier." My father would always say that. He was a career reporter and print reporter. I come from information, loving information, loving disseminating information. And you know, it's a major part of my life because people just don't believe what we're capable of.

Q: What do you feel are some common misconceptions about using video in digital marketing?

A: I think people think they're going to go viral right away and it's either luck or there's a certain method to follow. People always say: make a lot of videos and one of them's going to hit. You have to build your following elsewhere using other methods and then the video is going to hit.

So, when people are seduced by the viral nature of [video content]. Digital marketing is so fascinating in the way that it can pinpoint an audience down to knowing what color somebody likes and what they ate that morning. That's very interesting to me. [Digital marketers] are better at making things go viral because they are picking up all of those clues, all of those breadcrumbs we're leaving. It's scary, but it works, but again here we come back to cost. That is some dollars behind that technology and the people who know how to work it. If those people are giving you the research and information and something can get a nice amount of hits, you know video can.

Q: Do you believe that consistency is the key to eventually landing those views, likes, and comments?

A: Yes, definitely. Consistency is key. Creativity is key: somebody that keeps me interested, who I see, is putting in the work to constantly keep my attention. You know, it's the pursuit of that audience. We all love to be pursued. They tap into that human factor. So, definitely if they step up their game and they're consistent with great content: something that they really took care in. There are certain brands. Dove does a great job. I do like how they celebrate normal bodies of women and are consistent in that messaging. I got to say: Dick's Sporting Goods does an amazing job with their branding through their videos [and] the stories they tell. Beer commercials have always been great, I guess because you really can't push drinking. So, they always had to be creative and just really get into the essence of who wants to allow themselves that pleasure of having a drink, just taking in that time for themselves, and taking in those spirits. You know when they're showing those scenes of living? So yeah, alcohol ads really always nail it, which is very interesting.

Q: What do you think the future holds for video content in public relations and digital marketing?

A: I think that it's booming, you know, in public relations and marketing. All of the people who are growing up, who are younger than college-age and are watching these wonderful streaming channels and all its content on Netflix, on Hulu, on Paramount TV, or wherever, and saying, "Hey, I want to be a producer! I want to be a director or an actor!" can look to marketing and PR because that content needs to come out constantly. And not only will you be making ads in some part of this industry, you could also be pushing content and creating it for the marketers and advertisers. They're not exactly the same people. The doors are now open and thank goodness the marketers came along. The marketers had to go and push their services to many companies and they said: I can do videos for you and there's another industry. The marketing space is opened up. People who are just independent bloggers usually have to use some sort of video content to get people to come to their blog, where they're making, you know X dollars a month from visitors. It's all in numbers now. Video does draw numbers, you know. The use of video does draw an audience more than anything else. Podcasters have added videos to their website. And then, you know, going live with broadcast video and audio, you get more views and everything like that. On YouTube, you make money. Anybody now can make money on YouTube because [it] opened up that partnership program with its indie creators. So now, in fact, that you are growing up on these streamers and you're saying: "Hey, I want to make movies and get an Oscar!" You could go down that path or, if you just really enjoy working and telling stories, you have all these other paths now that are more open to you than they were for me and I look forward to the younger generation pursuing them.