

# How to Become Popular on YouTube (Without Any Talent)

an eBook by Kevin Nalts: career marketer,  
self-proclaimed “viral video genius,” and the  
author of industry blog, [WillVideoForFood.com](http://WillVideoForFood.com).

[Kevin “Nalts” Nalty](#) is one of YouTube's least talented "weblebrities," with nearly 150 million views of his more than 1,000 online videos. He is one of the most-viewed personalities on YouTube, and his videos routinely rank among the "highest rated" and "most discussed." You need only watch several of his videos to know these rankings are *not* due to his video-making abilities (at least not that alone).



Here, the career marketer reveals some of his "insider secrets" to developing a following on YouTube (and other online-video sites), and getting your videos widely viewed. The techniques he shares do not include "tricks" that ultimately undermine a video, but proven strategies that are not often intuitive.

To sign up for his weekly newsletter and information about his forthcoming book, “**Beyond Viral Video**” (Wiley 2010), visit [willvideoforfood.com](http://willvideoforfood.com). To see his videos: [youtube.com/nalts](http://youtube.com/nalts) (we recommend you watch all 1,000 at once).

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## About This eBook

After languishing in viral video for nine months, doctors told Nalty his viral-video career would be dead within weeks. But he persevered, and now reveals some *easy-to-apply* techniques that can help *you* become popular on YouTube.

In more than 34 pages – packed with real experience, examples and video links – the marketer and video

creator shares some proven methods to develop a global audience via YouTube.

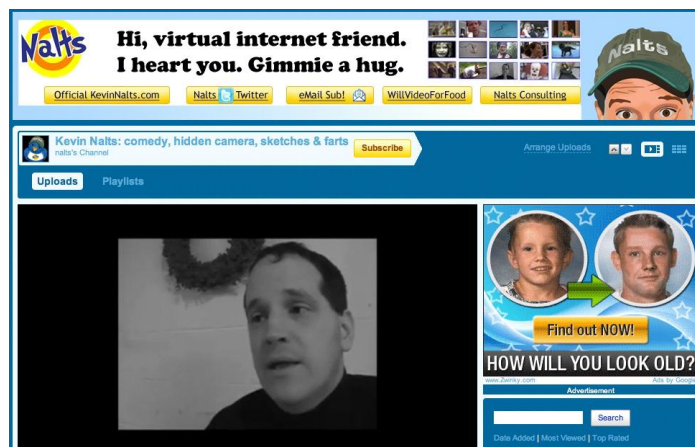
The techniques are built on experience, and will help you avoid some of the many pitfalls and violations

of the "unwritten rules" of the YouTube community. They'll also save you from wasting time with ineffective approaches, and hopefully help you persist in your YouTube endeavors and have fun.

The book offers basic – but sometimes counterintuitive – advice on how to become a welcome participant of YouTube, build friends, develop a loyal following, promote yourself or other causes, and have a blast along the way.

### Should You Read This Book?

If you're **asking yourself the following questions**, this book may be for you:



- How do I gain YouTube popularity without cheating or appearing desperate? What works and what might create a backlash?
- How can I get more views without spending an inordinate amount of time promoting them to people?
- How can I help make my videos appeal to a wider audience?
- How can I use YouTube to promote myself, friends, sponsors, or causes?

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# I. Foreword

## Thank You

This is the second version of this free eBook, which was first published in January 2008. I'd like to thank my wife, Jo (aka [WifeofNalts](#)) and children for their support and patience. My passion for online video has been intense over the past four years. I'd like to also thank Jan for editing and for helping me with [WillVideoForFood.com](#), and the active "WVFF Back Row" for making the comments more interesting than the posts. Thanks to the many "peeps" who have been so supportive to me on YouTube. I wish I could list many of you by name.



## Sorry

I suppose my "sorry" section is as important as my "thanks." Invariably when you make yourself as accessible as I do online, you end up entertaining many but offending some. I ignore much of my e-mail and YouTube messages simply because I don't have the capacity to be diligent about communication and also keep a full-time job and raise a family. I try, but can't spend the *hours* a day it would take to read and reply to my messages. Often people who don't know what it's like to get hundreds of messages from strangers each day interpret this

as arrogance. As a result, I'm fairly haphazard about my communication. Rather than sort and prioritize, I tend to impulsively check messages when I'm in the mood, and then ignore everything when I'm not feeling social. So if you feel like I've "blown you off," it's probably because I never even saw your note. Please don't take it personally.

## So Let's Get Started: Why Talent Isn't Enough

I hope you realize that the title was meant as self-deprecating humor and not a warranty. You are, in fact, going to need *some* talent. But contrary to conventional wisdom, talent is not the only ingredient for success. In fact there are *far* more talented people than I on YouTube, some living in obscurity and more deserving of my incredible audience. But they're lost in a sea of garbage, maybe because they don't understand how to market themselves, and they soon decide that they may not be very talented. It's sad, really.

Your primary goal is to have fun via this medium, which may create a loyal following, and help you promote yourself or other causes. In general, I find three characteristics of the most-viewed YouTube "stars": they enjoy making videos, they persist, and they are talented. The former two traits are as important as talent itself, and when someone stops having fun or becomes undermined by criticism, the talent itself serves little value.

**Here's an important "take away,"** so you might want to highlight this paragraph. *YouTube fame (f) is a function of your **talent** (t) multiplied by your **marketing** (m).*

$$f = t \times m.$$

I really should stay as far from mathematical examples as I do from sports analogies. But this is vital. If you rank as a 9 (out of 10) in talent, and this book helps to bring your marketing skills up to a 5 (again out of 10), then you are a healthy 45. But if you're really not interesting (say, a 2 out of 10) then this book may not help much. Sorry.



I will touch briefly on how to make your videos *not suck*, but I've seen some really, really talentless people on YouTube. I shudder to think that one of them is turning to this book for salvation. Not to be [Simon Cowell](#) or anything, but if all of your friends and family find your videos lame, then you may want to take up pottery (unless creating them brings you internal joy, which is just as important).

Still reading? Great. If you take nothing away from reading this, please remember this: *The act of "uploading" is only one tiny step on your YouTube adventure, and if you stop there you're not going to get very far.*

## Glossary of Terms

I'm going to be using some terms in this book that are worth defining.

- **Collab Videos:** Making a collaboration video with someone else on YouTube. This is an important way to introduce you to the YouTube community, and can be time consuming but fun. [Pipi](#) taught me this.
- **Subscribers:** You know how your magazines magically show up in your mailbox? Hard core YouTubers wake up each day and check their "subscriptions." If they've subscribed to you, they'll know each time you post a new video. You want quality not just quantity of subscribers because they're the ones who will rate your videos. If they like what they see, your video will get "honored" and appear on some of the "most viewed" or "most discussed" lists, which gets you a secondary audience.
- **Honors:** Temporary status a video garners if it's the most viewed most discussed or highest rated in a certain time period. A video receiving these

honors will, temporarily, be placed on lists and be more likely to surface on a YouTube search.

- **Partner:** YouTube shares advertising revenue with "partners." To learn more, see [YouTube's partner page](#). If you're thinking you're going to retire on YouTube Partner proceeds you're in for a shock. But it's still nice to receive income based on the advertising that appears around your videos. Unlike when this eBook was first published, I now know a dozen people who are living full-time on YouTube Partner income.

## II. Do You Really Want to Be a YouTube Star?

Let's evaluate YouTube "fame" for a moment, and make sure you really want what you're apparently after. I find most people in pursuit of YouTube "weblebrity" status are looking for one of four things:

- 1) They're a performer looking for a stage.
- 2) They're looking to sell a product or service.
- 3) They're trying to fill a self-esteem void with positive feedback, ratings and views (therapy is cheaper in the long run).
- 4) They're hoping to connect with similar people and share experiences.

I'm going to start by tempering your desire. If you enter YouTube with desperation for fame, people are going to find you *really annoying*. You'll give off a *scent* like those people selling Amway at neighborhood picnics. You might even *annoy people more than I do*.

YouTube popularity is not all it's cracked up to be. You'll find yourself spending inordinate amounts of time on YouTube, you'll lose a great deal of your privacy, and you'll get insulted in ways you've never imagined (someone wants to defecate in my mouth).

Each day you'll feel guilty because you're ignoring someone's cry for help -- *watch my video, mention my sick friend, be in my "collaboration" video, tell me what you think of my son's video*. Soon e-mail will feel like a portal to hell – with desperate and thirsty souls screaming for just a drop of water.

In some ways YouTube fame brings all of the negative side of real stardom without the money and perks. You'll almost certainly become addicted, and

sometimes will fail to differentiate between your own view of yourself and the opinions of your viewers. The first time you get featured or have a video that goes viral will create a mad rush of adrenaline, followed by a sugar crash.

**But enough psychobabble.** I just wanted to make sure you realize there *are* some downsides. Now let's explore the fun things you're going to experience if you have at least *some* talent and deploy the techniques you're going to learn here.

There are some fantastic things about having an established audience for your videos. First, you'll meet some terrific people. I started online video in December 2005 with naïve hopes of

supplementing my income. I certainly wasn't in pursuit of meeting virtual friends, as I'm busy enough with my day job and my family. I'm doing good enough neglecting my "flesh" friends much less forgetting birthdays of



virtual ones. But I've met some really amazingly creative and interesting people on YouTube. Some are passing relationships where we e-mail or mention each other in an occasional video. And others I've met in person to shoot videos, grab a drink, or huddle together at YouTube gatherings that make Star Trek conventions look cool.

I've been brought to tears by videos by my friends, and gained new perspectives from individuals – from all over the planet – with whom I'd otherwise have no

contact. And I've laughed until I could barely breathe. Lately I've leveraged my YouTube experience to help marketers benefit from online video, and that's been helpful in eliminating the mound of debt we've assumed along the way. But most gratifying is the joy of interacting with other creators, and getting instant feedback when I experiment with a new approach. Where I used to burden dinner guests with my videos, I now can post a video, go upstairs and shower, and return to find hundreds of comments that tell me if the idea sank or sailed.

### III. Understanding The Community of YouTube

Did you know YouTube is more than a search engine for videos? It's actually a lively community, and until you understand and respect that community, you're not likely to be widely seen. Certainly there are exceptions -- I call them "one hit wonders." Sometimes a



video is so darned remarkable that it goes *viral* on its own merit. But please don't bet on that, because you have a greater chance of getting killed by a llama. Many of the most popular videos on YouTube never help the creator generate a regular following, so their next attempt is futile.

If you're new to YouTube, you may want to **imagine yourself walking into the high school cafeteria**. What's your body language saying?

- Sit with me because I'm afraid to sit alone.
- I came to eat, so please stay away or I'll eat *you*.

- Hi. I'm a cheerleader. Want to sit with me and be popular?
- Where's the table for the people who hate everyone else here?

Because YouTube is a visceral medium with two-way interaction, you can't simply post your video and return a few days later to see if you're the next [Numa Numa kid](#). People are going to talk back to you eventually. If you listen and respond, they might stick around and watch more. They may even tell their friends about you. But if you're posting to YouTube like you're sending out mass holiday letters, your community "reputation" will be poor.

There's a core group of YouTubers that hang out on live video-conference websites, e-mail each other constantly, and interact with each other. You can learn a lot from this group, and they'll influence your YouTube reputation. If I had more time (and didn't derive social anxiety from live video), I'd be on Stickam.com, BlogTV or other websites "hanging out" with these people regularly.

As with any community, there are countless of unwritten rules. To "fit in" you'll have to watch a lot of videos and get a sense for these yourself. But I'll give you the quick guide.

Like any community, YouTube has unwritten rules, and I outline some of these in a video called "[YouTube Etiquette](#)." Nobody wants to admit this, but there's a subtle social ladder based on how many subscribers you have. It's rather repulsive, and I try not to look at the numbers. I find that a creator's ego can



unjustly bloat as their subscribers grow, and I often prefer to "hang" with the less popular, more interesting people. But this social ladder is important.

For example, I get a lot of requests to collaborate with people that have no videos or subscribers, and it is a lot easier to ignore them than someone who has talent and a following. I know some famous YouTubers that simply won't collaborate with someone who obviously doesn't watch their videos. If you try to do a "collaboration" video with [HappySlip](#) before you know her – and have developed your own following – she's likely to ignore you (she ignores me most of the time too, but that's survival when you're blasted with 100 e-mails a day). So initially interact with people who have as many subscribers as you, and find your own "pod" within YouTube. There are countless subcultures built around people and their friends, and this group stays with you like your freshman roommates (or the stink of garlic).

Some YouTubers leverage their talent (in music or graphic design) to create custom material that popular YouTubers can use. This makes us far more interested in helping these creators find their way to the top.

## IV. Methods Behind Madness

If you're a scanner, here comes the important part. I like lists because they simplify things, and are actionable. So let me jump right into some of the techniques that have helped me on YouTube. I'd also encourage you to watch a few videos and blog posts I've done on this subject:

- [YouTube Etiquette](#): This is meant as humorous, but it has some tips about posting, watching, interacting, collaborating, and meeting other YouTubers.



- [How to Promote Your Video](#): This is playfully titled "How to Cheat on YouTube," but it's got some decent basic tips like good titles, attractive thumbnails, compelling content, short videos and a "big finish." More importantly, it touches on the subject of *quality not just quantity* of subscribers. I speak about frequency of posting (my unofficial tagline is "Nalts posts a video every time you poop"). I also warn about the ineffectiveness of some techniques (like tag whoring and desperate "watch me" requests, and I'll elaborate these here). It outlines the power of making collaboration videos or those that invite responses (like contests).
- [How to Promote Your YouTube Videos](#) (blog post).

## A. Collaborate With Other YouTubers

There's probably nothing you can do on YouTube that has more impact than collaborating. I spent nine months uploading my videos, only to find 20-50 people had viewed each. Quite by accident, I began interacting with people and collaborating with other YouTube creators. That is when things began to change. Collaborations are a fun experience, and also introduce you to the audience of the person with whom you collaborate. For example, when popular YouTuber, [Renetto, shaved my head](#), I got some exposure to his rabid fans. When I [stalked HappySlip's NYC apartment](#), she was kind enough to post my video on her blog, and suddenly some of *her* subscribers subscribed to me. If you collaborate with someone whose content is similar to yours, this is more likely to occur.



I overlooked something critical in the first version of this book. If you want people to discover you and your videos, it's more important that you are in the video of a popular YouTuber (versus having them in yours). Generally a collaboration video is more valuable to the individual with the lowest numbers of subscribers.

[TheStation](#), a relatively new collaborative channel, rocketed overnight to one



of YouTube's most-subscribed because of the collective promotion by a number of YouTube "stars" including [Sxephil](#), [ShaneDawson](#), and [LisaNova](#). [ShayCarl](#), who was a stranger on this book's first version, is viewed exponentially more times than I. He first "popped" when Sxephil told his viewers to subscribe to him, and now ShayCarl has one of the most active fan bases on YouTube (you may be amused to see his 2-year-old feedback on the initial version of this book at the end of this document).

## B. Pursue Quality Subscribers (Not Quantity)

A year before this book's first version I had 200 people subscribed to my videos. In January 2008 I had 25,000. Now it's surpassed 150,000. Obviously many of these people subscribed and don't check their subscriber page, or lost interest in YouTube. But among these subscribers are people who share my sense of humor. Only a small portion people who "graze" YouTube actually subscribe to videos and check them routinely. But this core audience is vital, because they are the ones that will watch your videos, give you feedback, and rate you favorably. I'm

able to post a video, and have it appear in YouTube's "most highly rated videos of the day" because I have a group of subscribers that generally like my stuff (don't ask why). Then, when other YouTube "browsers" search for the highest rated videos of the day, they're finding my videos – thanks to my subscribers.

There are a few of us that live on these "most watched" and "most discussed" pages, and many of us aren't very talented. But

our subscribers like us, and that propels us to "honors," which give us access to a secondary audience. My videos almost always get "honors" because I have a quality base of subscribers. But if I suddenly inherited all of the subscribers of [Smosh](#), I'd probably get destroyed. Some of them would like me, but an old, balding guy who drinks out of a coffee mug bearing his YouTube name would not amuse many of them. So it's quality, not just quantity you want.



### C. Be Patient

Those creators who posted on YouTube early (2005) have a powerful advantage over the rest of us. They got in early and developed a regular fan base when the pickings were slim. [Renetto](#) and [MrSafety](#) are good examples, although only the latter has persisted. They're almost as talentless as me (I say in jest), but they have established audiences that really enjoy their content. It's very hard for a newcomer to rank initially. Please remember it's a marathon not a sprint! Save some energy and pace yourself.

## D. Interact

The YouTube audience is watching less television and become enthralled with online video because it's mostly *real* and *amateur*. We're all tired of scripted television, or worse yet, the faux reality television. Viewers want to see real people who are accessible and authentic, and with whom we can connect. This means you should try to read and reply to as many comments on each video as possible (and not just your own). This is easy at first, but becomes overwhelming as time goes on. Still, my favorite part of YouTube is the discussion that takes place on the video within the first 24 hours. I almost never check comments from old videos, but I tend to jump online to my most recent video and read and reply to interesting comments. If you ever want to catch the attention of a YouTuber, try commenting on their most recent video. The more popular they are the less likely they read YouTube messages or e-mail.

## E. Post Routinely

A year my slogan: "Nalts posts a video every time you poop" was accurate.

But I soon received feedback that my videos were losing quality, and many



people suggested I emphasize quality over quantity. I listened, and it was a tremendous mistake. In the past few months I've posted only 10 times per month, and I've seen my momentum decrease dramatically. I'm now doing my best to post routinely, and it's a critical

component to success. The video creators who currently top the charts have one thing in common: they post frequently, if not daily. This does not mean that

posting regularly will propel you to fame, but once you're "on top" it's important to keep your edge, and stay "top of mind" to those who watch your videos. Unlike when this eBook was first published, only a minority of my daily views comes from subscribers or recent videos. People will more likely discover and view your videos *if you're predictable about posting* on specific days or times. There are exceptions. Some of the most-subscribed YouTubers ([Fred Nigahiga](#), and [KevJumba](#)) post less frequently.

## F. Going Beyond YouTube: "Seeding"

Remember that YouTube is the most popular video site and #1 search engine, but only *one place* where YouTube videos are seen. When you post your video you may want to market it on niche sites, blogs, and discussion groups. I tend to avoid this because it's time consuming and often a violation of the unwritten "social media rules." For instance, when I did a video about [my obsession with The Office](#), I resisted the temptation to send the link to those blogging about the show. Unless you devote the time to personalizing your note (format below), then you're probably going to look like a spammer. That said, marketing your videos to blogs and social media sites has helped many popular creators.

Here's an example of an e-mail I'm happy to get:

*Dear Kevin: I've been reading WillVideoForFood.com for quite some time, and particularly enjoyed your recent post on (insert topic). I work for a company that does (insert company), and I would imagine this would be of some interest to your readers. Could I send you information for the possibility of being mentioned in a future post?*

Now contrast that with a random comment (including a link) on my blog from a promoter or public relations flack. Or worse, a form letter from a company that's simply interested in pushing its message. These feel like junk mail – at best you'll get some moderate uptake.



There are countless social media vehicles that can help you promote your videos (MySpace, Friendster, FaceBook, Digg). I find these overwhelming and not nearly as productive as my other techniques, but other YouTubers swear by the power of these. A good resource on this subject is [Charles Trippy's](#) "Viral Video Fever."

My best personal example of the impact of “seeding” videos to blogs and

websites is the success of my parody of the MacBook Air. When I received an Apple e-mail that announced the slick new product, I spent 20 minutes shooting a video that depicted my PC feeling insecure about being overweight. I called it “[MacBook Air Obsessed With Thin](#)” (which I later

changed to “[MacBook Air Parody](#)” to optimize it for search engines).

Just before going to sleep, I sent the video’s URL to a few Mac blogs. Gizmodo (a very popular blog) posted it, and it was quickly discovered by tens of thousands of people. (it’s now approaching 700,000 views. Obviously the video’s topicality was also a factor... *A little “blog gasoline” on the “video spark” is well worth its time.*



## F. Be Hot (or at Least Interesting)

I asked for feedback my first eBook, and Yuri from New Zealand wrote: *“I’ve seen people with no talent at all with YouTube partnership... Is it about looks? You did state that YouTube is like the first day of school and I noticed that popular kids are more handsome or pretty.”*



I wish I could tell Yuri that looks don’t matter, but they do. Many of the most popular YouTube creators are attractive looking. **Pretty females** have a higher likelihood of success than a middle-aged guy like me. But there are exceptions, and I can’t quite envision Sxephil, ShayCarl or [KassemG](#) on the cover of *GQ*.

I truly believe that it’s important to have energy, engaging body language, positive attitude, and humor. In the early days of YouTube, there were many surly vloggers. Today most of the most-viewed amateurs are fun people who have viewers with parasocial relationships with them.

## G. Commonalities of the Most-Popular Videos

This is a new section to this version, and an oversight. There are certainly common attributes about vides that attract views and subscribers.

**Pranks:** My two most-popular videos are pranks: [“Farting in Public”](#) shows my nephew’s friend Spencer using a fart machine to elicit stares in a library. It was featured on YouTube’s homepage in March 2007 (a time when a homepage feature had far more impact). But that video has been eclipsed by [“Scary Maze](#)



[Game](#),” a 52-second prank I almost chose not to post. Jo (my wife) has a friend who introduced me to Jo with promises we were future husband and wife. She brought her three sons to visit, and I put her son on a website game that requires careful navigation of the mouse through mazes. Before you complete the maze, the screen erupts with a scream and a photo of an image, presumably from The Exorcist. Another wildly popular video, “[Scary Hitchhiker Prank](#)” which I’ve since removed out of guilt, featured YouTube prankster ([EdBassmaster](#)) pretending to be a convict who I offer a car rider.



Spencer, who thought he would be making a drive-thru prank, was indeed terrified as EdBassmaster described how he recently “shanked” someone in prison (I think poor Spencer has forgiven me since). Indeed the YouTube audiences enjoy the realism and shock of a good prank. Some of my pranks (like a [huge frog I used to scare my wife](#) on a Bermuda vacation) have appeared on [MTV's Pranked](#), which does not take unsolicited pranks but features some of the best.

**Dancing:** It’s no coincidence that one of the most-viewed YouTube video of all time is a great dancing routine. “[Evolution of Dance](#)” by Judson Laipply is mandatory viewing.

**Music:** Britain’s Got Talent singer [Susan Boyle](#) was propelled to national visibility partially because her beautiful singing in April 2009 was widely circulated on YouTube. See her [most popular video](#) and you’ll appreciate why a simple

housewife with an enchanting voice enchants people. Most of the “[most-viewed videos of all time on YouTube](#)” are also professional or amateur singers.

**Children:** “[Charlie Bit My Finger](#),” which shows a young British child biting the finger of his brother, is the most-viewed video of all time, and the subject of countless parodies and homage’s. Who can resist [Hahaha](#), featuring the unbridled and contagious giggles of a child amused by an adult’s funny sounds. Or the “serious face” of a [child mimicking his mother](#)? My four children are no small reason that I have been viewed so many times. And [Shay Butler](#) may be funny, but his “tard” children provide some wonderful moments.

**Political Humor:** [Ben Relles](#), creator of “Obama Girl,” has franchised a magical mix of topicality, pretty women and musical satire. His “[I’ve Got a Crush on Obama](#)” has won numerous awards for its viral appeal. Ben is the only other successful YouTube creator who shares my background in marketing and advertising.



**Fails:** What is it about a pratfall, blooper or mistake that is so intriguing? The term “fail” has become a universal phrase for “the opposite of success,” and has resulted in its own [Wikipedia page](#). One of my favorite YouTube channels is “[Failblog](#),” which offers an endless stream of short, hysterical goofs. The channel is not “monetized” by the creators (see [Failblog’s blog](#)) since the clips are usually “ripped” without permission from television or other sources. But it’s hard not to



binge on these videos like popcorn. If your video's title includes the word "fail," it might likely get more views.

**Music and Song Parodies:** The #1 most-subscribed YouTube female musician of all time, "[Venetian Princess](#)," has made a career of song parodies. Her song parodies of Lady Gaga, Miley Cyrus and Katy Perry have been seen tens of millions of times, and her most popular video is a satire of [Britney Spears' Womanizer](#).

**Vlogging:** For [every vlogger \(video blogger\) that has achieved most-subscribed status](#), there are millions of others hiding in the depths of the YouTube ocean. But the active viewers of YouTube want to connect with a video creator personally, and poorly edited "moments of life" intrigue them.

**How-To:** While "do it yourself" (DIY) is not the most popular content, it's well poised for profit. [Howcast](#) is a site devoted exclusively to short, succinct "how to" content that is well optimized on search engines and mostly "evergreen" (as opposed to topical humor).

## V. Avoid These Tricks At All Costs

There are ways to artificially drive the views and ratings of your videos, and "tricks" you can use to spam your videos to others. Ultimately these won't help much because you'll lose credibility and annoy people. It's cheap, tacky and may give you a short-term boost, but it's just not worth the effort. Save your money and avoid buying software or service that promise to get you viral.

Here are some other mistakes I've seen people make as they try to popularize their videos. Maybe you can save yourself some time and humiliation by reading this list.

### **A. Blatant Self Promotion**

I often get accused of blatant self promotion because YouTube began as a community site for open dialogue, and I'm a marketer. So I can't resist a logo, a token hat, and a Nalts logo mug that sneaks into frame with all the subtlety of a migraine. Perhaps subconsciously some of my self-promotional behavior is driven by a desperate attempt to gain popularity to fortify my self worth. But a lot of what I do is meant as a self-deprecating humor. It's also fun to annoy people.



Still, self promotion can go terribly wrong. I wish I could show you some of the desperate e-mails I get requesting me to gratuitously mention someone else so they can get "famous." I get many requests to be in collaboration videos when the creator has no audience of his own, or any idea of what they are trying to do (other than to borrow some fame). It's awkward and embarrassing. Most of the popular YouTubers are insecure people with no experience in fame, so they are inconsistent about what collaborations they join. But fame desperation is a general turnoff, and something to avoid at all costs.

### **B. Spamming**

Unless there's a good reason to send someone a video, let them find it on their own. For instance, I almost never send someone a link to my recent video unless

they're mentioned or in it. There's nothing for the ego like getting invited to watch a video in which you make a cameo or you're referenced. But I stopped reading my YouTube mail because 90% of the messages were:

- What type of equipment do you use? (Never mind that I explain that in my profile page).
- Will you watch my video and tell me what you think? (No specific reason is provided; It's just a desire to be seen by a popular stranger).
- You are so incredibly sexy (okay- that's not one I've received before, but I wanted to make sure you're still awake).



There are other forms of spamming videos through social networks and "friends" lists, and candidly, I don't even understand most of these. [LisaNova](#) (one of the most popular YouTubers) faced severe backlash for apparently spamming people with her videos (see [example of parody](#)). She [made a public apology on the subject](#), as well as a [parody that has more than 2 million views](#). The bottom line is that your videos should be

viral based on the content and some promotion, but not through lazy and automated ways that will annoy people.

*Stay away from the fee-based promotional tools that are done by a 'bot!*

### **C. SEO Your Video, But Don't Keyword Bloat**

Many people have a naïve belief that if they bloat their "keywords" with terms like *funny, humor, comedy* and even other YouTuber's names, it will propel the

video to the top of a related search. Indeed, this myth is not without some basis of truth. Keywords not only help people find the video, but they can propel it to the top of Google and ensure it appears beside related content on YouTube.

When I was first featured on YouTube I noticed that people were posting their videos as replies, and mimicking my video's keywords. This is misleading and annoying, and will eventually penalize a video's performance. Remember- YouTube is now owned by the master of defying search engine manipulation: Google.

A better approach is to use relevant keywords in hopes that your video appears besides related videos. It's not a bad idea to misspell either. For example, sellers of Heelys shoes are spending massive advertising budgets to have their sites

appear on the common misspelling, "Healies." But my video (called "[Poor Man's Healies](#)") is unintentionally [one of the top results](#)... simply because I can't spell.

**One of the most effective ways to ensure your video is “search-engine” optimized** is to be selective about the terms or phrase (rather than trying to optimize for words that are highly competitive). Then use those terms consistently in your title, and the first words of your description and keywords. In general, shorter titles are preferable, so that's a tradeoff to consider.

## D. Abusing "Video Responses"

YouTube allows you to reply to another video, and this is a functionality that's often abused. Many people tack their videos onto popular videos, knowing that bored people will click them out of curiosity. Some video creators police this

### [Healies for kids? - Yahoo! Answers](#)

Jun 12, 2007 ... where an i buy **healies** trainers  
CAN SERIOUSLY HURT PEOPLES SHINS AI

...  
[answers.yahoo.com](#) > ... > Other - Games & Re

[What in the world is healies?](#) - 5 posts -  
[Which website is wheelie healies on?](#) - :

[More results from answers.yahoo.com](#) »

### [Image results for healies](#) - Report Images



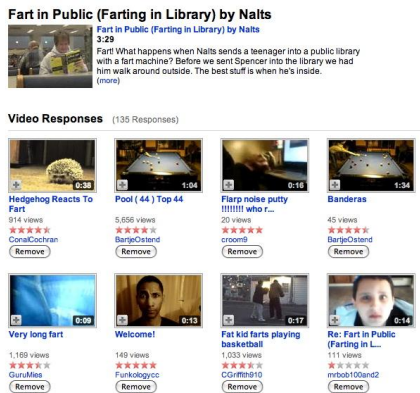
### [Video results for healies](#)



[Poor Man Healies](#)  
1 min 15 sec - Jul 17, 2006  
[video.google.com](#)

vigilantly by not allowing people to post replies without their approval (they

select a YouTube option that moderates videos instead of permitting them automatically).



I don't have time to groom the video replies, so I sometimes let anything get posted. However I become very annoyed by people posting videos that have no relationship to mine, and will occasionally "block" them (prevent them from

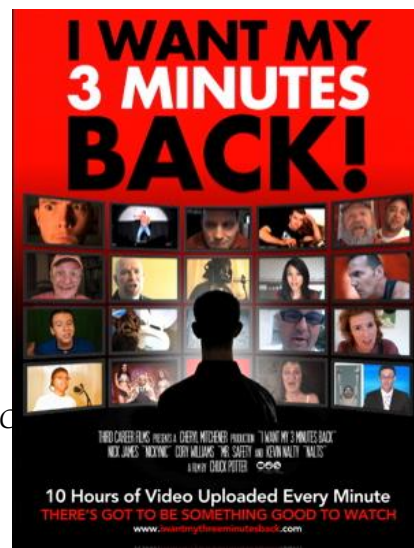
interacting with me).

## E. Getting Too Self Critical

If you're frustrated because you aren't finding an audience, move past it. Focus on doing videos that make you happy, and give it time. If you begin to doubt yourself, your videos will get worse. And don't allow a few negative people to take you from your course. Give "haters" no power, and as Dori says in the film, *Finding Nemo*, "just keep swimming!"

## F. Waiting to Be Discovered

YouTube editors once had the most powerful jobs in modern media, and could literally turn obscure talent into overnight fame by simply featuring a video. Once a YouTube community manager ([BigJoeSmith](#)) brought me to the homepage with [Viral Video Genius](#), but the video was only moderately well received. The second time was my "break



out" video, and it was called "[Farting in Public](#)." I will confess that I sent this video to the editors. I've only done that one or two times.

The biggest change since the first iteration of this eBook is that featuring is not the primary driver. The videos that are sporadically featured (in what's called "spotlighting") are mostly Partner videos (those that are "monetized" with advertisements). So becoming a Partner is an important move, and then it's persistence, persistence, and persistence. This is a common theme in a YouTube documentary ("[I Want My Three Minutes Back](#)"), which documents the long journey of me and several other YouTubers.

## **G. Infringing Copyrights**

Ensure your work is entirely your own, or that you have sufficient permission. Otherwise your content can be removed, and you will jeopardize your YouTube Partner status. Rather than using a popular song, find a talented amateur musician who might share his or her songs in exchange for a credit.

## **VI. How To Make Videos You & Viewers Will Enjoy**

If anyone should have the "magic recipe" for a good online video, it should be me. But I'm still learning each day, and that's part of what makes it so fun to create videos. People often ask me why I don't focus on creating fewer good videos instead of posting routinely. There are two reasons for that. First, if I stop creating for more than a few days, I generally don't feel like posting anymore. Second, I have no Earthly idea which of my video ideas will resonate and which will become popular. There are a lot of factors involved, so I play the odds with

volume and frequency. As I mentioned earlier, the unintended outcome of this routine posting is that it also keeps your audience loyal and aware.

That said, there are a number of things I'd advise to help you make better videos. Technically, the barriers to entry are extremely low (access to the web, a computer, and an inexpensive camera). But here are some tips to making your videos interesting and more likely to be shared and, therefore, become "viral."

### **A. Stick To Your Brand (Be Yourself)**

I know that my videos would be more popular if I made them more edgy and sexy. But it's not consistent with my style, and so I forgo that upside. It's not sustainable to create content that doesn't reflect your personality, and it will confuse your audience. Find a unique style and stay with it. That doesn't mean you shouldn't experiment. Some of the best YouTube creators have a very specific and "ownable" style.

[What The Buck](#) does daily celebrity gossip. [Smosh](#) does sketch comedy. [HappySlip](#) makes clever comedies about her family, and demonstrates her musical talent and appealing personality.



These creators aren't just talented, they know their audience and consistently provide for them. Some, of course, participate more extensively with the YouTube community, and others have their eyes toward larger media opportunities. To see other popular YouTubers, visit the "[most subscribed of all time](#)" section and get a feel for what's popular. Just resist the temptation to imitate these styles too closely. *Find your own niche.*





I tend to prefer variety in my videos – from simple vlogs (talking to camera) and real family moments to sketch comedy to "candid camera" style videos. I've even done suspense/thriller style, but usually with a comedic element.

When "Farting in Public" was featured, I picked up thousands of new subscribers, and some of those stuck around while others left disappointed that all of my videos weren't in the same candid style. In writing "Beyond Viral Video" (Wiley 2010), I've asked a number of popular video creators what advice the most give to fellow creators. Many of them encourage others to "find their own voice" and ensure it's unique.

## **B. Short, Fast and Big Finish**

There are no hard rules about making a video, and many videos fail because they try to replicate other "viral" videos. People generally want short (1-3 minutes, or less), rapid editing and a big finish.

I break this rule often, but it's a basic tenant of short-form video on the Internet. It takes me much longer to edit a video into 30-90 seconds, but it's almost always better that way. When you're editing, you sometimes can't resist keeping some footage. But when I return to the video weeks later, my undisciplined editing infuriates me. The viewers will never miss that gag that extended your video from 2 to 4 minutes, and you'll find your views are inversely related to the length of your video. If you must tell the story in more than 2-3 minutes, consider breaking it into a 3-part series.



## YouTube Analytics Provide “Insights” on When the Audience Begins to Drop



I sometimes overlook the power of the "big finish," but it's the *magical moment*. If people lose interest or lack excitement at the end, they won't forward the video to others. If there's a great ending, however, we'll forgive some of the dips in the middle. And we'll rate it higher and share it with others. Surprise us at the end, or at least return to a previous gag so the story doesn't taper away.

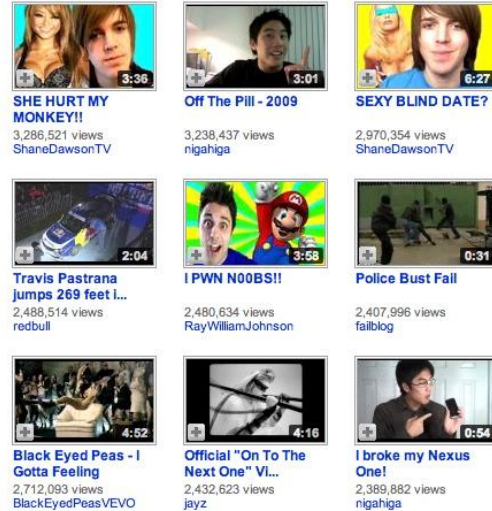
There's nothing I enjoy more than finalizing the editing of a video, and adding music. It helps to have someone watch your video with you, and note when they look bored. I've chopped my videos down by watching my wife's blank stare when I preview them to her. You'll sense what you can lose. Sometimes the best part of the video is what you decide to leave *out*.

### C. Respect (But Don't Obsess Over) Production

Want to know a secret? Many top creators have lousy equipment. For instance, this [GooTube Conspiracy trailer](#) was shot on a low-end camera using a very antiquated computer processor. Many of the people dominating the most-

popular YouTube videos each day are using simple Flipcams. If you want good tips on equipment, check [Steve Garfield's blog](#). For software, check [Chris Pirillo](#).

A mediocre video can become much more appealing if the creator worries less about fancy equipment, and puts time into the lighting, camera shots, editing and sound. Many people gravitate to online video because they're tired of overproduced television and film. So you're allowed to have a wobbly camera and some rough editing. But there are some basic tips, and countless websites that can help you improve your production.



- Light your subject softly with lights on two sides (not ceiling lights that produce a shadow). Natural light (overcast) produces the best quality.
- When possible, use a microphone or avoid public places with ambient sound and horrible acoustics. Most YouTube creators use the mike on the camera, which is usually poor. And there's nothing that screams "amateur" than the echo of a room.
- Edit tight so no shot lasts more than 5 seconds. The best movies have rapid-fire editing, and short-form entertainment needs it too.

## D. Package Your Video

Your video is more than the video. Your thumbnail, description, title and even keyword tags are part of the package. If these elements aren't consistent with your video idea, it won't have the same impact.

Some creators work hard for a good "thumbnail," which is the image that appears besides the video title. YouTube once drew these images by default from the exact center frame of the video (so a 2:00 minute video will use the image that's at exactly 1:00) or the first or third third. Now it's random unless you are a YouTube Partner and have the ability to upload an image that becomes your thumbnail. Lately some of the

top YouTube talent has been using bright, neon colors with a simple image (often their face) over it.

Using a photo of an attractive woman in this thumbnail, which certainly works in the

short term, has penalized some YouTubers. But many of the curiosity clicks will result in frustrated viewers that were expecting something else. In general, the video's thumbnail is one of the most important drivers of views.

Titles play another significant role in the decision of a subscriber to watch your video. I sometimes change my title when I think of a stronger one. For example, I posted a video of Spencer, the boy from "Farting in Public," beating up his friends with a 4-foot inflatable soccer and basketball. The title is "Spencer Has Big Balls." That should at least rouse some curiosity. In general, good titles arouse



**EATING LADY GAGA??**  
1,010,628 views  
ShaneDawsonTV2



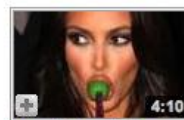
**GaGa Oprah Interview (part 1) \*L...**  
1,086,799 views  
schuster85



**Heidi Montag is PERFECTION!!!?**  
1,131,887 views  
sxephil



**Chinese Guy gets BOOB SPAMMED!**  
1,239,145 views  
pyrobooby



**Married to a Pr0n Star**  
1,398,182 views  
sxephil



**Fitness - GaGa for Tight Buns Wo...**  
988,473 views  
charliejames1975

curiosity and are short.

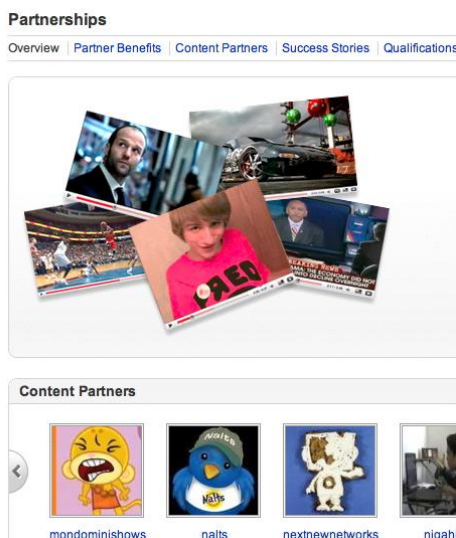
## VII. YouTube and Profit

YouTube shares advertising revenue with those that meet requirements as a YouTube Partner ([see website](#)). Interestingly, the most frequented blog posts on WillVideoForFood are those titled "[how much money does a YouTube Partner make.](#)"



The company's [criteria is published](#), but not consistently applied. In general, your videos have to be your own (no copyright infringements), they need lots of views, and you should have a steady history of posting. If you apply and are not accepted, try again after you have more views.

Again, I am working on a book called "Beyond Viral Video," (Wiley 2010) devoted specifically to the topic of video marketing. My blog, [WillVideoForFood](#), is focused on this subject, and here's an article I wrote for *Advertising Age* called "[Ten Things a Marketers Should Know About Online Video.](#)"



As I mentioned, I started in online video with hopes of entertaining people and supplementing my income. Initially I made a few thousand dollars through sites (like Revver and Metacafe) that shared advertising revenue. However I found this to be very, very slow

money. I'm not allowed to speak about my YouTube revenue... but it's not significant enough to be my sole source of income.

That said, I have a number of friends that are living comfortably full-time on YouTube Partner revenue. If making money is your primary goal, there are far, far more productive uses of your time. Find a topic that has a high Google cost-per-click (litigation, mortgage, diet, digital cameras), and start a blog about it with Google AdSense ads sprinkled about. But don't do video for quick money. If I divided the revenue I've made from online video by the time I've invested, my hourly wage might be low. However I'm extremely grateful that YouTube provides a non-trivial secondary income, and I've done a number of [sponsored videos](#) (for Fox, Microsoft, Logitech, Starbucks, Mentos, Holiday Inn) that are even more lucrative.

I am careful not to make these sponsored videos first entertaining and second promotional, and I turn down more clients than I accept. But



it's fun to make a video for a large brand, and help them engage with the online community with far more relevance than an online advertisement. I especially like being able to merge my day job (marketing) with my night job (online video).

If you seek YouTube popularity to market yourself or your products, I'd recommend putting that goal aside until you develop a following. The community will welcome you more if they don't see you as a walking advertisement. There are subtle ways to profit from your talents without looking like a commercial whore (that's my job, okay?), whether you're a musician,

painter or voice-over professional. For instance, I've done several collaborations with Brett Slater ([slatersgarage.com](http://slatersgarage.com)) and he uses his increasing online popularity to promote his services – without appearing overtly promotional.

If you're an artist, you might find someone you like on YouTube and offer them a free song, logo, painting, etc. They'll typically mention you in a video, and that can help you expand your audience.

## VIII. Conclusion & Summary

If you began this book to propel yourself to fame, I hope you've realized that there are effective strategies and some hidden pitfalls. More importantly, I hope you realize that there is tremendous gratification that comes along the way. I hope you'll focus on the fun journey and not just on the destination of fame. You'll be criticized like never before, but you'll also get wonderful feedback and meet fantastic people. And occasionally you find out you've made someone else's life better, or at least a bit more interesting.

There are other important video sites, but I've focused mostly on YouTube because it's the "low hanging fruit," and currently where the vast majority of videos are seen. If you can crack the YouTube code, you can always explore other sites. The audiences between these sites overlap less than you'd think. I use [TubeMogul](#) to upload my videos to a dozen sites, but few get anywhere near the views I get on YouTube.

**Now, the “Least You Need to Know,” in case you’re a “scanner” like me:**

1. Participate actively in the YouTube Community. It's rewarding.



2. Be patient but persistent. It takes talent and marketing yourself.
3. Build relationships slowly, and don't beg others to promote you.
4. Find your niche, and *be yourself*.
5. Be sure you're having fun. Otherwise you'll burn out.
6. Watch a lot of videos to learn what works.
7. Don't get frustrated when others are gaining more traction. Learn from it.
8. Avoid "tricks" or gimmicks that promise you views.
9. Keep your videos positive, brief, surprising, and short.
10. Collaborate with people who share your interests.

I'd really appreciate your feedback about this book. Did it meet your expectations? **Thanks to the more than 100 people who wrote via [kevinnalts@gmail.com](mailto:kevinnalts@gmail.com) with the subject heading "Book Feedback."**

*Thanks for reading, good luck on your pursuit,  
and [as the public relations folks at YouTube say, "Keep Tubing."](#)*





## IV. Select Feedback from Version 1.2

My name is Fox, I am 24, and I am currently employed in the US Air Force as a bomb tech. Unfortunately we can't really be making videos about that sooooooo.....

I wanted to let you know I appreciated the essay! It verified feelings I had about embarking, and offered insight into issues I hadn't considered.

I've seen people with no talent at all with YouTube partnership. or is it about looks? you did state that youtube is the same as the first day of school and I noticed that usually popular kids are more handsome or pretty.

Me and my 10 year old son read your online book "Popular on youtube without talent" and we both really enjoyed it. We have been making and posting videos since January of this year and I think that we gained a lot of insight from your book that will assist us in our online journey.

Climbing the mountain because "it's there."  
I find that having the desire to do something for the sake of doing it because you LOVE

IT! can be important and valuable. I've always said that I put up videos for myself primarily and then to entertain or inform my friends, then anything after that is gravy. (mmmm, gravy). The love of doing it is important, and knowing when to walk away from it, for a while, to get perspective, is equally important. Just a thought....

I believe it's been some time since you created the book because you stated in the book you had "25,000" subs. And now, checking your profile, you have a significantly larger amount. So I was curious, has there been anything major that you would put in the book now, that you didn't have experience with when it was written?

I'm having real bad trouble with promoting and i just really need to know what I'm doing wrong. I have awesome vids, much better than what's viewed millions of times \*cough\* Fred.

Thanks for the great advice as well as the many links pointing to helpful hints. I've spent a lot of time searching Google for

sound help that didn't include paying hundreds of dollars to advertise or tagging the video with "sex boobs teen"

While reading i couldn't even stop, because text was so attractive to me, really enjoyed mini jokes, you answered to every question i had, i think book deserves 10 from 10. From this moment i will stick on to your advices, and hope to become one day famous.

Most of what you said in your book was fairly common sense, but in today's day and age, common sense is very uncommon. It just cemented that I'm on the right track, but added some nuggets of gold that I didn't already know.

Anyhow, thanks for sharing your thoughts and experiences. I thought you were an asshat for a while, until I saw that WHATTHEBUCK thing and now after going through your blog a bit you seem like a pretty cool dude.

**Sent 1/5/08 from "ShayCarl":** NALTS!! You are a true genius! Im not just saying that. I just read all 34 pages of your book and LOVED it..I think that it's good that you did this for free but could definately forsee you charging for this or something similar in the future.Im very new to YOU TUBE. I made a

video called "HE MAN GERM" in response to SXE Phils contest "how to get a popular show series or vlog" at the last second and by some unicorn miracle was selected as one of the top 5. Now that video has been viewed ALMOST 10,000 times. I'm waiting for it to hit the 10k so I can celebrate!! But now I'm addicted to this DAMN thing called YOUTUBE "I could totally quit I just don't want to" and my life has turned upside down. I have been looking for something exactly like your book this whole time. Anyways I remember what you said short and sweet.. Thanks for being a YOUTUBE mentor...Official SHAY book rating ----3 thumbs up! and since I only have 2 thumbs thats pretty dern impressive!!!!

When I was 17, a young composer-arranger in the making, I worked for the late Judy Garland - who was such a spectacularly kind and very wise woman.... (Once) she was backstage at the Palace theatre in NY peeking out to the audience that awaited her. She spotted me nearby and said, "Aren't they beautiful?" I said, "Judy, aren't you scared? How will you ever reach all of those people?" She replied, matter-of-factly "Oh, Annie, I don't have to reach all of those people, I just have reach one of them."

I am somewhat of a research junkie, so finding your ebook was like finding a gift from Santa under the tree! Your lists and links give it a great clarity.

I just finished reading your book and found it to be inspiring, jovial, and vague in the same way my books on Zen Buddhism are.

It is so very refreshing to see an industry where good people succeed and try to help

others out. This may seem silly, but it makes me have some faith in folks in the entertainment business again.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to share this important info with the rest of us. More people need to have your open and sharing attitude. Your book should be required reading for an YouTuber.

## V. Additional Resources

- [Inside Online Video](#) by Mike Abundo. He is often the first to report on new trends and site features.
- [OnlineVideoWatch](#) (a great source).
- [ReelPop](#) by Steve Bryant, a columnist and editor living in New York, NY.
- [Cinemattech](#) by Scott Kirsner, who wrote "The Future of Online Video." CinemaTech focuses on how new technologies are changing cinema - the way movies get made, discovered, marketed, distributed and seen.
- [Uertainment Blog](#), written by a veteran technology-business journalist.
- [NewTeeVee](#)- an "Entertainment Tonight" of online video.
- [Fred Graver Blog](#), written [by the guy that once helped ABC/Disney to explore "Telefusion."](#)

- [Mashable](#), a site for social networking news.
- [DaisyWhitney](#), one of the leaders of online-video coverage.
- [Web Video Doctor](#), for tips and tricks to help make better web videos.
- [ViralBlog](#), collaborative team of bloggers hunt the globe for great virals.
- [System Video Blog](#) by Ken McCarthy
- [StreamingMedia Blog](#) is a bit “techie” for me, but has some nice info.  
Written by Dan Rayburn.
- [Xlntads](#) is a website that connects marketers, advertisers and amateurs, and has a nice relatively new [blog written by Mark Schoneveld](#).
- [WebVideoZone](#) is a terrific resource (includes “members only” content).
- Less of a blog, but this “[Online Video Industry Index](#)” has a nice links.
- [NewsVideographer](#) for journalists looking to leverage online video.
- [ReelSEO](#)- how to optimize your videos for SEO.
- [Gadget News](#): Lots of topics, including online video.
- [Ronamok](#), by Ron the New Media Evangelist
- [Hot Air](#), a new media conservative something or another that is really interesting. Founded by Michelle Malkin.
- [Web Video Report](#): The bizzness of online video
- [Politics YouTube In Review](#)
- [MathewWingram](#): The intersection between web and media.
- [PandemicLabs](#)
- [Camcorder Info](#): More than you’d expect from a camcorder site.

- [Viral Video Wannabe: FallofAutumnDistro](#) is one of YouTube's more clever self marketers.
- [Web Jungle](#): Advertising, digital marketing & web culture.
- [Viral Video Fever](#): The Charles Trippy DVD collection that will give you a comprehensive video tutorial of this space (and I'm in it, okay?).



*photo by [Joe Shields](#)*