# The Benefits of Video-Enabling Your Virtual Press Room

*Capitalizing on Digital Media in the Age of Transparency, Social Networking and the 24/x News Cycle*

YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, blogs and the proliferation of mobile devices have dramatically changed the corporate communications landscape, swiftly transforming the 24-hour news cycle into a 24-second *Tweet* cycle. Quite simply, news travels fast and carries with it a ripple effect that's both undeniable and unparalleled. As a result, it's no longer a question of whether your company's PR department should get involved, rather a question of how to get involved and what digital media practices will best serve your communications goals.

In the wake of this new media paradigm, many corporate communications practitioners have been forced to adapt to new and often uncharted, cross-media strategies. Digital media, and online video in particular, has not only altered the way that news is being consumed, but presents a compelling opportunity for marketing and PR professionals to maximize global coverage and build, protect and promote their brands to online publics with unsurpassed speed, transparency and control.

As Fortune 1000, government and media organizations have already discovered in other aspects of their business – such as marketing, advertising and training – online video on your Web site is a measurable and impactful way to deliver updates and other important corporate messages fast and cost-efficiently. This paper discusses the benefits and methods for making online video an essential part of an integrated, cross-media communications strategy going forward, and aims to provide the building blocks for making a case to management for investing in online video today.[1]

**Think Different**

The video news release, or VNR, is not a new concept to PR pros, but together with b-roll, still represents one of the most significant applications of video in PR today. With the explosive growth of new media, however, communication teams need to be thinking beyond the VNR and third-party news distribution services to apply video more broadly in support of media and consumers. As demonstrated by many leading brands, video can be a powerful vehicle for product introductions, customer testimonials, annual reports, crisis communications, reputation management or simply to seed new

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[1] Research conducted in late 2008 by Interactive Media Strategies shows that 55 percent of executives at organizations that have deployed online multimedia for a period of five years or more "strongly agree" that Web communications enhance productivity and create efficiencies that boost the return on investment recognized from the deployment of Web video.

ideas in the marketplace.  The possibilities are endless for how video is used and how it is disseminated.  Organizations like semiconductor giant, Intel Corp., for example, have found Web video to do more than revamp the rules of traditional media distribution.  It has emerged as an entirely new platform for their CEO and other company executives to speak directly with targeted constituent groups.

In addition to YouTube – which we'll cover shortly – a popular method for addressing the use of video in PR has been third-party news video distribution sites, which offer branded Internet TV "channels" with services for audience targeting and media distribution.  What corporate communications professionals sacrifice with this approach is a truly integrated strategy that ties together the marketing, advertising and PR initiatives of an organization in more creative and controlled ways – and at significantly lower cost.[2]

Adding the ability to quickly publish video to your virtual press room, produce live online press conferences or enable media to directly download high-resolution, broadcast-quality video from your site provides greater context and control of your news, as well as measurement in the form of real-time data on traffic, audience, views and downloads.  What's more, many of these efforts are seeing considerable ROI.  Some have gone completely viral, reaching tens of thousands, if not *millions* online.

The idea of incorporating video or creating an entirely video-based press room may be seen as costly, time-consuming and even intimidating.  The reality is that many of the same communication principles as other mediums, such as text and audio, apply to the production of video.  In fact, it can often be *easier* to tell a story or explain a complex concept with video than in text.  The affordability of professional video equipment, the growing number of people (often amateurs) who are capable of doing the work, and the general acceptance of streaming-quality video content have all been drivers in reducing video production costs to as little as one-tenth their price tag a decade ago.

**Eyes on the Prize**
Online press rooms are certainly not a new idea, but are not immune to change either.  The virtual press room, at its most basic level, is a collection of press releases, feature stories and corporate background information.  More evolved sites may include multimedia libraries, featuring video, audio, image and presentation downloads to aid journalists covering the company and its products.

When thinking about video-enabling your virtual press room, it's important to consider the needs of both the organization – and the media – in determining the best approach to addressing the enormous potential of video within the changing PR landscape.

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[2] Typical branded news channels, providing targeted news distribution to press and analyst communities, can cost as much as $100K for an annual subscription.  Fully hosted, end-to-end enterprise video publishing solutions, extensible to other departments across the organization, can be acquired at half the price or less, and include a range of features not offered by third-party news services.

In an article published by the Institute of Public Relations, well-known PR professional Don Bates cites research he conducted with more than 12,000 journalists and media representatives. The report concludes that corporate communicators remain key to helping reporting build stories, with 94 percent saying that they actively use information from PR professionals, and 87 percent regularly refer to press kits. The study also points out that in identifying and developing story ideas, Web sites are most important to editors and journalists.

In fact, the number of journalists seeking video-based content is compelling. The results of the official 2009 Online Newsroom Survey show the desire for video increased substantially in 2009 compared to one year earlier, adding that "more than 80 percent of journalists now want to see video files. Video is both functional and entertaining, and meets today's social media needs." Using online video, in both live and on-demand formats, companies can aid journalists in building stories, particularly if the video is easily accessible in the resolution and in the format required for broadcast, print or embedding.

Moreover, as broadcast-quality video is accessed by qualified press and analysts on a Web site, the company can keep a record of those journalists by simply requiring registration before download and can utilize this contact list for follow-up and further relationship building.

It's fair then to conclude that a well-thought out, video-based online press room can be a great resource to both journalists and PR teams alike. The recent US Airways Flight 1549 water landing video illustrates this. Con Edison, the major utility provider for New York City, captured the aftermath of the flight's Hudson River landing from a security camera located on a nearby pier. It was close-up footage showing the first passengers opening the fuselage door, climbing out onto the wing and the resulting rescue. Con Edison called on The FeedRoom to create a password-protected video player where journalists could view a 10-minute Flash video and then subsequently download a broadcast-quality version of the same video – directly from Con Ed's Web site. Video posted to their site in a matter of hours was downloaded by more than 700 journalists worldwide, many in time for 6:00 pm newscasts.

The Con Ed example shows the possibilities of video in addition to the global reach, cost and time savings of instant broadcast-quality downloads. By providing real-time video to the media from their online pressroom at the click of a button, Con Ed was able to rapidly disseminate the newsworthy video. Even the most well-staffed PR department would have not been able to handle the volume of requests, and perhaps the video would have never received such interest if it wasn't made available in such a timely fashion.

Other examples of how video can aid in a communication strategy include the case of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the H1N1 virus. Using streaming video, the agency delivered live expert roundtables on HHS.gov discussing the virus outbreak. It was an effective effort to rapidly educate the public and help people decipher fact from fiction.

Similarly, General Motors hosted a series of live executive press conferences using Web video, viewable from their Web site and later archived for playback, as the company unveiled its Viability Plan restructuring, leadership succession and subsequent bankruptcy filing during the spring and summer of 2009.  Delivered live from the company's headquarters in Detroit, real-time streaming video enabled members of the media and GM stakeholders across the globe to receive first-hand updates from company executives on the path forward for the troubled automaker.  In crisis situations such as these, video can play a powerful role in articulating your unfiltered message to millions.

**Beyond YouTube**
Without question, YouTube and other consumer-generated media sites have created mainstream demand for online video.  Each month, billions of video streams are delivered in the U.S. alone.  It's been heralded as the fastest growing medium in history with 72 percent of all U.S. Web users now watching video, according to a joint study published by social media firms Trendstream and Lightspeed in May 2009. Whether for good or for bad (as in the case of Domino's[3]), the viral nature of video is apparent.  In this age of corporate transparency and social networking, YouTube video channels have come to be an expected and necessary component of any corporate communications strategy.

Unlike consumer video-sharing sites, however, affordable, easy-to-use enterprise video publishing systems not only integrate with your existing network security, content management, syndication and analytics tools, but can also ensure positive, online brand experiences by providing maximum control over the distribution and measurement of video content. Using third-party sites, as previously discussed, organizations can lose the ability to control their brand, effectively reach their target audience, and track viewers using comprehensive reporting techniques.

Savvy companies will realize that they can quickly and seamlessly incorporate their own video publishing solutions to achieve a more polished look and feel that's both professional and cost-effective. In fact, the evolution of video in courting press, analysts and investors is being grasped by companies that understand that the use of video in a communications strategy goes well beyond a YouTube channel.

For example, Yum! Brands, the world's largest restaurant company with more than one million associates and 36,000 restaurants in over 110 countries, recently delivered their 2008 annual report on video. Yum! Brands, best known for its KFC, Taco Bell and Long John Silver Brands, wanted their shareholders to understand that the executives are both accountable and accessible. The video showcases their CEO, footage of their employees, their products and their chains, in addition to the requisite financial facts and figures. The resulting video is dynamic, personal and easy to follow. Available from their Website, it creates the story behind the brand and leaves the viewer with a lasting impression that instills confidence in the company.

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[3] In April 2009, two Domino's Pizza employees videotaped themselves doing unhygienic things in the kitchen of a Domino's Pizza branch. The posting of the video on YouTube generated close to a million views before it was put down.  The incident clearly demonstrates how anyone with a camcorder can bring a 50-year old brand to its knees.

**Going Viral with Social Media**

On the surface, it would seem that social media is at odds with corporate and investor relations. The new media channels – Twitter, blogs, podcasts, social networks, etc. – are all about conversation, informality and transparency. At the same time, they have emerged as valuable business communication tools and a resource for journalists seeking sources, trends and scoops. Most importantly, they have propelled the use and popularity of video.

Daunting as it may seem, video as part of any social media or mobile marketing strategy offers an extraordinary opportunity. All of these outlets can serve as additional channels for your company to distribute its news or corporate message in a timely – if not rapid-fire – fashion. Used intelligently in conjunction with other distribution techniques, such as advanced search engine optimization, XML and RSS feeds and syndication widgets, it can maximize your ability to get in front of a target audience fast and effectively.

Intel is a company that is at the forefront of this trend and is successfully harnessing the power of video through social media. Having experienced an almost unexpected popularity of its video portal – which includes more than 500 marketing videos and growing – Intel thought it could better utilize video within its various social media initiatives. As a result, they made it easier for users to identify and share videos originating from Intel's video archives. This also enables Intel to track specific viewer information, helping the company to monitor performance benchmarks for its online video efforts.

The convergence of smartphone technology and Web 2.0 marketing strategies has also contributed to the exponential growth of communication channels. According to the AdMob Mobile Metrics report for May 2009, the iPhone now accounts for 59 percent of all mobile Web traffic from smartphones in the U.S., up from just 10 percent a year earlier.

Capitalizing on this explosion, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) recently launched a mobile application that allows the nation's largest animal protection organization to extend its Web video library to millions of iPhone and iPod Touch users. A FeedRoom customer since 2007, The HSUS delivers information and alerts to members and others by enabling Web sites, blogs and social media sites with video and podcast RSS feeds, and other video sharing capabilities. "Online video helps us to deliver powerful perspectives on important issues, and to reach out to members of the public at critical moments with a medium that engages and empowers viewers to get involved," said Frank Loftus, Senior Producer at The HSUS.

In short, social media offers a way for organizations to bypass traditional media and communicate directly with an intended audience. Whether by posting video on a company's Facebook page or Twitter account, it helps to deliver key messages, garner impressions for a brand and engage the consumer directly.

One of the most storied examples of this strategy was the 2008 presidential election. Kimberly Smith, a reporter for MarketingProfs, recently authored an in-depth report on how Barack Obama's campaign successfully employed video and social media to build momentum and win votes. Smith notes that the campaign posted more than 1,800 videos on its official Web site, including a welcome video and more than 40 downloadable podcasts, speeches and endorsements. Viewers were then encouraged to share the videos with friends, neighbors and strangers. Smith concluded that video helped to provide a transparency and a "bond of trust" between the people and the candidate.

These specific examples lie in stark contrast to companies that have become *victims* of consumer empowered video. As a few brands have discovered the hard way, social media platforms also provide unfettered opportunities for consumers and others to express their unhappiness with a product, service or organization. One of corporate communicators' biggest concerns today about the use of social media is the possibility that someone will say something *bad*. The simple answer to this: be a brand that people like. When someone does say something negative about your organization online, you'll have plenty of fans who can and will respond positively on your behalf.

To build a base of champions before launching out into the Web 2.0 world, start local on your own Web site. From there, experiment with mobile channels if appropriate, then expand globally using widget syndication, distribution tools and services – but only when you are comfortable that you can track viewership, and have brand enthusiasts safely aligned within your target consumer, media and analyst communities.

**Getting Started**
Taking the first steps toward video-enabling your virtual press room or adding video to your Web site can be simple if you choose a solution that offers affordable, monthly subscriptions and is delivered in a convenient Software-as-a-Service model.

Most importantly, look for a partner that has the on-staff expertise and experience with other PR or public affairs departments of your scope and size and offers specific features geared toward the needs of PR professionals. Some of the capabilities to consider include:

- On-demand and live streaming capabilities (with recording and archive);
- Easy video upload and intuitive publishing workflow features;
- User-customizable, lightweight players in a variety of templates, including live players, video libraries and Section 508-compliant players;
- Media download features for podcasts, Web and broadcast-quality video including functionality for registration, user management, authentication, download and media formatting;
- Syndication support via XML and RSS feeds;
- Advanced reporting integration with industry standard measurement services and tools.

At the end of the day, the right solution will be easy to use, quick to deploy and enable you to publish video to your site in minutes.  Also, by taking a larger view of your video needs, you can ensure that the solution you choose is easily extensible to other aspects of your business, offering communication benefits to marketing, sales, customer support, HR, training and other departments as their needs evolve.  The ability to service the enterprise with a single solution will ultimately deliver greater cost savings and ROI.

**Summary**

Whether you are trying to reach media, consumers, shareholders, employees, customers or partners, Web video has become an expected form of enterprise communication.  Organizations such as Intel, General Motors, The Humane Society and others have already taken their virtual press rooms to the next level, and are beginning to use online video effectively to expand global reach, lower costs, make their sites more valuable to the media, and ensure that messages are delivered with impact.

At the same time, together with traditional broadcast media, more and more sites and blogs today are incorporating video in the form of podcasts, interviews and syndicated news feeds.  As media suffer cutbacks of their own, they are under increased pressure to stay competitive and deliver on a 24/x news cycle with fewer on-staff resources. As a result, they increasingly look to PR professionals to help with the development of stories.  Companies adept at understanding this and providing immediate access to the information and resources desired by the media from within their virtual pressrooms will stand to gain ground.  By creating a continuous media presence on *your* site, you can enable media, analysts, consumers and other stakeholders to get their news in real-time, live or on-demand, when and how they need it.

**About The FeedRoom**

The FeedRoom is a pioneer in online video communications, and a market leader in live streaming video and digital asset management. With an unparalleled commitment to customer service, The FeedRoom provides flexible online solutions that optimize business and marketing communications for the enterprise, government and media. Industry-leading organizations, such as Autodesk, Barnes & Noble, Boeing, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Hewlett-Packard and The Pentagon rely on The FeedRoom's expertise to help engage audiences, build brands, monetize content and manage rich media assets more efficiently.

Delivered in a Software-as-Service model, FeedRoom 4.0 Enterprise Video Platform™ is a scalable video publishing system that integrates seamlessly with existing content management systems, social media and community tools, and leading Web analytics solutions. The flexible system supports a variety of highly customizable, lightweight video players and the powerful, easy-to-use FeedRoom Studio™ publishing application.

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