

Blog > Online Video and Brand Development: How Disney Gets it SO Right

Online Video and Brand Development: How Disney Gets it SO Right

By Tubular Guest Contributor · March 23, 2018



There's no doubt The Walt Disney Company is a Jedi Master at marketing, as evident with the successful results of their acquisition of the Star Wars franchise from Lucasfilm, and the Marvel franchise. Disney's marketing machine is largely responsible for the corporation's financial success. On the 2017 Fortune 500 List, Disney was ranked No. 52 with a total of \$55.6 billion in annual revenue and the company is ranked No. 6 on Fortune's 2018 World's Most Admired Companies list.

Since 1923, Disney has been sprinkling a little magic in our lives through their theme parks, films, television shows, music, merchandise and now, online and social media experiences. A key component of Disney's success is due to their marketing philosophy of taking full advantage of all their distribution channels through cross-promotions and company branding. However, long before the internet was born, Walt Disney himself knew that cross promoting Disney's various businesses was the answer to big profits. His **diversified marketing strategy from 1957** illustrated a vision of a variety of different media and businesses connected to each other to form a web of marketing opportunities. Walt's original game plan is apparent today in the "Disney Synergy" where a successful film title can spawn a music CD, a TV show, comic books, merchandise and even a thematic cruise ship!

The brand giant currently has **772 different digital channels** under its umbrella including ABC, ESPN, and Marvel, making it the second most viewed entertainment and media property in **February 2018**:

Rank	Name	Change (Last 30 Days)	Facebook	YouTube	Other
1	Disney Channel	+	2,082,201,162	2,277,834,817	1,620,325,121
2	The Walt Disney Company	+1	1,760,632,035	2,371,457,847	498,983,187
3	Netflix	+	1,338,633,162	441,282,121	263,919,914

Most viewed Entertainment and Media properties – February 2018. All data exclusively via Tubular Labs

Disney was also the 4th most viewed media company in 2017 according to Tubular Labs data with 21B views on Facebook, and 23B views on YouTube, making them a Tubular Awards winner for the second year running.

Disney: The Marketing Juggernaut

For generations, **Disney** has successfully embedded their characters into our lives and culture. Almost everyone possessed at one point in their lives some kind of Disney product whether it be a toy or branded merchandise. Walt Disney was a media pioneer and the company continues his legacy by being one of the world's most effective brand storytellers, focusing on marketing techniques that resonates with and inspires audiences. Establishing Disney theme parks as a must visit destination is a large part of **Disney's marketing and branding strategy**. Rides, shows and events at Disneyland and Disney World are constantly changing and updated to reflect current trends and Disney's entertainment titles, ensuring there's always new content to promote and a new experience for returning visitors.

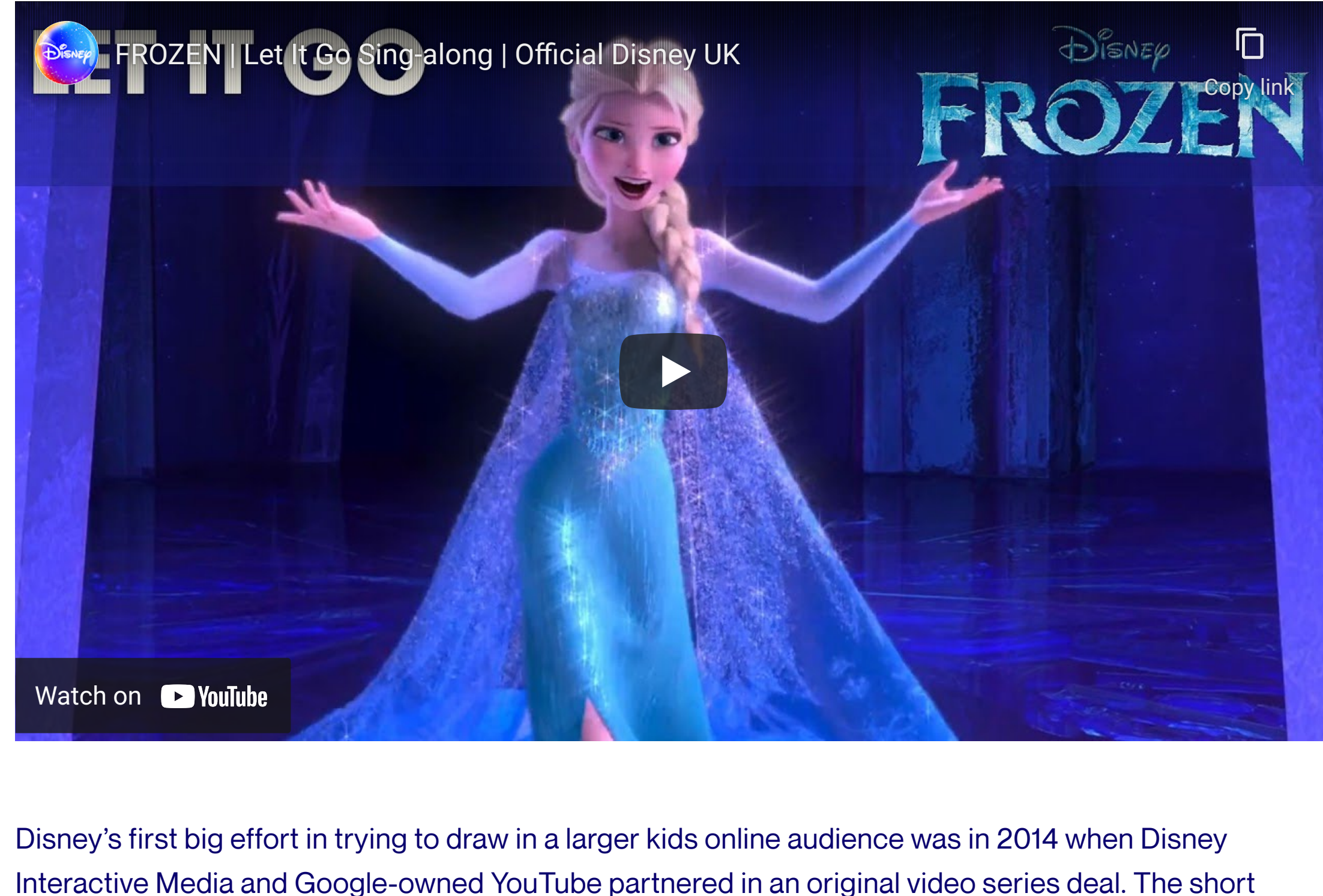
Another way Disney engages their fans is by strategically creating content for audiences of all ages. Depending on the film, Disney markets according to the target audience's age and interests. For Star Wars fans who encompass millennials and fans of the original films, Disney keeps interest strong even after a film release with diverse online content such as fun facts, videos, and even recipes for Stormtrooper cookies, available on their Instagram account. But for fans of the animated hit, "Frozen," who are too young to have Instagram accounts, Disney focuses on creating toys and consumer goods for this demographic. Frozen dolls alone have raked in \$500 million dollars in revenue for the studio and that's not counting the other officially licensed Frozen everything else that is sold.

Other successful Disney marketing techniques include **using nostalgia to create customer loyalty**. As the storyteller to various generations, Disney knows many people grew up watching their classic animated films and will now want to take their kids. Therefore, the studio has remade many of their classic films like "Jungle Book" and "Beauty and the Beast" and plans to release updated versions of more recent animated classics like "The Lion King."

Disney Marketing Dominates From Big to Small Screens

The company is immensely diverse when it comes to their marketing channels and with advances in technology, Disney's marketing campaigns have embraced innovation and adapted technology to connect with audiences. The internet and social media have empowered Disney's marketing to be even more effective, allowing them to reach out on a daily basis to their fans in a variety of ways.

When it comes to online video, Disney actively operates various YouTube channels and Facebook pages for nearly all their brands. The success of their videos are due to the fact that they are brief and entertaining, requiring only a short attention span but have high production values, just like Disney films. Perfecting the art of providing fun, valuable content without constantly trying to sell something, Disney keep their followers engaged by posting various types of interesting video content like showing the behind the scenes action of popular Disney shows and attractions in addition to live streams, "vlog" style videos, video ads and more. We already know that the **online video promotion behind "Black Panther"** has been a staggering success, and that the official 'Sing-a-long- video for 'Let it Go' from 'Frozen' is the most viewed Disney online video ever. The YouTube upload has generated an unbelievable 1.4 billion views (48.9 million in February 2018 alone!). It has also garnered an impressive 3.9 million engagements in the form of likes, comments, and shares, across both YouTube and Facebook.



Disney's first big effort in trying to draw in a larger kids online audience was in 2014 when Disney Interactive Media and Google-owned YouTube partnered in an original video series deal. The short videos were produced by Disney and distributed on YouTube and a Disney.com co-branded channel. Disney also bought multi-channel network (MCN) Maker Studios in 2014 as an investment for the YouTube content industry. MCNs are part online broadcasters and part talent agencies. They operate various networks of channels and produce new shows while signing and developing young talent to be in those shows.

After a restructuring in 2017, Disney combined Maker talent and brands with their existing web properties into the newly created Disney Digital Network. This revamping combined 300 social media channels that reach a total audience of over a billion. "The goal of the network is to create high quality, digital-first stories and deliver those directly to millennials and Gen Z audiences across all platforms and leverage the influencers that they know best," said **Andrew Sugerman**, Executive Vice-President of content and media with Disney Consumer Products and Interactive Media.

Continuing the Disney Synergy, the Disney Digital Network started with a slate of seven series based on several Disney brands, including the Mickey Mouse Club and Star Wars whose website and app are now also a part of the network. Other brands on the network include Oh My Disney, Disney Style, Disney Family and Babble, in addition to Maker's Polaris brand, which is made up of several YouTube gaming influencers.

Content is Key to Online Video Marketing

In order to keep their legacy brands fresh and resonant with audiences of all ages, Disney's content creation team produce content that is authentic to the brand's appeal while using the latest technology to update it for today's digital audiences. **Sugerman said**, "When you think about the 80-year legacy of these characters and stories, it's fun to think about how to connect the relevancy of those stories to an audience today."

Rita Ferro, the Executive Vice-President of Disney Media sales and marketing says the size of the Disney audience is around **1.7 billion total followers across all platforms** which equals about 125 million monthly engagements. Disney fans can find over 6,000 pieces of content per month across all of their various channels geared toward differing ages and interests. News and entertainment site Babble is aimed at young parents while Oh My Disney targets 13- to 34-year-olds with movie news and quizzes and Disney LOL's content is geared for kids. This is in addition to Disney content on multiple Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram plus the various Disney websites.

Due to Disney's large digital reach, other companies are taking advantage of the large Disney audience to promote their own products in a more creative way than simply buying video ad space. Instead, companies like Hasbro have been partnering up with Disney on video projects to produce fresh content that subtly advertises their products. They use video as a content piece by finding a way to tell a story about their products and brand. The Hasbro/Disney produced series "Boxed" is one of these video projects, and shows the process of how toys are actually made. One of these segments demonstrate how Hasbro created masks and shield toys for the Captain America: Civil War movie which is a Marvel film property and of course, Marvel is a Disney owned company.

The Importance of Data to Disney Marketing

A vital tool in helping Disney executives be so successful in producing engaging content to their audiences is their use of data and analytics. The company gathers and analyzes a wealth of information from its media channels and retail platforms. "Without analytics we would never know what the data is telling us or have a clear understanding of what consumers will find relevant," said **Richard Ellwood**, Disney's Head of Audience Strategy. "We also need to know which data to ignore because we generate so much."

Disney relies heavily on information from different data sources to help the company make strategic marketing decisions for all their brands. For the hit movie Star Wars: The Force Awakens, Disney collected intel from various data touchpoints including box office ticket sales, social media, above-the-line TV marketing and even retail toy sales. By monitoring the social media on the Disney Junior channel TV show, the Mickey Mouse Clubhouse, Disney is able to understand how, when and where people are watching. This type of data also enables Disney to see whether the characters and stories are connecting with the audience. "We take a data analytics approach to everything we do because it has a huge impact on our marketing strategy," says Ellwood. "The secret is to combine structured and unstructured data so we get an understanding of why people are behaving in a particular way." Even knowing what devices people are watching on helps Disney to adapt their content to appeal to their audiences. For example, parents and kids probably would not watch an entire movie on their phone but they will view short form content. This kind of information on their viewing audience's habits enables Disney to make content producing decisions.

Ellwood strongly recommends that companies work with data specialists to maximize the use of data analytics. "You do need advice on what data is valuable and to understand issues around privacy," says Ellwood. "Sometimes you think the data is suggesting a certain outcome when you explore and analyze it. However, when you link it with another set of data you can see that is not the case." He also suggests that marketers regularly update their behavioral data to make sure it is topical since viewing and purchasing habits change quickly.

Online video is not the only place that Disney is data centric. Their marketing masterminds are also leveraging data at the Magic Kingdom with their **MyMagic+ program** that collects data from guests via a MagicBand. When visiting Disney World, every guest gets a MagicBand, a wristband that has long-range radio and RFID technology. The bands are equipped with sensors that stream real-time data to computer systems located within the park. Guests simply swipe the band across sensors and real-time data is sent to the system about where guests are and what they are doing. This helps the operations team know whether certain rides have too long of a wait time and whether extra staff is needed. After all, the more time guests are waiting in line, the less time they are spending money on food and merchandise. All this data is designed to help Disney anticipate your needs and desires so the park can ultimately give you such a fun and memorable time that you will want to come back again and again. The MagicBands also do double duty as hotel keys, FastPasses, tickets and credit cards to make visiting the park a smooth and easy experience.

Disney's Online Video Future

In August 2017 Disney announced it would **ending its deal with Netflix** to stream all of the studio's movies because Disney was creating its **own streaming service** which would exclusively feature Disney blockbusters like the Star Wars franchise. Disney is further positioning itself to become a video juggernaut by its attempt to acquire a large part of 21st Century Fox. If the acquisition goes through, it would give Disney a controlling stake in streaming video service Hulu which is partly owned by Fox. This would bolster Disney's content library and strengthen its direct to consumer streaming video services which Disney CEO Bob Iger sees as a vital part of Disney's long-term strategy.

Streaming video is the last piece in creating the ultimate Disney Synergy, a holistic ecosystem of Disney centric distribution and cross marketing. Imagine this: a Disney film would premiere in a theater, be available online on the Disney streaming service while fans experience the film's locations at Disney theme parks and read more of the film's stories in books and comics in Disney publications while wearing film merchandise.

Walt would be so proud.

Discover more from Tubular.

Be ahead of the curve in the age of video.

ASK FOR A DEMO

