

Mike Buonaiuto talks film, social media, and fundraising

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BuzzFeed says that Facebook delivers most of their social referrals out of all the networks, has that been the case for you and your films?

The majority of viewership and engagement for video online comes from syndication and then from Facebook and other social media. So syndication is getting it on Upworthy, the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed and Reddit etc. You get it on there and you're going to get thousands of people who are engaged in what you're talking about actually sharing it.

Second of all having a good social strategy that then links in with Facebook and the other networks is important. Their algorithms have recently changed so it's much more difficult to get stuff shared on Facebook without paying for it. They've argued that it's because they want an emphasis on quality content reaching people but if the only things that are reaching you are the things that have been paid for then it's really restrictive.

But if you get the right syndication, that shouldn't be a problem.

You've shot a lot of your work on DSLRs. Is that purely a budgetary decision or are you getting something out of using these cameras?

DSLRs look amazing so it's a case of quality versus cost, I have recently started shooting a lot of my work on C300s and C500s to bring it up to higher broadcast quality. DSLRs have revolutionised the way that people shoot films, a lot more people are able to make visually appealing work.

I guess you also have the adaptability of the camera and it's lenses.

DSLRs are a double-edged sword, when you turn up to a shoot with a tiny little camera, if you haven't worked with the client before they can be a bit surprised. I used to work for people you would rig their DSLR up like a Transformer just to make it look a bit more impressive and I just think the footage speaks for itself, if they can't wait for the edit to see how good it is then that's their problem.

Some video ads on YouTube are now tailored towards grabbing an individual, or getting across the whole message, in the first five seconds before someone skips the ad. What's the key to getting someone's attention in that space of time, or better, having them continue to watch the ad?

I think you have to shape a video like a press release and put all your good stuff up front because not everyone is going to watch it all the way through. It depends what that ask is, if it's a share, then maybe that should come half way through. But if that ask is for a donation for a fundraising project then put it at the end because only the dedicated people who watch the video all the way to the end are likely to donate.

It's thinking about that user journey and where the audience is coming from before they see your content and what you want them to do after they've watched it.

How can you measure the impact of a video like that?

It depends – what's the point in getting a million views if what you're really after is donations and you don't get any donations? I think measuring the success of video comes down to what you want that video to achieve, so we've just run a private campaign for the funding of a film, Credence.

In terms of viewership it hasn't done as well as the other videos but it wasn't run as a viral video, it was run to drive traffic towards a campaign so we've got 80,000 hits, which is still brilliant for a film trailer but then we've ended up with £19,000 in one week.

Well congratulations!

Thank you – I've often said video is great for fundraising but never actually had to prove it until now!

Where's the fundraising coming through then?

Syndication. We made a trailer so that it can be featured by journalists and their readers have then clicked through. We tried to make the trailer look like a finished piece of work and then at the end it says: "Guess what? It's not done, share or donate".

When you go through to the donate page you're hit with another video which explains what we're doing in more depth. A lot of the people I was working with wanted that video to be upfront but we decided not to do that because people want the gentle emotional stuff first and then if they're engaged they want a bit more information before they then donate so it's again about the user journey.

Ashley Coates