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EXPLORING BRAND CONTENT VIDEO



Christine Beardsell

Content Integration Director

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Digital video studio *For Your Imagination's* name suits the equally creative and openly collaborative people who work there. As early pioneers in the digital brand content space, Paul Kontonis and his cofounding creative partner Alec Pollak have created successful shows, including "A Day with the Hiltons" and the promotional series for Warner Brother's "The Watchmen" within the Kyle Piccolo franchise.

I got the chance to catch up with the CEO and cofounder of this small but mighty digital studio to talk about business models; what's important when it comes to measurement; and what kind of brand content shows are really working in the space.

Christine Beardsell: Briefly describe your company.

Paul Kontonis: For Your Imagination is a branded entertainment studio which develops, produces, distributes, and syndicates Web videos for advertisers and brands.

CB: I know you work closely and in partnership with other digital studios, like Next New Networks. How do you distinguish yourself from them?

PK: Next New Networks produces original Web shows that they deficit-finance with hopes that they will be able to sell the ad inventory they generate by their views. Back in 2007, that was what we primarily did as well. Once we had a couple of successful series under our belt, we decided it would be more effective to wait for the advertisers to come to us and then together develop, produce, and distribute a Web series which speaks perfectly to their target audience.

We call it brand-conscious development. The keys to making this work are to make sure you develop content and not just advertising and that you have a solid and proven multiplatform distribution and syndication strategy in place.

CB: But isn't it riskier for an agency to partner with you if you don't have a built-in audience base?

PK: Brands and agencies partner with us because we are able to present a video distribution and syndication plan along with the content that ensures delivery of video views to the target audience.

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We are always mitigating our clients' risks and applying current learning to improve our branded entertainment solutions.

CB: What do you think brands should be measuring in the brand content space and why?

PK: The two most basic and important metrics are video views and video engagement. In terms of views, in our minds at least 10-15 seconds of the video needs to be played in order for it to count. The number of views is really a relative metric and should be used as a measure of success based upon the desired scale of the campaign and budget, and not judged solely against the number of views achieved by other video campaigns.

Also, not every view is created equal. When syndicating your videos, there are two methods: autoplay and click to play. Unfortunately, there is no standard method of reporting these two types of views. Autoplay views are being counted equal to click to play, and the brands and agencies may not even realize it. I think we all see the added value of someone choosing to play a video, and the industry needs to create a new reporting method that reflects what is really happening.

And in terms of engagement, our desired minimum engagement metric is at least 50 percent of the views lasting for at least 75 percent of the video.

CB:What types of shows are you seeing the best success with?

PK: First and foremost: targeted shows that speak directly to a particular audience and satisfy the needs of that audience work best.

We always like to advise content creators and producers to avoid the curse of the "any." If you have an idea for a show and you think anyone would like to watch it, that's a bad sign. You should be able to clearly define your audience and speak directly to them. If you think any advertiser would be interested in it, that's a bad sign. You should be able to identify and explain why a specific advertiser category would be interested in your show. Then you've got something.

CB: So what do you think is the future of online content formats and digital storytelling?

PK: Right now the formats and storytelling styles are really all over the place. Everything is being tried out with mixed results. As the Web video audience continues to expand, along with consumption and the volume of content exponentially expanding, there will be opportunities for all types of vertical content. In order for it all to take hold and start to settle, brands and agencies need to catch up. Once brands evolve their media buying strategies and planning and explore the possibilities of original Web videos, we'll all be in a better place to evolve the form of this great new medium.