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Put Audio & Video on Your Web Site

By Ronni Rhodes

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As a company that sells streaming media services for a living, we get questions everyday about what needs to be done to make an audio or video presentation that will stream well over the Internet. Most of these inquiries come from small businesses with limited budgets for marketing and advertising. They are always pleasantly surprised when we tell them that they can do it themselves!

Let's start with an audio only presentation:

- Write out your script first! Focus on two to three points that you feel are essential to explain your products or services. Keep the script simple. If your site offers a wide variety of goods or services, you might consider several different messages with each one keying in on one or two important areas.
- Have someone who is not familiar with your business review the script and your site. Be sure that they understand your message. If they don't, rewrite it!
- Practice reading the script until you feel completely familiar and comfortable with it. (You can hire professional voice talent for reasonable rates if you'd prefer not recording the audio yourself.)
- Use the best quality tape recorder available to you. A cassette recorder is fine.
- Use a high quality brand name audiotape.
- An external microphone that plugs into your recorder is preferable to the one that comes built-in. They are very inexpensive and produce a better recording.
- Do your recording in a quiet place with as little background noise as possible. (That one seems pretty obvious, doesn't it?)
- Speak naturally! It can help to have a friend or colleague act as an audience to give you focus.
- Record your presentation several times. Select the one that will sound the most natural and inviting to your site visitors.
- Send the tape to the encoding (streaming) vendor. They'll take it from there!

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A video presentation takes a little more time and effort, but you really can do it yourself. Your home video camera will work just fine! All of the same rules you used to make your audiotape apply here including the use of an external microphone. Good quality videotape is essential. The following suggestions will help you prepare a video presentation for your site that should stream very well:

- Keep the camera steady! Put the camera on a tripod or brace it against something solid like a table or a wall. If you must pan or zoom, do it very slowly. (Too much motion can cause a "blurry" stream.)
- Simplify your frame. Think about where everything is going to be. People coming in and out of the frame can create movement that may cause confusion.
- Stay focused. A lot of auto-focus cameras can't focus properly if you are too close to your subject. Five or six feet away is a good distance. Don't try to shoot through a window; the camera will focus on

the glass.

- Good lighting is essential. Try to light your scene from the front. Don't stand in front of a window; the backlighting will cause you to be in silhouette. Try shooting outside if possible.
- Use the fastest record speed. This will insure the best video quality.
- Record in a quiet place. Hold the mike close to your mouth to cut down on external noises.
- RELAX AND ENJOY YOURSELF! It really shows. Practice until you feel comfortable.

If you have additional questions or concerns, your streaming vendor should be ready and able to assist you.

Early adopters of Rich Media techniques, streaming being one of them, have already started to reap the rewards of higher click-through rates and increased conversion rates. If your message is meaningful and relevant to your site visitors, your streaming presentation will add to their enjoyment of visiting your site and encourage them not only to buy but also to return and buy again!

Ronni Rhodes is the owner of WBC Imaging, an Internet company that specializes in web site enhancement utilizing streaming media technology. With her husband, Don, a digital media engineer, they work with companies to incorporate streaming as part of successful and meaningful sales and marketing programs. Please direct all questions and comments to: Ronni@wbcimaging.com 520-742-5780 <http://www.wbcimaging.com>

Do's and Don't of Web Video

By Adi Gaskell

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Video on the Web can be compelling or annoying, depending on how it's handled. Here are some tips to help ensure your Web video clips don't hinder the business goals of your site.

1. Always offer a choice.

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When possible, give visitors a chance to click a link and make a conscious decision to view the video. Video that's streamed automatically when visitors land on the page can be jarring and result in site avoidance - not the best outcome. This is especially true when the video includes loud audio streams. Anyone who works in a small office with thin cubicle partitions knows how disruptive such streams can be.

2. Keep it low.

For the most part, your audience will be viewing your media streams from their office desktops, so audio needs to be clear yet unobtrusive (see #1). This means avoiding large spontaneous crashes, beeps, sirens, etc., and making sure volume controls are obvious and easy to use.

3. Make it short.

Web attention spans - especially when it comes to video - are even shorter than those for television viewing. If you really want to get your message across, keep it as short as possible.

4. Make it navigable.

When you need to run a long piece of video, simply break it into manageable pieces and let the user navigate among them. This is another way to put the user in the driver's seat and ensure that the video is well-received.

5. Test it.

Most sites test their video streams prior to deploying them live, but what about a week or a month later? As your site changes, so does its ability to support streaming video. Constant vigilance and good measurement tools, like those that provide metrics for different times of day, days of the week, geographical areas and so on, are a good investment.

6. Make sure it's necessary.

Many sites are tempted to run video just because they can, and that's not a good reason. Video should add to your message or present it in new, compelling ways. A talking head spouting a marketing statement is not an example of compelling video content.

Adi is the founder of www.WebVideo4U.co.uk, a leading provider of Flash based streaming video solutions.



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