

How Video Dramatically Improves Corporate Communications

Count the many benefits of video in communications. It's more engaging than text. It's more personal. There's less room for misinterpretation. One caveat, though: You must do it right.



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INTRODUCTION

There's a reason video is skyrocketing in internal communications.

The personal connection is greater when you see the messenger's face. Video increases the opportunities for employee engagement. And in the YouTube age, everyone is used to consuming quick bites of video on the go.

Video webcasts were a major part of a 13 percent increase in engagement in one year at GoDaddy, says Kim Clark, director of internal communications at GoDaddy.

"Body language speaks volumes," Clark says. "And you can get the tone right, which can sometimes be off in email communications."

Video is only going to grow. [Cisco](#) reports that the vast majority of leaders say they will rely more heavily upon video in the next five to 10 years, with the trend even stronger for those managing large teams. Oracle has benefited to the tune of \$10 million by using on-demand video to power sales kickoff meetings, rather than staging an annual in-person event for its entire international sales force, [Forbes](#) reports.

Everyone who has ever sent or received an email understands the risk of misreading the tone or inflection, says Bill Accola, vice president of customer success at MediaPlatform. Video reduces the possibility that an employee will misinterpret a message.

Still, video must to be done right or its benefits are lost, Clark says. Millions of mediocre organizational videos fail to move their audiences to action because they don't play to employ video's advantages.

Gone are the days of highly produced videos of suits sitting in stuffy corporate environments.

"Now there's such a call for authenticity and honesty and transparency that you can't do that and expect to get a credible response," Clark says.

Read on to learn about the benefits of video—and how best to leverage this powerful channel.



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EARLY WINS

BENEFIT: Video makes small wins easy.

It takes time to master any medium, but for those who approach it right, video has a major advantage from the get-go. It makes small wins possible—even for novices.

Think of quick supplemental footage, rather than an epic three-part docu-series on a complicated subject, says Justin Allen, head of production and video strategy and an affiliate partner of Ragan Consulting Group.

Small wins could mean shooting video with an iPhone to accompany an article. Or you can set up a tripod to shoot a time-lapse in a cool location or plant. Allen also recommends natural sound-only pieces, which capture moving images and noises in interesting locations.

Another benefit of small wins is they help sell executives on video. “Show me something cool that gets people interested in it. ‘Oh, wow, *that’s* what that looks like,” Allen says.

But make sure you discuss why you are shooting a video in the first place. If the answer is, “Because everybody else is doing video,” pause to figure out your strategic purpose. Video should be fully integrated with your communications and marketing strategy, Allen says.

BENEFIT: Video is more dynamic.

Video mirrors our lived reality and therefore has greater power to grab and surprise the viewer. To capture this advantage over text, successful videos require three elements, says Allen.

- **Emotion.** Videos have unique emotional power. Make viewers feel an emotion that compels them to act.
- **Entertainment.** Remember to use its visual possibilities to entertain.
- **Surprise.** Unpredictability gives a video a satisfying twist that counters expectations.

“Those are the three key things that every video needs,” Allen says. “I need some level of this being worth my time.”



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BENEFITS OF SETTING, SOUND AND MOTION

BENEFIT: Video makes every element in the frame a character.

A written story on a new corporate directive likely won't include hundreds of words describing the background. Video, however, allows you to make the background and the composition part of your message. Every element becomes a character, Clark says.

"I'm a huge fan of shooting video with a live environment in the background," she says. "People are working; they're just going about their business."

If a worker in overalls carries a ladder through the background of a shoot, that's great. It adds to the atmospherics.

GoDaddy supports a nonprofit called Kiva, which makes microloans around the globe to alleviate poverty. When the company announced that every employee was getting a [\\$25 credit to direct to a Kiva project](#), Clark emphasized the international theme by capturing the chief executive walking past a line of international food trucks while explaining the program. This hinted at the program's global reach. Employees discussed the person they were supporting abroad—telling a story about who they had chosen and why, Clark says.

GoDaddy announced the video in a town hall, resulting in half the company seeing it. It fired up interest in the charity.

"We did get a ton of feedback that it helped people understand super-quick what [Kiva] was and what to do, plus get them jazzed to do it," Clark says.

BENEFIT: Video gets executives out of their comfort zone—and into the audience's.

Video has greater authenticity—but you must get subjects out of their comfort zone and into the audience's. Allen cites entrepreneur, author and speaker [Gary Vaynerchuk](#) as someone who ditches the stuffy posture that many adopt on video. He even makes fun of himself.

Video helps your audience feel that the executive is transparent and authentic, Allen says. Often a change of scenery is all it takes.



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“If you’re in a suit at your desk talking about how you care about the people on the manufacturing line,” Allen says, “I don’t believe you. If you’re down there with them taking a selfie video on your phone and you’re pulling people into the shot talking to them, I feel that you understand at least a little bit of what goes on on that line.”

BENEFITS OF HUMAN MESSENGERS

BENEFIT: Video creates in-house stars who extend your message’s reach.

SAS, the North Carolina business analytics company, uses video—and humor—to share reminders with employees about the importance of observing basic company policies and procedures, says Becky Graebe, director of internal communications. This includes reserving conference rooms rather than just grabbing them, slowing down when driving in pedestrian zones, and quickly reporting misplaced company-issued devices.

“This is important stuff, but no one wants to read a full-length article about it,” Graebe says.

The solution: A video series featuring a charismatic if nerdy character, the suspender-clad, bespectacled Mr. Smarty Pants, who magically appears in dramatized scenarios starring employees. Mr. Smarty Pants pops up to hold employees accountable when they skirt correct procedures. The company choir (yes, there is such a thing) even came up with a 1950’s-style jingle for the series.

Mr. Smarty Pants videos are consistently the most-watched internal videos posted each month, Graebe says. The nerdy spokesman quickly become a favorite among SAS employees and executives. Look-alikes dressed as the smart-talking know-it-all on Halloween, and the company began showcasing him at family fun events.

“Bottom line: We had more eyes and ears on some of the most important announcements and reminders because of the unique video series,” Graebe says. “I think it’s proof that we don’t always need to take a serious tone or approach to convey an important message.”



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BENEFIT: Video messengers can build trust. (But choose wisely.)

“When you hear it from the horse’s mouth, especially done right, that’s where trust comes in,” Clark says. “You put a face to a message. It’s actually coming from a human being. The connection is more credible. It builds trust.”

To do this, choose your messenger wisely. Perhaps you have a few good video presences in your executive suite—those who can charm a camera, or are eager to improve their presentation skills. Others, however, do more harm than good.

This isn’t about appearance. It’s a matter of charisma, camera savvy and communications skills. Show tough love, Clark says. Strike from your list that executive who insists that you write out the message in advance.

“I don’t waste my time with executives who aren’t coachable,” Clark says. “I spend my time on the people who do want to get better, know that they can get better, and want to have that influence on employees and that respect from employees.”

BENEFIT: Video is less formal.

You’ve seen the good internal videos, in which the presenter is comfortable without reading from a script. Often all it takes to achieve that effect is to approach the interview right.

As you do your sound check, Clark recommends making small talk, even something as simple as, “What did you have for breakfast this morning?” or, “What’s your morning routine?”

During the interview, subjects respond well to questions that elicit emotion: “How do you feel about the numbers?” You might also ask for a great customer sales story.

You—and your subject—should think about “story, story, story, story, story,” Clark adds.

She praises GoDaddy’s chief financial officer, who knows how to humanize abstract numbers and figures.



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When discussing quarterly revenue, Clark says, he says, “What does it look like to get to these numbers? It represents 17 million customers. It represents 6,000 employees.” He will call out a good sales rep, and play a clip of a conversation with a client.

BENEFIT: Video enables dialogue.

Back-and-forth discussions are hard to pull off in text. Video is a natural medium for lively exchanges.

Corporate webcasts often feature top executives, but Micron communicators offers exposure to experts who aren’t necessarily senior leaders. The events are promoted on the home page.

Sometimes a single person does the webcast, but usually the expert has “a buddy” to create a lively conversation, Dunne says. The two have seven or eight minutes to talk, with the rest of the time devoted to questions. Dunne’s team solicits questions in advance.

The assumption was that this would be a channel for business news, but the topics branched out. One episode featured an HR executive in Singapore with a reputation as an outstanding manager. Another, titled “Demystifying Autonomous Driving,” featured a pair of engineers excitedly talking about their work and demonstrating their technology using Lego cars.

Though some employees view the webcast live, many watch afterward, particularly on the weekends.

The webcasts have been an immediate success, Dunne says. The title alone, “Live at 15,” has generated interest since even before the launch. One executive said, “I want to do that,” as soon as he heard about the proposal.

“It’s been a delightful project,” Dunne says. “It’s fun to do. We give ourselves permission to be informal.”

BENEFIT: Video allows for remote presenters.

Want to make your staff in Bangalore or Manila feel part of things? Use presenters from multiple locations during webcasts. This approach works well when you are presenting pieces of a larger project or showcasing the diversity of your team.



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This also reminds viewers of employees who might feel less visible in the organization. The goal, says Clark, is “to be inclusive and to help them feel visible to the company.”

INTERACTIVITY

BENEFIT: Video allows live polls and chats that boost engagement.

If you want to take the pulse of your organization live, no tool is more effective and immediate than video.

Organizations can enhance video events through interactive elements such as polling, questions and chat, Accola says. This engages the audience and keeps their focus on the message, rather than another window where they are writing an email.

Polls enable the presenter to solicit opinions through the video platform. Good practice is to ask follow-up questions based on the previous responses. This shows viewers that the presenters are listening to the answers and seeking deeper understanding, Accola says.

Accola says he loves one major client’s video events, which encourage employees to comment for all to see. This company’s viewers are deeply engaged with the presentation.

“They’re talking about the product that’s been presented, and maybe they worked on it, or maybe they didn’t work on it but like the features that are being added in,” Accola says. “You’ll see things like, ‘Great job, guys!’ ‘Wow, that looks like a great new feature.’”

BENEFIT: Video connects viewers through geography.

Another trick that perks up the ears of the viewers during live events is to mention the location of people submitting questions, Accola says.

The presenter or moderator can say, “We have a question from Mary in Pittsburgh,’ or, ‘We have a question from Bob in New York,’” Accola says. “That gets the other audience members thinking, ‘Hey, do I know Bob? Do I know Mary?’”

This technique tends to bring in more questions and gets people to pay closer attention.



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BENEFIT: Executive ‘Hangouts’ increase engagement.

GoDaddy’s “Hangouts”—the ones that helped boost engagement 13 percent in a year—have a standard format. They last 30 minutes each. Half of that is a presentation from an executive, the rest questions from viewers. Viewers pose their questions through the intranet.

“They can ask any question, and every question will be answered,” Clark.

Afterward, Clark polls people with open-ended questions, such as, “What did you think?” The enthusiastic comments—and an increase in viewership and engagement—have proven the benefits of “Hangouts.”

If the speaker runs out of time, Clark parcels out the questions to leaders and posts the answers on the intranet.

There is no live audience—just the presenter facing the camera. This creates a sense that the speaker is personally addressing viewers.

To gain a sense of trust and intimacy, your subject must stare at the camera, rather than glancing at an interviewer sitting out of frame. You can achieve this by having the interviewer sit in another room (or even, potentially, another city). Display the interviewer’s face on an iPad attached to the camera, much like a teleprompter, Clark suggests. The subject will talk to the face. The interviewer can see the interviewee via a laptop webcam set up on the side.

“You can be in another room or another state or another country,” Clark says, “and this executive is looking at your face. They’re totally forgetting that they’re looking at the camera.”

If you go with an interview format, make sure the interviewer is on camera as well, rather than having a disembodied voice posing questions.

IN CONCLUSION...

From boosting engagement to creating in-house communications stars, video offers an array of advantages over other channels. Your employees are already devouring video content through YouTube, Facebook and other platforms. It’s time to cash in on the benefits.



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