

## FiveThirtyEight doubles down on its YouTube presence to drive channel growth

FiveThirtyEight is the data journalism site for ABC News. Founded by Nate Silver in 2008, its mission is to use data to make sense of the news and tell rich, compelling stories. It covers politics and elections, sports, science, culture, and economics.

### OPPORTUNITY

FiveThirtyEight wanted to bring its unique brand of data journalism to a broader audience on YouTube. It saw an opportunity to use beautiful graphics and compelling narratives to give YouTube viewers deeper insights into the news and the world around them. This would help viewers understand and appreciate how FiveThirtyEight's analyses and predictions work, and lift the veil on the traditional newsroom.

### APPROACH

FiveThirtyEight built up its digital video capabilities by leveraging existing talent, hiring new staff, and investing in its studio space and equipment. The team then tested new formats, including a video version of the popular FiveThirtyEight Politics Podcast.

**Investing in digital video capabilities:** FiveThirtyEight hired new staff who had specific experience with digital video. It also trained up charismatic staffers to be on-camera YouTube hosts. Some of the hosts have since built a devoted audience, and people tune in specifically to hear what they have to say about major issues in science and politics. In addition, FiveThirtyEight created a new studio and purchased equipment.

**Developing new workflows:** FiveThirtyEight already had a rigorous copy editing and fact checking process that was built around print and data visualization. But it took some time to develop workflows that allowed the digital team to create timely videos while making sure they lived up to FiveThirtyEight's editorial standards.

**Creating a custom look:** The team hired an animator to help enhance video content and develop a more consistent visual style. They also developed bespoke branding for the studio and published videos.

**Experimenting with formats and topics:** The team then developed and tested a number of different content formats and topics, including:

- **A video format for its popular FiveThirtyEight Politics Podcast**, which served as something of a marketing vehicle to introduce the podcast to a new audience on YouTube. Additionally, existing fans of the podcast appreciated being able to see the faces of their beloved podcast hosts. This podcast played a pivotal role in fueling channel growth. In particular, podcasts that were recorded as quick turnaround reactions to major news events (like election nights) gained significant traction on the platform. Several of these videos were highlighted by YouTube's Breaking News on Home shelf, which provided a significant boost in viewership.
- **A series called "Confidence Interval"** where FiveThirtyEight team members make persuasive cases for political arguments and then reveal just how confident they really are.
- **Interviews with high-profile guests like Dr. Fauci**, some of which aired on ABC News or other news networks.
- **Upcoming projects around the approaching 2020 election** that will bring FiveThirtyEight's election forecast to life for its YouTube audience.

### RESULTS

FiveThirtyEight's YouTube presence was minimal before this project. It invested in digital video capabilities so the team could experiment with content that would stand on its own, and do more than supplement existing reporting, in order to drive YouTube channel growth.

- At the beginning of 2019, FiveThirtyEight had just over 2K subscribers and 121K views. By mid-2020, it had **64K subscribers and over 4M annual views**.
- The team published dozens of episodes of the FiveThirtyEight Politics podcast. This drove more than **30% of the channel's views** in the first half of 2020, and more than **half its watch time**.

### LEARNINGS

**Build an audience with breaking news:** Responding quickly to breaking news on YouTube is a great way to build your audience. When FiveThirtyEight started publishing 'emergency' podcast videos during unplanned breaking news events, it saw big spikes in traffic. This helped to inform its strategy of reporting from the campaign trail, and publishing quick turnaround videos on election nights.

**Give your brand a clear aesthetic:** Repurposing visual assets that are meant for articles or infographics is not a great way to build your video strategy, but it is important that your videos feel representative of your brand's aesthetic. FiveThirtyEight hired a part-time animator who really understood the brand to develop a visual animation language, which was very successful — the animations have been broadcast on other major news channels, like MSNBC.

**YouTube audiences like to consume podcasts on the platform:** Many news organizations are getting great traction with podcasts on YouTube — particularly if they already have a following on other platforms. FiveThirtyEight saw immense success because its loyal podcast listeners appreciated being able to see (rather than just listen to) their favorite podcast hosts. And distributing podcasts on YouTube also initiated a new audience to the FiveThirtyEight Politics Podcast. This allowed FiveThirtyEight to strengthen the connection between podcast hosts and fans, and, ultimately, propel its YouTube channel to new heights.

“ We've created a digital video newsroom at FiveThirtyEight that can live on into the future. We are staffed to take on multiple types of projects, both in the studio and in the field. And our videos have a consistent look and feel that is unique to our brand. ”