

Imagen Digital experiments with digital-first video formats to better engage YouTube audiences

Grupo Imagen is one of the top news organizations in Mexico. They cover global and national news, politics, sports and entertainment across radio, TV, newspaper, and digital.

OPPORTUNITY

Imagen Digital saw an opportunity to experiment with made-for-YouTube formats in order to expand their audience and grow their YouTube channel. They specifically wanted to explore how 'soft' news would resonate with a younger YouTube audience in comparison to the 'hard' news stories that they publish on other channels.

APPROACH

Imagen Digital first wanted to define their YouTube brand image, including their look, voice, and identity. Then they wanted to test digital-first video formats, and consolidate teams and workflows so they could more efficiently produce content.

Defining the experiment: As a first step, Imagen Digital made a decision about how they'd test types of content. They decided to experiment with an evergreen series called "Bipolar" that would consist of short opinion pieces, interviews, news coverage, and documentary videos. Each episode would be written by a different reporter/collaborator, and would explore one topic with two contrasting points of view. The aim was to see which topics, presenters, and styles would work best for YouTube audiences.

Building up the digital team: Imagen Digital then needed to bring in a team to execute the project. This included hiring production staff and presenters, as well as identifying YouTube influencers they could collaborate with. As they started developing the series, they invited additional collaborators in order to get a wider range of perspectives.

Finding the visual identity: Imagen Digital understood that brand identity is important on YouTube, so they spent time workshoping and developing a specific look and feel for the series (they wanted it to be fast, funny, fresh, and informative). They then created a logo and defined visual identity guidelines so each episode would be consistent.

Defining the workflow: Concurrently, they developed workflow best practices, so that content could be created in the most efficient and effective ways possible (e.g., script must be delivered and approved before shooting starts, etc.). Once they had a good workflow in place, Imagen Digital hired several more production staff to reduce bottlenecks in delivery and uploading.

Experimenting with format: Over the course of the project, Imagen Digital trialed different formats to see what resonated best with YouTube audiences. For example, early pieces were informal discussions between two presenters, whereas later the discussions were fully scripted. They also evolved the topics they covered, starting with a lot of breaking news coverage, but adding more evergreen content into the mix so that they'd have sustained viewership over a longer period of time. They used YouTube Analytics to measure what worked and what didn't, and would tweak and change formats based on results (e.g., they plan on increasing the amount of evergreen formats they create).

RESULTS

Imagen Digital successfully built up a team, found effective ways to work with different collaborators, and experimented with an evergreen, made-for-YouTube format. Most importantly, they've been inspired to continue innovating with digital formats in the future.

- **They formed a multidisciplinary team** and put in place best practices for workflows, creative output, and collaborations.
- **They collaborated with eight different journalists**, seven of whom had never written or directed content for YouTube before.
- **One "Bipolar" video garnered 100K views** in the first week after it was published.

LEARNINGS

The small details matter: Thumbnails and titles are your first chance to engage audiences, so make them count. Consistency is important here, so give your series' thumbnails a look that audiences will recognize at a glance.

Cross-promote to drive engagement: Use as many digital platforms as you have at your disposal to promote your YouTube content. This will drive more people to YouTube, and you'll have more potential eyeballs for your content.

Finding your voice takes time, so don't rush it: Don't worry if you can't find your unique YouTube brand identity immediately. You'll get there! The key is to keep exploring and try every idea you have until you find what works for your audience. But even then, don't become stagnant — your audience is always changing and growing, so you must, too.

Embrace parallel production schedules: Audiences reward consistency, so have multiple videos in production at any given time to maintain a consistent upload schedule. Imagen Digital started out just working on one video at a time, but quickly realized that even the smallest delay could shift their release schedule. They invited additional collaborators to work on pieces concurrently, so that if a delay occurred on one piece, they had a backup ready to go.

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This is the first, but not last, project exclusive to our YouTube channels. We've learned that we can explore and innovate with new content formats as well as find new working processes and collaboration methods with creators.

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