



# Shooting for Success

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## By Chuck Bender

In these economically tough times, when we are all trying to reach out and engage our clients as often as possible in a meaningful way in order to stimulate more business, video can be a promising medium. In fact, video may prove more useful than the other social media that many of us have recently adopted.

### Do Social Media Boost Business?

Are social media effective tools to increase our sales volume and our profits? Using Facebook, even over the long term, hasn't showed any indication of increasing our sales volume. And Twitter seems to be less successful because there is nothing in our current business model that is so time sensitive that it cannot be answered by a text message or detailed e-mail later that day or the next day. However, we use LinkedIn religiously.

We post a question almost every 10 days, trying to build our network with people who have expressed similar interests. When we receive responses, we answer them individually and promptly, giving them the attention they deserve. Again, this is to build that business bond in an effort to increase our sales volume at some later date. After two years, we are not sure of an instance where this has helped our bottom line either directly or through referral business.

We are not against staying in touch with clients over long periods of time. We enjoy it. However, at a time when we are working harder for less money, with our overhead staying the same, we are very focused on using our time as wisely as we can. Today, that means improving our sales volume so we can see the results on our bottom line.

### Lights, Camera, (Somewhat Synchronized) Action

We have turned to video to improve our contact with our clients. The first video we posted to YouTube (search for Bill Gladstone Group) was a dance video performed by the Bill Gladstone Group and choreographed by a local dance instructor for \$600. The customized song from a singer we found on Craigslist.com cost us \$300. It was a fun video posted as entertainment for ourselves and our clients.

Over time, more than 2,300 people have viewed the video. Some of those clicks were members of our own company; others were those who looked at it more than once. But even with only 1,800 unique visits, that is certainly more than we have received from our social media networks, especially on one particular topic. Also, Bill received follow-up e-mails such as "do not quit your day job" and "I never knew you had it in you," messages that prompted a few conversations regarding real estate. What is important is that these comments came from current and previous clients, not from people who had simply joined our network.

Amateur-type videos followed, and eventually we found a niche where we felt comfortable posting interviews with professionals in our market and commentary on the previous 90 days (titled "The Last Ninety Days").

We know from the e-mails and phone calls Bill has received after people have seen these videos that our credibility in the market is being enhanced. Many clients are eager to let you know they have just seen your latest media attempt. It is a new way of presenting factual information



in an acceptable manner through a professional medium. This form of media allows you to touch your clients and establish and enhance your credibility at a very rapid pace. No one has yet purchased real estate as a result of the videos, but the number of clients and potential clients that have called or e-mailed in response is great.

Moreover, we can track our results through this medium. Once we finish our “Last Ninety Days,” we post it to YouTube, send out a link to those in our database we believe would like to see it, and then count the number of people who view it. Your numbers are right there on YouTube. You can count them yourself.

### **Nuts and Bolts—Getting Started**

You have many options for recording your own viral videos. There is a lot of software and equipment out there to perform this task, and not all of it is very expensive. The objective is to know what your goal is. Are you seeking to produce television-quality videos or videos that will only be seen on the Web or computer playback? If your goal is to produce Web-style videos, you are in luck. Many online viewers have been conditioned not to expect the best quality from viral videos. They understand that most creators are not video experts, and they have come to respect this form of video. This does not mean you should not give it your all. Viewers need to be entertained and informed.

You can begin video production with a high video resolution camera, a USB lapel microphone, an updated laptop computer

with at least 2 GB of RAM, and a simple software package. Most viral video is now done in HD, which calls for a camera with video resolution of 180 X 1024. These are relatively easy to find and can be purchased for \$80-\$100 online. Most cameras will come with a built-in microphone, but most of these pick up too much background noise. An omnidirectional USB lapel microphone costing about \$150 will give you crisp and clear audio. Chances are you already have a laptop. You will just need to be sure it is up to date and has enough power to handle the camera. If there is too much running on a computer with too little RAM, your video may skip or freeze. Most Web cameras come with their own software, which offers little editing or customization. But this may be all you need to start with.

If you decide you want video quality and advanced editing options, you will need additional software and equipment. Adobe offers a program called Visual Communicator (about \$400), which includes customizable graphics, music clips, and special features. It helps novice users create video presentations that resemble television newscasts, complete with green screen technology. You can decide exactly which features you want to use, the most important being the built-in teleprompter. In addition to this software, you may also want an advanced light kit with umbrellas (\$300 and up) to better focus light and a high-end digital video camera. Given the seemingly endless choice of video cameras, we recommend that you find a local supplier to explain all of your options.

## At the Shoot

Depending on what you want to do with the video—listing presentation, market overview, financial analysis, or something else—you need to choose the right location. Should it be filmed in your conference room, on site, or at someone else's office? Moving to a different location means transporting the equipment and arranging for people to be there.

This location will need to be quiet, have good lighting, and have a backdrop that is not too distracting or obnoxious. You want the viewers to focus on your message, not your backdrop. Eliminate any possible noise sources such as phones, entryways, or extra people. Cell phones and Bluetooth headsets can interfere with your camera, microphone, or speakers. They should be turned off or kept a few feet away during production. Experiment with different locations and effects until you are happy with the results. Test your audio and video constantly. You do not want to wait until you are finished to discover there was an issue in the production.

## The Right Medium for the Message

What motivates people to watch your videos once they receive a link that says you've posted a new one? First, don't waste people's time with the video equivalent of Tweets about what you've just had for lunch. Present something your client would

be inclined to watch. We've found that people are more likely to respond to personal marketing videos of yourself, your team, or a colleague tackling topics of common interest, rather than to property marketing videos. Full 360-degree panoramic views no longer hold people to the video. This effect can be achieved with a still camera and software that turns still pictures into video. We already do that, and we post views on our Web site along with still shots. That is where they belong, not in a video presentation trying to motivate clients to buy or lease.

We know from experience in giving presentations that people want factual and accurate information. They will pay more attention and for longer periods of time if the presentation is also entertaining. Probably the most entertaining real estate-type format we have seen is MTV's *Cribs*. It shows the residential real estate of many famous people in a very interesting and entertaining way. We started working with a creative marketing company, looking for ways to expand this to focus on our commercial and industrial listings. Although the poor economy has put this project on hold, we hope to resume work by the second half of 2011.

In the meantime, we'll focus on our personal marketing in an effort to provide factual and entertaining information, continually working towards enhancing our credibility in this market. 

