

ABS-CBN embraces digital video and explores new ways of engaging audiences

Established 65 years ago, ABS-CBN is one of the largest media organizations in the Philippines. While broadcast remains its biggest platform, the organization is in the midst of a digital transformation across all its main businesses – TV and film, magazine publishing, cable and broadband, and news.

OPPORTUNITY

ABS-CBN had always wanted to experiment with made-for-YouTube news content. They saw an opportunity to introduce a new digital-first brand (NXT) via YouTube that would help them report the news in innovative ways and reach a younger audience.

APPROACH

ABS-CBN wanted to create a new digital brand for showcasing bespoke digital-first content, to complement their successful online strategy (the ABS-CBN news channel already has over 7M subscribers). They hired and trained staff, purchased equipment, then started to experiment with different formats to maximize audience engagement.

Building a digital video team: As a first step, they set about hiring staff for their new digital video team. They selected people with limited or no TV experience, but who had an understanding of YouTube. This meant mostly hiring from outside the organization, and it took more time than they had anticipated. Next, they purchased new equipment – they went for equipment that was high quality, versatile enough to use every day (could be used for different types of content), and that they would continue to use well into the future (e.g., 4K Mirrorless cameras and laptops). Then, they held orientation sessions for staff around YouTube best practices (e.g., storytelling, editing, etc.), and equipment and technical training (e.g., camera operation, video editing basics, etc.).

Experimenting with formats: The whole digital video team brainstormed content formats and agreed on an initial storytelling approach – for launch, they would release two mid-length (10-15mins) videos per week based on their own, original ideas and topics trending on YouTube (a regular schedule helps build audience). Several months in, they started to experiment with other formats, such as mini-documentaries, profiles, and explainer videos about politics, history, culture, and science.

Ongoing testing and learning: After each video aired, the whole team would regroup to discuss the performance of the video and areas for improvement. They then applied those learnings to new videos so they could improve and hone their YouTube storytelling skills on the go. They continue to study available data and insights so they can better understand their audience. Moving forward, they aim to reduce the amount of format experimentation they do and develop a short-list of best performing content, then focus on producing more of those formats.

RESULTS

ABS-CBN built and launched a digital video brand, and succeeded in exploring and innovating with a number of digital video formats, which employ different storytelling techniques from their broadcast offerings.

- **They trained 11 team members** to produce video content specifically for YouTube.
- **They experimented** with a number of different formats, launching five series in total.
- **They are better at engaging audiences** – average watch time for NXT features is 13% higher than other ABS-CBN videos.

LEARNINGS

Finding the right people for your team is key: It might sound obvious, but when you're under pressure to put together a team, always remember: Never settle. Decide what positions you need to fill, but more importantly, decide what kind of people you want on your team. For example, ABS-CBN wanted people with little to no TV production experience, but who were familiar with the digital landscape. Be patient with this part of the process because it will have the biggest impact on your brand and, ultimately, will determine your success.

Experimentation is your friend: Do not be afraid to experiment with new YouTube-specific formats, technology, equipment, and different styles of storytelling. Coming from TV, ABS-CBN quickly realized that there's more than one way of telling a story. For them, producing for YouTube and other digital platforms is creatively freeing, so enjoy the process as much as the results!

Test and learn your way to successful content: Study your content. What worked? What didn't work? Use the tools available to you (e.g., YouTube Analytics) to understand your audience better. This way, you can make adjustments that will ultimately help you to produce more engaging content.

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These new formats are important to our digital strategy because, being from an established television company, it's important for us to continue to innovate and move outside our comfort zone.

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