

EBC leans into livestreaming and increases audience engagement and revenue

Founded in 1991, Eastern Broadcasting Company (EBC) operates eight satellite TV channels as well as online programming across multiple platforms. They broadcast content for news, finance, variety, drama, entertainment, and kids.

OPPORTUNITY

With GNI YouTube Innovation Funding, EBC had the opportunity to experiment with native digital video content for the first time (previously they'd just put TV content online) — something they'd been wanting to try for years. Specifically, they wanted to see how made-for-YouTube livestream formats would help them engage with audiences. In addition, they wanted to find ways to monetize audience engagement and build a sustainable digital video platform.

APPROACH

EBC first had to set up a space and a team dedicated to digital video. After that, they were able to experiment with format and learn how to engage with audiences in real time.

Creating a digital video team and space: EBC built up its digital video team by hiring producers and a host, and then trained them in YouTube best practices (including interview techniques, equipment operation, etc.) and EBC standards and protocols. Simultaneously, they established a dedicated studio inside the EBC offices, which is smaller and more cost-effective than their regular TV studios. The studio has a green screen so they can easily (and cheaply) change backdrops multiple times per show. They also purchased equipment, including cameras, cloud-based video editing software, and animation/graphics software.

Livestream format experimentation: The team started brainstorming which content formats would help best achieve their goals. They decided on two livestream shows: A daily talk show, “The Crazy Political Show,” and a bi-weekly current events talk show, “Crucial Moment” (a made-for-YouTube version of a popular EBC TV show). They launched the shows on YouTube (at a fraction of the cost of their regular TV programming), then spent the first couple of months honing how they interacted with audiences during the livestream. For example, during ad breaks in “The Crazy Political Show” editors chat with viewers in real time via live chat. They also started using Super Chat, which allows viewers to pay to have their responses pinned to the top of live chat. Editors can then feed audience interactions back to the hosts, and they can integrate questions and suggestions into the show in real time.

Honing ways to monetize the channel and grow the audience: Once the editors and hosts had found the best ways to incorporate real-time feedback, they could focus on monetizing the channel by encouraging more people to use Super Chat. In addition, they increased audience reach by releasing a version of the livestream as video on demand (VOD) after it had been filmed.

RESULTS

EBC successfully developed, launched, and tested made-for-YouTube formats, which are helping them grow and monetize their online audience to create a sustainable digital video presence.

- **EBC hit breakeven** (non-fixed costs) within a month after launching.
- **Through a combination of livestream and VOD**, “The Crazy Political Show” had over 16M cumulative views for 2019.
- Up to **\$3-5K earned via Super Chat** per livestream of “The Crazy Political Show.”
- **The made-for-YouTube version** of “Crucial Moment” gets 100K-300K average views per episode.
- **Revenue for the made-for-YouTube “Crucial Moment” has grown by nearly 65%** since launch (currently ~\$50K USD).

LEARNINGS

Digital video affords greater flexibility than TV: One of the benefits of digital is the flexibility it affords. With livestream particularly, you can pivot, tweak, and change as the show is on air. For example, EBC hosts are able to answer questions and discuss topics that viewers request in real time, or address breaking news right in the moment it happens.

YouTube audiences favor long-form content: Don't discount digital video as a platform for ‘fluffy’ content — in-depth, professional content resonates strongly with a YouTube audience, who prefer meaty topics, deep-dive discussions, and complex journalistic investigations.

Interactivity drives engagement and loyalty: One of the huge benefits of digital video over TV is the audience interaction component. Particularly for livestreams, giving your audience a chance to participate through live chat or Super Chat will boost engagement and increase long-term loyalty (and subscriber numbers) for your brand. It's also an effective way to monetize your channel and build sustainable digital video operations.

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Through the use of digital technology, video has been upgraded from one-way communication to two-way interaction.

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