

EWN invests in digital video capabilities to increase the quality and quantity of video production

Eyewitness News (EWN) is a South African media organization covering national news, politics, sport, entertainment, and weather. Its website has an audience of around 4M people.

OPPORTUNITY

EWN wanted to improve its video content, explore new ways of telling stories, and grow its audience. It saw an opportunity to increase the quantity and quality of its digital videos, and embed a video on demand (VOD) player into its website to drive traffic.

APPROACH

EWN invested in digital video resources and built up its team so it could start experimenting with new video formats, including live streaming.

Building up the team: EWN hired staff with different levels of digital video experience, from college graduates to highly skilled multi-media producers. Staff were trained in video best practices around filmmaking (e.g., shooting, editing, graphic design, storytelling) and publishing (e.g., distribution, reach, searchability). EWN also purchased equipment to ramp up digital video production (e.g., live stream unit, cameras, mics, computers, etc.).

Experimenting with new formats: The team planned content via a daily diary and focused on creating breaking news, features, and mini documentaries that they would publish on their own website via an embedded YouTube player. They tested different formats with their audiences to see what would resonate — for example, they created ‘fast news’ segments (short videos on breaking news), which were popular because South African data costs are relatively high. They created longer documentaries on important national issues (e.g., the South African water crisis), which they published every six weeks. The team also started a longer documentary series called “Dangerous Streets”, a year-long project covering different topics set in the streets of South Africa. For all the videos, they reviewed performance on a regular basis and used audience insights to tweak videos as needed.

Experimenting with live streaming: The team trained in live streaming so they could offer live coverage of key national political events. For example, they live streamed coverage of the May elections, the State of the Nation Address, former president Jacob Zuma's appearance at State Capture, and the return of the Springboks after winning the Rugby World Cup.

RESULTS

EWN successfully launched a video player on its website then populated it with quality content, even winning some awards in the process. This helped the brand drive subscription numbers and revenue.

- **Over 255% increase** in YouTube channel subscriber numbers over 12 months.
- **Trained the team and started live streaming** key national political events that helped grow the audience (e.g., Jacob Zuma's live stream appearance gained 35-75K concurrent viewers over five days of streaming).

LEARNINGS

Get the right team in place: It is important to identify the right talent for your team and then provide the correct training for the specific goals and objectives you want to achieve. Don't rush training as it can impact the success of your project. EWN, for example, allocated the whole first month of their project to training the team.

Get to know your audience's content needs: As soon as you launch a piece of content start testing how it resonates with your audience. This will provide an important guide to what you should produce and where to invest your money to grow your audience.

Integrate the video team into the newsroom: Digital video shouldn't be separated from the rest of your newsroom — you're all trying to achieve the same goals (for example, growing audience and reach). Integrating teams also allows for skills and knowledge sharing, giving you more chances to create high-quality content.

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The GNI YouTube Innovation Funding helped us improve the quality and quantity of our content while exploring new ways of telling stories.

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