

## PBS NewsHour evolves digital video to meet the demands of today's audiences

PBS NewsHour is a video-centric public media news producer with a nightly hour-long television broadcast and a robust digital footprint across the web and social media. The team produces editorial content about the most critical news of the day.

### OPPORTUNITY

PBS NewsHour is dedicated to adapting its journalism so it evolves along with the needs of its audience. The team saw an opportunity to speed up their digital video evolution and build better capacity to meet the demands of today's viewers, while also laying a foundation for future innovation.

### APPROACH

PBS NewsHour expanded its digital video infrastructure and improved the team's core video knowledge and skills. The team then assessed existing projects and workflows, re-aligned priorities, and expanded their digital video capabilities.

**Assessing content, infrastructure, and team:** First up, PBS NewsHour examined current performance metrics for digital video content across their platforms, and decided which projects to improve and which to move away from. It set goals for developing a new digital studio space, improving live stream infrastructure and broadcast, and enhancing overall production workflows. In addition, it created two new video producer roles, which it filled through internal promotion and external hire.

**Creating new studios and increasing live stream capacity:** PBS NewsHour invested in the upgrade of two new studio spaces — one for general use and one for producing video podcasts. Next, it added new programmable rack-mounted encoders, doubling its capacity, and allowing the team to live stream and post clips to YouTube concurrently. It also purchased production resources for staff (e.g., laptops, cameras, software) and provided ongoing training.

**Streamlining workflows:** It hired a consulting firm to help streamline and automate the workflow for its nightly show. This helped speed the delivery of episodes to viewers, and reduce workload for many staff, freeing them up to produce different types of digital video content.

**Experimenting with content:** With new staff, skills, and production improvements PBS NewsHour was able to test new video projects and expand existing projects. For example, the team experimented with live pre- and post-shows for major live stream events, interactive videos using Live commentary, and more. Along the way, they collected performance metrics and audience insights so they could make the most out of live streaming efforts around major news events later in the year.

**Engaging audiences:** The PBS NewsHour team used two new methods to deepen audience engagement. First, they experimented with Live commentary, so they could provide the viewing audience with additional context and updates for major live events. Additionally, they used Community posts to collect questions for Live commentary, promote content, and solicit feedback. To add more depth to the chats they often called on the expertise of other PBS NewsHour staff (via email, internal chat).

**Live streaming major events:** While PBS NewsHour is no stranger to live broadcast, it had numerous high-profile live streams in Q4, 2019 — hearings, news events, and December's Democratic primary debate. The planning, preparation, and

execution of these events relied on its full infrastructure and required far more resources than a typical daily stream, sometimes involving full television studios and control rooms dedicated to digital video production.

### RESULTS

By overhauling its live stream infrastructure and workflow, and testing new tools for engaging audiences, PBS NewsHour significantly grew its digital video presence.

- **51% year-over-year increase** in overall video views.
- **87% year-over-year increase** in overall watch time.
- **Nearly 60% growth in subscribers**, surpassing 1.5M within the year.

### LEARNINGS

**Focus on audience needs:** Organizations can feel pressure to get content up on YouTube fast, without thinking through audience needs. But it's worth investing the time and energy to understand what audiences want and why they might engage with you — ultimately it will help you prioritize where to invest your efforts. For example, PBS NewsHour spent time considering the benefits of live versus pre-recorded pre-shows for major events. The team found that, in many cases, the level of effort required for a live pre-show was not worthwhile. Often, pre-recorded videos paired with an aggressive Live commentary and Community experience delivered greater value. By focusing on the eventual audience takeaway, they were better able to prioritize resources.

**Engage audiences directly:** To deepen audience engagement and provide more meaningful exchanges, explore different ways to directly communicate with your viewers. PBS NewsHour was wary of the way that a small number of bad actors may be able to post disruptive chat messages, which could negatively impact the experience of other viewers. To account for this, the team began experimenting with Live commentary (they would accept questions via Community posts and answer them via Live commentary) with great engagement results.

**Optimize your videos:** Think about how each video you post impacts the channel as a whole. PBS NewsHour invested time in creating tighter titles, and more tailored, relevant descriptions. As a result, it saw lifts in two categories that are directly tied to optimization: a 57% YoY increase in views from suggested videos and a 69% YoY increase in views from YouTube search.