



## Refinery29 empowers digital video journalists and experiments with new formats

Refinery29 is a digital media and entertainment company with a global audience of 550M across all platforms. It provides optimistic and diverse creativity, storytelling, and points of view, aimed at women.

### OPPORTUNITY

Refinery29 elevates and celebrates the voices and experiences of young women, with a passion for service, storytelling, and new ideas across six core categories — style, beauty, lifestyle, entertainment, wellness, and news. Refinery29 is part of VICE Media Group, which sees an average of 380M unique views per month across all platforms globally.

### APPROACH

Refinery29 experimented with a new video format, created a sustainable workflow that enabled more nimble production, and trained female content makers in digital storytelling.

**Recruiting for the fellowship program:** The Refinery29 team approached 21 journalism schools and programs in New York and California to find students or graduates who were passionate about digital video storytelling. They interviewed 32 candidates, ultimately selecting six Fellows to participate. The Fellows were assigned to pods and worked in pairs that were optimized for complementary skill sets. Each pod would produce, shoot, and edit digital videos. Refinery29 hired a new supervising producer to oversee the program.

**Training the fellows:** Experienced employees conducted brand awareness and audience insights training for the Fellows and the supervising producer. They covered areas such as data analytics, video success metrics, and key content archetypes. The training helped inform the tone, look, and feel of the content.

**Choosing formats:** The team then came up with three new formats to experiment with: explainer/informational videos; first-person reporting by Fellows on pertinent issues; and Refinery29 hosted videos, where an existing host would go into the field with a Fellow to cover a topic.

**Choosing topics:** Fellows had input from Refinery29 staff and the supervising producer, and topics were ultimately selected based on their relevance to the current news cycle and their evergreen potential.

**Learning on the go:** Fellows began researching stories, and honing the skills needed to tell them (e.g., scriptwriting, video storytelling). Regular meetings were held to track progress and help the Fellows with stories, execution, and production schedules. Training continued throughout the fellowship, focusing on best practices around shooting on phone versus camera, audio, lighting, etc.

**Producing the videos:** One Fellow from each pod was assigned to go into the field while the other worked in the office to support them. All Fellows were trained in basic editing skills and they cut their own videos, but the final polish was added by a seasoned editor to ensure all work complied with the high Refinery29 production standards. The team chose thumbnails that were high resolution, close-up shots of the video subjects.

**Launching the new formats:** Refinery29 starting publishing content from the Fellows in July. The team used Community posts to tease upcoming episodes and YouTube Stories to show behind-the-scenes footage of the Fellows at work. They also used Community posts to pose relevant questions for each video, inviting viewers to share their thoughts and comments.

**Looking to the future:** Refinery29 developed a complete style guide and a scalable infrastructure that is renewable and repeatable so they can continue to bring on new team members and train them in brand-specific digital storytelling. Refinery29 also took stock of which formats and topics were the most successful so it could integrate those learnings and best practices into future digital video strategies.

### RESULTS

Refinery29's fellowship program was hugely successful in training a new generation of digital video creatives, and also in helping the channel reach a broad audience. **The videos produced during the fellowship received over 1M views.**

### LEARNINGS

**Engage audiences with first-person storytelling:** While Refinery29 received positive audience feedback on all the formats it tested, first-person storytelling combined with topical news stories were the most successful.

**Train creators in your brand style:** It's critical to train new content makers in your own brand voice and production style, and get them familiar with insights about your specific audiences. Create workflows and processes to help choose topics and stories, and develop style guidelines so you can easily and quickly onboard new people.

**Take a multi-track approach:** Have a variety of stories in progress at any one time so that if one story stalls you can switch to another. Also, create workflows that encourage action and empower employees. For example, at Refinery29 the Fellows could dive straight into logistics and planning once stories were greenlit, rather than wait for further approvals at each stage (e.g., they could find flights, plan itineraries, book equipment, etc.).