

SPIEGEL TV combines archival footage with bespoke digital video content to test new formats and engage younger audiences

SPIEGEL TV is the German television production arm of the news magazine, DER SPIEGEL. SPIEGEL TV produces documentaries for its own television and digital channels, as well as making films on behalf of other publishers and broadcasters.

OPPORTUNITY

SPIEGEL TV wanted to modernize and reach a younger audience, while still maintaining the brand's values and integrity. Their team recognized the opportunity to leverage archival content from their news magazine and television channels and translate these into digital video formats that followed YouTube best practices.

APPROACH

SPIEGEL TV experimented with digital video formats to help reach younger audiences, testing and learning as they went, then pivoting when needed.

Testing pilot videos on target audience: SPIEGEL TV created four videos (purely for testing purposes), where a presenter and a journalist talked about different archival articles from the news magazine, DER SPIEGEL. They showed the test videos to random shoppers in the street, and also invited two focus groups of their target audience to provide feedback. This helped them better understand the content and visuals that worked, as well as finetune their target demographic.

Leaning into analytics: In addition to these live tests, SPIEGEL TV also used analytics to gain insights into what target audiences responded to. They looked at audience retention, click-through rates, and audience responses to images, topics, and presenters. Based on these findings, SPIEGEL TV clarified concept and format, identified topics to pursue, and determined overall digital video approach.

Developing an ongoing workflow: For the first phase of videos, SPIEGEL TV used a production approach similar to the one they use for their TV documentaries. But over time they adopted a faster, cheaper, and more flexible production workflow (e.g., they worked with video journalists instead of TV camera teams and used smaller, more agile TV equipment). For post-production, they adopted a new editing program and hired an intern, to allow for a faster and more flexible editing process.

Revising concepts: After 10 episodes, SPIEGEL TV's new YouTube format still wasn't performing as well as their traditional documentary content. The team brainstormed and revised the concept using the learnings they had acquired. They involved the heads of the documentary department, who shared important insights about visual storytelling that the SPIEGEL TV team incorporated into the second phase of their series.

Looking to the future: YouTube has become an important channel of distribution for the whole SPIEGEL organization in engaging younger audiences, and they plan to increase publication and distribution of bespoke YouTube content. Moving forward, they will continue to uncover new strategies for growing their audience.

RESULTS

By taking a test-and-learn approach, SPIEGEL TV were able to incorporate critical learnings into the development of their digital video series and drive views. They saw a **880% increase** in average views per video between the first and second phase of the project.

LEARNINGS

Use analytics to help you make decisions: Don't shy away from analytic insights. For every piece of content you publish, look at things like engagement, watch time, likes, and shares to understand what audiences are responding to (and what they're not!), then apply these learnings as you move forward. Your content will improve and audience retention will increase, helping your channel grow.

Test and learn until you get it right: It's important to approach every new piece of content with an open mind. If the content doesn't perform as well as you hoped, then rethink your concept. The smartest thing you can do is uncover what's working early on. For example, SPIEGEL TV found that: shooting footage at a variety of locations (including outdoors) drove more engagement than footage shot entirely in the studio or at a single location; blending archival video footage with bespoke YouTube content performed well; over-produced and glossy videos didn't perform as well as those that looked and felt more real. They also realised that while their journalistic archives were immensely valuable, they needed to let the YouTube community's interest guide which archival stories they chose to develop.

Dare to modernize, but stay true to your roots: Updating a traditional brand without diluting its inherent value can be a challenge. YouTube audiences value authenticity, so rather than completely reinventing your content, see what has worked for you in the past and try to leverage it. Combining what works well already with an openness to incorporate YouTube-specific elements will allow you to experiment while retaining your authenticity.

“ Before the GNI YouTube Innovation Funding, we only uploaded archive footage videos or video content adapted from other channels (e.g., clipping from linear broadcast). Today, we know how to create and upload video content that is aimed at a YouTube audience. ”