

# Are Digital Clips PR's New Frontier? Yahoo Comms Director Dugan Dishes on What's Hot in Web Video—and Details PR's Emerging Role in Online Branding

*This week's spotlight: Nicki Dugan, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Yahoo  
by Brian Pittman*

If “click here to play” is a foreign phrase to you, you're in a rapidly shrinking minority. Web video is here—and in a big way. Even Hollywood's jumping on board, with studios like Sony striking deals to provide titles such as “The Legend of Zorro” to Internet video-on-demand services.

Proving the tipping point has been reached, Microsoft joined the digital fray and launched its Soapbox on MSN Video service last week. The service lets users watch and post online video, and is the latest offering in a busy (and increasingly lucrative) online search and sharing market already dominated by the likes of Yahoo, Google and new media wunderkind YouTube, which has attracted over 30 million users to date.

So what does Microsoft's late entry to the web-ready video mean to the market and the rest of us—and what do the new technologies, trends and media consumption behaviors we're seeing across the Internet these days mean to communicators and PR practitioners seeking to reach their publics directly? **Nicki Dugan**, senior director of corporate communications at **Yahoo** offers her take—along with a few insightful content and production tips for brands seeking exposure on the Internet's “sliver” screen:

## **What's your reaction to Microsoft's announcement?**

From Yahoo's perspective, it's a further validation that online video is everywhere. There were other similar announcements recently, including Amazon and Apple's getting into digital video—they both partnered with studios to provide online video content. There's also Apple's video iPod that lets you download feature movies. With studios getting into digital distribution, you're now seeing this have an impact at the furthest end of the spectrum.

## **What qualifies as the “closest end” of the spectrum?**

It's the whole “novice video” movement, which includes the material you see on YouTube—people shooting home digital video with cats on camera and so on. So there's been a lot happening this month that points to the fact that online video content has become ubiquitous. Digital video is proliferating and becoming more popular—both in terms of user-generated content to professionally produced content.

## **How does Yahoo fit into this—what are you bringing to the picture, so to speak?**

Yahoo has been on the forefront of this all along. We're focused on everything from providing access to online video through our search—you can use us to find content like you would on YouTube and smaller sites—to allowing people to upload and share video directly through Yahoo.

## **What do these developments suggest for PR?**

It means that video is becoming something that is in great user demand. There's a strong appetite out there for online video content. So this is one more channel available to PR to make brands known to consumers. It's been said before, but this puts PR in the role of content generators. It requires that PR people put a different lens on the content we create.

For example, it casts new light on the traditional products video that PR used to put out for news entities—things like VNRs, which may have fallen out of practice over the past five years. It also forces us to revisit standard B-roll, which basically provided the rough ingredients for TV producers to pull together a package.

## **Does that mean VNRs and B-roll don't have a place in the online video revolution?**

Not at all. It just means that the traditional content we used to create doesn't hold that much interest to people online. For example, a VNR won't be interesting to consumer audiences. It will feel like a newscast. These days, you can dis-intermediate the newscaster and go direct to the audience.

So this requires more creativity to create fully-baked video products because they're now intended for consumers, not producers. Packaging needs to appeal to the masses, from intros to outros. On that note, B-roll can still be effective because they include the rough ingredients, visuals and slates that we can now use to produce our own packaged pieces online.

## **So how to PR practitioners break into online video?**

For starters, you have to ask yourself what your strategy is going to be. Why do you want to get into this, and what forums are best suited to meet your goals? For example, is your web video going to be something you run on your career site—like an office or campus tour? Is it something you want to get passed around on YouTube? Is it going to be a video for analysts?

There are a lot of different approaches, but they depend on what you want out of this. So you have to decide the goal, the audience and the tone upfront. You need to determine what will resonate best with your end user, not the people in the C-suite.

## **What makes for content consumers will want to watch?**

Again, it depends on your goal. But another way to start is to ask yourself if you have content you can repurpose. Do you have, for example, B-roll that can be posted online and repacked as a complete piece? One of our more popular online videos did that. It was a tour of our campus here.

Nothing kills a video like boring, over-produced material. So what doesn't work with online video is something that seems too self serving or corporate. So we presented a campus tour that was shown in the first person, with the viewer being the visitor. It started with a guy in a cab asking, "So you want to go to Yahoo?" The shots then went into the building. In that way, it was interactive, and not just a pastiche of shots.

The lesson is that you need to give viewers a personalized experience, not a voice speaking from on high. Look online and you'll see that the most successful videos are not

over staged. They're fun to watch and include visual elements, like our ever-present Y-bang, which is the logo.

### **What production tips can you share with readers?**

If you mean things like technical specifications, there is a limit of 100 MB for Yahoo Video. That's pretty much standard online, including YouTube. And don't shoot in HDV. When we were shooting the tour, we ended up with a two-GB file. That had to be edited down to work. You can also compress files.

### **What's your process for producing compelling online video?**

It comes down to this: plan, plan and then produce. You have to make sure that your final product reflects the brand appropriately. Again, that involves determining the goal, audience and tone first. Then before I get to a set, I can come up with my set list so I know what we need to get to direct the camera man.

If I had to phrase that as a tip it would be this: Know your visual elements. Do they include cubes, tchotchkes, or even an aerial shot? You also need to consider music and how it fits into the tempo you want. For our campus video, those were the must-haves, so start with that. Then you need to line up each person to interview and come up with a list of questions. If you're working with executives at your company, that can be challenging because they have very little time and you need a certain amount of flexibility on the shoot.

### **Can you give our readers some low-cost, DIY suggestions for getting started?**

If you're doing this on a limited budget with limited time and resources, you can go in with a minimum of a camera man and a producer. And this is important: Don't reshoot. Otherwise, costs can escalate. Beyond that, the types of video that get pushed on YouTube or on blogs can be shot on a handheld DV cam and imported into a desktop application like Apple's iMovies.

That might seem primitive to PR people who are used to heavily produced VNRs—but remember: This is what's getting attention online, and it's what started the whole phenomenon. Do-it-yourself production values translate well to what consumers expect and want online right now. Anything else risks coming across like an ad, and people don't want that. They can already get that by turning on the TV.

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