

## DoYouYouTube

2115 words

1. YouTube allows you to show, not just tell, brides about your store.
2. Create a video that educates, as well as entertains, potential brides.
3. YouTube is free advertising that's viewed by millions of people worldwide.
4. YouTube is extremely user-friendly; a technology background isn't needed.

### Do You YouTube?

It might be one of the best new ways to spread the word about your store.

By Katie Roberts

As a storeowner, you're always on the lookout for inexpensive yet effective ways to market your business. Thanks to the Internet, some of the hottest promotional trends - e.g., blogs, message boards and community sites like Facebook and MySpace - are right at your fingertips, found in the virtual realm of the World Wide Web.

Not only can these online tools be pretty cheap (typically free!), but some also have the potential to be powerful.

Heard of YouTube? Chances are, you know something about it, but maybe you haven't yet visited the site and considered what it could do for your store. In short, YouTube.com is video-sharing Web site where users can upload, view and share video clips with each other.

Here, you can broadcast video clips about your shop and its professional expertise to the masses - and do so for a price you'll probably appreciate: free! Below, VOWS: takes an in-depth look at this relatively new marketing tool, exploring the pros, cons and possibilities.

### All About YouTube: What Can It Do For You?

YouTube began in mid-February 2005 when its founders shot some dinner party video and then discovered there was no way to share the large files online without compressing them first. So they created a medium that made uploading video easy and could handle thousands of big files. Today, that medium is YouTube.com, which Google purchased in 2006 from the site's original owners, not even a year after its official online debut.

YouTube is a hotspot of worldwide activity with people and companies posting videos on anything and everything. Tapping into the audiences of avid YouTube users, wedding industry professionals are discovering this is one way to gain face time with engaged couples and prom-bound teens.

"From what we're seeing on the site, there's a great number of retailers engaging the community in interesting ways," says Spencer Crooks, a YouTube spokesperson. "Across the board, many retailers and companies are having great success on YouTube," and this success is consistent

## DoYouYouTube

among small and large retailers within the bridal and prom industries as well.

For instance, a quick YouTube search for "prom store" or "bridal store" pulls up hundreds of videos. Scroll through the list and you'll see an extensive menu of video clips, varying in style, length and quality, that fall into genres such as: business commercials uploaded by manufacturers and retailers; TV segments and online magazine spots shot in bridal stores; designer and high school fashion shows; advertorial pieces, such as store tours; clips on fundraisers sponsored by designers and retailers; documentaries; and how-to videos demonstrating everything from prom hair updos to picking out the perfect wedding dress.

In fact, YouTube's "How to & Style" section, located under the site's "video" tab and packed with advice and demonstrations on all things prom and bridal, is probably the best avenue for those of you who are trying to connect with potential customers.

That's because people are turning to YouTube not only to be entertained but also be educated and take away something of value, Crooks says. Given this, the on-camera opportunities to demonstrate quality service and expertise are endless, and don't have to be particularly complicated.

When Crooks recalls the videos that have been really successful, he talks a lot about cooking videos, which have built huge audiences because of their helpful, honest approach.

"On YouTube, people generally don't like feeling like they're watching a commercial," Crooks says. "They want something that's genuine, like when you talk directly into a camera and make it very personal."

In addition, the more videos you upload, the better, he says. Your consistent presence can eventually build an audience of regular viewers, or a video community, which then looks to you for regular advice. This means that through YouTube, there's the potential to become a trusted resource. And to brides and prom shoppers, who are dishing out lots of dough, building relationships of trust are key.

YouTube is also interactive, so the community of viewers can give you feedback on your video and even rank others' feedback. From the comments, you can receive tips and insight on anything and everything, so be prepared for that. But the input can also help you make business decisions or serve as a sounding board; it's up to you to decide if what you learn is of value.

Of note, when feedback is ranked below a certain level, or is of a certain nature, this can result in your video being yanked. For this reason, YouTube polices the site pretty heavily.

Looking at the Costs and Effort:  
Is YouTube Time-Worthy?

There are certain types of advertising approaches you must have. For instance, if you're going to reach brides and teens, there's no question you need to have an online presence. Not having a Web site is like not listing your store in the Yellow Pages. If potential customers don't see you in either place, they think you don't exist.

However, promoting your store or expertise via a YouTube video is not a must-have marketing tool - at least not yet. Nevertheless, it does offer value, especially when you consider the relatively low

## DoYouYouTube

costs.

Kimberly Miller, the new owner of The Wedding Bell in Spokane, Wash., is one retailer who took advantage of YouTube when she decided to relocate the bridal store.

"The Wedding Bell has been in business for almost 64 years and has a great history," Miller says. "I was a little scared to move the business. I wanted something that would help create buzz about our business and its new location."

When a videographer walked through the front door and offered to shoot The Wedding Bell's grand opening, Miller felt like this was the perfect opportunity to document the history of the business, as well as capture its new, present-day appeal.

Since then, customers have commented that they've seen the video, and through it, they've gotten a taste for the store's personality before officially becoming customers. Plus, posting the video simply made sense to Miller, who says the Internet and sites like YouTube provide progressive promotional opportunities. The YouTube video also proved much more financially feasible than shooting a traditional commercial and buying spots with local TV stations.

Just how costly is YouTube? Uploading and using the site is free, and your videos have the potential to be viewed by millions. But as to the price of creating the perfect video, it depends on how you go about it.

You can spend hundreds or thousands of dollars hiring a high-end camera crew to direct, shoot, edit and produce a commercial. Or you can save money by bartering with a wedding videographer and promoting his/her services in exchange for the work.

You might also be able to recruit some nearby high school or college students who are looking for a project in exchange for a grade. These "kids" sometimes really know what they're doing and might surprise you with their level of professionalism. They also know the market - what other teens or young adults want to see on YouTube - and can provide great video topics or scripts.

Another idea is to look within your staff and see who might have the talent to produce a video for your store. Keep in mind you'll be taking this person off the floor to do the work, so give that person a timeline to finish and don't delegate this project during your busiest season.

If you're creating your video in grass-roots fashion, you'll need a digital camera that shoots video, editing software and online access (a computer linked to the Internet) to upload the video. If you don't have editing software, you can find it at your local computer or office supply store. Keep in mind, most cameras come with some basic editing software these days, so if you have a digital camera or access to one, check to see if these programs are included.

If you're shooting TV commercials, consider uploading them to YouTube. That way, you can link them to your Web site and raise your visibility in search engines.

That's exactly what Lori Roggero, owner of The Perfect Dress in Fort Wayne, Ind., is doing. Like any marketing tool, she's getting as much leverage as possible out of her commercial.

"I strongly feel that being consistent in the way your business is portrayed is vital," she says. "A homemade type of video would not be agreeable for my type of store. This commercial was shot for the purpose of airing on television but now has served a dual purpose."

## DoYouYouTube

Echoing that sentiment is Kevin Harrison, CEO of My Wedding Hero, LLC, which offers online wedding planning software through its Web site [www.myweddinghero.com](http://www.myweddinghero.com). Harrison and his staff create numerous wedding-planning videos, some of which are filmed within bridal stores and have done very well within the YouTube community. According to Harrison, retailers should focus on the integrity of the video and the image they're projecting. It doesn't matter if you're shooting a commercial or "how-to" video - it's the promotion's quality that counts, he says.

"When a bride sees your video, she will make a decision about whether she wants to do business with you or not," he says. "If your video looks cheap or amateurish, you will have to do some pretty strong convincing to get her to do business with you (a.k.a - offer really low prices)."

Whether you hire a camera crew to do the job for you or recruit someone you know who has the skills, the final product should speak to your professionalism and accurately reflect your store, its product and your services.

### The YouTube Addiction: What's the Big Deal?

If you're someone who shies away from technology, you might be surprised to learn how user-friendly YouTube is. And it's this quality that makes the Web site so addictive and fun. Watch one video, and then next thing you know, an hour has passed and you've watched another 10.

Considering the extremely visual nature of bridal and prom retail, this means YouTube is a prime opportunity for the "showing," not just "telling," brides about your business. And given technology today, this opens up the number of people you can communicate with and creates real communities where previously there were none, Harrison says.

"I have our video on my iPhone and have shown people when we are out to dinner at a restaurant or hanging on the sidelines at a football practice," he says. "The great thing about video is it's not really something new. (YouTube) is just a new way of getting the video to the brides."

Harrison continues, "One thing that was surprising was the number of other wedding vendors who responded to our video - there were many positive comments and replies, which have led us to some great new business relationships."

Equally positive is that YouTube is not going away, and neither are the growing numbers of brides and prom-goers who will use this as a way to learn more about your business.

"I think sites such as YouTube, which make it easy for brides-to-be to get access to new and exciting information, is going to grow by leaps and bounds," Harrison says. "Video is only just beginning to spread through the Internet and will totally change how we communicate in the future. Features available today let brides comment on a video or forward it to a friend. Stop and think for a moment how powerful that is."

Bottom line, word-of-mouth is your number-one marketing tool, and YouTube has the potential to help bolster that impact. But in order to make that marketing work for you, you've got to be proactive about trying out this new technology. Depending on your level of commitment, YouTube could work wonders for you.

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As Easy as 1, 2, 3!

Think making a YouTube video is hard? With the right equipment and effort, you can do it in no time! Here are five simple steps:

- 1) Shoot your movie with a digital camera. Given that you're promoting a business, don't mess around with web cams or cell phone video.
- 2) Edit the movie. (Hint: Mac's Imovie or Windows' Movie Maker are great, user-friendly programs). Have fun but avoid going overboard with side effects.
- 3) Size the video for YouTube viewing. Ideally, you want it to be 340 x 240 resolution for QuickTime's .MOV files, Windows'.AVI or .MPG files. For a 10-minute video, your file should be 100MB.
- 4) Join the YouTube community by creating an account, then upload your video.
- 5) Give your video a way to be located easily in searches. Do this with a good title, description, the right category, etc.

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