

## Business News

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### Setting Strategy | Using video can give small businesses a bigger presence

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Chris Marks wants the videos promoting his barbecue equipment business to be so authentic that customers can almost feel the heat and smell the smoke.

“I believe in technology, and the use of video adds value for the customer,” said Marks, general manager of Ace of Hearts BBQ Specialties in North Kansas City, which sells smokers online. “We get phone calls from all over the world, and the first thing people usually say is, ‘We love your Web site.’ Nobody else selling barbecue smokers has a Web site quite like ours.”

And nobody would suspect that the company is run by a staff of five rather than a large corporation. A human, video-powered guide grabs the attention of visitors at first click and introduces them to the site and the product, Good-One Smokers. Even the product use manual is presented as a short video on the site.

“We may be a small company,” Marks said, “but using video on our Web site gives us a face and enables us to present a professional image.”

Ace of Hearts BBQ and other small businesses are finding that video can be a cost-effective way to communicate in a tech-savvy world.

“We are a video society now,” said Dan Cooper, chief operating officer of Ej4 in Overland Park. “We typically have 11 minutes between interruptions in the workplace and seven minutes between commercials on television. People are used to brief, engaging messages. Smaller businesses are nimbler and able to use video in sales, Web sites and other communications.”

An effective video immediately communicates a company’s image and values, said Lori Baerg, owner of Prizm Productions in Kansas City.

“Your Web site is your window to the world,” she said. “It determines the way people see your business, so you need to use it the right way.”

The entry point for many small businesses is an introductory video on their Web site, Cooper said. Regularly updated videos give visitors a reason to keep coming back.

Potential uses for video can be as varied as the businesses that create them, said **Angie Lile, president of LifeStyle Productions in Kansas City.**

“One of our clients is a massage therapist who posts monthly tips by video,” she said. “She has attracted a following of people who visit her site each month. Another client makes wigs and wanted to produce a how-to video showing how to put them on.”

Businesses can leverage the effect of videos by posting them on social media sites. Marks, for example, posts videos of many of the barbecue classes he conducts across the nation.

“YouTube has been really big for us,” he said.

Video also can be an efficient way to reach internal audiences, such as sales representatives, said Cooper at Ej4.

His company recently introduced a software application that enables businesses to quickly produce professional-looking videos and distribute them electronically.

“Video is becoming like PowerPoint used to be,” Cooper said. “It used to be that one person in the company made all of the PowerPoints, but now everyone makes their own.”

Prizm also offers proprietary technology for its small-business clients.

Marks uses Prizm’s Human Host and its Electronic Video Messaging delivery service.

“We use Prizm for the high-end video for our Web site,” Marks said. “But my son, Christopher, does all of the taping and editing for our YouTube videos, where you want more of a grassroots feel. It takes a bit of time, but it’s not that hard to figure out how to do it.”

The trick is understanding where to cut corners — and where not to, Baerg said.

“Anyone can do it,” she said. “The really big catch is that if you are trying to build brand awareness and identity, you can’t just pick up a camera and do it yourself.

“Another pitfall is the quality of the streaming video for online media. Be careful in the selection of the professional team that you use.”

For Marks, it doesn’t have to be an either-or decision.

“I recommend professional production for your Web site,” he said. “For viral videos on YouTube or elsewhere, you can buy a camera, software and book on how to make a YouTube video.”

As technology advances and prices come down, a small business potentially can make as big of a splash as a Fortune 500 company.

“Video has really leveled the playing field for us,” Marks said.

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### **Lights, camera, action**

Interested in using video to promote your business? Lori Baerg, owner of Prizm Productions, makes these recommendations about selecting a production company:

#### **DO THIS ...**

- Make sure the firm understands small business.
- Do your research, ask for references and get to know the personality of the production company.

## NOT THIS ...

- Don't get a quote on a finished-minute rate. You probably don't know how long the video will need to be, and charges for additional production can be expensive.
- Don't accept a company's word that they have experience with online videos unless you have seen examples of their work.

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