Best Practices

So far, I have shared why your library needs to make videos. I have also shared what types of video can work well in a library setting. There are a lot of video-creation best practices that will help you make an awesome video, and we will explore these practices in this chapter.

Best practices covered here include

- the basics
- video placement
- video style
- video content
- content around the video
- video length
- when and how often to post
- where to post
- social media channel best practices
- telling a story

The Basics

Let's start with the basics that will improve your videos.

Lighting

When making videos, you have two best friends. One of them is lighting (see figure 3.1). If you can't clearly see the subject, the video will be much harder to watch and will look unprofessional. Thankfully, there are some really easy ways to maximize lighting. These options range from free, to cheap, to not quite so cheap.

A simple lighting solution is to make the video outside. Stand in the sun and have your subject face

Figure 3.1
Using lights during a video shoot.

toward the light source. Voila! The subject will be well lit. If you need to make the video inside, find some bright lights or a window source for light and set up in the same way. If you have the budget, you can also visit your local hardware store and buy some cheap shop lights. Get some daylight or natural light bulbs, and then aim the lights at your video subject.

One step up from shop lights are actual video lighting setups. These range from inexpensive to pricey. Start out with a couple of LED video lights and see if they work for you. I will give specific examples of lights to buy in the following chapter.

Audio

Your other video best friend is audio. The sound on your video is possibly even more important than lighting. Most likely, the information you share in a video is spoken, so the audio (i.e., your voice) needs to be clearly heard.

You have a few options to improve audio. For starters, when shooting your video, get as close to the source as possible. For example, if you are recording someone talking, place yourself four to five feet away from the person instead of ten to twelve feet away. This will help you capture clear audio. When it's time to edit the video, make sure to boost the audio volume a bit.

Also make sure your video subject speaks clearly— no quiet voices or mumbling! Your other option is to buy a microphone for your video camera. There are fairly inexpensive microphone options that will help make your video subject sound a lot better. We'll look at specific examples of microphones in the equipment chapter.

Rule of Thirds

You can find out more about the Rule of Thirds in most books on video production or photography (see figure 3.2). But the gist of the rule is this: don't place the video subject in the center of the screen. Instead, move the subject toward one side, so the subject fills one-third of the screen.

If you are recording movement, have the movement start either in that one-third spot, or even off screen, and headed toward the middle to fill empty space, rather than quickly going off screen. Doing this makes your video more interesting to watch.

Talk to the Camera

Think of the camera lens as the person you are talking to. When you are making a video, make sure to look directly at the camera lens and direct your conversation to the camera (rather than another person in the room). Doing this will make your video look like you are talking to the person watching the video.

Stay Steady

Your video should not be shaky; a shaky video makes viewers nauseous. There are a few options to help you hold the camera steady. For example, your camera's recording software might include a stabilization option. That often works well.

You can also use a tripod or a handheld stabilizer. If nothing else, brace your elbows on your chest or on another object (e.g., lean on a railing or desk). That will help your camera remain steady.
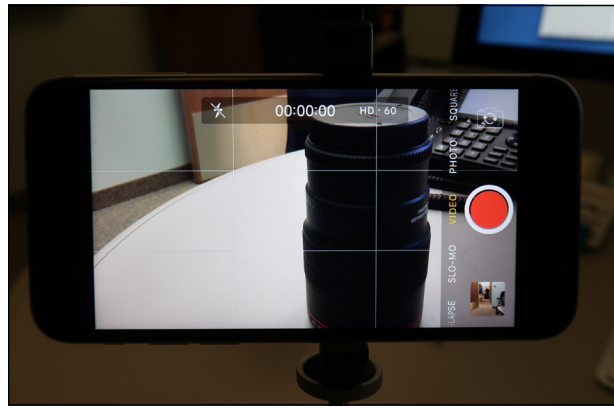
Figure 3.2
Rule of Thirds on camera screen.

Here is a quick editing tip: when recording a video, make sure to pause for five to ten seconds after you start recording, and include some extra time before you stop recording. This provides an easy place to trim your video during editing time. Also, if you do a lot of starts and stops, make sure to leave enough space to delete those pauses without making the subject seem to shift. You'll be glad you left space when it's time to edit the video.

Video Placement

Here are two quick tips related to placing video on your library or organization's website.

- **Post the video above the fold.** Yes, this is still important. If you really want busy people to see your video, you need to get it in front of them. An easy way to do this is to place the video "above the fold" on your website.

  Make sure it shows on the top of the screen of an average computer. For example, make sure to place the video first in a blog post, and at the top of a page describing a service, rather than at the bottom of the page.
- **Post the video on your website!** For some reason, some people go to a lot of trouble making a video, upload it to YouTube . . . and never post the video on the library website or on its other social media channels, like Facebook or Twitter. Don't be those libraries! Make sure to post your video on your website (see figure 3.3) and anywhere else your library customers might be likely to see it.

Video Style

Here are a couple of quick tips on how to make your video stand out.
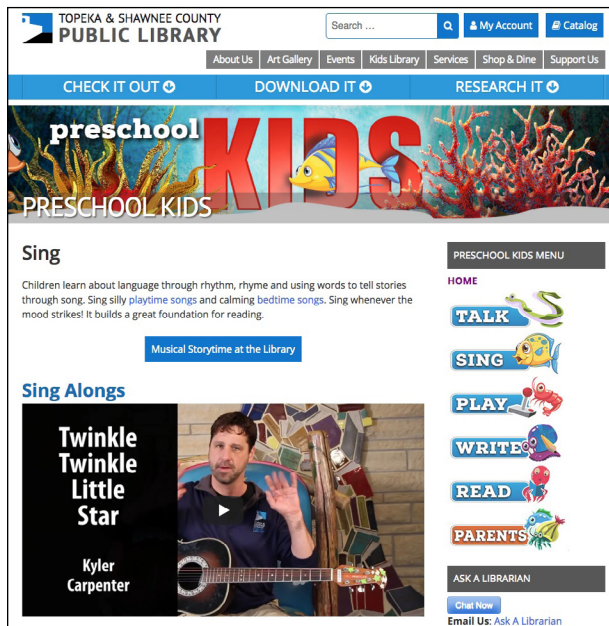
Figure 3.3
Screenshot of video on Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library's website.

People First

Focus on people (unless you are shooting a landscape video). People like to watch people, so make sure that's what your video features.[1]

Tell Your Story with and without Sound

You should definitely talk and tell your story (whatever your video is about) using sound. But can you also tell that story without words? Make sure your video makes sense without sound.

I'm not talking about using captions (though that's good); I'm talking about the actual video. Make sure what people see when they watch the video relates to the content of the video.[2]

Video Content

Now let's focus on the content in the video itself.

Calls to Action (CTAs)

A call to action, or a CTA, is asking people to do something. The request can be as simple as asking people to make a comment, subscribe to a video channel, or share a video with friends. The CTA can also be library-specific, like checking something out, attending a program, or visiting the bookmobile.

Always include a CTA in your videos. After someone watches your video, what do you want that person to do? Make sure to include those directions or that

request, very clearly, in your video, preferably close to the beginning. Also place a short reminder about the CTA at the end of the video.

Repurpose Popular Blog Posts

Having a hard time coming up with ideas for video content? If you have a blog, make a short video about each of your blog posts. Or when creating the blog post, also make a video version of that post. That will help extend the reach of the content you are trying to share with customers.[3]

Create Videos for Each of Your Products

Do libraries have products? Sure we do! Classes and events at the library are products that we can "sell" to the public. We can consider our book collections as products we want to move off the shelves.

How do you sell the library's collection in a video? You can illustrate how to use the catalog to check out a book or share the benefits of reading the book. You can share the features of a new service. This will highlight the new offering or service and will help to sell that product to your customers.[4]

Don't Be Boring

I know that "Don't be boring" is easier said than done! Make sure to have fun when you are creating a video, and that energy will come through, making you (and your library) seem positive and likeable.

Content around the Video

There's also content that surrounds video.

Title Correctly

Video titles are very important. YouTube focuses searches on titles and descriptions in your video, so these need to be accurate. To adequately title your video, use a journalistic approach rather than a cutesy approach. Think like a newspaper and create descriptive five- to six-word titles. Figure 3.4 showcases examples of good video titles.

Video Complements Other Forms of Content

Often, your video can stand alone. But if you want to post the video on your blog or website or in social media, you will need other content to surround your video. Plan ahead and surround your video with an article or blog post describing the video content. In the accompanying article, you can include a list of links that point to more resources.[5]

Tags and Descriptions

In YouTube, you can add a video description and relevant tags along with the video. Your video description should succinctly describe what viewers will see when they watch the video. You can also include links in the video description.

Make sure to point to your library and other relevant social media accounts in your video and in your tags.

Video Length

Keep It Short

There are two things to remember regarding video length. The first is to simply keep that video short! A good rule of thumb is to keep your video under two minutes in length. If it's short, people are more likely to watch the entire video.[6]

Figure 3.4
Examples of good video titles.

As Long as Needed

The second rule is that video length is less important than telling a cohesive and concise story. Your video shouldn't be longer or shorter than the amount of time needed to tell your story well, so make sure to create something that captures your viewers' attention so they watch the full video.[7]

First Ten Seconds

The first ten seconds are the most important part of your video. If it's not interesting, people will click over to the next video, and your video won't be watched. Make sure to quickly get to the point.

Remember, we aren't making feature movies, so your video doesn't need credits, a title, and a fancy fade-in with music. Instead, start by sharing the most important part of your video content first.[8]
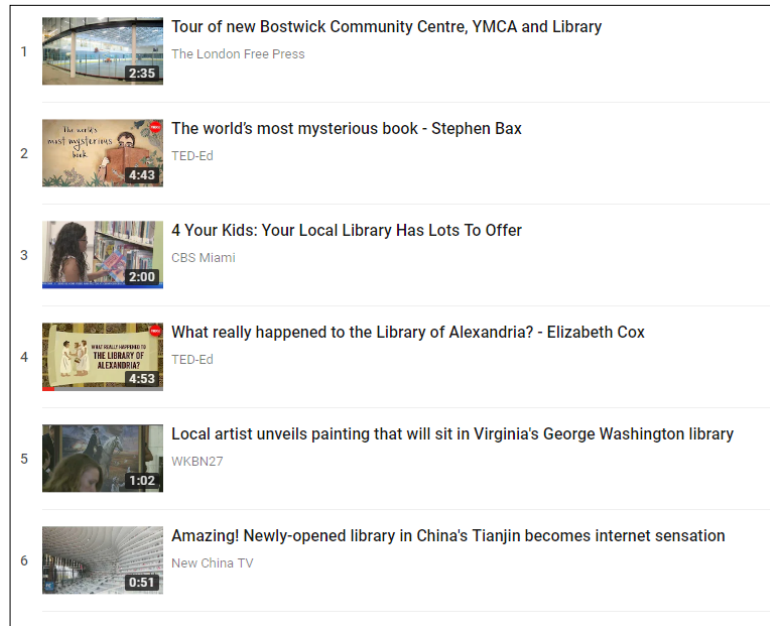
When and How Often to Post

Post Regularly

The only way to consistently grow your video channel and your video viewership is to consistently post video content. Create a schedule, plan out the next couple of months of content, and stick to that schedule.

Use an Editorial Calendar

If you want to take your posting schedule to the next level, create an editorial calendar for your video content. An editorial calendar can show dates and times when you want to post video.

It can also be a great reminder of themes. For example, you might have a video series named *Maker Mondays* so you'll know that you are posting maker content every Monday. Setting this type of calendar can help you organize, plan, and schedule your videos so they align with the library's business goals and are consistent.[9]

Where to Post

I've already shared that you should post your video to your website. Where else can you post?

Use Multiple Channels

Post your video in multiple places, like YouTube and your library's website. Share the video in your other social media channels. That might mean editing your video to fit Instagram's current one minute or less video length (this will possibly be changing in the near future). If you do this, point to a longer version of the video using Instagram's Profile URL.

Include Videos in Your Email Content

Does your library have an e-newsletter? If so, by all means make sure to share your videos there. Be sure to put the word *Video* in the subject line, as well.[10]
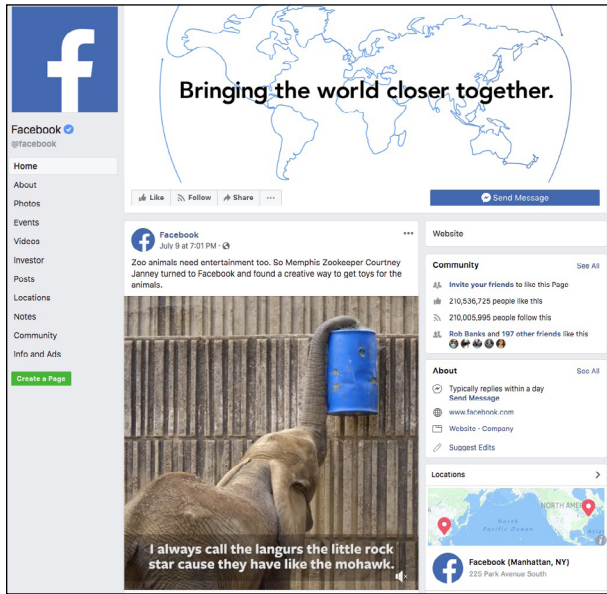
Figure 3.5
Square video on Facebook.

Multiple Platforms

When using multiple channels for your video, you should also upload the video file in multiple places. For example, if you want your video to appear in both YouTube and Facebook, you should upload a separate video file to Facebook. Facebook's algorithm favors Facebook-native video (video files uploaded to Facebook), so a video that is natively uploaded to Facebook will be viewed more than a YouTube video that's embedded and shared within a Facebook post.

Social Media Channel Best Practices

Now let's focus on some best practices for specific social media channels because each one is slightly different when it comes to video.

Facebook

USE "SQUARE" OR 1:1 FORMAT

Studies show that videos using the square 1:1 aspect ratio outperform landscape video formats by 30 to 35 percent. This makes sense because currently the majority of people watching videos in Facebook use a smartphone app. On a smartphone, a square video will fill up more of the screen than a standard widescreen-formatted video does (see figure 3.5).[11]

ADD CAPTIONS TO YOUR VIDEO

On Facebook, 85 percent of videos are viewed without sound. So use captions. Since videos on Facebook

autoplay with the sound off, it's important to make sure your video holds the viewer's interest, even when the audio is muted.[12]

MAKE THE FIRST THREE SECONDS COUNT

Facebook's Autoplay feature counts three seconds as a "view." Because of this, you want to make those first three seconds engaging and visual so people click the play button and watch at least a little clip of your video.[13]

USE HIGHER RESOLUTIONS

Higher-resolution videos (i.e., 1080p HD) tend to get more video views than lower-quality resolutions. This makes sense because people would rather watch a clear video than a grainy, pixelated video.[14]

WRITE A COMPELLING HEADLINE

Facebook Live videos have titles and short descriptions that accompany the live video. Because of this, you should write headlines and descriptions in such a way that they are interesting enough for people to click the play button.[15]

YouTube

ADD CAPTIONS TO YOUR VIDEO

Captions also work well for YouTube videos. More YouTube videos are starting to be watched via the YouTube mobile app, and these videos are probably viewed first with the sound off. YouTube videos may see 40 percent more views when captions or subtitles are included in the video.[16]

MAKE THE FIRST THREE TO TEN SECONDS COUNT

Of viewers, 20 to 25 percent will watch less than ten seconds of your video. YouTube places related videos in front of viewers, and they can easily choose a different video. So those first ten seconds need to be compelling.

That's why I say to start right in with the main content of your video, or at least do a quick summary of the video's focus.[17]

USE ROBUST VIDEO DESCRIPTIONS AND TAGGING

YouTube is a search engine (the second most popular search engine in the world, second only to Google—which also owns YouTube). Because of this, you want to use clear, descriptive titles for your videos and complete the video description.

That added information helps your video get discovered when people search YouTube. Since YouTube
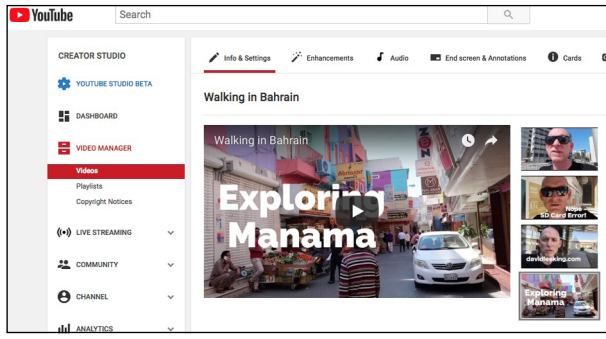
Figure 3.6
Example of a custom thumbnail image on YouTube.

is owned by Google, it also helps your video show up in Google searches.[18]

USE KEYWORDS

Keywords are similar to titles and descriptions for your video. You need to make sure your keywords, or tags, are descriptive. These will help people discover your videos.[19] For example, if you make a storytime video, tag the video with keywords like *storytime, toddler, story,* and *kids*.

CREATE CUSTOM THUMBNAILS

You have the option of allowing YouTube to automatically choose a thumbnail image for your video. You can also create and use a custom thumbnail image. I suggest using a custom thumbnail image (see figure 3.6).

When done well, a custom thumbnail can make the video more engaging by showing a person, and a nice, large video title page if needed. Over time, you can create a custom thumbnail style for consistency and viewer recognition.

USE END SCREENS

YouTube channels have some unique links to other videos and channels, called end screens (see figure 3.7). End screens allow you to link to other YouTube videos, playlists, and channels. Add about ten to twenty seconds of space at the end of your video, and add some end screens that point to another one of your videos and a Subscribe button.

USE THE PROFILE PAGE

YouTube channels have a profile page. Fill it out! On your library's profile page, describe who you are (e.g., a public library) and create links to your library's website and social media channels.
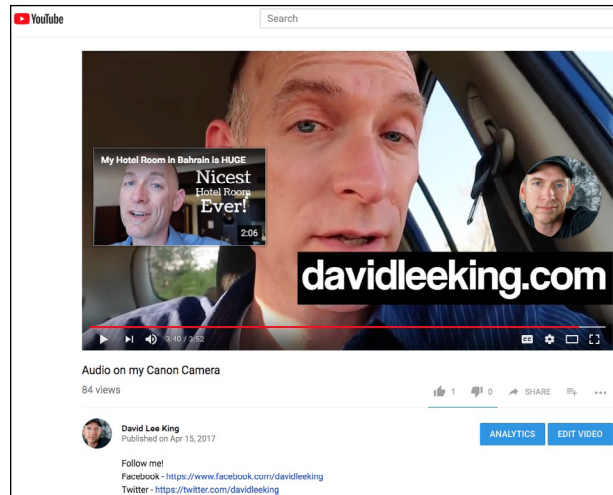
Figure 3.7
End screens on a YouTube video.

Instagram

Instagram is a new up-and-coming video platform. At the moment, Instagram allows videos of up to one minute in length. As of this writing, it looks like Instagram is planning to add long-form videos (up to one hour in length).

That will be a big change and will be seen as direct competition with YouTube. Here are some tips for creating and posting video to Instagram with the current one-minute video length.

USE "SQUARE" OR 1:1 FORMAT

I mentioned using "square" or 1:1 format earlier in the Facebook section. This principle also holds true for Instagram.

THINK "NO SOUND"

Instagram videos start silent; you have to tap the sound icon to hear a video. Make sure your video makes sense with no sound. Provide captions if needed, and also use big, bold visuals that tell a silent story, if possible.

USE HASHTAGS

Posts in Instagram that include one or more hashtags get 12 percent more engagement. Make sure to add one to three hashtags that make sense. Try to find local or slightly more niche hashtags to get more local and authentic engagement. If you use popular hashtags, you will gather a lot of spammy likes and follows.[20]

Telling a Story

Finally, work at telling a good story. That means you need to focus. Tailor your story to your audience. Your library should create videos that focus on what you do as a library and on local content and information.[21]

With social media, people are more likely to pay attention to content that's relevant to their interests. Thankfully, they followed you—which means you already have their attention. They want your content, which is why they clicked that follow button.

Think about making videos unique to different audience segments—maybe even different versions of the same video. For example, if you are showing off your library's new 3-D printer, you might create a couple of videos: (1) a teen-focused video that shows you printing Groot from *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and (2) an adult, entrepreneur-focused video that shows how to print a design concept for a new product.

Notes

1. Margot Mazur, "Tips and Tricks for Optimizing Your Videos for Success," Wistia, May 18, 2018, https://wistia.com/learn/marketing/optimizing-video-success.
2. Facebook Business, "Bring Video Ads to Life: Best Practices for Video Creative on Facebook," July 21, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/business/news/video-ad-best-practices.
3. Mike Templeman, "17 Stats and Facts Every Marketer Should Know about Video Marketing," *Forbes*, September 17, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/miketempleman/2017/09/06/17-stats-about-video-marketing/3/#46c03c6c63b2.
4. Templeman, "17 Stats and Facts Every Marketer Should Know."
5. Flockler, "8 Reasons Why You Should Engage in Video Content Marketing," *Flockler* (blog), July 10, 2017, https://flockler.com/blog/8-reasons-why-you-should-engage-in-video-content-marketing.
6. Ezra Fishman, "How Long Should Your Next Video Be?" *Wistia* (blog), July 5, 2016, https://wistia.com/blog/optimal-video-length.
7. Facebook Business, "Bring Video Ads to Life."
8. Visible Measures, "Benchmarking Viewer Abandonment in Online Video," *Visible Measures* (blog), September 29, 2010, https://www.visiblemeasures.com/2010/09/29/benchmarking-viewer-abandonment-in-online-video/.
9. Templeman, "17 Stats and Facts Every Marketer Should Know."
10. Templeman, "17 Stats and Facts Every Marketer Should Know."
11. Brian Peters, "Square vs. Landscape Video—$1.5K Worth of Experiments: Here's How They Compare," *Buffer Social* (blog), March 22, 2017, https://blog.bufferapp.com/square-video-vs-landscape-video.
12. Peters, "Square vs. Landscape Video."
13. Peters, "Square vs. Landscape Video."
14. Peters, "Square vs. Landscape Video."
15. Peters, "Square vs. Landscape Video."
16. Emily Griffin, "7 Ways Video Transcripts and Captions Improve SEO," *3PlayMedia* (blog), June 14, 2016, last updated May 16, 2018, http://www.3playmedia.com/2016/06/14/7-ways-video-transcripts-captions-improve-seo/.
17. Griffin, "7 Ways Video Transcripts and Captions Improve SEO."
18. Griffin, "7 Ways Video Transcripts and Captions Improve SEO."
19. Griffin, "7 Ways Video Transcripts and Captions Improve SEO."
20. Visible Measures, "Benchmarking Viewer Abandonment in Online Video."
21. Facebook Business, "Bring Video Ads to Life."