



YouTube shifting focus to reward time watched in video rankings

YouTube is changing the way videos are ranked in an attempt to promote more quality content. This month, the YouTube Partners and Creators Blog announced an adjustment to the YouTube search algorithm that moves away from a system rewarding clicks toward one rewarding time spent watching videos. The new algorithm replaces view count with watch time.

This shift in focus began in earnest earlier this year. YouTube has made other modifications aimed at getting people to stay engaged on the site. In March, the company released changes to the Suggested Videos function with the intent of encouraging people to continue watching instead of clicking away after one video. YouTube has also added a watch time statistic to its Analytics tool.

YouTube wants to remain competitive with other video services and cut into the amount of time people spend watching television. In order to do so, it needs to convince people to spend more of their total media watching time online. For years, a video's popularity has been based almost entirely on clicks, leading users to upload misleading or salacious thumbnails just to get them. But this also leads people to quickly click away. And YouTube wants to reduce the rate at which people abandon videos.

What does this mean for attorneys who use videos and YouTube as marketing tools?

Like most other aspects of law firm marketing, it means unique, compelling content is key. YouTube is now rewarding videos that get watched. In order to get your videos ranked higher in search results, people need to spend time with them.

Share a personal story. People using social media, particularly visual social media, make decisions based primarily on emotion. Speak to them in a way that connects. Do you have a story about why you practice in your area of law? Has an issue like special education, Alzheimer's care or workplace injury impacted a family member or friend? If so, speak to that experience. This will help build trust and keep viewers involved with the video.

Focus less on length. In the past, people have been advised to shorten their videos in order to get users to watch a greater percentage of the piece. However, since YouTube is now examining how each video contributes to a longer time spent on site, shorter videos may actually be punished. It is also not a good idea to go the other way and create intentionally long videos. If a longer video cannot fully engage viewers, it will suffer the same fate. The focus must be on content.





Speak about relevant topics. It is likely that your firm does not want suggested videos appearing after a user has watched one of yours. But that does not mean that you cannot take advantage of the suggested videos function by having yours suggested to others. Do not just talk about yourself or the law. Speak to topics related to your area(s) of practice that people will find helpful and interesting.

YouTube will keep attracting videos of hamsters on pianos and cats – well, cats doing just about anything. But it is also trying to position itself as a substantive video source where people spend more time watching useful and entertaining material. Attorneys can and should take advantage of the personal connection that is made possible through video marketing. YouTube remains a good way to get exposure, especially for those who understand how to benefit from these recent changes.

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