

IDEAS

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THE TECH BEAT | BY JAMES HARDING

STARTING ON YOUTUBE

If I offered you a free marketing tool that would not only help you influence thousands of local prospects but would also reduce your after-the-sale costs and increase your customer loyalty, would you use it?

What if I told you that the very same tool has been proven to increase store traffic, improve website performance, and build brand recognition for similar businesses in your area?

It's called YouTube, and it's well past time that you started using it.

Be honest. How long have you been putting off starting a YouTube channel? What's holding you back? Are you afraid to try it because you're not a video expert?

I remember the genuine fear I felt the day I decided to start my first YouTube channel. I didn't know anything about video editing, lighting, camera software or even filming. All I knew was I had a story I wanted to tell for my business, and YouTube was the only place I could afford to tell it. I took a cheap video camera and filmed a few short clips of kids performing at our annual "Halloweekend" recital. I then brought those clips and a



'YouTube might be the single most important marketing tool available to small businesses today.'

few photos into a basic editing program called "Magix Movie Edit Pro."

The result was a pretty terrible one-minute video promoting our Halloween recitals. Only about 100 people ever saw it, but this video

launched my channel. Before long, I was making high-quality videos with good lighting, non-copyrighted music and fancy editing tricks. My audience grew, too. Instead of hundreds of people, tens of thousands of people were now watching my videos.

With no training, no experience, and very few resources, I was able to build a successful YouTube channel for my business, and you can, too. Here are a few quick tips to help you get started:

YOU DON'T NEED A FANCY CAMERA. Most cell phones now film in high definition (HD). If you don't have a digital SLR camera, just use your cellphone.

BUY CHEAP EDITING EQUIPMENT. Purchase basic video editing software. Get one that's affordable and easy to learn. You can always upgrade as your editing skills grow. Also, purchase a basic set of studio lights to give your videos that "professional" look. You can get three "softbox" photography lights and a black, white and green backdrop for around \$150. This will greatly improve the look of your videos.

PLAN A 'RELEASE' SCHEDULE. At first, you might only make one video per month. With time and experience, your frequency may increase, but — whatever you do — keep it consistent and communicate your release schedule to your viewers. Let them know when to expect your next "episode."

ADVERTISE YOUR CHANNEL. Post links to it in your email signature, on your website, and on your Facebook page. You can even host related events — like a jingle contest for local student bands. Make your community a part of your new channel.

YouTube might be the single most important marketing tool available to small businesses today. That's why we're dedicating our first-ever "Tech Beat" series to developing your YouTube presence.

With every video you make, you'll learn new ways to polish your look, build your brand and grow your audience.

Before long, you'll wonder how you ever did business without it. **MI**

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