

How to Become Popular on YouTube (Without Any Talent)

an eBook by Kevin Nalts: career marketer,
self-proclaimed “viral video genius,” and the
author of industry blog, WillVideoForFood.com.



[Kevin Nalts](#) is one of YouTube's least talented "*weblebrities*," with some 20 million views of his more than 550 online videos. He is one of the [most-subscribed comedians on YouTube](#), and his videos routinely rank in the top "highest rated" and "most discussed" lists. You need only watch [several of his videos](#) to know these rankings are *not* due to his video-making abilities alone. Here, the career marketer reveals some "insider secrets" to developing a following on YouTube (and other online-video sites), and getting your videos widely viewed globally. The techniques he shares do not include "tricks" that ultimately undermine a video, but proven strategies that are often not intuitive. To [subscribe to Nalts' videos, please click here](#). To subscribe to his blog, [WillVideoForFood, click here](#).

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About This Book

After languishing in online video for nine months, [Kevin Nalts](#) was advised by doctors that his viral-video career would be dead within weeks. But he persevered, and now reveals some *easy-to-apply* techniques that can help *you* become popular on YouTube. In 30 fun-filled pages – packed with real experience, examples and video links – the video creator and marketer shares proven methods to develop a global audience via YouTube.

The techniques are built on experience, and will help you avoid some of the many pitfalls, and help keep you from violating "unwritten rules" of the YouTube community. They also will save you from wasting time with ineffective approaches.

The book offers basic – but sometimes counterintuitive – advice on how to become a more welcome participant of YouTube, build friends, develop a loyal following, promote yourself (or other causes), and have a blast along the way.

Should You Read This Book?

If you're asking yourself the following questions, this book may be for you:

- How do I gain YouTube popularity without cheating or appearing desperate? What works and what might create a backlash?
- What can I do to get my videos more views without spending an inordinate amount of time promoting them to people?
- How can I help make my videos "viral" (get them passed along)?
- How can I use my YouTube fame to promote myself, friends, advertising sponsors or worthy causes?

Testimonials

"I can't believe you're putting testimonials in a book you're giving out for free. Isn't that a little weird."

– Jo Nalts (aka [WifeofNalts](#))

"Promoting a product or service or even yourself on YouTube is utterly different than the message-driven advertising-centric approach to marketing. With tons of example videos, 'Nalts' shows everything you need to know about creating YouTube videos. His insider tips on etiquette and smart promotional ideas are worth thousands of dollars. This compelling guide has taught me a great deal. Now you can learn how to have fun with this terrific media and promote your ideas too."

– [David Meerman Scott](#), bestselling author of [The New Rules of Marketing and PR](#)

"Online video is one crowded space right now and if all you do is upload your video and hope for the best, don't have high expectations. You have to be an active participant. Kevin's book on the subject is an eBook, so you'll have to print it out yourself (preferably not on good paper)."

– Paul Kontonis, [For Your Imagination](#)

"I read Kevin's eBook after I had already become popular and after reading it, I am still popular. Thanks Kevin!"

– Michael Buckley, [What The Buck Show](#)

"His book summarizes two years of useless knowledge. It wasn't really as strong as my [Viral Video Fever](#) DVDs, but it certainly was a value for its price."

– Charles Trippy, [YouTube Heartthrob](#) and Producer of [Viral Video Fever](#)

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I. Foreword

Thank You

I appreciate the time you are taking to read this book and I hope you find it helpful and inspiring. Keep an eye out for my soon-to-be published book, *The Prophet of Online Video* ([download a free 2-page synopsis here](#)). Unlike the eBook you're reading, "The Prophet of Online Video" will be geared toward marketers and agencies interested in capitalizing on the convergence of online video and advertising. And it's going to be wicked expensive. Moo haaa haaa.

I am so grateful to the people that view my videos and participate on my blog ([WillVideoForFood](#)). These are the people who have paved the way, making a reality of a long and precious dream. These are also the people who have given me the popularity I have today. Thank you all!

Of course, there also happens to be a slight faction of people that despises me, they label me a "sellout," one who feeds and promotes the commercialization of the You Tube Community. This eBook will probably piss them off. So much so, that in a small part, writing this and making it available to the public for free is more worthwhile than any profit I could potentially realize.

I want to give my wife, Jo (aka [WifeofNalts](#)) a special thanks for her continued support; her patience is more than tremendous! More than anyone, she knows just how time-consuming online video is and has been. She continues to tolerate my neglect of basic tasks around the house, not to mention sleep. I'm a very fortunate man. I also want to thank my children, Kate, Patrick, Grant and

Charlie. My fathering is not nearly as flawless as it appears on video, and they are patient and keep me from taking it all too seriously.

I would also like to thank [Jan Ischinger](#) and Tom (formerly known as "TrippleHelix" on YouTube) for helping me launch the [WillVideoForFood Forum](#) along with so many of my other "peeps."

There are more who have been there through thick and thin, diligently supporting me over these past two years. When I was initially passed over for a YouTube's revenue sharing program, I created a video called [NAPPY](#) which was met with such a supportive voice from the community and remains listed as one of YouTube's "most responded to" videos of all time. When I have grown frustrated with YouTube, the community welcomed me back. And I am constantly tickled by the creative variations of "___ofNalts" that people have created as YouTube user names.

I wish I could list all of them by name. You have watched my videos, provided me with positive and constructive feedback, collaborated, participated in my blog, and told your friends about my crazy antics. You've even driven to my house to take me out for pizza and beer when I was ready to throw in the towel. A great thanks to you all!

I'd also like to thank a few people for their help with this book. It's a free book, so I clearly will share all proceeds with the following people.

- Thanks to [David Meerman Scott](#), who encouraged me to publish this book for free (I can't remember his rationale but it was really compelling), and for reviewing a draft. David is an accomplished author and online-video expert, and has tolerated an endless barrage of questions from me (whose

closest venture to print publishing was a weekly newspaper that went bankrupt just six months after I started working there).

- [Jan Ischinger](#) has not only helped with this book, but is the driving force behind the [WillVideoForFood Forum](#). She also sends notes like this: *"Take care of your health. Viral Video Making can be dangerous... The stress is exhilarating, but it is also debilitating. Melt downs really, really happen, almost over night."* And she's right.
- Paul Kontonis of [For Your Imagination](#) not only broadened my knowledge of online-video promotion beyond YouTube, but reviewed a draft and taught me the difference between the word "Mike" and "mic."
- Ben Relles of [Barely Political](#) provided some important tips he learned while promoting one of [YouTube's most popular videos of 2007](#). Until I met him recently I didn't know there was another MBA who moonlighted in online video.
- There a few others that invested time proofing my earlier drafts, and oddly wouldn't take me up my offer for credit (like the nice mysterious lady behind [The Cult of Nalts](#), who saved me from quite a few grammatical errors).

The Apologies

My "sorry" section is as important as my "thanks." Invariably, when you make yourself this accessible online you end up entertaining many, but also offending a few. I take this to heart when it comes to ignoring a fair chunk of my e-mail and You Tube messages. Honestly, it's really hard to be diligent about this sort of communication while keeping a full-time job and caring for a family of six. I

really do try, but can't find the hours it takes to read and reply to all the messages I receive. I often think this may be interpreted as arrogance by people who don't know what it's like to get hundreds of e-mails and messages every day. As a result, I've become fairly haphazard about my personal communication. Rather than sort and prioritize, I've found that I impulsively check messages when I'm in a more social mood and ignore everything when my plate is full with pressing matters at work and home. If you feel like I'm "blowing you off," I hope you will understand my circumstances and please, I beg you not to take it personally.

Welcome, And the Brass Tactics!

I hope you realize that the title of this book was meant as self-deprecating humor and not a warranty. When making videos for online entertainment you have to have some talent. Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, talent is not the only ingredient for success. Admittedly, there are people far more talented than I on YouTube who deserve my incredible audience. The stumbling block often is that they do not know how to attract an audience and are relegated to endless obscurity, lost in a sea of garbage. Unfortunately, when this happens these talented people start to think that maybe they aren't so talented. They begin to lose interest when all they really needed were a few basic marketing tools.

Here is an important take-away (you might want to highlight this point).

*YouTube fame (f) is a function of your **talent** (t) multiplied by your **marketing** (m).*

$$f = t \text{ times } m.$$

If you're "9 out of 10" in talent and this book takes you to a "5 out of 10" in marketing yourself, then you've achieved a healthy 45, congratulations! However, if you're lacking in talent (say a 2 out of 10) then this book may not help. Sorry.

I will touch briefly on how to make your videos *not suck*, but let me say this, I've seen some really, really talentless people on You Tube. I shudder to think that one of them is turning to this book for salvation. Not to be Simon Cowles or the like, but if your friends and family find your videos lame you may want to think about taking up pottery or basket weaving.

Still reading? Great! If you take nothing else with you from this book, please remember this: The act of "uploading" is only one tiny step on your Great You Tube Adventure, and if you stop there, you're not going to get very far.

Glossary of Terms

I'm going to be using some terms in this book that are worth defining.

- **Collab Videos:** Making a collaboration video with someone else on YouTube. This is an important way to introduce yourself to the YouTube community. It's time consuming but fun. [Pipistrello](#) taught me this.
- **Subscribers:** You know how your magazines magically show up in your mailbox? Hard core YouTubers wake up each day and check their "subscriptions." If they've subscribed to you, they'll know each time you post a new videos. You want quality not just quantity of subscribers because they're the ones who will rate your videos. If they like what they see, your video will get "honored" and appear on some of the "most viewed" or "most discussed" lists, which brings you a secondary audience.

- **Honors:** These are a temporary status a video garners if it's the most viewed, most discussed or highest rated within a certain time period. A video receiving these honors will, temporarily, be placed on lists and be more likely to surface on a YouTube search.
- **Partner:** YouTube shares advertising revenue with "partners." To learn more, see [YouTube's partner page](#). If you're thinking you're going to retire on YouTube partner income you're in for a shock. But it's still nice to receive income based on the advertising that appears around your videos.

II. Do You Really Want to Be a YouTube Star?

Let's evaluate YouTube "fame" for a moment, and make sure you really want what you're apparently after. I find most people in pursuit of YouTube "weblebrity" status are looking for one of four things:

- 1) They're a performer looking for a stage.
- 2) They're looking to sell a product or service.
- 3) They're trying to fill a self-esteem void with positive feedback, ratings and views (therapy is cheaper in the long run).
- 4) They're hoping to connect with similar people and share experiences.

I'm going to start by tempering your desire. You see, if you enter YouTube with desperation for fame, people are going to find you *really annoying*. You'll give off a *scent* like those people selling Amway at neighborhood picnics. You might even *annoy people more than I do*.

YouTube popularity is not all it's cracked up to be. You'll find yourself spending inordinate amounts of time on YouTube, you'll lose a great deal of your privacy,

and you'll get insulted in ways you've never imagined (someone once commented on a video that he wants to defecate in my mouth).

Each day you'll feel guilty because you're ignoring someone's cry for help -- *watch my video, mention my sick friend, be in my "collaboration" video, tell me what you think of my son's video*. Sometimes e-mail will feel like a portal to hell – with desperate and thirsty souls screaming for just a drop of water.

In some ways YouTube fame brings all of the negative side of real stardom without the money and perks. You'll almost certainly become addicted, and sometimes will fail to differentiate – between your *own view of yourself* and *the opinions of your viewers*. The first time you get featured or have a video that goes viral will create a mad rush of adrenaline followed by a sugar crash.

But, enough psychobabble. I just wanted to make sure you realize there *are* some downsides. Now let's explore the fun things you're going to experience if you have *some* talent and deploy the techniques you're going to learn here.

There are some fantastic things about having an established audience for your videos. First, you'll meet some terrific people. I started online video in December 2005 with naïve hopes of supplementing my income. I certainly wasn't in pursuit of meeting virtual friends. I'm busy enough with my day job and my family, and I'm proficient enough at neglecting my "flesh" (non-virtual) friends – much less forgetting the birthdays of my virtual ones. But I've met some really amazingly creative and interesting people on YouTube. Some are passing relationships where we e-mail or mention each other in an occasional video. And others I've met in person to shoot videos, grab a drink, or huddle together at various YouTube gatherings that make Star Trek conventions look cool.

I've been brought to tears by videos by my friends, and gained new perspectives from individuals – from all over the planet – with which I'd otherwise have no contact. And I've laughed until I could barely breathe. Lately I've leveraged my YouTube experiences to help marketers benefit from online video, and that's been helpful in eliminating the mound of debt we've accumulated along the way. But most gratifying is the joy of interacting with other creators, and getting instant feedback whenever I experiment with a new approach. Where I used to burden dinner guests with my videos, I now can post a video, go upstairs and shower, and return to find hundreds of comments that tell me if the idea sank or sailed.

III. Understanding The Core of YouTube

Did you know YouTube is more than a search engine for videos? It's actually a lively community, and until you understand and respect that community, you're not likely to be widely seen. Certainly, there are exceptions -- I call them "one hit wonders." Sometimes a video is so darned remarkable that it goes *viral* on its own merit. But please don't bet on that, because you have a greater chance of getting killed by a llama. Many of the most popular videos on YouTube never help the creator generate a regular following.

If you're new to YouTube, you may want to imagine yourself walking into the high school cafeteria. What's your body language saying?

- Sit with me because I'm afraid to sit alone.
- I came to eat, so stay away or I'll eat *you*.
- Hi. I'm a cheerleader. Want to sit with me and be popular?
- Where's the table for the people who hate everyone else here?

Because YouTube is a visceral medium with two-way interaction, you can't simply post your video and return a few days later to see if you're the next [Numa Numa kid](#). People are going to talk back to you eventually. If you listen and respond, they might stick around and watch more. They may even tell their friends about you. But if you're posting to YouTube like you're sending out mass holiday letters, your community "reputation" will be poor.

There is a core group of YouTubers that hang out on [Stickam](#) (a live video site) each night and interact with each other. You can learn a lot from this group, and they'll influence your YouTube reputation. If I had more time and didn't derive social anxiety from live video, I'd be on Stickam "hanging out" with these people regularly.

As with any community, there are countless unwritten rules. To "fit in" you'll have to watch a lot of videos and get a sense for these yourself. But I'll give you the quick guide. I outline some of these in a video called "[YouTube Etiquette](#)." Nobody wants to admit this, but there's a subtle social ladder based on how many subscribers you have. It's rather repulsive, and I try not to look at the numbers. I find that a creator's ego can unjustly enlarge as their subscribers grow, and I often prefer to "hang" with the less popular, more interesting people. But this social ladder is important.

For example, I get a lot of requests to collaborate with people that have no videos or subscribers, and it is a lot easier to ignore them than someone who has talent and a following. I know some famous YouTubers that simply won't collaborate with someone who obviously doesn't watch their videos. If you try to do a "collaboration" video with [HappySlip](#) before you know her – and have developed your own following – she's likely to ignore you (she ignores me most of the time too, but that's survival when you're blasted with 100 e-mails a day).

So initially interact with people who have as many subscribers as you, and find your own "pod" within YouTube. There are countless subcultures built around people and their friends, and this group stays with you like your freshman roommates (or the stink of garlic).

Some YouTubers leverage their talent (in music or graphic design) to create custom material that popular YouTubers can use. This makes us far more interested in helping these creators find their way to the top.

IV. How To Make Videos That Don't Suck

This chapter sounds arrogant, and it's somewhat hypocritical. Because I make so many videos, many of them suck. If anyone should have the "magic recipe" for a decent online video, it should be me. But I'm still learning each day, and that's part of what makes it so fun to create videos. People often ask me why I don't focus on creating fewer quality videos instead of posting routinely. There are two reasons for that. First, if I stop creating for more than a few days, I generally don't feel like posting anymore. Second, I have no Earthly idea which of my video ideas will resonate and which will become popular. There are a lot of factors involved, so I play the odds with volume and frequency.

That said, there are a number of things I'd advise to help you make better videos. Technically, the barriers to entry are extremely low (access to the web, a computer, and an inexpensive camera). But here are some tips to making your videos interesting and more likely to be shared and, therefore, become "viral."

A. Stick To Your Brand

I know that my videos would be more popular if I made them more edgy and sexy. But it's not consistent with my style, and so I forgo that upside. It's not sustainable to create content that doesn't reflect your personality, and it will confuse your audience. Find a unique style and stay with it. That doesn't mean you shouldn't experiment. Some of the best YouTube creators have a very specific and "ownable" style: [What The Buck](#) does daily celebrity gossip. [Smosh](#) does sketch comedy. [HappySlip](#) does clever comedies about her family, and expresses her musical talent.

These creators aren't just talented, they know their audience and consistently provide for them. Some, of course, participate more extensively with the YouTube community, and others have their eyes toward larger media opportunities. To see other popular YouTubers, visit the "[most subscribed of all time](#)" YouTube section and get a feel for what's popular. Just resist the temptation to imitate these styles too closely. Find your own niche.

I tend to prefer variety in my videos – from simple vlogs (talking to the camera) and real family moments to sketch comedy and "candid camera" style videos. I've even done suspense/thriller style, but usually with a comedic element. When "[Farting in Public](#)" was featured, I picked up thousands of new subscribers, and some of those people stuck around, while others left disappointed that all of my videos weren't in the same candid style.

B. Short, Fast and Big Finish

There are no hard rules of online video, but popular videos tend to be short, fast-paced and offer a "big finish." People generally want two or three minutes, and

90 seconds is maybe ideal. That said, the historically most popular video ever on YouTube, ([Evolution of Dance](#)) is six minutes long.

It takes me much longer to edit a video into 30-90 seconds, but it's almost always better that way. When you're editing, you sometimes can't resist keeping some of your favorite moments. But when I return to the video weeks later, I become infuriated by my undisciplined editing. Trust me, the viewers will never miss the gag that took a video from 3 to 5 minutes, and you'll find your views are inversely related to the length of your video. If you must tell the story in more than 3-5 minutes, consider breaking it into a 3-part series.

I sometimes forget about the power of the "big finish," but it's *the* magical moment. Certainly it's **as important as captivating them in the first 20 seconds**. If people lose interest, they won't forward the video on. However, if there's a great ending we'll forgive some of the dips in the middle. We'll also rate it higher and share it with others. Surprise us at the end, or at least return to a previous gag so the story doesn't taper away. [Google Butt Crack](#) is an example. I try to close my videos with my URL, then return to one final gag.

There's nothing I enjoy more about video production than finalizing the editing, and adding music. It also helps to have someone watch your video with you, and note when they look bored. I've chopped my videos down by watching my wife's blank stare when I make her watch them. You'll get a quick sense of what you can lose. Sometimes the best part of the video is what you decide to leave *out*.

C. Topicality Drives Views

Topical celebrity humor brought Michael Buckley, host of "[What the Buck Show](#)" from obscurity to top YouTuber status within months. [Comedian Mark Day](#) is

one of a few comedians who have translated their timely wit into videos people watch. And Ben Relles, founder of [Barely Political](#), discovered the magical mix of timely political content, attractive women, and music videos (Ben reminded me recently that many of the top videos are musicals). He produced "[Obama Girl](#)," one of the most popular videos of 2007. He also parodied an SNL short ("Dick in a Box") with "[Box in a Box](#)," which has been viewed more than 5 million times.

Typically a major news event will spawn countless parodies, and timing is everything. Chris Crocker's "[Leave Britney Alone](#)" was well timed, and spawned a barrage of parodies. Good luck finding that video without its URL.

D. Respect Basic Production Guidelines

Want to know a secret? Many top creators have lousy equipment. For instance, this [GooTube Conspiracy trailer](#) was shot on a low-end camera using a very antiquated computer processor. A mediocre video can become much more appealing if the creator worries less about fancy equipment, and puts time into the lighting, camera shots, editing and sound.

Many people gravitate to online video because they're tired of overproduced television and film. So you're allowed to have a wobbly camera and some rough editing. But there are some basic tips, and countless websites, that can help you improve your production (see "[Lose 10 Pounds in 20 Minutes](#)").

- Light your subject softly with lights on two sides (not ceiling lights that produce a shadow). Natural light (overcast) produces the best quality.
- When possible, use an external microphone and avoid public places with ambient sound or horrible acoustics. Most YouTube creators use the mic on the camera, which is usually poor. And there's nothing that screams "amateur" louder than the echo of an empty room.

- Edit tight so most shots last fewer than five seconds. The best movies have rapid-fire editing, and short-form entertainment needs it too.

E. Package Your Video

Your video is more than just the video. Your thumbnail, description, title and even keyword tags are part of the package. If these elements aren't consistent with your video idea, it won't have the same impact.

Some creators work hard for a powerful "thumbnail," which is the image that represents the video. YouTube initially draws this image from the exact center frame of the video (so a 2:00 minute video will use the image that's at exactly 1:00). [Brotherhood2.0 has a nice tool for calculating this image](#), and the other two possible thumbnails based on the duration of the video. Ideally your center frame is strong because changing to one of the other two is brutally slow and unpredictable. If you use a still image, you'll want to have some movement (a pan) because a static image may be interpreted as manipulation.

This picture is vital, and I spend time in editing to ensure that it's a representative image. Some YouTubers have been penalized by using a photo of an attractive woman in this thumbnail, which certainly works in the short term. But many of the curiosity clicks will result in frustrated viewers that were expecting something else, and give you a false sense of the video's popularity.

Titles play another significant role in the decision of a subscriber to watch your video. For example, the video I posted recently features Spencer, the boy from my most popular video ("[Farting in Public](#)") beating up his friends with a 4-foot inflatable ball. The title, "[Spencer Has Big Balls](#)," should rouse some curiosity.

V. Tips for Getting Your Videos Seen

If you're a scanner, here comes the important part. I like lists because they simplify things, and lead to action. So let me jump right into some of the techniques that have helped me on YouTube. I'd also encourage you to watch a few of my videos and read blog posts I've done on this subject:

- [YouTube Etiquette](#): This is meant to be humorous, but it has some serious tips about posting, watching, interacting, collaborating, and meeting other YouTubers.
- [How to Promote Your Video](#): This is playfully titled "How to Cheat on YouTube," but it has some decent basic tips like engaging titles, attractive thumbnails, compelling content, short videos and a "big finish." More importantly, it touches on the subject of *quality not just quantity* of subscribers. I speak about frequency of posting; my unofficial tagline is "Nalts posts a video every time you poop." I also warn about the ineffectiveness of some techniques, like *tag whoring* and desperate "watch me" requests. It outlines the power of making collaboration videos or those that invite responses, such as contests.
- [How to Promote Your YouTube Videos](#) (this is one of many [WillVideoForFood](#) blog posts that provides some additional specifics on promoting your videos).

A. Collaborate With Other YouTubers

There's probably nothing you can do on YouTube that has more impact than collaborating. I spent nine months uploading my videos, only to find 20-50

people had viewed each. Quite by accident, I began interacting with people and collaborating with other YouTube creators. That is when things began to change. Collaborations are a fun experience, and also introduce you to the audience of the person with whom you collaborate. For example, when popular YouTuber, [Renetto, shaved my head](#), I got some exposure to his rabid fans. When I [stalked HappySlip's NYC apartment](#), she was kind enough to post my video on her blog, and suddenly some of *her* subscribers subscribed to me. If you collaborate with someone whose content is similar to yours, the audience is more likely to subscribe and, more importantly, keep watching your videos.

I just launched a new online-video show, titled "[Bubblegum Tree Show](#)," to feature 50 of the most interesting online-video creators in 2008. People enjoy seeing their online-video "weblebrities" out of context, and this show will be fun to produce, but also a nice way to meet creators and find new audiences.

B. Pursue Quality Subscribers (Not Quantity)

This time last year I had about 200 hundred people subscribed to my videos and now I have more than 25,000. Of course many of these people subscribed and don't check their subscriber page, or perhaps lost interest in YouTube. But among these subscribers are people who share my sense of humor. Only a small portion of people who frequent YouTube actually subscribe to videos and check them routinely. This core audience is vital, however, because they are the ones that will watch your videos, give you feedback, and rate you favorably. I'm able to post a video, and have it appear in YouTube's "*most highly rated videos of the day*" because I have a group of subscribers that generally like my stuff (don't ask why). Then, when other YouTube "browsers" search for the highest rated videos of the day, they're finding my videos – thanks to my subscribers.

There are a few of us whose videos frequently make the "*most watched*" and "*most discussed*" pages, and many of us aren't very talented. But our subscribers like us, and that propels us to "honors," which give us access to a secondary audience. My videos almost always get "honors" because I have a quality base of subscribers. But if I suddenly inherited all of the subscribers of [Smosh](#) (which features young sketch comedians), I'd probably get destroyed. Some of them would like me, but many of them would not be amused by an old, balding guy who drinks out of a coffee mug bearing his YouTube name. So it's quality, not just quantity, you want.

C. Be Patient

Creators who posted on YouTube early on (in 2005) have a powerful advantage over the rest of us. Their early arrival helped them develop a regular fan base when the pickings were slim. [Renetto](#) and [MrSafety](#) are good examples. They're almost as talentless as me (I say in jest), but they have established an audience that really enjoys their content. It's very hard for a newcomer to rank initially. Please remember it's a marathon not a race, so save energy and pace yourself.

D. Interact

The YouTube audience is watching less television and becoming enthralled with online video because it's mostly *real* and *amateur*. We're all tired of scripted television, or worse yet, the faux reality television. We want to see real people who are accessible and authentic, and with whom we can connect. This means you should try to read and reply to as many comments on each video as possible, and not just your own. This is easy at first, but becomes overwhelming as time goes on. Still, my favorite part of YouTube is the discussion that takes place on

the video within the first 24 hours. I almost never check comments from old videos, but I tend to jump online to my most recent video and read and reply to interesting comments. If you ever want to catch the attention of a YouTuber, try commenting on their most recent video. The more popular they are the less likely they read YouTube messages or e-mail.

E. Watch Other People's Videos

I read once that a new blogger spends time on his own blog. An old blogger spends time on other people's blogs. The same is true for online video, and yet I'm pretty bad at this. I tend to subscribe to anyone, and as a result my subscription page is bloated with garbage. So I don't visit it with great frequency, and sometimes miss that my favorite creators have posted a new video.

Nevertheless, do as I say... not as I do. Watch videos. Loads of them. There are several reasons for this:

- First, people like to see your name on the comment section of their video. It makes them feel appreciated, especially if you have a lot of subscribers and still take the time to watch their videos.
- Watching videos gives you greater insight into what works and doesn't, and will keep you topical on YouTube trends.
- It's hard to connect with people if you don't watch their videos. And it's awfully embarrassing when you meet a prominent YouTuber and ask a question that reveals you haven't watched their videos.

Take this from someone who knows. I'm almost afraid to talk to prominent YouTubers because I'll invariably ask a question that reveals I don't watch their videos. I can almost count down to when they're going to say, "you don't watch

my videos, do you?" I had one famous YouTuber get so annoyed he sat me down and showed me some of his videos. They get less angry when I tell them I've watched them all but can't remember anything for more than 5 minutes. Then I call them [MrSafety](#) if they're a guy, and [Brookers](#) if they're a girl. That usually calms them down.

I vowed to myself when I meet people I would *never* assume they have watched even one of my videos. Join me at the next YouTube gathering, and you could ask me if I have any children. I wouldn't hold it against you.

F. Go Beyond YouTube

Remember that YouTube is the most popular video site, but only *one place* where YouTube videos are seen. When you post your video you may want to market it on niche sites, blogs, and discussion groups. I tend to avoid this because it's time consuming and often a violation of the community around that particular topic. For instance, when I did a video about [my obsession with NBC's "The Office"](#), I resisted the temptation to send the link to those blogging about the show. Unless you devote the time to personalizing your note (a sample format below) and familiarizing yourself with their blog, then you're probably going to look like a spammer. Here's an example of an e-mail I'm happy to get:

Dear Kevin: I've been reading WillVideoForFood.com for quite some time, and particularly enjoyed your recent post on (insert topic). I work for a company that does (insert company), and I would imagine this would be of some interest to your readers. Do you agree? Could I send you information for the possibility of being mentioned in a future post?

Now contrast that with a random comment (including a link) on my blog from a promoter or public relations flack. Or worse, a form letter from a company that's simply interested in pushing its message. These feel like junk mail – at best you'll get some moderate uptake and at worst you'll get smarmy comments from their readers.

There are countless social media vehicles that can help you promote your videos (MySpace, Friendster, FaceBook, Digg, StumbleUpon). I find these overwhelming and not nearly as productive as my other techniques, but other YouTubers swear by the power of these. A helpful resource on this subject is [CharlesTrippy's "Viral Video Fever."](#)

Marketing your videos to blogs and social media sites has helped many popular creators. If you're making a video that spoofs Hillary Clinton, look no further than bloggers who have trashed her. Some chose to send their video URL anonymously, and others are forthright and personalize the message.

G. Merge Public Relations and Social Media

There are currently countless interactive agencies and public relations firms, but very few have merged these competencies to promote effectively via social media. This will be an evolving discipline, and a few companies are emerging with this valuable expertise. In the meanwhile, some of the most popular creators are partnering with public-relations experts to promote their video content. One of my favorites is Paul Kontonis from [For Your Imagination](#). Paul's online video network has a variety of shows, which helps him amortize the cost of promotion. He's taught me about how to get seen beyond YouTube, and has a knack for getting his videos seen via blogs and other social media venues.

VI. Avoid These Tricks

There are ways to artificially drive the views and ratings of your videos, and "tricks" you can use to spam your videos to others. Ultimately these won't help much because you'll lose credibility and annoy people. It's cheap, tacky and – at best -- may give you a short-term boost, but it's just not worth the effort. Here are some other mistakes I've seen people make as they try to popularize their videos. Save yourself some time and humiliation by avoiding these:

A. Blatant Self Promotion

I often get accused of blatant self promotion because YouTube began as a community site for open dialogue, and I'm a marketer. So I can't resist a logo, a token hat, and a Nalts logo mug that sneaks into frame with all the subtlety of a migraine. Perhaps subconsciously some of my self-promotional behavior is driven by a desperate attempt to gain popularity to fortify my self worth. In fairness, a lot of what I do is meant as self-deprecating humor. It's also fun to annoy people.

But self promotion can go terribly wrong. I wish I could show you some of the desperate e-mails I get asking me to gratuitously mention someone else so they can get "famous." I get many requests to be in collaboration videos when the creator has no audience of his own, or any idea of what they are trying to do -- other than to borrow some fame. It's awkward and embarrassing. Most of the popular YouTubers are insecure people with no experience in fame, so many of

us are inconsistent about what collaborations we join. Nonetheless, *fame desperation* is a general turnoff, and something to avoid at all costs.

B. Spamming

Unless there's a reason to send someone a video, it's best to let them find it on their own. For instance, I rarely send someone a link to my recent video unless they're mentioned or in it. It's good for the ego to watch a video in which you make a cameo or you're referenced. However, I stopped reading my YouTube mail because 90% of the messages were:

- What type of equipment do you use? (Never mind that I explained that on my profile page).
- Will you watch my video and tell me what you think? (No specific reason- just a desire to be seen by a popular stranger?).
- You are so incredibly sexy (okay- that's not one I've received before, but I wanted to make sure you're still awake).

There are other forms of spamming videos through social networks and "friends" lists, and candidly, I don't even understand most of these. LisaNova, one of the most popular YouTubers, faced severe backlash for spamming people with her videos (see [example of parody](#)). She [made a public apology on the subject](#), as well as a [parody that has more than 2 million views](#). The bottom line is that your videos should go viral based on the content and some promotion, but not through lazy and automated ways that will annoy people.

Stay away from any promotional tool that's done by a "bot" (automated tool).

C. Keyword Bloating

Many people have a naïve belief that if they bloat their "keywords" with terms like *funny, humor, comedy* and even other YouTuber's names, it will propel the video to the top of a related search. Indeed, this myth is not without some basis of truth. Keywords not only help people find the video, but they can propel it to the top of Google and ensure it appears beside related content on YouTube.

When I was first featured on YouTube I noticed that people were posting their videos as replies, and mimicking my video keywords. This is misleading and annoying, and will eventually penalize a video's performance. Remember- YouTube is now owned by the master of defying search engine manipulation. A better approach is to use relevant keywords in hopes that your video appears beside related videos. It's not a bad idea to misspell either. For example, sellers of Heelys shoes are spending massive advertising budgets to have their sites appear on the common misspelling, "Healies." Meanwhile, my video (called "[Poor Man's Healies](#)") is [one of the top results](#)... because I can't spell.

D. Abusing "Video Responses"

YouTube allows you to reply to another video, and unfortunately this is a functionality that's often abused. Many people tack their videos onto popular videos, knowing that bored people will click them out of curiosity. Some video creators police this by not allowing people to post replies without their approval (they do this by selecting a YouTube option that moderates videos instead of permitting them automatically). I don't have time to groom the video replies, so I sometimes let anything get posted. However I become very annoyed by people posting videos that have no relationship to mine, and will occasionally "block"

them, thus preventing them from interacting with me. On the other hand, a relevant video response that riffs off the original video in a fun or surprising way can win you lots of affection from the original creator's subscription base.

E. Ask Someone to Help Get You Featured

YouTube editors have one of the most powerful jobs in modern media, and they can literally turn obscure talent into overnight fame by simply featuring a video. Naturally, when you've been around YouTube for a while, you occasionally interact with these editors. I rarely send them a video to feature. Don't ask someone to do this for you even if you know them fairly well. Selectively send someone a video link and let them to decide to forward it on their own.

I've been featured twice on YouTube's homepage. Once a YouTube community manager ([BigJoeSmith](#)) brought me to the homepage with [Viral Video Genius](#), but the video was only moderately well received. The second time was my "break out" video, and it was called "[Farting in Public](#)." There are three critical things to remember about the homepage feature:

1. Don't bank on it. Your odds are very low, and if you consistently produce appealing content it may happen without you trying.
2. The homepage of any site attracts "haters," so you'll be lambasted with negative comments if you land on the homepage. Newly featured creators are usually shocked by this, but it's sadly inevitable.
3. Not every video featured results in people subscribing to that creator. Many viewers will visit the profile page of the featured creator, but then decide there's not enough there to subscribe. Look at the profile page of popular creators and imitate some of the things they do.

VII. YouTube and Profit

As I mentioned, I am working on a book devoted specifically to the topic of marketing via video and monetizing creation, and it's tentatively titled *The Prophet of Online Video* ([download a free 2-page synopsis of the book here](#)). It's worth noting that my blog, [WillVideoForFood](#), is designed for creators, marketers and agencies. Here's a recent article I wrote for [Advertising Age](#) (a leading trade publication for marketers and agencies). Since it's archived now on the site, you can see the full article here: "[Ten Things a Marketer Should Know About Online Video](#)."

Coincidentally, my *Advertising Age* article ran days after a controversial [TechCrunch](#) article that revealed "secret" strategies behind clandestine marketing approaches. "I have run clandestine marketing campaigns meant to ensure that promotional videos become truly viral," said TechCrunch contributor [Dan Ackerman Greenberg](#). We were [characterized by one blogger](#) as *Glenda the Good Witch* and *The Wicked Witch of the West*. I was flattered in a way, but would secretly prefer an army of flying monkeys to a white dress and a bubble.

Again, I started in online video with the hope of entertaining people and supplementing my income, and initially I made a few thousand dollars through sites (like [Revver](#) and [Metacafe](#), which share advertising revenue). I found this to be very slow and conservative money. YouTube offers a Partners Program, and unfortunately I'm not allowed to disclose my earnings... but rest assured I won't soon be retiring to live on advertising revenue generated by my videos. If making money is your goal, there are far, far more productive uses of your time.

For example, find a topic you like that has a high Google cost-per-click (litigation, mortgage, diet, digital cameras), and start a blog about, then sprinkle Google AdSense ads all about. But don't post videos expecting quick money. If I divided the revenue I've made from online video by the time I've invested, my payback would be less than minimum wage.

As marketers plunge deeper into online video, it's possible that advertising premiums (which are shared with some creators) will become significant. In the meantime, I've found custom sponsored videos to be far more profitable for myself and my sponsors. I'm careful not to make these over promotional, and I turn down more clients than I accept. But it's fun to make a video for a large brand, and help them engage with the online community with far more relevance than an online advertisement.

I especially like being able to merge my day job (marketing) with my night job (online video), and I currently make between \$3,000 and \$10,000 for these. Before you get too excited, recognize that my marketing experience and fixed audience is part of what I offer, and the going rate for a simple sponsored video appears to be around \$2,000. If you have a day job and keep your costs down, this is possible. But a small production house will charge more, and I've seen agencies charge hundreds of thousands of dollars for a few "viral" videos that are generally over produced and under promoted.

If you are seeking YouTube popularity to market yourself or your own products, I'd recommend putting that goal aside until you develop a following. The community will welcome you more if they don't see you as a walking advertisement. There are subtle ways to profit from your talents without looking like a commercial whore (that's my job, okay?), whether you're a musician, painter or voice-over professional. For instance, I've done several collaborations

with Brett Slater (slatersgarage.com), and he uses his increasing online popularity to promote his services – without appearing overly self promoting. Another good example is [Vals Art Diary](#), where you can watch the artist paint each week and bid on her art via a silent auction.

If you're an artist, you might find someone you like on YouTube and offer them a free song, logo, painting, etc. They'll typically mention you in a video, and that can help you expand your audience.

VIII. Big Finish

If you began this book to propel yourself to fame, I hope you've realized that there are effective strategies and some hidden pitfalls. More importantly, I hope you realize that there is tremendous gratification that comes along the way.

I hope you'll focus on the fun journey and not just on the destination of fame. You'll be criticized like never before, but you'll also get wonderful feedback and meet fantastic people. And occasionally you find out you've made someone else's life better, or at least a bit more interesting.

There are other important video sites, but I've focused mostly on YouTube because it's the "low hanging fruit," and currently where the vast majority of videos are seen. If you can crack the YouTube code, you can always explore other sites. The audiences among these various online-video sites overlap less than you'd think. I use [TubeMogul](#) to upload my videos to a dozen sites, but few get anywhere near the views I get on YouTube.

I'd really appreciate your feedback about this book, as you're reading a first draft. Did it meet your expectations? Were you hoping for the magic bullet and feel let down? Let me know.

Please send me an e-mail at kevinnalts@gmail.com with the subject heading "Book Feedback" so I can revise this. Thanks for reading, and [as the public relations folks at YouTube say, "Keep Tubing."](#)

IX. Additional Resources

- [Inside Online Video](#) by Mike Abundo: Often the first to report on new trends and site features.
- [OnlineVideoWatch](#) (a great source).
- [ReelPop](#) by Steve Bryant, a columnist and editor living in New York, NY.
- [Cinemattech](#) by Scott Kirsner, who wrote "The Future of Online Video." CinemaTech focuses on how new technologies are changing cinema.
- [Userainment Blog](#), written by a veteran technology-business journalist.
- [NewTeeVee](#)- an "Entertainment Tonight" of online video.
- [The Daily Reel](#) has had good coverage on the space (not lately).
- [Fred Graver Blog](#), written [by the guy that once helped ABC/Disney to explore "Telefusion."](#)
- [Mashable](#), a site for social networking news.
- [Web Video Doctor](#), for tips and tricks to help make better web videos.
- [ViralBlog](#), collaborative team of bloggers haunt the globe for great virals.

- [System Video Blog](#) by Ken McCarthy
- [StreamingMedia Blog](#) is a bit “techie” for me, but has some nice info.
- [Xlntads](#) is a website that connects marketers, advertisers and amateurs, and has a nice relatively new [blog written by Mark Schoneveld](#).
- [WebVideoZone](#) is a terrific resource (includes “members only” content).
- Less of a blog, but this “[Online Video Industry Index](#)” has a nice links.
- [NewsVideographer](#) for journalists looking to leverage online video.
- [ReelSEO](#)- how to optimize your videos for SEO.
- [Gadget News](#): Lots of topics, including online video.
- [Ronamok](#), by Ron the New Media Evangelist
- [Hot Air](#), by a new media conservative named Michelle Malkin.
- [Web Video Report](#): The bizzzness of online video
- [Politics YouTube In Review](#): I contribute occasionally to this one.
- [MathewWingram](#): The intersection between web and media.
- [PandemicLabs](#): Viral video and social media.
- [Camcorder Info](#): More than you’d expect from a camcorder site.
- [Viral Video Wannabe](#): [FalloffAutumnDistro](#) is one of YouTube’s more clever self marketers, and also helped me clean this book up.
- [Web Jungle](#): Advertising, digital marketing & web culture.
- [Viral Video Fever](#): The Charles Trippy DVD collection that will give you a comprehensive video tutorial of this space (and I'm in it, okay?)

My Shameless Plugs

- WillVideoForFood.com: My blog. Go RSS it immediately.
- [Nalts on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...): My videos. Go subscribe.
- KevinNalts.com: My lame attempt at a personal site.
- [Hire Nalts](http://HireNalts.com): Information about my services for brands.
- [The BubbleGum Tree Show](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...): A *new* channel featuring viral video weblebrities. Only 10 subscribers as of this writing. Thanks to [Gage](#) for the design, [Sean](#) for the theme song, and [Trevor](#) for the animation!
- Contact me: kevinnalts@gmail.com (but I'm not great at checking it so please be persistent).



How could I not end with the cool logo that Gage ([cosmic-flight](#)) made me!