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How Do You YouTube?

YouTube isn't just for entertainment, you can also put it to work to help promote you and your firm.

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It seems as though pretty much everyone with a computer, smartphone or tablet uses YouTube, at least for personal entertainment. A glance at my Facebook page often brings up several of my friends' posts linking to old and new music videos, comedy

videos or news footage that's been uploaded to YouTube. I often search the online video site for the same things.

If you're like me and the other hundreds of millions of people that visit YouTube, you also enjoy watching things that others have uploaded, but how often do you share videos on the site? Once again, if you're like me, probably not all that often...if ever.

YouTube isn't just about entertainment and sharing personal videos, though. Just as small businesses and accounting firms have found successful marketing techniques on other social media outlets, many have also developed methods to use YouTube in a convenient and free way to offer informative videos to current and potential clients, as well as to position and market their practice and its areas of expertise.

Adrian Simmons, a CPA in Laurel, Maryland, has been using several social media technologies at the firm he shares with his father David (www.simmons-cpa.com). This includes Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogging on their website and several other tools, plus YouTube. The firm's YouTube page (www.youtube.com/SimmonsCPAFirm) includes information on new features on QuickBooks, tax season issues and information on the firm.

Many other practices are posting how-to videos, small business tips and other advice on the video network, such as the Southaven, Mississippi, father-daughter firm Griffith CPA (www.griffithfirm.net), which has nearly 40 videos on YouTube. As you can see from their YouTube page (<http://www.youtube.com/user/GriffithCpaFirm>), you can also customize the backgrounds to show your firm logo or images, plus enter some background information on the practice.

Firms are using YouTube mostly for client outreach and marketing, as I've noted above, showing simple how-tos and tutorials, or explaining recent tax or accounting rule changes. But some firms use a different approach, such as WithumSmith+Brown (www.withum.com), ranked as the 33rd largest firm in the U.S., which has produced videos that included choreographed dancing, music and a New York City flash mob. Although it may seem a little slow to start, it's definitely worth watching at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1osnKQ9lHI>. And make sure you continue to watch even after the credits start to roll at the end. What's their point? They wanted to show that accounting firms don't have to be stodgy, unfun places for either clients or staff.

Tips for Getting Started

First, come up with a topic of genuine interest. You likely get similar questions from many of your small business clients, likewise with your individual tax clients or perhaps with specific industry segments you serve. Start there, with one of those questions you've answered five times already this month.

Keep it focused on a single topic so that the video is not too long. There isn't a specific time guideline, but if you can answer a simple question in 2-3 minutes, your videos will be more popular. More complex topics can extend for a couple of minutes longer. Then write down some notes, and do a couple of run-throughs as though you're talking to a person. You don't need a real script, this is something you know.

Lights, Camera... Action

Next comes the camera: Almost everyone has a video camera these days, either a real stand-alone device, a webcam on their computer, or the one included with their smart phone or tablet device. Get comfortable in front of it and do a few takes until you're comfortable with it.

Upload Your Video

When it's ready to share, go to YouTube and log in. Since it's now owned by Google (for better or worse), you can sign in using an existing Gmail account or create a new one, then either go to the "My Channel" link or simply click the "Upload" at the top of the screen near the search field. Once your video is up, make sure that you've named it and added an appropriate definition so that visitors to YouTube will see it in their search results when looking for information related to your video.

Promote It

Unlike Las Vegas, what happens on YouTube doesn't stay on YouTube. Once you've got your video uploaded, it's easy to post the link and share it on your Facebook messages, Tweets and other social media activities, or to even embed the video on your website, blog, newsletters and emails. Promote it everywhere that you're already currently active.

YouTube is one of the most used websites for watching videos, but is still very under utilized by small and mid-sized businesses and accounting practices. It's free and simple, and it allows you to get your message and your voice out to clients and prospects. And as WithumSmith+Brown has shown us, can also give you the opportunity to lighten up.

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