
Instruction videos are the new marketing gold

Videos have become our customers' most popular channel to find answers and solve problems.

But can we create a video for every use scenario in every language?

A new technology makes automated video creation a reality.

Text by Wouter Maagdenberg



It is a misconception that most YouTube visitors visit the platform for fun and distraction. Most YouTube visitors come to learn. According to a Google report, more than 70 percent of today's YouTube traffic is generated by people learning and searching for solutions to everyday problems. In response, the presence of instructional videos on YouTube, the second largest search engine in the world (owned by the largest search engine in the world), has skyrocketed. In the beginning, these videos were mostly created and distributed by users themselves, so-called *user-generated content*, but corporate presence is increasing.

How-to videos are everywhere and, with eight out of ten viewers indicating they are discovering new things as a result of watching them, it is no wonder that companies are increasingly recognizing the power of video instructions to stimulate learning, to increase their brand and product recognition, and to improve customer satisfaction. From product launches to aftersales services, customers are exposed to videos at every stage of the customer journey.

But not only compelling, sales-oriented videos help to stimulate sales and promote specific features. Buyers also consult videos to compare products or find out how something works. How-to videos are an effective way of demonstrating desirable product features, especially if they help elevate a product above those of competitors. Google studies reveal that 50 percent of in-store and online consumers watch videos before purchasing a product. Instruction videos are fast becoming a crucial part of customer support, maintenance instructions and marketing.

Technical communication as a gate opener

Whether in B2B or B2C, whether selling products or offering services, buyers and users need the right information during acquisition, ownership and usage. Technical communication plays a major role in every step of the customer journey. Therefore, we need to understand what kind of information is needed and when. Neglecting this will cost us customers; poor execution will cause frustration and will ultimately affect the company in a negative way.

According to analytics provider GfK, the younger we are, the more we research online before we buy. Seventy-two percent of Millennials research and check their options online before making a purchase. These young peo-

ple also bring their behavior with them when they enter our offices and factories. They will use Google for anything they want or need to solve. And this approach is by no means restricted to young generations. We all have become obsessed with researching before we buy or decide, no matter how big or small the investment. And that is exactly why you, as a brand, should be the adviser these consumers are searching for.

On top of this, younger generations look for authenticity first. Traditional advertisements and commercials have a much lower impact on these audiences. Vlogs (video blogs), reviews, and recommendations are the way to catch their attention. Where commercials are often perceived as unreliable, vlogs and also branded how-to videos – when done correctly – are seen as a reliable source because of their authenticity and authority.

Authentic information, such as the branded user guide, is perceived in a far more positive light than slick marketing. However, today's generations are hard to reach via traditional paper and PDF; instead, they are focused on digital media. Being a trusted source is a great start, but getting your content within reach is vital for success. This provides both a great challenge as well as a great opportunity for technical communicators to become the source for these branded how-to videos.

Technical communicators have strong experience in creating and managing fact-based, modular content – which is the ideal source for the authentic and smooth experiences that users are looking for today, including how-to videos. Users are becoming more demanding as to how they want to get their information. It is vital for brands to feed them only the right information at the right time, both with regard to the specific content itself as well as how it is presented. Dumping a multilingual PDF of your product manual on a

smartphone is perceived as neither smooth nor helpful when all that is needed is a quick answer to a simple question.

From manual to how-to video

Many users today prefer a how-to video over a written manual. Purely looking at the instruction value, video outperforms the written manual as well. This is due to how our brain works: We simply process audio and images more easily than text. According to molecular biologist John Medina, listening to a voice-over while looking at matching images significantly enhances the learning ability of our brain. The effect is enhanced when we simultaneously read a short text of what we are listening to, e.g. short bullet points.



Figure 1: The role of digital videos in our consumers' lives

Source: www.thinkwithgoogle.com

¹ Google/Magid Advisors, Global, "The Role of Digital Video in People's Lives", n=20,000, A18-64 general online population, August 2018.

^{2,3} Google/Ipsos, Global, "How People Shop with YouTube Study", 18-64-year-olds who go online at least monthly and have purchased something in the last year, n=24,017, July 2018.

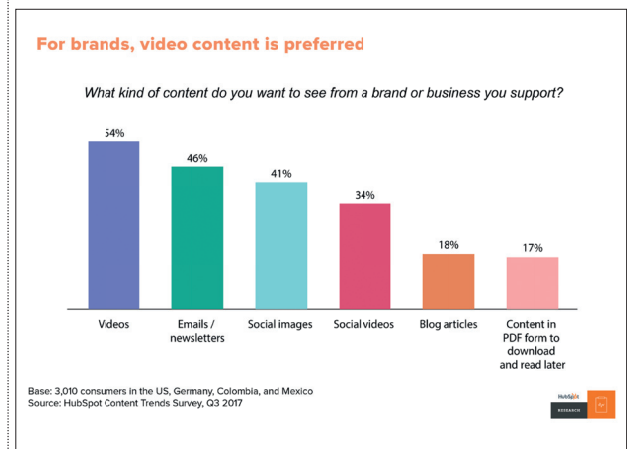


Figure 2: Our customers' content preferences

The power of modular content for multipurpose publishing

For marketers, it is an immense task to create, curate, and publish on time all this requested information, especially within global companies. The greatest challenge they face is understanding how to create, manage, localize, and update this content at low costs without dependencies on external teams or agencies.

Technical communication teams, with their traditionally topic-based and single-source content creation methods, have a major advantage here. Their modular content, often stored in XML formats and DITA, gets adopted and promoted for all the obvious reasons, such as consistency, reuse and therefore cheaper localization, maintenance, and publishing. Specifically, for digital release, structured content embodies additional valuable characteristics: The way our content is curated and stored with the associated metadata and separate from any style or form makes structured content an ideal base for multipurpose publishing and reuse.

While we are aware of the advantages of modular content during the creation process, these advantages are not leveraged as much after publishing. Even in digital environments, we often find modular content published in the same way it appears on paper. The simplest way is to publish to a PDF and enable visitors to download the file – an obvious choice that serves various use cases neatly. But it is not all that handy when you just want a quick answer to a direct question: You might need to scan through several PDF documents to find the answer to your question. The once granular content has become one big chunk of content again, having lost most of its granularity and its prime accessibility features.

Publishing structured content as HTML already makes up for most disadvantages of paper and today's PDF. Compared to PDF, HTML allows each topic to appear on screen directly and separately, and immediately searchable via search engines and browsers. Still, this can no longer meet all of today's expectations. Audiences have moved to more visual environments, including social media and video platforms. They expect rich up-to-date information at hand, quick responses and interaction if needed. They're visually focused, with video being the most-viewed media. Not offering videos simply makes you unavailable to these large audiences and nonexistent to millions of people. Even search engines display the video results first nowadays. And if you do not have these videos in place, your competition probably does.

From topics to how-to videos in an automated way

With the immense amount of content managed by technical communication departments, especially within global companies, it sounds impossible to transform it all into videos, let alone keep it up to date. Imagine what it would entail to produce how-to videos for all your topics in all your languages. It is indeed impossible. At least, if you attempt to solve this manually.

The good news is that it is not necessary to transform all your content into videos. There are clever ways to choose what videos you need to create first, such as using logs from your local call centers to get an indication of which videos to start with. But even then, there could be a large range of important topics. Also, the number of topics might be multiplied by the languages needed.

Once you know this number, the next step is to decide how to create these videos. For creating how-to videos, many companies use the same approach and methods as for creating commercials or marketing videos. This is a missed opportunity. Research shows that viewers value an instructional video on different grounds than a commercial. Whereas commercials must sell an experience or future enjoyment, the instructional video should immediately answer a question or solve a problem. It needs to be short and to the point. This is why these videos must be different.

It is important to create the right feeling and experience when producing commercials, but applying the same approach to how-to videos is often perceived as dull and distracting. The most important aspect of an instructional video is to clarify – even before the start – what specific purpose it serves. Viewers want to know right away: Does this video cover my exact problem? And what will I know after watching this video? These are main criteria for selecting the right video amid all the other search results.

In short, the first frame of your video is the most important one. Another important requirement is that the video (and thus the start screen, and SEO metadata) is offered in the viewer's native language. Hence, prioritize the financing of localizing your videos (and their metadata) for all your markets before spending too much money on (often redundant) actors and location.

Single source to the next level: structured media

Fortunately, there is a solution to automating the creation of videos and keeping them up to date. This solution, offered by TXTOmedia, uses modular – or even better: structured – content topics to transform them into rich media, such as videos and interactive step-by-step media sliders. The technology transforms XML- and DITA-based files into animated and live action videos on the fly.

This technology can tie into content management solutions (CMS, CCMS) to make workflows even smoother. When done correctly, new, newly translated or updated text content automatically transforms into new or updated videos, and the system keeps track of compliance and updates. After an initial setup to make the technology understand specific structures and to define the look and feel, selected

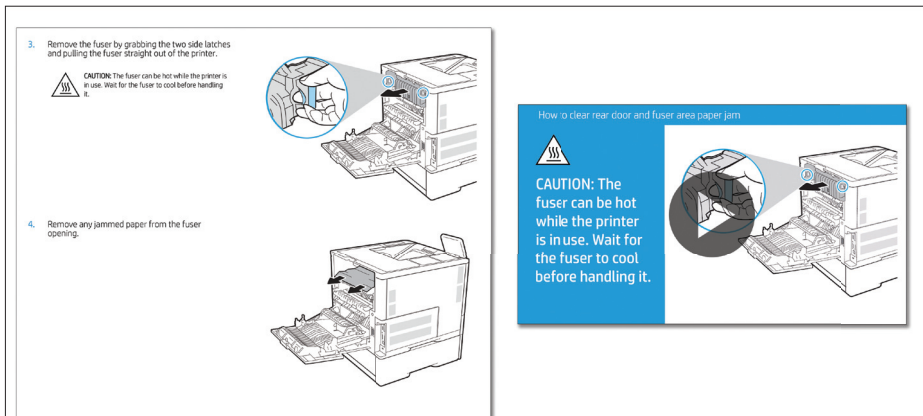


Figure 3: The same XML-based content published as a PDF and as a how-to video

topics are published from within the (C)CMS to the TXTOmedia technology in an XML/DITA format.

Animated videos

Upon arrival, the selected text is brought to speech, using automated speech services. The created audio fragments all together represent the video's timeline. Referred media and associated data in the XML enrich the visual experience and, together, they deliver the animated video, or a sequence of videos, in a media slider a/k/a step-by-step video. This concept is based on the idea of fully reusing existing content and workflows and preventing any additional manual effort.

Live-action videos

The technology can also replace the original referred media with newly added or enriched media, such as high-quality pictures or video fragments. In this way, line drawings from the original maintenance manual are now automatically replaced by filmed video fragments or screen captures, resulting in live-action videos.

Making media multilingual

This method is even more beneficial when the CCMS contains all localized text content. From now on, when creating illustrations, product images, screen captures, or even live-action video fragments, one should avoid the use of language, written or recorded. All created imagery and video should be kept clean of text and audio, thus saving cost and time. The TXTOmedia technology will add the specified language automatically when generating the videos.

This allows the reuse of these images and video fragments in multiple situations and in all language variations. On-screen text, voice-over audio and metadata are associated based on the topic, language and situation. Style and content are kept separate until the videos are generated.

Speed up production while reducing costs
The initial idea behind the technology of TXTOmedia is to enable video creation at scale in a cost-effective and manageable way. TXTOmedia often reduces video creation costs by 80-90 percent and brings production time down from weeks to minutes.

The reuse of content and media not only saves costs and precious time-to-market but also

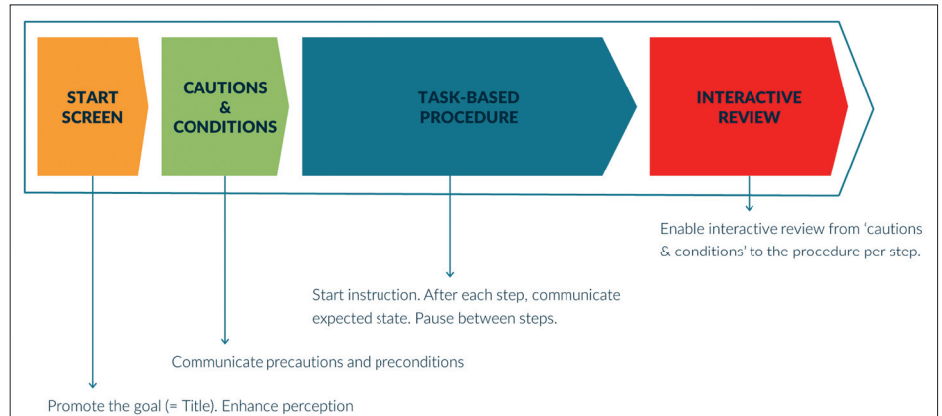


Figure 4: TXTOmedia video model for high-performance instructional how-to videos

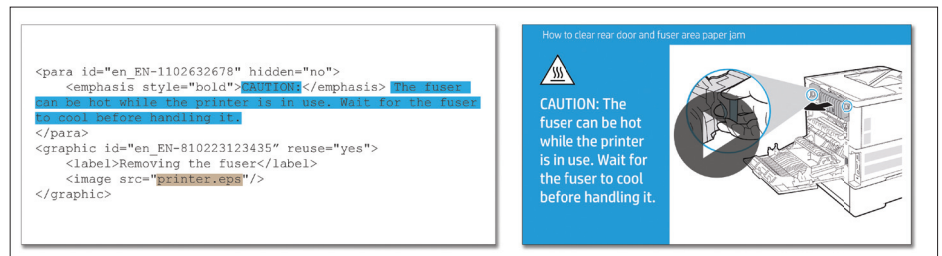


Figure 5: From XML/DITA to animated video Source: www.txtomedia.com/products/structured_studio

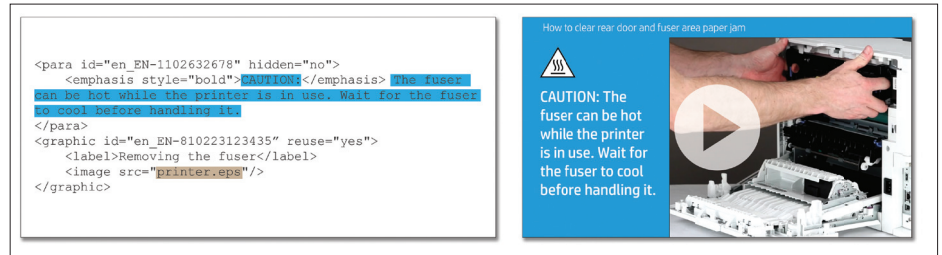


Figure 6: From XML/DITA to animated and live action video Source: www.txtomedia.com/products/video-library

helps to prevent disconnected user experiences during customer journeys. By reducing or preventing the need for manual post-production, TXTOmedia hopes to stimulate the availability of native-language videos, and to contribute to the accessibility of information, support and education for people around the world.

Learn more about this topic at the **tcworld conference:**
 Date: Thursday, November 14
 Time: 15.00 - 15.45
 Room: C7.2

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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started his first tech company during his BA studies at Erasmus University in 1996 and sold his former company Calamares (Enterprise Video Content Management) to SDL plc in 2011. He left SDL in 2016 to start TXTOmedia. TXTOmedia technology transforms structured content into rich media in an automated way to produce interactive how-to videos on the fly.



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