

Announcer: Marketing for community colleges is tough. But after 20 years of working solely with 2-year, technical and community colleges, we've learned a few things. Now, we want to share them with you. Welcome to the Community College Marketing Masterclass Podcast. If you're looking for expert insights from industry experts, you've come to the right place. Bringing more than two decades of marketing and communications experience, please welcome your host and Interact Communications President, Cheryl Broom.

Cheryl: Hi there. This is Cheryl Broom with Interact Communications. Thank you so much for joining us on our first "Community College Marketing Masterclass Podcast," where we get insights and interviews from industry experts. And, today, I'm really excited to have our first guest on. Amy Hazlehurst has been a friend and a colleague of mine for more than 10 years. I first met her when I was working at MiraCosta College, and she helped us get our feet wet in all things digital. She was the first sales rep that I ever worked with on a paperclip campaign, online display advertising. And since then, more than 10 years ago, she has now come alongside Interact Communications and helped community college clients across the nation launch and grow their digital marketing strategy. So before we get started, just a little bit more about Amy. She has more than a decade experience at ReachLocal, and she works with businesses and colleges to help plan their digital media strategy and budgets. Her expertise really resides in helping businesses understand and utilize which platforms will be most beneficial to them. And, today, we're gonna talk about one of those platforms and one of my favorite platforms, and that is YouTube. So, Amy, thank you so much for joining us.

Amy: Well, thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Cheryl: So as we get started, just a little easy question for those listening out there. Tell me about the YouTube platform. What do you like about it?

Amy: Oh, sure. Well, right now, video is one of the most engaging and sought-after forms of content by online audiences today. So that being said, it is a no-brainer to make sure that you include YouTube in your digital media plan, because, in 2018, we actually had over 75% of all internet activity came from people watching video. The way people are consuming media has changed, whether they are going to look online and look at a recipe, look how to do something. Whatever it is that they're wanting to do, people are now wanting to watch it in a video. So as more and more people are choosing to watch a video over any other activity they do online, it just makes sense for a business to make sure that they adapt their digital plan to include YouTube and they're getting in front of their target audience to ensure that they stay relevant.

Cheryl: You know, it's really interesting when we look at our target audience. You and I both have young children, and my 3-year-old watches YouTube more than any other platform.

Amy: Definitely.

Cheryl: He likes to watch other kids play with toys, which is strange, but that's what he likes to do. And then my 11-year-old watches people play video games, but everybody seems to be using YouTube. It doesn't matter what age you are, from looking up content on how to make something or do something, to watching commercials or shows, there's really so much happening on that channel. And I was wondering, with all of the audiences out there, with so much happening on YouTube and colleges having to target so many different segments, what is it like to set up a campaign? How do you make decisions about what audiences to target and what tactics to use?

Amy: Sure. Well, the great thing about YouTube is there are multiple targeting tactics to choose from. That being said, it definitely can be a little bit overwhelming, but you do wanna make sure that you're getting your message in front of the right target audiences. By using multiple videos that speak to the correct audience and setting up the correct targeting tactics for the campaign, you'll make sure your message is going to show to the right person, from when they start their journey online searching for the right community college to when they come to the decision making time and selecting it. What a high school student is gonna be interested in watching is gonna be completely different than what the parent of the high school student is gonna wanna see. So you wanna make sure that you are creating video ads that are going to appeal to each audience and then selecting the right type of targeting tactic, the right age, keyword search retargeting, email retargeting, all different types of things to make sure that your correct video will get in front of that audience. The great thing, too, about making this type of platform a great fit for advertisers is YouTube is skippable after six seconds. So, for an advertiser, they're only going to pay if somebody watches their video ad in completion. So it's a very affordable way to get in front of your target audience, and then the only people that are really gonna see your ad are people that are choosing to watch your ad in full.

Cheryl: That's fantastic, and what do you normally pay? Like, what should you expect to pay for somebody to complete an ad?

Amy: Sure. So industry average is usually between 10 to 15 cents per completed video view or 30 seconds of watching that ad. We don't recommend

ads really longer than 30 seconds, because people's attention span doesn't hold for that long, and you wanna make sure your message is concise at that point. But we have seen, depending on a targeting tactic that you use, if you want to run a Hispanic video campaign on the Spanish YouTube channel, you can run them as low as 1 cent per completed video view. And so this is great for small budgets and large budgets, because you can definitely go really far with your budget you have to spend.

Cheryl: So that's something that, if you're running a campaign, that's a metric that you should really watch, is what you're actually paying per completed view.

Amy: Definitely. You can get a cheaper cost per completed video view if you choose to run video ads that are skippable, meaning that you're gonna pay...if somebody chooses to skip that ad after six seconds, you'll still have to pay, and you'll pay usually between 3 to 5 cents, though we really recommend making the ad skippable, because why waste your video and have to pay for it for somebody that doesn't want to watch it? But that's definitely a metric that you should keep a close eye on just to make sure that the way your campaign is set up and it's being targeted, that you are within the industry averages of what you're paying for.

Cheryl: Any other metrics that are important for people to keep an eye on as they set up campaigns?

Amy: I do think the biggest metric is definitely to make sure that the completed video view rate... So typically, on average, video ads, if they're gonna be watched in full, have about a 15% completed video view rate. We have seen here at ReachLocal and working with Interact that pretty much all of our video campaigns we're running on YouTube run between 30% to 50% completion of a video view rate. That's so important, because that tells you whether your video ad is compelling or not and, at the same time, do you have your targeted audience set up correctly. If an ad is geared towards an influencer or parents but it's being shown to a high school student, they're not gonna watch that video ad in full. But if your targeting is set up properly and you see that your completion rate is low or under the industry average, you're gonna wanna make sure to probably take a look at those ads and see what kind of compelling message you could do. We have found that testimonial ads of students actually perform the best across any digital platform, YouTube also, social media. Because people really wanna hear that person's experience at the college, and so they usually opt in to watch those ads in full all the time.

Cheryl: That's fantastic, and you talked a little earlier about all the different type of targeting options. And one of the ones that we've been playing around with with some of our campaigns is behavioral retargeting. Is that something that YouTube can do, and how does that work?

Amy: Sure, definitely can. So behavioral targeting is targeting an individual user and what their journey is and what they're doing online. So if they are consuming content, whether they're reading a blog, they are interacting on social media, they are reading a news article about anything relevant to career programs, community colleges, and based on their behavior, if it's relevant, then what you can do is target them to show your school's video ad for them when they spend time on YouTube. It is one of the tactics we found out that usually generates the best results. Other tactics we like to include are keyword search retargeting. So if someone is going to be searching on Google looking for a community college near me, you would know that you would want your video ad to play in them for a 30-day period afterwards. So we typically do like two setup campaigns with a mixture of different targeting tactics to see what's gonna perform the best. Usually, we include behavioral retargeting, keyword search retargeting. If a college has an email database of students that have applied, that's a fantastic way, too. You could do CRM retargeting and stay in front of those people to get them to enroll in the college.

Cheryl: So all of those options are really kind of creepy, right, but they're really cool at the same time. I mean, you really get a chance to be thoughtful and not just broadcast a big message.

Amy: Yeah. So you're right, you know, it is a little creepy, but if you think about it, we're used to that. If I go online, and I go and look at a shoe website, or I go furniture shopping, the next time I go into Facebook or I check my email, the banner ad is gonna be targeted to exactly what I looked at. And so the great thing is that you can be relevant. You no longer have to waste your digital ad budget into showing banner ads, or videos, or text ads to an audience that doesn't wanna see it. And so that is the fantastic thing. So while it is creepy, everybody is kind of used to it, and so I don't think they think twice about it. And you are definitely not gonna be wasting your ad budget to an audience that isn't the correct audience to show your video ad to.

Cheryl: Right. And I think if somebody is searching for a community college or searching for terms around education, then you're helping educate them about your community college by showing the ads. So it's actually a really nice way to connect with people who are already interested in maybe attending your school or learning more.

Amy: Yeah, I think so. The one thing that video stands out over any other form of digital advertising is I think you can reach somebody on an emotional level that a static ad doesn't allow. So while you still should be doing display advertising, social media advertising, and if you're doing search engine marketing with a paperclip text ad, those are all great, but video can speak to somebody on a different level and compel them on an emotional level. You can showcase what the college campus looks like. You can have a professor give a testimonial. You could show the inside of a classroom. For a career program, make it exciting. Make somebody really feel that they want to be a part of that community. And I think that that's another reason why video advertising has such a great impact to your targeted audience, because you're reaching them in a way that a display ad just cannot get to them.

Cheryl: And now we've worked on...I don't even know how many different ad campaigns that we've worked on now. We've had a lot over the last year. Is there anyone that stands out that did that really well, that used, you know, a testimonial or an emotional ad that had great success? Anything that comes to mind?

Amy: Oh, definitely. One of the ones is Riverside Desert Community College Consortium. We have actually split their YouTube budget into two different campaigns. We have an English and Hispanic campaign, and we do run multiple video ads in both of their campaigns for A/B testing, because you wanna make sure that you are, over time, gonna be showing the video ads that have the highest completion. And then when an ad is not performing so well, you'll see that and be able to switch the video ad out, but both of their campaigns do extremely well. I know that for the English campaign, I believe it has a 40% completion of a completed video view rate, and the Spanish one does, too. And Spanish is just paying a record low of just 1 cent. The reason for that is, too, inventory is a lot cheaper on that site, so if you have that target audience, it's great to get ahead of your competition right now and utilize that platform as well.

Cheryl: Yeah, I really like that the ads that we made for the consortium feature actual students talking about the programs, how they got jobs, and we actually have those up on our website, interactcom.com. So if any of the listeners want to go and see some really great creative that's had good results, go to the Our Clients section, and you could take a look at the work that we've done and actually have some links to those YouTube videos that Amy mentioned. Just a couple more questions, Amy. A lot of our colleges don't have a lot of money, or they might have a decent budget, but they have pressure to spend it in a lot of different ways. How much do you think a good minimum for a campaign would be? What's the recommendation you give your clients?

Amy: Sure. So a good starting budget or a good minimum, you can really run a very successful YouTube campaign for about \$1,000 a month. The great thing with the YouTube platform right now is it's still in its infancy, so as an early adapter, you can take advantage of this and stay ahead of the competition. There is so much inventory on there, and that's why it's so affordable. And so when you're only paying pennies for a completed video view, \$1,000 really does go a long way. The good news is, though, both small and large budgets do really well on the platform. Obviously, the larger budget you have, the bigger reach you're gonna have, the more times you're gonna be able to get in front of a user multiple times to have an impact on that particular person, but small budgets do drive excellent results as well, because, at this point with YouTube, you really are just paying pennies for a completed view. And that landscape, you know, hasn't changed yet, and so it's a good product for both budgets, large and small.

Cheryl: And what about timing? How long of a campaign do you recommend? When during the year should colleges look to do this, or should it be something that they do all 12 months? What do you think of timing?

Amy: Sure. So we do work closely with Google, and Google has studies that show that over 51% of prospective students actually take an average of 6 months to a year before they make a decision on which college they want to attend. So truly understanding the student journey online, from when they start their research through the discovery phase, to when they actually make a decision can honestly be up to a full year. So if you can budget and run a video campaign for that entire time because you're wanting to capture that person through every aspect of the funnel, from consideration to a decision, is very important. And I think winning in the consideration piece of the funnel is gonna be the most critical. Students today use an average of over 8 touchpoints when they make a decision, and compared to actually 15 years ago, they only used 2 touchpoints. So it's so much media that is out there, and the different touchpoints that are affecting them, it's incredibly important to make sure that you're gonna be found when they decide to start doing their research and then, when they come to that decision making period, that you're still there in front of them.

Cheryl: Wonderful. I mean, you've given such great tips. There's so much to think about, and is there anything else that you could think to share with the colleges that are listening?

Amy: I think that's pretty much it for YouTube. I do think it's crucial if you're trying to target the high school students. It's how they consume media, so it's becoming more of a priority over other forms of digital advertising.

Cheryl: Well, thanks so much, Amy, for joining us, and we have more resources on the Interact Communications News Center. We have a blog that has some really great data, specifically about community college YouTube consumption across the nation, and just a lot of information on there, including sample ads. If you wanna go take a look, it's interactcom.com. So thank you so much for listening.

Amy: Thanks for having me. Thank you.

Cheryl: And we'll catch you next time.

Amy: Sounds great.

Announcer: Thank you for joining the Community College Marketing Masterclass Podcast. For more great tips on how to improve marketing and communications at your two-year college, visit interactcom.com, and join us next time as we discuss and share actionable, time-tested strategies on topics directly related to community college marketing.