



BY CHRIS BROAD

Whenever someone refers to me as a “Youtuber” I always feel a bit odd. I don’t like to think my identity is tied up with my out of control hobby of sharing my experiences in Japan through video.

Yet at the same time, after four years of doing Youtube and more recently turning it into a full time career, it would be naive of me to dismiss the title. But however I define whatever it is I do, I’ve nonetheless still learned a lot from the experience.

SO here’s my four years of distilled Youtube wisdom, condensed into 6 things I’ve learned, for people considering starting a youtube channel or just curious as to what it’s like behind the scenes.

1) Being featured in traditional mass media ultimately leads to little traffic

Over the years, Abroad in Japan channel videos have been featured all over the place, including traditional media such as the Daily Mail and the Guardian, to the BBC and Japan’s NHK. Videos that have enjoyed this kind of exposure include, “KFC Christmas in Japan”, “Teaching Japanese People Swear Words,” “McDonalds chocolate fries”, “Japanese Love Hotels” and ‘Japanese People Trying Marmite’.

And yet despite all of this wonderful publicity, it ultimately never leads to nothing in the way of traffic or views. For example, last year a video called “Japanese People Eating Marmite” got some great coverage in the UK. I clearly recall sitting awkwardly in my car, in the car park of the school

where I worked, giving various interviews to BBC radio about how and why I gave Japanese people marmite (which was the most absurd interview I've ever had for anything ever). The experience was certainly fun, but I didn't see a jump in views or traffic on the video itself, or via the link on the BBC website.

I've even had a video shouted out by a real Youtuber, Phillip DeFranco, a few years ago, which again led to a few views, but nothing spectacular.

That said in spite of this, I do still enjoy the media coverage, as it's good for branding, and it's good to know the videos are being appreciated.

Truthfully, there are only two real sources of traffic that exist when it comes to Youtube it seems. The first is Youtube itself - getting your video featured on the trending page can have a huge effect. In fact the McDonald's chocolate fries video (arguably the worst video I've ever made), got 400,000 views in a day through Youtube.

The second source of traffic over the years has been Reddit. In fact, every time one of my videos is successful on Reddit, it ends up being in the aforementioned mass media. But numerous videos over the years have ended up on Reddit, been up voted by Redditors and then enjoyed enormous success. This year's Love Hotel gained at least 300,000 through Reddit alone.

Unfortunately, ending up in either of those positions isn't easy. It's a combination of luck and having a video that usually contains some kind of shock factor/reaction.

2) Hate comments are the best thing ever

I was speaking with a friend who runs a successful Youtube channel the other day, and she was a bit down due to some hate mail she'd been receiving. I was trying to convince her of the benefits of hate mail, because when you receive thousands of comments a month, hate mail is an inevitability outside of your control. The only real way to get around it in the long term is to change your perspective and how you deal with it.

Now first off, I won't lie, I've been very lucky over the years to get negative comments pretty rarely, but in my first two years of making videos, whenever I did receive them, I found them difficult to forget. They definitely got to me and it really annoyed me, from someone telling me to go "go kill myself" to someone telling me "talk too much...show only ur face". I was less offended, more just annoyed that people out there were sad enough to write this stuff.

But then I started using the negative comments as a source of entertainment. Whether that was reposting them on Facebook or twitter, or making feature length videos about it. In fact, when I ask people their favourite video on the channel, they often cite last year's video "British Guy Reads Hate Mail", a video even I enjoy watching (and I rarely enjoy re-watching things I make).

And so these days I genuinely feel excited by hate comments and I put them into a folder on my laptop, stockpiling them like treasure, to be used in an upcoming video.

Converting loads of stupid, negative comments into a source of entertainment and income through producing a Youtube video is just about the best form of revenge there could possibly be. Last year's hate mail video did unusually well in terms of ad-revenue, and I remember celebrating by using some of the income on a splendid sushi dinner, with every mouthful of sushi tasting like a form of delicious revenge.

So if you find yourself receiving lots of hate mail, store it away in a special folder and make a video every year by reading them out. Turn the hate into a source of income and entertainment, and you'll fall in love with all the hate that comes your way, as I have done.

3) The best days to release videos are between Thursday and Saturday

A practical tip for anyone starting out on Youtube.

For reasons I don't quite understand, videos tend to do better towards the end of the week. It seems Youtube gets more traffic on these days - perhaps as its the end of the week, people can relax more. But if I release a video on Monday or Tuesday it'll often perform poorly, getting about 10,000 views less than I would have got had I released it between Thursday and Saturday. There's a great article on this containing more data (<https://goo.gl/v0D3TW>), which I can confirm is accurate when measured against Abroad in Japan. It's worth taking into consideration if you're new to Youtube.

4) You know how well your video is going to do in the first hour

Actually, I'd go one further; you know how well your video is going to do before you've even uploaded it, judging by the topic of the video and the title/thumbnail you choose to go with it.

But I find if a video gets over 6,000 views in the first hour, the video will go on to do really well. I don't know why 6k is the magic number, but in recent months, when I watch the view count go up, if it goes over 6k in the first hour, it usually does very well and get over 100,000 views in the first week.

Less than 4,000 views in the first hour and I've got a problem.

This is because the first people to watch your videos are the people who really enjoy your videos and if the title and thumbnail of the video aren't enough to interest them, then odds are the less invested viewers are not going to be keen to watch.

Once you've made a few videos, you'll be able to benchmark them against your most successful and least successful videos.

5) Simpler videos get more likes

Even now after 4 years, I still feel as though I've got Youtube wrong sometimes. If I sit in my apartment and talk to the camera about something, or discuss an opinion, it usually does really well. If I go off and make a high-end travel video about something I think is interesting, it often doesn't get nearly as many likes.

This is good news for people to new to Youtube, because it means you don't particularly need a big budget to succeed - just a camera, a room and an internet connection.

There's no doubt this year I've gone a bit overboard on the travel video front though, and forgotten that most of the viewers on the channel would rather watch me sitting in a room talking about something, than going somewhere and showing them a location. So going forward I need to get the balance right once again.

I guess it's because viewers like to feel the connection between themselves and the person on screen - that's what makes YouTube vlogging so unique. It's a lot easier to do if you're sitting in front of a camera, as opposed to walking around the countryside being all artistic with nice shots.

6) You don't appreciate the view count until you bump into people in the street

It wasn't until I'd been doing Youtube for two years, that people started recognising me in the street and when it started happening, I was always so shocked and confused by the concept of folks I'd never met, coming over and saying hello.

Even now it's a weird sensation, although in the last year it's become quite frequent if I'm in a major city - particularly Tokyo or Kyoto. In just one day in Tokyo I've found myself being spotted over 10 times - everywhere from in the street, to on the train and in restaurants and coffee shops.

I even had one Japanese girl who seemed completely star struck, who covered her mouth in surprise and jumped up and down in a shopping mall once. I never know how to react to these situations (especially that time), although it wasn't until it started happening that I realised the significance of the view count on the videos.

Even after I'd passed a million views, it still felt meaningless, as if it was nothing particularly special. After all, it can be difficult to imagine that out there the other side of the world, there are people watching something you've created. It's a very strange concept to grasp.

Surprisingly, I don't get an ego boost from being recognised in the street, but I do feel pretty good when the folks I encounter tell me they've been entertained or learned something of value from the videos.

Youtube can be a lonely career sometimes - more often than not, you're working alone. You're filming yourself in a room - you're editing in the corner of a coffee shop or a hotel room, you're glued to social media.

You're out there filming things and sharing them with people around the world, who you'll likely never meet. Therefore bumping into the awesome people who appreciate the things you make, really does give you a serious motivation boost and help you remember why it is you make videos in the first place. But even now, when it does happen, it's still something I genuinely struggle to truly comprehend.