



## SECRET STRUGGLES OF A YOUTUBER PERSON

By Chris Broad

I hate the term 'Youtuber'. It sounds lame and it comes with a curse.

The curse is the look of disappointment you receive from the stranger at a networking event, when you reveal "you make videos on YouTube", only for them to subsequently remark "...I see..." and slowly edge away towards the sandwiches.

For most people over 35, Youtube still seems to be some sort of hobby teenagers do, sitting in their bedroom, whinging about homework in front of a webcam and disclosing their favourite three makeup brands (accurate to some degree).

Only last year did I finally come to terms with the fact that I am a person who's very life depends on making videos in a room, before uploading them to the internet and waiting for things to happen - a summary that sounds far shadier than I intended.

So last year I finally modified my sales pitch, as I realised the cause of many strangers edging off towards the sandwiches was partly to do with the fact that describing my life as "I make videos about Japan on Youtube," wasn't a sufficient life synopsis.

I've since learned to follow up that unremarkable line with a premium business card, plastered with eye catching statistics like "300,000 subscribers" and "25 million views." And only when I've witnessed the stranger's initial sneer turn into an expression of surprise and curiosity, I'm the one who gleefully departs for the sandwiches. Never to be seen again.

But the main issue I've struggled with, even now after four and a half years, is working out who I am when I'm sat in front of an inanimate object, speaking loudly, whilst trying to imagine that the inanimate object is a person.

And as the years have progressed and the audience on the other side of the inanimate object has grown from a handful of people, to enough regular viewers to fill a football stadium, I've found myself more and more confused as to how to act.

The bigger it gets, the scarier it is. As an amateur Youtuber there's no manager, or Director, or cameraman, or PR staff. There's no-one to check what you're producing isn't utterly awful, or potentially offensive to viewers. I recently turned a toy cat into a regular feature of the channel, only to realise soon after that it looked worryingly like Hitler, thanks to a sea of comments from viewers pointing it out.



***It's not easy trying to look serious whilst doing this.***

A fine example of this is perhaps back in November (2016), when I was working on a video where the opening segment contained myself and the aforementioned 'Hitler car', playing Jenga.

Our game of Jenga was rudely interrupted by a nuclear explosion, which was then followed up with some remarks about British and American politics (you can watch the sequence here: <https://goo.gl/54QV58>).

I suspected my political remarks might annoy a few people, so I showed it to a few friends and Patreon viewers, and to my surprise no-one mentioned the political remarks. However, quite a few folks were worried it would be offensive to Japanese viewers by featuring a nuclear explosion (due to Hiroshima). Honestly, I hadn't even considered it as a factor and to be honest, even now, I don't think it would have been an issue. But nonetheless, I scrapped the sequence for fear of causing a storm of irritating comments and decided it wasn't worth the hassle.

(Although the real reason I cut it was due to the copyrighted soundtrack and I didn't want to get shouted at by Youtube).

(...And NO I didn't want to change the song either, as it fitted too well with the sequence でしょう!)

But I've realised my biggest issue in recent times has been confusion at who it is I need to be on camera, and this was starting to blow a hole through my motivation. It's just fortunate I finally discovered the key factor that was corrupting my motivation and sapping the enjoyment out of the creative process.

When I'm sitting in front of a camera, or writing up an idea for a video, I often subconsciously picture the viewer in the process. I do it to put myself in their shoes and it also helps me keep some sanity while talking to an inanimate camera.

However, it turns out this simple subconscious process has been grossly affecting the way I perform in front of the camera, including the dialogue and overall tone of each video.

For example, when I'm at my most bitter, sarcastic, satirical-self, I'm often picturing many of my friends and folks my age (late 20's, early 30's) who share this kind of humour. This is when I'm at my most comfortable and creative and it keeps me motivated.

Yet, in recent years, having met various Japanese viewers (who are sometimes over 40), without noticing it, I started to tone down my sarcasm and colloquial British expressions for fear they may

struggle to comprehend the content. Consequently my persona became more 'family friendly' and I felt conflicted when writing down ideas.

Then a while back a distant relative got in touch and told me they enjoyed watching the videos with their daughter and they thought the videos "were wonderful!"

- Except for the swearing.

I told them regardless, there was no way I'd be cutting out the swearing - but then it happened AGAIN. My subconscious kicked in during filming and writing; I pictured a 9 year girl watching the video, with her father covering her ears for half of the video, and without realising it, again, the swearing began to disappear from the videos.

Every time someone tells me they watch my videos, I start to factor them into that visualisation process and it confuses me greatly. So instead of writing a great idea for a video, or filming something with a dash of satire and some wonderfully offensive points of view, I sit there, lost as to who I'm making my videos for. I've sometimes made videos in the last 18 months and wondered who the fuck it is in them, because it's certainly not me and it's turned sitting in front of a camera into some kind of psychological Freudian mindfuckery session each time.

Thank god I've now identified this as a problem, because as small and trivial as it sounds, it affected my my motivation as a writer and filmmaker. My enthusiasm went down as I didn't know who it was I needed to be on camera anymore and what tone to set in each of the videos. I learned that to appeal to everyone is to essentially appeal to no-one. You stand for nothing.

Discovering this issue has got me quite excited about 2017, because I know now why I've been plagued creatively on and off recently. I've remembered who it is I enjoy being when I'm on camera; namely a grumpy, bitter, snarky, sarcastic bastard.

And once you know what persona you enjoy playing in front of an inanimate camera, it makes the creative process a heck of a lot easier.

There's a reason my favourite video on the Abroad in Japan channel is also the simplest; there was no real effort, no clever camera tricks or exotic royalty free music. Just a few lines of sarcasm and an absurd Japanese-English textbook (this one: <https://youtu.be/bZqUtVxDFvw>). This video will be my guiding star going forth into 2017.

So off the record, my number one New Year's resolution in 2017 is this; before I sit down in front of a camera to film a video, I'm going to first dedicate five minutes of precious time to burning a Unicorn alive, listing 6 things I hate about everyone and everything and slamming my fingers in a car door. Twice. Because only then will I be evil enough - only then will I be in the right frame of mind - to produce a video that'll be worth watching.

After all, there's already enough over-enthusiastic, happy, smiling, sunshine-lollipop-rainbow wonder-dream bullshit, sycophantic content-creators on Youtube. Joining the club isn't on my agenda.

If I could summarise this article in three points, **Number 1:** Expect more videos than ever before this year on the Abroad in Japan channel, now I know how to be comfortable on camera.

**Number 2:** If you become a Youtuber, don't necessarily be yourself - be who you want to be. It's far more fun and will give you some serious motivation.

**And number 3:** Don't you *dare* leave me for the sandwiches. God help you - I'll chuck you on the fire with the Unicorns.