

The rollercoaster ride of creating valuable video content

 By Leigh Andrews

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2016 will be all about the video. Here's why you simply can't afford to give the video content trend a miss and how to get started, with tips from the ZAlebs video team.

With Snapchat's 'vanishing video' viewing now on [6 billion daily](#), you can't afford to ignore the 'moving pictures' medium any longer. There's no set guideline for how to get going, as video can be as long or short as you'd like. You can create a 5-second clip to get a single brand message across or create a weekly vlog series that leaves your audience on the edge of their seats, begging for more. You can create Q&As based on your readers' comments. You can go the 'voxpops' route, getting voice comments from people live at the scene of breaking news events.



Altamish with Toya Delazy

You can do all this or invent something completely clever that'll transform video content as we know it. Whatever you do, don't miss out on the trend.

One example a media platform that caught the video wave early and riding it to the shores of success is [ZAlebs.com](#), currently one of South Africa's fastest growing black entertainment brands - yes, the name is a punny way of putting across that it's all about South African celebrities. Clever.

And there's a lot more clever thinking behind the scenes thinking when it comes to creating valuable video content. I found out more from Charis Coleman, Head of Content at Kagiso Media's Content Studio and Altamish Khan, lead in the video production unit for Content Studio and video producer for the [ZAlebs.com](#) platform...

1. Tell us about ZAlebs' early days.

Coleman: Launched in 2010, ZAlebs started off as a channel within the South African Howzit MSN portal. Due to its popularity with the readers, Kagiso Digital (now known as Content Studio) decided to spin it out as an individual web property in 2011.

Since then, the brand has seen incredible growth in an extremely tough and saturated market and with the site's trademark blend of celebrity gossip, exclusive content and engaging photos and videos, is turning it into the destination of choice for celebrity watchers in South Africa. Under the editorial direction of Zee Dlala and a killer editorial team, we produce content that allows the readers to get to know their favourite South African celebrities. Our stories range from interviews with South African musicians and actors, to covering music awards and highlighting the talent in showbiz. ZAlebs allows South Africans to stay up to date with, and entertained through, local celebrity and entertainment news.

Online, we are the largest independent entertainment site by a long shot. Every other significant alternative is either rolled up in a larger network, a newspaper site or a broadcaster site. Beyond the website, ZAlebs has partnered with broadcasters to make its content available via both radio and television, reaching more than 1.5 million South Africans each month.

■ 2. *Share what a day in the life of a video producer is like.*

Khan: Being a video producer in the digital sphere is a lot like being on a rollercoaster. There are ridiculous bumps and curves and ups and downs, but it's extremely worth it when you take a look at the finished product at the end of the day.

Our day usually begins the night before, as you have to work ahead in order to be on track with what's trending. Usually the writing process begins the night before with our daily news videos on ZAlebs too, and we have to ensure that scripts are ready in the morning, ready to begin shooting first thing when we get in and then the arduous, but most magical, process of post-production begins.

Everybody in the team has to be on-form, on time and on their toes, as being on schedule and making our deadline is crucial to ZAlebs and most of all, reaching our expected goals. We also have to think about the month ahead and plan our schedules around the hottest events happening in town and see how we can cover and shoot at these events, what angles we go with and find out who will be rubbing shoulders with who, so we make sure we're in-between those shoulders to bring the readers and viewers the latest entertainment happenings.

■ 3. *The video editing process is a bane to many. What's involved?*

Khan: I see it as one of the most important processes involved in production. There's something glorious about taking a turd and polishing it. But, seriously, when you've taken hours of footage and you're able to create a fantastic video out of it through the power of editing, it's liberating and there's a sense of pride thereafter.

We generally shoot most of our content in a little nifty green-screen studio here at our offices at Content Studio. We use a combination of Adobe After Effects and Adobe Premier Pro in post, putting together our news stories first. Secondly, render time has to be taken into consideration to get the process of "keying" right - that's the process of replacing the 'green' with any desired background. Nothing looks worse on TV than a bad key! We try keep our look and feel streamlined from the website, hence why we have a matching animation/motion graphic package, which we include in our edits for the logos, straps and title sequences. Due to the really tight turnaround time we have on our daily videos, we personally final mix the audio on these videos. Not many production houses can claim to do that.



Altanish in the ZAlebs studio with two of the presenters, Siya Ben and Tinashe Venge.

■ **4. Talk us through the difference between short-form and longer video productions.**

Khan: With short-form productions, you're always on your feet and you have to be up to date with your content team on everything that's happening, as turnaround time is crucial and news gets old fast, especially in the social-media heavy space we're in right now. Every day we are shooting and editing at the same time, releasing videos every day, going live on YouTube and to our respective TV channels partners Glow TV, Soweto TV and StarSat.

On the long-form side of production, you have a much larger team involved, from pre-production all the way through to post. There's a lot more hands involved in the process compared to short form, where a number of your team is taking on a lot more tasks, your deadlines are more spaced out, you're given a lot more time in edit, there are a lot more approval viewings with producers, executives, clients and broadcasters, and most importantly, you're dealing with bigger budgets.

■ **5. Tell us how you interact with your audience.**

Khan: We take advantage of a lot of the great built-in features on YouTube, such as the annotations and cards features. Through the following, we connect viewers to relatable video links and link them to related content on our website. These generate more views on other videos and more visitors to our site. Plus, we highlight the importance of audience interactivity on our videos through the comments section and call-to-action messages we include in our scripts. Our videos are also shared via our various social media pages such as Facebook and Twitter, and we encourage people to visit our site and view the videos by posting little promo videos on Instagram.

■ **6. Any exciting new developments in the pipeline at ZAlebs you can share with us?**

Khan: Currently, ZAlebs is working on a great new look and feel across all our videos. We have redesigned the daily news graphics and animations, which you should look out for very soon. We're really excited for what's coming up, as it has been quite a work in progress. Also in development is a 24-minute ZAlebs magazine show, which we can't say much about now. Plus, we're starting to curate original content formats and ideas, instead of just reporting on news and events and broadening our scope a little bit.

■ **7. Share tips on how marketers and advertisers can better make use of video.**

Khan: One of the most important things is to really understand your audience and know who they are. It might sound obvious, but if you aren't getting that right from the get-go, you're wasting your time. Keeping the video content engaging, fun and interactive is the best way to keep your audience in the palm of your hand.

Never compromise on quality, no matter how tight your deadlines are or how small the budget might be. Always find the

best way to get the most out of what's available to you, even if it's a small camera, one light and a little laptop. You can change the world with one video.

Keep engaging with the audience as well, find ways to get them involved through experiments or even making their own little videos through competitions and challenges, as everybody has cameras on their phones these days.

■ 8. *Let us in on trends in video that are set to shake up the online news industry.*

Khan: 360-degree imagery and virtual reality are making a huge comeback! Artists and film-makers, in collaboration with Google and Chrome, are now able to shoot videos where the video moves their smartphones, tablets and computers around to watch an entire setting in a video, as if they're right there, almost POV style. People will be able to feel the entire environment that you're shooting in, whether it's a concert, protest, war-zone, wherever, all in the comfort of their own home.

Google has created hardware that makes it as simple as inserting your phone, attaching it around your face, switching to 360-mode and 'boom', you're in the zone! Artists such as The Weeknd and Linkin Park cofounder Mike Shinoda have already experimented with this and it's surprisingly cheap to pull off.

Lots of exciting aspects to consider. [Here's how](#) to truly measure the success of video content. For more on ZAlebs, [visit their website](#) or follow their [Twitter account](#).

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