

Vlogstars! How to start winning at YouTube

 By Leigh Andrews

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"It's such a weird job title, to introduce yourself as a 'YouTuber', but only a small part of it is making the videos. It's a hugely complex role, which only content creators really understand." Intrigued? You're in luck if you want to find out more, as one of SA's top film directors-turned-YouTubers Dan Mace shared some of that complexity at a recent Heavy Chef masterclass.



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Close to 60 of Cape Town's digital content creators gathered in the main hall at Workshop 17 on Tuesday, 4 December 2018 for Heavy Chef's four-hour masterclass on 'winning at YouTube'.

Through the format of a practical workshop with a heavy focus on doing after learning, Heavy Chef CEO Fred Roed reminded us that the best way to succeed in life is by following a life-long learning lifestyle, especially with a focus on technology, leadership and creativity. That's exactly what the content creation lifestyle is all about.

MC for the morning was Danilo Acquisto, SA CEO of Special Effects Media, who said it's great to see such a diverse crowd attending as most people think Youtube as a broadcast platform is purely for 13-year-olds.



The state of SA's social influencers with Special Effects Media

Leigh Andrews 27 Nov 2018



While there were a few teens in the audience, they were vastly outnumbered by the working generation, especially those who have already made it big on traditional social media channels and now want to crack into YouTube by sharing their vlogs (video weblogs or recorded sessions shared online, to those not in the know).

Next, Acquisto said the long and short of it is that it really takes a lot of hard work to make a “kick-ass YouTube channel”. To explain just how much hard work is involved, Acquisto introduced the day’s speakers, storyteller Dan Mace – now based in New York, where he works with business partner Willie Morris, who has worked with Mr Social Media himself, Gary ‘Vee’ Vaynerchuk.

From the way they were bouncing ideas off each other, you’d never tell that Mace and Morris have only worked together for four months now.

Pinpoint your passion before pursuing production

The core of their message? That succeeding in the vlogging space takes much more effort than just putting together pretty pictures and blogging your thoughts once a week.

While that’s the crux of what people see, behind the scenes there’s a whole unseen world of strategy and planning to ensure the content created hits the mark. But before you even start highlighting the most trending topics to touch on, you need to identify your own passions.



Dan Mace becomes first South African to win three Young Director Awards at Cannes

Egg Films 26 Jun 2017



That’s the hardest part, for some, and one that many attendees mentioned in their introduction – we know we want to be part of the digital content revolution, and all consume and even create some of that content, but some of us haven’t identified our passions and place just yet.

Speaking of his own experience, Mace said the beauty of vlogging is that as you start to share your own message and build your brand, people return for more of your voice. That’s why you need to share your own views and experiences rather than emulate those of other successful vloggers. That said, there’s always more to learn from others, like Morris and Mace. For example...



#CannesLions2017: “We don't need awards to believe in our work” - Dan Mace

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Morris shared that he grew up in Lynchburg, Virginia and left as soon as he could. Describing himself as a super-nerdy kid trying to hack what he could on the early AOL internet, Morris admitted he didn’t know entrepreneurship was a career path until after he had graduated.

Morris went on to work with the likes of Boeing and Amazon, where he pitched products directly to Jeff Bezos and ran a subscription box company with Gary Vee, which they later sold. Of the experience, Morris said"

“ When you own a company you eventually need to hire other people to do the fun stuff and you end up doing the boring admin. ”

To change things up a little, he decided to [start vlogging](#). While it felt terrifying and uncomfortable at first – and he admits that it still does – Morris went on to put out 500 videos in 365 days while growing his company with Gary Vee. The process taught him a wealth of skills, like presenting off the cuff and the nitty gritty post-production editing of videos. But for Morris, the intention was never to become a vlogger. It wasn't about the numbers, it was a creative outlet.

“ WORKING AT WINNING ON YOUTUBE | 🎬🎬🎬🎬 Today's knowledge soak-up is again at the inspiring [@Workshop17za](#) - this time it's the [@heavy_chef](#) masterclass on [#WinningAtYoutube](#) with SA's own [@danmace](#) and his manager, [@MoreWillie](#). 🎬🎬 Key outtakes on [@Bizcommunity](#) soon! [pic.twitter.com/VTrJK9x34X](#)— Rambling Litchi ([@Leigh_Andrews](#)) [December 4, 2018](#) ”

On the flipside, Mace got into filmmaking because when he was younger, he was one of the listeners of the world, the ones who tend to be quiet in conversation but have a lot going on inside. He felt misunderstood, and while he could have fallen into poetry or art or music to express himself, film was his way of becoming relatable.

Tell your story: Tips to start your vlogger journey

Mace explains, “The beauty of film is that you can package it with music and visuals”. He developed deep narratives and used the full spectrum of film, to which he's already had resounding success across the globe.

Mace says to stick true to your core as a storyteller, and while you don't need to spend ages preparing, you do need to have a plan. To demonstrate this, Mace showed us his first YouTube video from six years ago.

He commented that when watching his older content he often feels he was a better storyteller then in that he was naive and not scared – it's something he's trying to get back to.

Also note that he had zero followers before his upload, which quickly grew to over 10,000 after just the first film.

That's what makes it hard to believe Mace has only been a dedicated vlogger for a year now, as his YouTube channel had a whopping 716,752 subscribers at the time of writing, and his individual video views often top 1m:

Morris interjected that that's the beautiful thing about YouTube – seeing how the content creators' journey progresses, as you can binge-watch all their content.

Mace adds that when you start looking at your life as an outsider, it's more beautiful than you can ever imagine. "Embrace it. It's always embarrassing watching a first attempt, but he aims to keep that emotion and positivity in all of his filmed storytelling as it's how he wishes he saw the world all the time.

He's since made the SA slang term 'bru' global and incorporates his viewers' feedback into the content he creates...

Next was a quick Q&A session with the audience on how to achieve success in YouTube. Mace and Morris pointed out that everyone's definition of success is likely to differ. Morris reiterated that one of the biggest challenges is to understand that your passions change as you go, so you need to find where the value lies for your audience.

Mace added that many people don't start vlogging on YouTube as they think they should talk about or fit into a specific niche, but they struggle to get going as their passions lie elsewhere. Don't overthink it – just start sharing your story. Get comfortable with sharing content and creating value for your audience.

The rollercoaster ride of creating valuable video content

Leigh Andrews 13 Nov 2015





It's the million-dollar question: How do I make the money when everything has been done before? That pressure makes it that much harder to create something unique and spot the next trend. To keep people coming back, you need to decide how frequently to post content – don't be too optimistic about daily vlogging at first as it can be hard to maintain – and you need to stick to your schedule as best you can.

Mace says you have to decide what type of content you enjoy creating and what type of content your audience enjoys consuming. Then take what you love and embed it into what people want to see.

“ That said, Mace admits if you didn't care about the views you would simply upload it all to Vimeo, without the rush of seeing how popular your content is. ”

Most of us don't know who we are as a brand before we start creating content, but hopefully you know who you are as a human. Let your beliefs and passions guide you.



How to stop your passion from ruining your business

Thati Segoatle 16 Nov 2017



Also remember that it's harder to 'make it big' on YouTube than on other social media channels as the investment is singular, in someone watching the whole video, whereas on the likes of Instagram and Facebook, the content level is high yet concentration is low – so there are more likes, but fewer people seeing every content item you post.

Mace and Morris said they often get asked if paid content works. While you can feel like a sell-out in creating content for a brand rather than yourself, it doesn't have to be that way. If this is a route you want to pursue, remember to work with brands that align with you, and don't include ads throughout the content – work to make it a natural element of the storytelling, or don't go there.

Battling burnout and whether to do it all on your own, bru

Morris says where that is well aligned, the sign-up reflects that. Again, it's about the sweet spot of finding brands your audience is interested in and tying in with that. You need to dive deeper than surface level, based on whether you just want to raise awareness of an issue or sell products.

Speaking of the SA YouTube audience, Mace is pleased there's growing interest from brands' side on influence.



Unpacking social media video marketing

Joseph Neusu 23 Sep 2016



And just like with the 'full-time SA influencer', most SA YouTubers have to fit in their content creation and editing outside of their office job.

In addition, it seems many South Africans are hesitant to click on Youtube subscribe buttons, as they worry that 'subscribe'

means 'pay'.

Then there's the fact that online videos equal data usage, and accessing data is a huge problem in South Africa – but I've tackled this topic elsewhere.



#Africom2018: What's *really* chewing up your data

Leigh Andrews 13 Nov 2018



#AfricaCom2015: YouTube takes Africa offline

Leigh Andrews 20 Nov 2015



Another question from the audience tackled confusion over when to hand over to a manager or assistant.

“ *It's something creatives struggle with, because focusing on both the business and the creative side frequently leads to burnout.* ”

You need to work hard together to get things done, and just because someone else is focusing on the admin doesn't mean you can take things easy, as it'll leave you with more time to create content.

Acquisto summed up his key learnings as follows: You need to be consistent, in whatever format works for you – whether you can commit to daily, weekly or monthly content, make sure there's always something there when your audience expects it.

Also, remember that your reason for creating content transcends the need to 'just create' content, as people connect with the passion of your 'why'. Without this, you find yourself creating for creation's sake and will struggle to get off the hamster wheel of your own creation.



Danilo Acquisto on the online video revolution (Part 1)

Juanita Pienaar 8 May 2018



Acquisto adds that once you've started, you need to analyse and refine your work as you go.

Attendees then spent an hour putting this into practice. We split into groups to create content plans for YouTube channels that may or may not be coming your way soon.

We decided on the metrics we would use to classify success, as well as the mission, overarching theme, growth strategy, frequency of upload schedule, and more.

These team discussion groups raised the importance of identifying gaps in the market for our intended audience, then catering that content across the board, so it's accessible to the widest possible market. Getting this right can be the difference between your great content being found and shared by others, rather than just promoting it yourself.

Danilo Acquisto on the online video revolution (Part 2)





Juanita Pienaar 9 May 2018



Mace and Morris ended with a reminder that you can monetise your Youtube efforts through the likes of Google ads and by selling products and merchandise – Mace will offer merchandise on his own channel from early in 2019.

To win at YouTube yourself, best follow Morris and Mace's footsteps in realising that it's a constant learning experience and that each digital viewer is influential in their own right.

So when your audience numbers start to grow, don't lose sight of the fact that your audience is made up of individuals coming to your channel for something only you can offer. Go forth and YouTube!

What a day of learning and doing. Follow [Heavy Chef](#), [Mace](#), [Morris](#) and Acquisto on [Twitter](#) for the latest updates and don't miss [Mace's YouTube channel](#), bru.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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