

THE MEDIUM OF INTERNET VLOGGING CAN BE A USEFUL TOOL IN  
COMMUNICATING THE FAITH TO TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

BY

CALEB K. SCHULTZ

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PROF. STEVE GEIGER, ADVISOR

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## **Abstract**

Martin Luther translated the Bible into German in 1534. He did this to connect the Bible with his people in a way they could understand. Since then, the Lutheran church has placed a high priority on connecting with people in ways they can easily understand. Vlogging (video blogging), specifically through the website YouTube, has grown exponentially into one of the most used communication methods on the internet over the past decade particularly for those under the age of 25, but many congregations across the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod are not leveraging this medium. This thesis will examine the state of internet video use in WELS, the reasons for using such a medium, best practices in creating a faith-building vlog, and how such a vlog could be used to teach the faith to teens and young adults.

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## **Glossary**

*Blog* – a discussion or informational site published on the internet and consisting of entries ("posts") typically displayed in reverse chronological order (the most recent post appears first). They are usually created by one author and focus on one topic.

*Vlog (Vlogging)* – a combination of the words "video" and "blog." Short videos documenting things that happen in the "vlogger's" life. A video diary of sorts.

*YouTube Channel* – A webpage that contains ("hosts") all the video content from one user.

*Faith-building vlog* – Online video that specifically teaches a theological concept or explains a text. For this essayist, sermons do not qualify because they are part of worship and while they are faith-building, they are not written or presented primarily for an internet audience.

## Introduction

“How much does a video weigh? Well, when you stream a video onto your computer, that information is temporarily stored using electrons. ... So, let’s say you’re watching a YouTube video at a really nice resolution, 720p, assuming a typical bitrate, we can figure that a minute of YouTube video is going to need to involve about 10 million electrons on your device. ... We can figure out that one minute of YouTube video increases the mass of your computer by  $10^{-19}$  grams. ... We can’t measure it, but we can calculate it and that’s really cool because when I was a kid, my school had two shelves of science books. That was really cool, but I read all of them within like two grades, and it was hard to get more books because books are heavy and you need space for them and moving books around is a lot tougher than what we can do today. With numbers that small...I can stream hours and hours and days and days of YouTube video without my computer ever getting measurably heavier. And as information becomes that light, it becomes a lot more democratic meaning that more teachers and presenters and creators and viewers than ever before can be involved. ... It turns out, tapping into people’s curiosity and responsibly answering their questions is a brilliant way to build fans and get an audience and get in viewers. It’s even a great way for brands and companies to build trust.”<sup>1</sup>

YouTube has grown up literally right in front of our eyes. While videos of cats chasing laser pointers and guys falling off skateboards are still there, YouTube has become one of the major contributors to education in all sorts of disciplines. Instead of saving product manuals, you can now search for a YouTube video on how to fix your smartphone. Instead of having to learn from your dad, you can search for a YouTube video that will teach you how to change the oil on your car. Instead of reading *Cosmopolitan* magazine to learn how to do your makeup, you can follow a “style vlogger” who will teach you how to look your best. Instead of having to pay attention to your teacher, you can just search for a lecture that moves faster, is more accurate, and can be accessed anywhere,<sup>2</sup> and the fact is, more and more people are using YouTube for these things. “YouTube is where the world goes to watch video. More than a billion users—

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Stevens, *How Much Does a Video Weigh?* Accessed September 1, 2015. [http://www.ted.com/talks/how\\_much\\_does\\_a\\_video\\_weigh](http://www.ted.com/talks/how_much_does_a_video_weigh).

<sup>2</sup> A completely YouTube based education system called YouTubeEDU has been created, just as an example of how education happens online. See Chen, Hsin-liang, and Sarah Burns Gilchrist. “Online Access to Higher Education on YouTubeEDU.” *New Library World* 114, no. 3/4 (March 2013): 99–109 for explanation of YouTubeEDU

nearly a third of all of the people on the internet—are watching more video on YouTube than ever: watch time grew 60% on YouTube between 2014 and 2015.”<sup>3</sup>

This is especially important for people under 24 years old. People in this demographic<sup>4</sup> watch more hours of video than any other age demographic.<sup>5</sup> They are being influenced by and learning from watching hours of video. This demographic is also the group of with whom the church has traditionally struggled most to engage. Could it be that a major reason we have lost many young people in our churches is because we do not engage them on the number one way they communicate with the rest of the world?<sup>6</sup>

Ask just about any member of a WELS congregation what they think is the biggest challenge facing our synod, and they will include “we need to engage the youth” as part of their answer. It stands to reason then that our church body should use YouTube as a supplemental teaching tool for the teens and young adults of our congregations as we help them engage with the Bible and their church.

Because of the vast amount of people using YouTube, the many different communities, the varying demographics, and the ever changing landscape of what YouTube does, every essayist on the topic of YouTube must necessarily narrow his evidence. In this paper, I will do my best to focus particularly on content helpful for a faith-building vlog targeted primarily at teenagers and young adults in our WELS congregations. Much like a thesis, the topic of a vlog must be narrowed to the target audience, and while it is somewhat expected that people outside the age range of 14-24 would enjoy such a vlog, this paper intends to prove why and how a vlog targeted at that demographic can be a useful tool for teaching the faith.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/products/youtube.html> accessed 11/22/15.

<sup>4</sup> It should be mentioned that this does not mean that older generations are not engaged by the topic. Especially in the case of the Baby Boomer generation, visual media (especially television) has been a major part of their life.

<sup>5</sup> <http://digiday.com/platforms/demographics-youtube-5-charts/> also backed up by Madden, M. (2007). *Online Video*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project.

<sup>6</sup> Based on <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/06/facebook-texting-teens-instagram-snapchat-most-popular-social-network/373043/> accessed 11/12/15. YouTube is #3, but #1 and #2 respectively are texting and Facebook which are primarily for communicating with people you already know. YouTube is very rarely used to communicate with people you already know, but is for spreading new ideas. YouTube is also the #3 viewed website in the world after Google (who owns YouTube) and Facebook (where most YouTube videos are promoted).

## Literature Review

Research for this thesis consisted of two topics, communication to teenagers in the church and best practices in vlogging. Much has been written on the first topic, but since vlogging is a form of communication that has only come into mainstream thought in the last decade, not as much research has been published on the topic. However, those who do write on the topic admit that more study needs to be done on vlogging. They explain that vlogging is shaping communication in the younger generations. Because of this, the two are very closely tied, and facts about vlogs often have correlations to youth communication.

For studying teen communication, admittedly, one could read for months and go down several different paths of research and not even scratch the surface of what the world has to offer in advice for communication with teens. However, when it comes to communication of the faith to teens, very little has been written on the topic of communicating with teens through the medium of video, and that makes sense. Young people, especially teenagers, crave personal interaction, so most youth communication books and articles assume that you will actually be with your youth in person. Because of this, I had to take most of what I read and apply it to an electronic context. Therefore, a lot of what I learned and applied was not necessarily new knowledge, but was old knowledge applied in a new way.

One source that was very helpful was *How to Speak to Youth...and keep theme awake at the same time* by Ken Davis. The book primarily focused on making speeches or teaching lessons rather than focusing on forming relationships. While those relationships are important, they are not necessarily what I'm going for, so Ken's focus on creating an engaging speech was very helpful.

I also benefitted greatly from *Do They Run When They See You Coming?* by Jonathan McKee. While his theology and end goal of having teens "make their decision for Christ" was not helpful, his focus on communicating the faith in an interesting way to a disenchanted or even disgusted teenager was very insightful.

On the topic of vlogging, while there were some journal articles written on the topic, the insights were not very unified like research in youth communication is. This is because those writing on youth communication have had generations to refine their insights. However, in vlogging, researchers have not come to as many generally accepted truths. I believe that's only

because the medium has not been around very long and because vlogging is such a personal expression of self that it is hard to nail down technique, best practices, etc. in some sort of empirical way. So, although I did get some solidly researched information from credible sources, I went in a different direction for research on vlogs. I watched vlogs. Lots of them. I even watched some vlogs about how to make vlogs.

I think this allowed an interesting insight that I hope the reader will appreciate. Communication through YouTube is personal and unique to the producer, but all popular vlogs tend to have some things in common. The fact that this research was done in a non-traditional way, I hope, will also speak to the nature of the topic.

Vlogs that particularly inspired me were Crash Course, Vlog Brothers, Vsauce, and Kahn Academy.<sup>7</sup> They are all educational vlogs with new posts added regularly so students can watch and re-watch content in order to learn it better. They were helpful in showing good ways to communicate educational content and modeling techniques to keep viewers interested. While they do not teach faith related topics, they do show how YouTube can be used as a great educational tool.

In addition to those educational vlogs, I watched a handful of what I will call “typical vlogs.” I simply found the statistics for the top 10 most subscribed vlog channels and watched their videos in order to get a feel for what is popular in the vlog community.

The greatest resource to my research was the YouTube channel *Worldview Everlasting*. It is run by pastors and lay members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and includes regular video posts that focus either on biblical texts or topics and explain them in engaging ways. *Worldview Everlasting* is not necessarily geared toward teenagers and young adults, although much of the humor is internet based and therefore most accessible to that generation. They also don’t follow some of the rules of good vlogging, but on the whole, they are the closest to what I want to accomplish.

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<sup>7</sup> If you are unfamiliar with the idea of vlogs, I suggest searching for these on YouTube, but understand that they are atypical in the vlog arena. Most vlogs are not done with their level of professionalism. Kahn Academy does not fit the definition of a typical vlog, but more of what is called a “white board talk” in which a voice speaks over images or drawing happening on the screen. However, Kahn Academy is on the cutting edge of education through video, and that is its main benefit to this paper.



## The State of Faith-Building through YouTube in WELS

A YouTube search of terms such as “WELS,” “Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” or even “Wisconsin Lutheran” yields not much more than some recordings of live music from our synodical schools, some clips from our synod conventions, and some sermons.<sup>8</sup>

WELSstreams is a regularly producing vlog channel on YouTube run by WELS members. It produces a program called WELSTech which “explores the intersection of technology and ministry.” While it is great to see WELSTech producing a vlog-style program regularly on YouTube, the videos are not made to catechize anyone, nor are they meant to. While music from our schools is beautiful and is certainly a witness of our faith, they are not educational in purpose. While the sermons are educational and spiritual, they are typically 15-30 minutes long, making them significantly less likely to be watched by someone who is not specifically searching for them.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, we as a synod are not producing much faith-building content, and sermons are not the ideal way to teach the faith to teens over YouTube. Time of Grace Ministry (a traditionally TV-based ministry not run by WELS, but affiliated with WELS) is currently rebranding and focusing more on using the internet to communicate their message. Their YouTube channel, Your Time of Grace<sup>10</sup>, is producing short devotional videos done by a group of WELS pastors along with posting sermons from Pastor Mark Jeske. By their own admission, Time of Grace’s main audience is over 35 years old, and while Your Time of Grace will definitely open up doors to younger generations, the channel is reaching out to a wider demographic. Their work is quality, but it is not really a vlog, and it doesn’t specifically target teens and young adults.

Some pastors in our synod have attempted to use internet video as a teaching tool, but sadly, most of them have either been done with low quality video, and/or just targeted at their own congregations or communities. Professor Tom Kock, who was a pastor in Johnson City, TN before becoming a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, created short vlog style teaching

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<sup>8</sup> Most of which are done with either poor sound, lighting, video quality or some combination of the three.

<sup>9</sup> As my grandpa told me once, “The longer the talk, the better you have to be.” This is heightened on YouTube, but more on that later.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCct-udVD9X-iQanj0jZA\\_1Q](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCct-udVD9X-iQanj0jZA_1Q)

videos for his congregation and community during his time in Johnson City.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, if the number of views is any indication of popularity and effectiveness, they were largely underutilized.<sup>12</sup> Pastor Aaron Boehm from La Mesa, CA currently uses Periscope (a live video streaming service created by Twitter) to do short devotions for his people or anyone else who happens upon his content. He also does not see many people finding his content and staying engaged with his content right now, although he admits that he is really targeting his own congregation with the devotions.<sup>13</sup>

There is almost no YouTube content that reaches out to young people in our synod while at the same time actively teaching the faith.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Relationship Between Youth Communication and Vlogging**

Why use YouTube? The way young people communicate and what YouTube has become are inextricably tied. “Youth are attracted to YouTube because the barriers for them to participate are low, their creation is easily circulated and shared, informal mentorship and instructions facilitate their developing identity, their levels of contribution matter, and they feel socially connected to peers within the community.”<sup>15</sup>

Teenagers are also more familiar with using the internet to communicate than they are with many modes of traditional communication. “...experienced Internet users incorporate the technology into their everyday lives and use it for communicating with close and distant friends and relatives. Those highly comfortable with the technology engage in higher rates of “social capital building activities.”<sup>16</sup> Because teenagers spend a large amount of time on YouTube and

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<sup>11</sup> Viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/user/thecanman61>

<sup>12</sup> None of his videos have more than 25 views as of 11/11/15.

<sup>13</sup> E-mail interview with author on 11/16/15.

<sup>14</sup> This is an assertion based on my search of YouTube. If there is content that fits this description out there, it is difficult to find, and that’s troublesome. It is not only important to produce quality content, but it is also important to make sure that content is easily findable.

<sup>15</sup> Chau, Clement. “New Media and Technology: Youth as Content Creators.” *New Directions for Youth Development*, no 128. Winter 2010: 73.

<sup>16</sup> Molyneaux, O’Donnell, & Milliken, 423

feel more in control of the medium, they begin to form their communication norms through what they see, hear, and read.

YouTube has become one of the most available places for teens to express themselves and participate in real discussions about real topics. This happens because YouTube offers the chance for teens to interact with thousands of people without ever leaving their room.<sup>17</sup> Because they have been given freedom to express themselves and because in turn other teens are viewing their content and learning from it, teens have created their own norms of communication through participation in YouTube specifically.

Research shows that teens engage in a variety of activities on YouTube. Entertainment Media Research found that 44 percent of teens find YouTube to be a better source of video entertainment than other sources. Over half of this population reported that they registered to become a member to post comments. In addition, 17 percent of teens who registered to create their own YouTube channel, a Web page that users can customize and personalize, did so to broadcast their original content. Teenagers visit YouTube to be entertained (79 percent), pass time (71 percent), watch videos (61 percent), see what others are talking about (56 percent), and follow up recommendations from friends (53 percent).<sup>18</sup>

Whether it is through active participation like commenting or sharing, or simply through the passive action of accruing another view on a video, the most active members of YouTube shape what becomes the norm for communication, education, and entertainment. These members are teens and young adults.

However, the possibly counterintuitive aspect of this truth is that teens and young adults form what is popular on YouTube not by producing video content, but by viewing it primarily. The way that happens is through “viral video.” Viral video is the concept of a certain video being exponentially shared by viewers. One person sees the video, enjoys it and shares it with three friends, those three friends share it with three friends and the video’s views increase exponentially. Since teenagers are the number one consumer demographic of video on YouTube, they are often the ones to make a video “go viral.” Because of this, teenagers’ likes and dislikes in video create the norms for what is considered quality, funny, interesting, or engaging video. This means that even though teenagers are the least likely demographic to create video on

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<sup>17</sup> Chau, 65

<sup>18</sup> Chau. 66

YouTube, they are the main source of norming what makes a good YouTube video and feel the most in touch with what is produced on YouTube.

YouTube is also popular with teens and young adults because it is built to be a place where young people want to stay. It allows them to experience and experiment with the major changes that are going on in their lives and minds. It allows them to see what other people are saying and doing about puberty, high school, identity, sex, religion, and other things. It teaches them how to talk about these issues, and allows them to use what they learn by commenting on videos with the anonymity that the internet offers or by personally engaging in the discussion using videos of their own.<sup>19</sup>

These youth are prosumers, a contraction of the words producer and consumer – youth who are producing their own imagery drawn from their consumption of popular mass media (Toffler, 1980). They operate in what Jenkins (2006) variously refers to as a “peer-to-peer culture” (p. 38) and a “participatory culture” (p. 1). Instead of merely consuming media, these youth participate in cultural exchanges as producers. While consuming professionally produced mass media, equally, they bounce off the productions of like-minded, similarly motivated amateur peers.<sup>20</sup>

YouTube also offers a place for teenagers and young adults to learn outside the normal educational arena, and this is significant because by the use of satire and subversive caricatures of the establishment which they see on YouTube, they have learned to disdain the traditional way of learning in many cases.<sup>21</sup> This causes the YouTube viewer to desire a different method of receiving education than typical models, such as the classroom. Because the videos on YouTube help poke holes in what they know, teens and young adults have learned to trust YouTube over traditional education models, even if what is posted on YouTube is not true or impartial.<sup>22</sup> For many teens, the use of YouTube as their outlet for self-expression or their source for new knowledge has been a way to rebel against the educational system their parents went through as well. Imagine a child has grown up in a church where the pastor presents his knowledge about

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<sup>19</sup> Fitton, Daniel, and Beth Bell. “Working with Teenagers within HCI Research: Understanding Teen-Computer Interaction,” Published by BCS Learning and Development Ltd. Proceedings of HCI 2014, Southport, UK

<sup>20</sup> Duncum, Paul. (2011). Youth on YouTube: Prosumers in a peer-to-peer participatory culture. *The International Journal of Arts Education*, 9(2), 24-39.

<sup>21</sup> Olson, Brad M. “Digarts: A Case Study of Digital Visual Culture, Teenagers, and Tensions in the Third Space.” Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015. 57-58

<sup>22</sup> By “traditional education models” or variations of that phrase in these paragraphs, I mean classroom lecture.

the Bible, but does not actively involve the child. While this may have worked for their parents, today's young people expect different treatment, and even if the child really wants to learn about the Bible, they will not be very attracted to sitting in a typical classroom listening to a pastor teach. They want a participatory education, and in the same way YouTube has bred contempt for traditional educational methods, it offers the alternative.

Imagine also a non-Christian who has heard enough negative press about churches to never want to step into one because they fear the perceived hypocrisy and indoctrination. They would much rather go to a source where they can learn what the church teaches in a way that isn't so "churchy." YouTube also offers that chance to viewers.

YouTube's satirical and unfiltered content has taught teenagers to not take something seriously unless it is apparently unserious (in that it does not fit the typical mode of communicating such thoughts, namely the formal classroom). YouTube has bred that discontent, and now offers the alternative. Even if a video is simply a lecture, it allows the viewers to engage in commentary and discussion that often doesn't happen in a lecture based lesson in a classroom. This is exactly what the learner who is dissatisfied with traditional education methods is looking for.

Young people also have a very keen sense of when they are being talked to either above or below their level, and while adults may patiently wait and listen to content that is boring or that is over their heads in a typical classroom setting, young people are less likely to do so. In an effort to fill the void of material targeted at their own age, young people produce and watch content at their level on YouTube. Therefore, YouTube has become a place that works for the most active demographic on the website, teenagers.

Finally, young people expect education to be carried through the digital mediums that they are used to. They can even be wary of a teacher who refuses to use the mediums because they fear he might be "old fashioned" even though he may be an expert on the topic.

Marc Prensky (2001) similarly describes today's students as digital natives who have functioned in a digital environment for most of their lives; as a result, technologies that faculty and staff typically see as revolutionary are routine for today's entering college students. ... They are ready for multimedia learning to be delivered on a flexible learning schedule, one that is not tied to a set time and place. Recent information on student expectations already reveals significant changes that should be anticipated by educators. While today's students still see faculty knowledge and expertise as the most important element in learning (Roberts 2005), an EDUCAUSE survey reports that they will want faculty members to use information technology to communicate that knowledge better

(Kvavik and Caruso 2005). Forty-one percent of the students surveyed said they preferred instructors to make moderate use of information technology while 27% wanted extensive use and 26% said they preferred only limited use. In light of the rapid expansion of Web 2.0 technologies in the everyday lives of students, such preferences are likely to become even more pronounced in newer generations of learners wanting more technology use by faculty members.<sup>23</sup>

YouTube is not just a nice thing that we could maybe use, but don't really need to use. By avoiding the use of YouTube or similar technologies, we can very easily give the impression to young people who see these technologies in almost every other part of their life that we don't have a message that is applicable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Because of all these factors, YouTube is a powerful form of communication to teenagers and young adults that our synod could use more intentionally than we are currently. It fits with the desires of young people for community, a voice, and personalization, and by their activity on YouTube, we can know that the norms of what is considered popular are driven by the likes and dislikes of young people.

### **The Case for a Faith-Building Vlog**

Besides the reality that teens and young adults are watching YouTube more and more, internet video itself provides a number of advantages in faith-building. The first is that YouTube is a medium rich in social presence.

Video can aid communication by adding social presence, a term originally coined by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) and defined as the quality of being present when a communication medium is used. Social presence theory suggests that increased richness of the communication medium leads to increased social presence (Lowenthal, 2010), and different communication media have varying degrees of social presence. For example, video, with its greater ability to support visual cues such as body language and facial expressions, generates a greater sense of social presence than audio alone (Roussel & Gueddana, 2007). ... Text-based communication, like email, is not as effective as the telephone and in person communication for maintaining personal relations (Cummings, Butler & Kraut, 2002). Video-based communication allows for greater social presence than email or the telephone because the audio and visual elements combined increase communication richness. Users benefit because video channels allow them to communicate in a more natural way resembling in-person communication (Bruce, 1996).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Thompson, John. "Is Education 1.0 ready for Web 2.0 students?." *Innovate: Journal of Online Education* 3, no. 4 (2007): 2

<sup>24</sup> Molyneaux, O'Donnell, & Milliken, 423

While our traditional models of reaching out to teens and young adults through books or publications lose a level of personal interaction that face-to-face contact has, video is the closest thing we have to “being there” for our young people with the Word.

Internet video also allows a presenter to perfect his or her presentation. While in a classroom or even in a sermon, a speaker is bound by the rule that whatever comes out of their mouth cannot be erased. If you misspeak, lose your place, or become distracted, there’s no record to pull to get you out of your problem. However, in internet video, the speaker has the opportunity to make sure everything said is accurate and clear. A challenge for an everyday teacher is that they very rarely can perfect their lectures simply because their lecture is new every day. Guest speakers, on the other hand, have the advantage of usually having given their speech already. They have carefully chosen which illustrations to use or which jokes they should leave out, etc. They are therefore more engaging because their speech is near perfection. Recorded internet video offers that possibility to a speaker every time. This advantage cannot be emphasized enough. Imagine a teaching medium where you can make sure that what you teach is correctly and interestingly worded every time! What pastor or youth minister would not want that?

Internet video is also very efficient as a teaching tool. While a teacher in a classroom might become side-tracked by a question or be tempted to take up a tangent, recorded internet video strongly encourages the speaker to stay on topic. This in turn will cause a faith-building vlog to be more time-efficient as well. While a speaker in a normal lecture situation might stumble over his words or forget something, a video allows the speaker to edit out mistakes or pauses, cutting down the actual viewing time.<sup>25</sup>

However, that is not to say that there isn’t something lost in a YouTube lecture. Question and answer are an important part of learning, and YouTube struggles with that because the comments sections under YouTube videos are usually unregulated and left unaddressed by the producers of the videos. While a producer should take time to use the comments section of the video, as I will write about later, it cannot be considered a worthy replacement for face to face question and answer.

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<sup>25</sup> Brevity is vitally important to a quality vlog. See the next section for benefits of a shorter video.

The reason YouTube's efficiency is desirable is related to the presentation of the message. The benefit is not primarily in the depth to which a viewer will understand the topic (although that will definitely be a result). The benefit is primarily that there will be another chance for the viewer to connect with God's Word outside Sunday morning or a weekday Bible study. Therefore, the lecturer has the opportunity to be concise, accurate, and quick with his message on YouTube.

That brings us to the efficiency that the learner experiences through YouTube lecture. While in a classroom setting, a learner might miss something the teacher says or feel that the content was covered too quickly and that they did not have a chance to process what they have heard. As the Kahn Academy<sup>26</sup> has made famous, students watch short videos explaining a concept and then take a test based on the knowledge they obtained. But, as Kahn explains, one of the major benefits to students is the ability to go back and re-learn what they have just seen and heard if it doesn't make sense. This is especially important for a faith-building vlog that will explore complex theological topics that might need to be heard again and again. Kahn adds that when his cousins watched the first videos he produced, they commented, "We like you better on YouTube than in person." Kahn explains, "Now they can pause and repeat their cousin without feeling like they're wasting my time. If they need to review something they should have known...they don't have to be embarrassed. ... They can watch at their own time, at their own pace."

At Kahn Academy, a student starts with the basics in an area of study and only progresses once they complete the quiz that accompanies the video. While a WELS faith-based vlog would not necessarily offer tests, it would provide the opportunity for a viewer to go back into the archive of videos to have a certain topic explained more fully. For example, in a video that teaches resurrection of the dead, if the speaker wants to reference Baptism in such a video, he probably will not have a lot of time to explain Baptism, but he will hopefully have a growing collection of videos, including one or a few on Baptism, that a viewer could view to understand a video about the resurrection of the dead.

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<sup>26</sup> The Kahn Academy is an online educational space started by entrepreneur Salman Kahn. Kahn Academy's website is <https://www.khanacademy.org/>. Salman Kahn gave a TED Talk that you can view here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTFEUsudhfs>. Everything about the Kahn Academy in this paper was obtained through this presentation.



Another benefit of internet video is the permanency. As Kahn explains in his talk, "...this content will never grow old...it could help their kids or their grandkids." In the Wisconsin Synod context, we have seen children grow into adults who in turn use the teaching tools that worked particularly well for them to teach their children. We can see this in the wonderful Catechism Class curriculum created by Professors Dave Valleskey and Forrest Bivens called "Confirmed in the Faith." Published in 1993, it is now being used to teach the children of the original students in many congregations.<sup>27</sup> When something works, we want it to be used again. And for teens and young adults who will soon be parents, we should be creating a compendium of content that they can use later to teach their children what they learned in the exact way they learned it.

The added benefit to the permanency of internet video is the ability to share content. "YouTube is principally designed as a content-sharing site. Beyond a simple and intuitive interface design, YouTube also features many instructional videos to guide new users at all levels of engagement. The ease at which youth create and share content is evident in the popularity of YouTube. Members and viewers can share automatically generated links, and popular videos are featured on the home page so that visitors are familiar with the emerging topics of the community."<sup>28</sup> Kylie Jarrett writes, "On YouTube, the plethora of search functions and browsing options utilise the aggregation of individual choices (e.g. tagging, honours, links, the option to link through into a particular poster's profile to view more of their input, etc.) to create a viral, peer-to-peer system of trustworthy recommendations which are vital to the user's experience and navigation of the site."<sup>29</sup> Sharing of quality content is expected in the YouTube community. If a student or parent sees a faith-building vlog and finds it particularly intriguing, engaging, or educational, they can share it across the country. This happens all the time. "100 million people take a social action on YouTube (likes, shares, comments, etc.) every week. There are 500 tweets<sup>30</sup> per minute containing a YouTube link."<sup>31</sup> As a youth group leader and even as a

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<sup>27</sup> While I don't have any hard statistics on how many congregations are using Confirmed in the Faith, I have taught Catechism class in five different congregations over the past 2 years, and they have all used the curriculum.

<sup>28</sup> Chau, 68-69

<sup>29</sup> Jarrett, Kylie. "Beyond Broadcast Yourself: The Future of YouTube." *Media International Australia* No. 126 (February 2008): 139.

<sup>30</sup> A "tweet" is a user-generated post on Twitter.

teen myself, I heard teens and young adults complain that their greatest obstacle in sharing their faith is an inability to explain their point of view to someone and know all the correct doctrinal words to say or the right Bible verses to reference. Internet video gives those people a chance to share the exact words and context in which they understood a concept, and they get to share it in a way that is widely accepted and understood.

Internet video is international as well. “80% of YouTube's views are from outside of the U.S. YouTube has launched local versions in more than 70 countries. You can navigate YouTube in a total of 76 different languages (covering 95% of the Internet population).”<sup>32</sup> As we continue to spread the gospel outside North America, internet video content can go places we can't, and can be found even without our promotion. Pastor Aaron Boehm comments, “We are a video-driven culture, and technology today makes it so easy for anyone to do; it allows the Word to literally be broadcast anywhere in the world to anyone who might tune in.”<sup>33</sup>

Finally, internet video offers the “everywhere” teaching benefit. Without faith-building internet video content, a student must personally contact a pastor or church leader to learn about a topic, wait for the topic to come up in a sermon or Bible class, or possibly seek out a book in a library in order to learn. With faith-building internet video, suddenly, the content is in their pocket at all times. “More than half of YouTube views come from mobile devices.”<sup>34</sup> If a young Christian gets in a spiritual conversation with a friend and wants their point explained clearly, they can simply pull out their smartphone and show a short video. In a personal way, a Christian can view the video in places they've never had access to faith-building content before. How often do we remember to bring a theological book to the doctor's office, on the bus, waiting in line, over a bowl of cereal in the morning, or taking a five-minute break on the couch? With internet video, those places become the classroom.

For the pastor, this is especially beneficial because it allows him to help his members connect with God's Word during the week where he may not necessarily be able to teach them himself. Pastor Boehm commented about his use of Periscope as a regular devotional tool, “. . .I

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.jeffbullas.com/2012/05/23/35-mind-numbing-youtube-facts-figures-and-statistics-infographic/#IL8sUG1yhMGosd9G.99> accessed 11/21/15

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html> accessed 11/21/15

<sup>33</sup> From an e-mail sent to the author on 11/16/15

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html> accessed 11/21/15

have started promoting the devotions to the entire congregation as a way to interact with them in a day and age where it is unrealistic to get time with each member personally one-on-one each week...”<sup>35</sup>

Another way a pastor could use such a vlog is to connect his people with content presented on Sunday during the week. Patrick Carman’s young adult novel *Skeleton Creek* showed how this can be done.<sup>36</sup> *Skeleton Creek* was normal book, but in the story there were points where the reader would have to go to a link to watch a vlog style video from one of the characters or some other content that explained something in the story. This merged the written word with video in an interesting way for the reader.<sup>37</sup> For a pastor, taking a faith-building vlog and using it as a footnote or primer in a Bible study, newsletter, e-mail or really any communication could be very useful. Imagine an e-mail sent to prospects that includes a video link for a vlog about dealing with loss, struggling with stress, or joining a church. Imagine a worship folder with a link in the announcements section to a video explaining a portion of the gospel text for the next Sunday. Imagine a newsletter to members that features a short sharable video to prime them for the upcoming Bible study series. Video can connect people with the church throughout the week, and don’t forget, it’s immediately sharable from there. Those quick video links give another chance for faith-building content to go viral.

Faith-building internet video can teach the faith with advantages that traditional faith-building methods do not have. It offers accurate and efficient teaching, more accessible and student friendly learning, and the permanency, connectability and sharability that could not be achieved to the same level without that content. Vlogging comes closer than any other medium to mimicking real life conversation, and in a church where we believe the Word is what works, we should take every opportunity to speak.

### **Best Practices in Vlogging**

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<sup>35</sup> From an e-mail sent to the author on 11/16/15

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.patrickcarman.com/enter/skeleton-creek/> accessed 11/03/15.

<sup>37</sup> I have not read/viewed *Skeleton Creek*, but Karly Grice mentions it as a cutting edge idea for blending reading and video.

While the idea of faith-building internet video shows many benefits, the videos are worthless if no one wants to watch them. 60 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute,<sup>38</sup> and a lot of it goes unwatched or rarely watched. “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14) If we want a faith-building vlog to be truly faith-building, then it needs to be watched. Although the apostle Paul never knew the internet or video, he knew that he needed to be heard, and although he didn’t think of himself as an excellent speaker or writer, he gave his best effort. We, of course, see the excellence that God gave him in his speaking and writing and want to use the gifts God has given us for excellence whenever we can. So, for us, a faith-building vlog needs to maintain a high quality.

As Phil Cooke, CEO of Cooke Pictures (a company that helps churches engage their culture with video), writes about visual media in general, “On our home cable TV system in Los Angeles, we have nearly 500 channels. With TV remotes, our experience and research indicates that most people take an average of two to three seconds to decide which program to watch. Therefore, it doesn’t matter how powerful your message is—if the rest of the program can’t keep their attention, they’ll never watch long enough to hear it. We need to package our messages in an innovative and exciting way so people will want to watch and listen.”<sup>39</sup> In my opinion, this is the point on which the idea of faith-building internet video hinges. If we cannot create video worth watching in our “channel flipping” culture, we are wasting our time.

First, we must answer the question, “Why a vlog?” A vlog is a very personal video. The typical vlog is a single person, looking directly at a camera, viewable only from the waist (or more often shoulders) up. It mimics what you would experience in face-to-face communication.<sup>40</sup> For the student, this begins to create rapport with the speaker in the video even though they may never actually meet the person in the video. It’s just common sense that people will very rarely take someone seriously unless they trust the person and believe he or she is being

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.jeffbullas.com/2012/05/23/35-mind-numbing-youtube-facts-figures-and-statistics-infographic/#IL8sUG1yhMGosd9G.99> accessed 11/21/15

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.churchleaders.com/worship/worship-articles/172209-phil-cooke-pastor-needs-to-know-about-media-ministry.html> accessed 11/21/15

<sup>40</sup> Hansen, A. (1998). “Analysing Visuals: Still and Moving Images.” In *Mass communication research methods* (pp. 189-224). New York: New York University Press.

genuine. A vlog allows the viewer to take in non-verbal communication such as facial expression or gestures that build this trust and rapport more easily.

A typical vlog also expects some level of “off the cuff” speaking. In her vlog series about how to create a quality vlog, Karly Grice says in her first video, “As soon as you sit down to do a vlog, you realize that you can’t just go into it without thinking about what you’re going to say. So vlogging in itself must require some form of script and pre-planning despite the fact that it looks very spontaneous. That’s something that I feel a lot of professional vloggers probably make effortless.”<sup>41</sup> This combination of planned content but effortless delivery is characteristic of quality vlogs and helps the viewer feel as though they are just having a casual conversation with the vlogger. We as a synod have already somewhat wrapped our mind around this concept with the increase what I will call “conversational preaching.” Personally, my preaching professors taught me to be conversational in the way I preached rather than come across as having all the answers and pontificating. Vlogging just takes that concept to the next level and makes the presentation literally a one-on-one experience for the viewer.

In the vlog community, it is hard to nail down exactly what makes one vlog more popular than another. Some are popular because they feature an interesting topic, others because they feature an entertaining or engaging on-camera personality, others because they are promoted well, others because they exhibit a high level of professionalism. In addition, the vlog community is constantly changing. New vlogs are being created every day and styles change. So, let’s examine characteristics of popular vlogs.

One characteristic of popular vlogs is professionalism. While the very nature of a vlog is to be a somewhat unprofessional (i.e. seemingly spontaneous), most popular vlogs include a couple of different professionally achieved elements. One is video quality. YouTube supports up to 1080p high definition video. While many vloggers cannot achieve this because of the expense of that level of camera, higher popularity vlogs almost exclusively feature 1080p HD video.<sup>42</sup> You can easily get away with 720p or even down to 360p, but with every downgrade, you run the risk of discrediting your professionalism.

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rB0NUHlOrw> accessed 11/21/15

<sup>42</sup> For a simple breakdown of specs on cameras for vlogging see <http://filmora.wondershare.com/business/vlogging-cameras.html>. While the point of this paper is not to help you buy a good camera, the idea of video quality is pretty clearly illustrated there.

Related to video quality is the environment in which the video is filmed. This varies from vlogger to vlogger, but many are filmed either in a room in a house, usually a bedroom, or using a purely white background. Many vloggers considered a space in their house more personal and therefore more relatable to viewers than a white background.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, a white background eliminates distractions and gives the appearance of professionalism akin to major companies such as Apple, who have made the clean white background famous in many of their commercials.<sup>44</sup> Either is acceptable, and both are used. Conversely, other environments for filming a vlog make it much more difficult to achieve professionalism. Outdoor vlogs are unpredictable and subject to the elements, and in-car vlogs are bumpy and conducted by (understandably) distracted vloggers.

Another professional characteristic is sound quality. While those using their smartphone or an inexpensive camera will probably use the built-in microphone on the camera, in order to achieve clear sound many vloggers use a wireless lapel microphone attached to their shirt.<sup>45</sup> While this is not necessary for a popular vlog (in fact, the most popular vlog on YouTube, danisnotonfire<sup>46</sup>, is filmed without a lapel microphone), vlogs filmed with a lapel microphone will sound more professional and a lot less like a family home video.

As mentioned before, professional vlogs are typically focused on one person from the shoulders up speaking directly at the camera, but some feature more than one person or even more than one camera angle. Some very well-done vlogs feature use two cameras to achieve seamless videography. One camera is focused on the speaker head-on in the typical style, but another camera is offset to one side. The reason for doing this is to give you a chance to make a mistake while filming without appearing to make a mistake. When the speaker makes a mistake or forgets what to say next, an editor can simply switch to an alternate camera angle for the next phrase. This eliminates the obvious break when the camera angle does not change. This can alternatively be done with a single camera by taking the original video and zooming in slightly

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<sup>43</sup> Bovill, M., & Livingstone, S. M. (2001). "Bedroom Culture and the Privatization of Media Use". In S. M. Livingstone & M. Bovill (Eds.), *Children and their Changing Media Environment: A European Comparative Study*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZP0qKVJ0lc> accessed 11/21/15

<sup>45</sup> For a great example of the difference between using an external microphone vs. a built-in camera microphone see: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXwjXkr\\_kNc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXwjXkr_kNc)

<sup>46</sup> [www.youtube.com/danisnotonfire](http://www.youtube.com/danisnotonfire)

whenever you want to cut the video. For the task of creating a faith-building vlog, a single camera with shifting zoom allows the vlog to look professional without costing too much.

Once the vlog looks and sounds professional, there are some best practices in creating the content of a vlog. The first is length. There is no real benchmark for a quality vlog length. Some studies will say that a vlog is typically less than three minutes.<sup>47</sup> Others, like the Vlog Brothers, made famous the four minute golden rule, making all their vlogs four minutes or less.<sup>48</sup> It is generally accepted that a vlog will be more than two minutes long. A basic YouTube account only allows uploaded videos of 15 minutes or less, but a “partner” account is not difficult to obtain and allows videos longer than 15 minutes. Biel and Gatica-Perez say that vlog length is a non-factor,<sup>49</sup> but with any form of communication, people will listen to you as long as you are interesting, or at least more interesting than everything else vying for their attention at that very moment. Because of this, my suggestion is that a vlog fit its content. However, at the same time, I believe that if you can’t say it in four minutes, you better be sure your content is interesting enough to hold the viewer past four minutes. It seems that vloggers with more subscribers are able to get away with longer vlogs because their viewers are invested in their content already, but overall, the shorter a vlog entry, the better.

A speaker must also eliminate distractions. It seems that speakers who avoid major movement in their head and maintain distance from the camera that allows their shoulders to be in view are more popular in the vlog community.<sup>50</sup> While it is important to be energetic and emphatic with hand gestures, they should never be disingenuous or manufactured.

Finally, the most interesting part of a quality vlog is what brings viewers back. The most attractive things to a viewer are humor and a connection with the speaker.<sup>51</sup> This comes before video quality, sound quality, whether a speaker is male or female or even subject matter. It turns

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<sup>47</sup> Hansen, A. (1998). “Analysing Visuals: Still and Moving Images.” In *Mass communication research methods* (pp. pp. 189-224). New York: New York University Press.

<sup>48</sup> [www.youtube.com/vlogbrothers](http://www.youtube.com/vlogbrothers)

<sup>49</sup> Biel, Joan-Isaac, and Daniel Gatica-Perez., 4

<sup>50</sup> Biel, Joan-Isaac, and Daniel Gatica-Perez. "Vlogcast yourself: Nonverbal behavior and attention in social media." In *International Conference on Multimodal Interfaces and the Workshop on Machine Learning for Multimodal Interaction*, p. 50. ACM, 2010., 4

<sup>51</sup> Yuping Liu-Thompkins. “Seeding Viral Content: The Role of Message and Network Factors.” *Journal of Advertising Research* 52, no. 4 (December 2012): 465–78.

out a viewer will watch just about anything if it is funny or they feel some personal connection with the speaker.

As it applies to a faith-building vlog, the personal connection could be somewhat already achieved through the simple fact that the on-screen personality would be a WELS pastor. A WELS member who comes to the vlog already knows that the speaker shares their worldview and values. The inherent security will help viewers who are already members of WELS connect. But for the non-WELS viewer, this relationship could take some time to foster. So, the speaker on such a vlog should remain the same. While it may be beneficial to occasionally bring in a special guest, the speaker of the vlog is what people connect with most. To that end, a speaker must strike a balance between being a teacher and also being themselves. As I said above, a vlog is the closest medium we have to face-to-face conversation, so the speaker should simply behave as if he were having a one-on-one conversation. He must be casual but in control because he will be the only one speaking.

While humor is a slippery concept, a faith-building vlog must be engaging as well as educating, and humor is a great way to do that. While a classroom of confirmation class students or teen group members will groan at a teacher's joke and go back to texting each other about how lame their teacher is, a viewer on YouTube has the wonderful ability to shut you up with one click of a mouse and you will never be heard from again. While we know the power for salvation lies in the Word of God, our use of engaging humor can help bring a viewer back to hear more, even if it is not for the right reasons immediately. Now, humor is not something you can prescribe, but a faith-building vlog should strive for humor in its content.

A quality vlog also allows for viewer interaction. This can be done in a number of ways. The first and most common way to interact on vlogs is through the "comments" section of the YouTube page. John Green suggests that this is where the real learning happens in YouTube based education, although he does concede that typically, the comments section deteriorates into name calling and empty assertions.<sup>52</sup> Another option is to use another service for post-video discussion. The vlog Worldview Everlasting uses a Facebook group to host discussion and has had success with it.<sup>53</sup> They also post answers to questions on their website, although they have

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<sup>52</sup> John Green, *The Nerd's Guide to Learning Everything Online* [http://www.ted.com/talks/john\\_green\\_the\\_nerd\\_s\\_guide\\_to\\_learning\\_everything\\_online](http://www.ted.com/talks/john_green_the_nerd_s_guide_to_learning_everything_online). Accessed 11/25/15.

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/WEtVDojo/>



said that it is hard to have enough time to respond to all the questions or comments that come from their videos.<sup>54</sup> For a faith-building vlog, interaction is vital. Not having a way for viewers to ask questions may very easily make the vlog seem very closed-minded, and it would not allow for spiritual leaders to provide spiritual guidance as much as they would like.

Finally, a good vlog brings its viewers back by answering the questions they are asking or asking the questions they don't know to ask. Michael Stevens, the vlogger behind Vsauce,<sup>55</sup> said in his TED Talk that asking the right questions changes viewers into fans, and fans want to come see everything you've made and will make.<sup>56</sup> Christians and non-Christians alike have questions about the Bible, and we as spiritual leaders have answers. In a time where the cutting edge of education is on the internet and the engaged learners have turned to internet video to ignite their thoughts,<sup>57</sup> we need to be where the people are. There we can engage teens and young adults with the questions they want answered, and we can do it in a medium that they understand. By being there we can hopefully answer the ultimate question that the jailor at Philippi asked and my generation continues to ask, "What must I do to be saved?"

There are many types of vlogs, but having examined how best to address the production of vlogs, we need to narrow our focus to the audience we are trying to reach. However high quality a vlog may be, a vlog's purpose is to communicate. This next chapter deals with best practices in communication with the narrow focus on teens and young adults.

### **Best Practices in Youth Communication through Video**

The topic of internet video, vlogging, and YouTube is in a constant state of change due to the fact that the technology is not very old and is built on the idea that anyone can produce content. However, most of the literature on the topic of communicating the faith to teens and young adults exists in the context of a personal, church-driven youth group-style ministry that reaches out to teens. These groups are usually led by a youth pastor or lay leader who can

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<sup>54</sup> [www.worldvieweverlasting.com](http://www.worldvieweverlasting.com)

<sup>55</sup> [www.youtube.com/vsauce](http://www.youtube.com/vsauce)

<sup>56</sup> Michael Stevens, *How Much Does a Video Weigh?* Accessed September 1, 2015. [http://www.ted.com/talks/how\\_much\\_does\\_a\\_video\\_weigh](http://www.ted.com/talks/how_much_does_a_video_weigh).

<sup>57</sup> For an interesting explanation of how the vlog community is shaping the movers and shakers of forward thinking, watch John Green's TED Talk, *The Nerd's Guide to Learning Everything Online* at [http://www.ted.com/talks/john\\_green\\_the\\_nerd\\_s\\_guide\\_to\\_learning\\_everything\\_online](http://www.ted.com/talks/john_green_the_nerd_s_guide_to_learning_everything_online).

connect with teens or young adults face-to-face. A faith-building vlog cannot achieve the relationships that a group like that can simply because there is no way of being able to get to know every viewer personally when you can't see their faces. Therefore, some of the traditional methodology is not applicable. To help, I will do my best to transition some conventional wisdom to the medium of video in order to explain how what is actually said and how it is said can be used to target teens and young adults.

Every speech consists of two parts, writing and presentation. A speaker on an educational vlog must be sensitive to how his audience works in order to excel at both. In the writing process, in so far as it exists in a vlog, excellence includes preparation, purpose, relatability, imperatives, and cultural relevancy. These topics are, of course, intertwined at multiple points, so while the next few paragraphs try to take them individually, there is obviously crossover between topics.

Preparedness is an easy thing to talk about, but in vlogging, it might be the most vital part of writing. While preparedness is most definitely taking your time working with material, crafting interesting illustrations or catchy ways to remember concepts in the same way a pastor writes a sermon, in vlogging the effort has to be front-loaded. While YouTube does not take statistics on how long viewers view a video before clicking on something else, it is simply a fact that with the amount of possible entertainment and education sitting on the right side of a typical YouTube page, if the content of the video does not grab the viewer's attention immediately, it will not be watched to its conclusion. Ken Davis says that the first fifty words of a speech are the most important.<sup>58</sup> I will adjust that for a vlog and say that the first ten seconds are the most important. In the first ten seconds, a viewer has been seized by a clever opening or question, or he has moved on to something else. Even if that is not always true, in a world that competes for what little attention people have, a vlog has to live by this rule if it wants to stand out.

In addition, each vlog entry must have an obvious purpose and accomplish it. In his book, Davis also lays out a plan for how to craft a purposeful speech and there is a very good reason he takes time to do that. No one enjoys a poorly planned, rambling speech, and no one on YouTube will watch it. A vlogger must always have a purpose! In the vlog community, this means having a video title that is interesting and intriguing, but also communicates what the video will teach.

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<sup>58</sup> Davis, Ken. *How to Speak to Youth...and Keep Them AWAKE at the Same Time*. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. pg. 114-115

Interestingly, once the viewer has clicked on the video, while it is necessary that the video actually accomplish what it set out to accomplish, there can be a lot of leeway in what the speaker says in relation to the topic. Asides, sarcastic comments, and small tangents are not necessarily bad; in fact, they are often praised as showing the speaker as more “real” to the viewer.<sup>59</sup>

This is especially true for teens and young adults who have grown up in a culture where attention is a hot commodity. While older generations may be more patient in allowing a speaker to grow interest in the topic, young adults are very easily distracted. From the beginning of their lives, they have had hundreds of channels to watch on TV, thousands of websites to look at, and millions of hours of video and writing to engage with. The fact is if your content isn’t attention grabbing, it will easily be dismissed. One way to grab attention is with good writing.

Over the past couple years, many church leaders have written on the topic “how to reach millennials” because they seem to be an enigmatic generation which is not interested in church for the most part. In almost every one of those articles that I have encountered, the idea of a call to action has been part of the strategy. The people who are teens and young adults rights now are a “cause culture.” In other words, they care as much if not more about the cause they are supporting than the product they consume. An example of this would be millennials tending to pick businesses that “go green” over less expensive options without the same world-consciousness. To reach these people, a vlog must have a call to action or at least a suggestion of how to implement the subject matter into the viewer’s life so they can participate in the “cause” of what they believe in. This is especially important for teens because teens are at a stage of life where they are trying to find a purpose, and they have a very strong desire to belong to a community. If a faith-building vlog can offer easy ways to get involved in that community or help shape identity and worldview, it will be accomplishing its purpose.

Another key to reaching teens and young adults is to talk about what actually matters, that is, to talk about the difficult topics. This means confronting teens with holes in their worldview or gaps in their understanding. It can also mean taking on what culture is feeding them with God’s point of view and exposing its faults. Even though we may think that

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<sup>59</sup> Christian, Aymar Jean. “Real Vlogs: The Rules and Meanings of Online Personal Videos.” *First Monday* 14, no. 11 (November 2009)

confronting teens will push them away, conflict will often engage them more.<sup>60</sup> During the teenage years, many people are forming their concept of what is going on in the world and are finally at a cognitive level to critically think about arguments. As they get older and into the post-high school years, they begin to come to their own opinions and are able to back them up with proof while still remaining open to the idea that they may be wrong. However, they have very little patience for people who don't "say anything." They are by nature very skeptical and arrogant, so challenging them in these topics very often leads to a discussion, and that interaction is important in building rapport and answering questions. For a faith-building vlog, this would probably mean being very clear about what God's Word says about popular culture, news stories, and events. In many cases, content from a Scripture-alone worldview will not be what anyone else is saying to teens and young adults, and it will challenge their way of thinking.<sup>61</sup>

Related to that is answering the "Why?" and the "So what?" of each topic. "So what?" already fits into the section on giving a call to action, but answering the "Why?" is more important in my opinion. As I have been taught multiple times by my homiletics professors to "Take people down the rabbit hole,"<sup>62</sup> a faith-building vlog must do the same. The easiest way to do this is for the speaker to ask himself "Why?" after every assertion he makes. If it is not inherently obvious, then it needs to be answered in the current video or in a subsequent entry. Another way to answer the "Why?" is using the comments section of the YouTube page to allow discussion. When you answer the "Why?" as much as possible in the video and are willing to answer it again in a comments section after the video, you are allowing viewers to grapple with and understand the ideas you are presenting.

Finally, in writing content, write the way viewers speak. This obviously includes the colloquial and seemingly unplanned nature of vlogging, but it also means using language that is clear and understandable. This does not necessarily mean acting or talking like a teen or a young adult would. If you are an adult, you should act like one and speak the way you normally speak.

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<sup>60</sup> Davis, 184

<sup>61</sup> Davis, 126

<sup>62</sup> By this I mean, ask "why?" again and again in your sermons. This was most often taught to me by Prof. Rich Gurgel, but I also heard it from Prof. Bill Tackmier, and my supervising pastor over my vicar year, Rev. Jon Schroeder, pastor of Faith Lutheran, Sharpsburg, GA.

However, an educational vlog that wants to connect with teens and young adults shows the audience that the teacher is in touch with the world around them while being very adult.<sup>63</sup>

When the writing process is completed, the plan for speaking begins. There are a number of good practices in presenting your content through the medium of internet video. The first is energy. A speaker must relay the passion they have for the topic in their voice. This is done by not stumbling over themselves, but clearly articulating their position at a normal rate of speech as if the knowledge were second nature to them. Biel and Gatica-Perez write, “Vloggers talking more, faster, and using few pauses receive, on average, more views. On the other hand, changing the tone in which you speak frequently is negatively correlated to attention which suggests that vocal control has also a relation with the way vloggers are perceived in YouTube.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, a speaker who does not maintain a relatively constant rate of speech is more likely to lose his or her viewer’s attention.

As mentioned earlier, teens and young adults are naturally very skeptical and able to pick out insincerity in a speaker very quickly.<sup>65</sup> Because this is true, a speaker must not try to be anything or anyone he is not. Teens and young adults are drawn toward what they perceive as sincerity often above quality video, sound, good content, or other marks of professionalism. “Researchers have postulated that in video communication, the emotional, relational content of the message is more important than the informational content.”<sup>66</sup> While this is not exactly healthy, it is a fact, and a faith-building vlog needs to play to that fact.

A great advantage of pastoral ministry is the chance to walk with someone as they grow in their faith. This happens because a pastor usually is a spiritual leader for someone for a long period of time. Over that time, their relationship grows, and the pastor learns how to serve the member of his church better. However, through the medium of internet video, this is almost impossible, and that’s a definite disadvantage. Instead of having their pastor apply God’s Word specifically their life, they now have to do the application themselves based on general principles. While we have explored some ways to maintain connection with people as they

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<sup>63</sup> Davis, 35

<sup>64</sup> Biel, Joan-Isaac, and Daniel Gatica-Perez., 3

<sup>65</sup> Davis, 31, 36, 184

<sup>66</sup> Molyneaux, O’Donnell, & Milliken., 424

watch, a speaker must be willing to use himself as an example to help his viewers apply his message.

In addition, a speaker must anticipate questions from his viewers. Since, in a normal face-to-face conversation, a listener might be able to ask questions about the speaker, a speaker in a vlog must take it upon themselves to answer some of those questions. It is generally accepted that a person will believe a message from someone they know before someone they do not know, and a speaker can grow this trust quickly by showing who he is to the audience.

“Communication richness developed through video technologies could contribute to better (stronger and quicker) development of trust.”<sup>67</sup>

In his Doctor of Ministry Major Applied Research Project<sup>68</sup> on visual retention using PowerPoint in sermons, Pastor Joseph Meyer found that the use of pictures on the screens in his church was lowering the retention of the content of his sermons. He noticed that for a few moments as every new image came up, people stopped listening to him and started thinking about the picture. This seems counterintuitive to the perceived idea that our culture is visually oriented. While that may be true, visual does not necessarily mean pictures, especially in the case of a speaker talking over the images. While picture and video may be useful in communicating a point, they should not coincide with a speaker trying to make a point, says Meyer. For a vlog, then, the application is that the speaker does nothing and adds nothing to a video that distracts from his own speaking. While visuals are certainly encouraged and very useful, they must not be distracting.

Finally, a speaker must enjoy what they’re talking about. Smile, look straight at the camera to maintain eye contact with the perceived viewer, speak with excitement. These are all things that make a difference.

One of the benefits listed in the chapter, “The Case for a Faith-Building Vlog” was the perfection of the lecture. In order to achieve this perfection, or at least the closest thing to it, a speaker must be willing to put in the work to make their writing and speaking excellent, clear, to the point, and without distraction.

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<sup>67</sup> Molyneaux, O’Donnell, & Milliken., 423

<sup>68</sup> This project was referenced by Pastor Matt Richard in this blog post: <http://steadfastlutherans.org/2012/09/why-we-should-rethink-the-use-of-visual-powerpoints-in-sermon-messages/>

## **How a Faith-Building Vlog Should Be Used in Youth Ministry**

It is my opinion based on my research that there are really two types of educational vlogs on YouTube. There are the community vlogs and the global vlogs.<sup>69</sup> Community vlogs are usually low visual and content quality and targeted for small audiences. An example of this would be Professor Tom Kock's videos referenced in the Introduction to this paper. His goal was to help his members and anyone else who knew him or his church learn about the Bible, and, because it was so specifically targeted, he could count on viewers despite lower video quality. The draw of the video was content, but interest and repeat viewers were primarily based on a relationship with Professor Kock. Global vlogs are different. They are targeted for mass consumption. They put a high importance on visual and content quality in order to hold the attention of anyone who stumbles on the video, regardless of background with the speaker or the topic.

Both have their benefits. "Online communication is a means for people to stay in contact with their own 'personal communities'—the set of relationships with others that encourage socialization, foster support, and create a sense of belonging."<sup>70</sup> A community vlog allows for greater personal benefit to anyone who knows the speaker and wants to stay in touch with the community that surrounds the topic or speaker. Trust is established more easily, fans are created more quickly, and the speaker can more effectively address topics that are specific to his audience. If a speaker knows there are 25 people who watch his vlog, he can more personally interact with them and find out what would benefit them. I believe this format has a lot of potential. A pastor could create his own short YouTube clips like Professor Kock and encourage his members to watch them during the week.

Another way to accomplish a community vlog is with Periscope. Pastor Aaron Boehm uses the live video streaming service Periscope to do devotions for his members during the week. This allows him to connect with his members when he can't see all of them. This idea has potential, although even Pastor Boehm has not been doing it long enough to really feel like he has a grasp on Periscope's effectiveness. If he sees success with Periscope, a pastor could potentially set up a camera in his office, record himself explaining a devotional thought for two

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<sup>69</sup> I made up both these terms.

<sup>70</sup> Molyneaux, O'Donnell, & Milliken, 423

minutes and most likely have a number of people from his congregation view the video. However, the odds are that such a video and channel will not go viral.

A global vlog has the benefit of being interesting and engaging for many people. While its content may be less specifically applicable to its viewers, it is more easily sharable because the hook for a sharer is not “Look what my pastor said,” but it becomes “Look at what someone said about a topic you’re interested in.” The major benefit is its usability in a number of different arenas. It could be used as a primer to a Bible study, as a post on Facebook to invite people to a sermon series, as a piece to view for homework, or simply as an at-home devotional. The opportunities are wider.

Studies show that people tend to share video with those closest to them, typically family members or close friends.<sup>71</sup> Such a global vlog could be a non-confrontational way for a person to show a close friend or family member what they believe or give them a starting point for a religious conversation that they may not be able to manufacture otherwise.

The faith-building vlog I present as the solution to the problem of a lack of faith-building content on YouTube produced by WELS people is a global vlog. The reason is sustainability and quality. While every pastor should consider how internet video could benefit the mission of his congregation, he also needs to know when it is just not his gift. If you don’t feel like this approach fits your personality or gifts, or you don’t know much about internet video, save yourself a lot of time and heartache and do not go down that path. That’s why I propose a community vlog with global vlog production value. I want it to be used primarily to grow the faith of teens and young adults who are already connected to their church. I want to help connect them with the doctrines they already know in a different way, and give them another way to hear God’s Word throughout the week. I want the content and video to be at a quality level that keeps viewers already in the community engaged with the content. If they are engaged with the content themselves and respect its quality, they are more likely to share the content or use it to witness their faith to someone who is not already part of the community.

Imagine a teen group leader or pastor who directs their teens to subscribe to a channel on YouTube that teaches the faith in an interesting way from a trustworthy source. Suddenly, a group of teens who are lucky if they get in touch with God’s Word even once a week are sent a

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<sup>71</sup> Molyneaux, O’Donnell, & Milliken. 424-425



notification when a new vlog comes out. They connect with the material, and in turn, use it to share their faith with a friend by showing them the video in person, or by sharing it over social media.

The vlog will consist of one of two types of content, at least to start. One type of video will be a topical video, tackling any question sent in from a viewer or a topic from something happening in popular culture. This type of video would be produced as needed, without a set schedule. The second would be produced more regularly and would be more important. Using one of the lessons coming up in the lectionary, an explanation of the text at a young person level with application to everyday life will give the viewer a point of reference when they come to church on Sunday. This helps them connect with the Word a little better when their pastor preaches and allows them to see the theme of the Sunday a little more clearly.

These videos are by no means meant to take the place of a pastor's relationship with his teens or the regular meetings of a teen group at church. Because of the nature of a global vlog, questions will not always be applicable to every student, and because of their length, they will not be able to cover topics completely. This is where the regular contact of a pastor or teen group leader comes in. He must maintain relationships with the teens because a vlog will not do that to a sufficient level.

### **How These Videos Will Be Made**

The major obstacles to a faith-building vlog are content credibility, time, and ease of production. Because the video deals with doctrine, and because the doctrine is substantial in keeping with the "talk about major issues" imperative of the best practices in youth communication, the preparation for writing a quality vlog is not a menial task. It will take time, and ideally, the perspective of more than just the speaker. I propose that a team of willing pastors be developed to tackle the questions or texts that are up for the next vlog.

Ideally, it would be a team diverse enough in gifts to cover a number of different areas of study as a question is discussed. So, the team would consist of a guy who enjoys Hebrew, a guy who is good at Greek, a guy who is well-read in the Confessions or Luther or the church fathers, a guy who knows church history, a guy who is gifted in apologetics, and it should not be limited to just men, ideally. These people would then get together as they are able in a group online to

discuss aspects of the question that should be answered in a certain way. This could be done using a service like Basecamp, Google Hangouts, or Asana.

No one would be required to comment on the questions because this should not be an extra burden on any pastor's schedule, but should be something in which they find professional growth, fun, and service. To that end, the team would have to be sizeable so even when some people take a week or two off from helping there are still people to answer the questions.

Once a question is discussed, an outline of thoughts and specific ways of speaking are developed by the group and the speaker. The speaker then takes the script and records the raw video using the principles listed above. Once he has finished, he sends the video to an editor who cuts the video, adds humorous video clips or pictures in the video if applicable. He would finish the video and either post it to YouTube and other social media himself or delegate that to someone else.

To begin, the goal would be to produce one video a week, with the priority on textual videos, but doing topical ones as the topics become available through questions from viewers or current events.

Ideally, this should not take more than two hours per video per person. Contributors would not need to take more than an hour to read the previous comments and put in their input. The speaker would take an hour or so to write the outline and a little less than an hour to film 4 minutes of video. The editor should take no more than 2 hours to edit the film and post it. The point is not to make this a primary task in ministry for anyone person, but a collaborative effort among a large group of people. Not only will this guard against burnout, but it will also allow every pastor involved to be able to continue his normal pastoral duties.

### **Conclusion and Thoughts for Further Study**

From the Kahn Academy to Vlog Brothers to TED Talks, the world has learned the educational power of internet video and the ability to create and strengthen learning communities through it. As we as a synod continue to try to reach people with the gospel, we would be foolish to also continue to underutilize YouTube as a service to our people with the Word of God. Through internet video we have the ability to be anywhere and at any time with quality biblical content. This is invaluable to keeping an increasingly biblically illiterate culture connected to the truth that we all need so desperately. As adults complain about the lack of engagement and

interest in the Bible among young people, we can do something about it by connecting with teens and young adults through a medium they understand very well.

The biggest challenge to this idea is sustainability. Will this idea continue a year or two into ministry? With the work of a team, I believe it can. I believe there are enough guys concerned about communicating the faith clearly through the internet that the team idea will work.

If someone were to take my research and expand on it, I would suggest they look into how vlogs can be used to flip the classroom in catechism class or Bible Information Class. Can vlogs become the primary form of lecture in those classrooms? I would also investigate how to use the comments section of a YouTube video effectively as a moderator so good discussion can happen there and name-calling and bullying can be cut down. I also think there is great potential in using animation in YouTube like the animation team Thought Bubble does for the vlog Crash Course. Finally, I think the next medium we will see explored is exactly what Pastor Boehm from La Mesa, CA is trying: live video devotions or Bible classes using live video streaming like Periscope. I would love to see someone do research on how Periscope can be used effectively as a ministry tool.

I pray that God blesses our best efforts in getting the gospel to our teens and young adults through the medium of YouTube. As with all things, we work like it depends on us knowing that it completely depends on God.

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