

## **How to Achieve 15 Minutes (or More) of Fame through YouTube**

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**Abstract.** *YouTube is a video sharing website where people can upload, share, view, and comment on originally created videos. It is an arena where ordinary people with little or no funding can compete with mega corporations on an even playing field to achieve higher viewership and a loyal following. This article takes a look at how a group of amateurs rose from obscurity to become YouTube sensations with literally millions of fans and substantial earnings. Using these YouTubers' roadmap to success, this article lists practical suggestions for launching a successful YouTube career.*

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### **1. Introduction**

If someone told you they could give you a roadmap to a sure-fire way to become world-renown and earn thousands of dollars a year doing what you loved to do through YouTube, would you be interested? If they added that this venture required very little capital and could be launched within a few hours, would you be ready to sign up? Are you ready to become the next YouTube sensation?

Unfortunately, there isn't a magic wand or crystal ball to guarantee success, but a tool exists that provides a window to success. By looking into YouTube's past and studying YouTube success stories, you can learn from how and why things came to be and make reasonable choices that could favorably affect your future.

Founded in February 2005, YouTube is a video sharing website where people can upload, share, view, and comment on originally created videos. YouTube's vision is "to give everyone a voice, to evolve video, and to make our partners and advertisers successful."<sup>1</sup> YouTube was purchased by Google in November 2006 and now operates as a subsidiary of Google.

An average of 2 million videos per minute are viewed on YouTube,<sup>2</sup> ranging from humor and entertainment to science and technology and everything in between. On the average, users tend to spend a total of 2.9 billion hours a month watching YouTube videos.<sup>3</sup> Casual viewers, particularly those who only watch when a video link is sent to them, might associate YouTube only with viral videos, such as Susan Boyle auditioning on Britain's Got Talent, dancing babies, or cute kittens. However, others have discovered the many uses of YouTube: it is a search engine for viewing news updates (e.g., NASA Mars Rover landing on Mars), learning new things (e.g., courses from Harvard through YouTube EDU), finding "how to" videos (e.g., how to charge a car battery), and enjoying an entertaining video. More ardent users subscribe to their favorite YouTube channels to be notified as soon as a new video is uploaded.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/t/faq> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Fields, Matthew, "One Minute in Social Media (Infographic)," <http://socialmediachimps.com/2012/one-minute-social-media-infographic/> (accessed August 11, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Bullas, Jess. "20 Stunning Social Media Statistics Plus Infographic," <http://www.jeffbullas.com/2011/09/02/20-stunning-social-media-statistics/> (accessed August 11, 2012).

## 2. YouTube for “the Common Man”

If you want to create and share videos, YouTube gives you a voice; an opportunity and a venue to showcase talent, to create original content, share an idea, express an opinion, champion a cause, or even become famous, all on a shoe-string budget. With luck, you might even make enough to earn a decent living on YouTube.

To upload videos on YouTube, you must first set up an account and a YouTube channel. A YouTube channel is the home page for an account. It shows your account name, account type, public videos you’ve uploaded, and any user information you’ve entered.”<sup>4</sup>

With nothing more than a video camera and Internet access, you can upload a YouTube video that can potentially be viewed by hundreds (or even millions) of people. Some YouTubers, such as Kina Grannis and David Choi, have uploaded videos of themselves singing and playing a guitar at home, with a camera on a tripod, ambient lighting and little to no editing.<sup>5 6</sup> Grannis and Choi now release more sophisticated videos and have since risen to become top-favored musicians on YouTube and launched successful singing careers. They have gone on world music concert tours, released solo albums, and been featured on shows on NBC, ABC, and Disney.

In their YouTube video, *Sandcastle Sensei – Behind the Scenes*, Freddie Wong and Brandon Laatsch, two popular YouTubers, opined that “you don’t need a super good camera or expensive software to make movies.” In their video, they explained that T-Mobile challenged them to shoot a whole video on a cell phone camera.<sup>7</sup> In response, Wong and Laatsch filmed *Sandcastle Sensei*,<sup>8</sup> using a T-Mobile Samsung Galaxy S3 cell phone and iMovie editing software to produce a good quality video.

## 3. Celebrities Discovered on YouTube

If you do a Google search on “famous people discovered on YouTube,” you will find a good number of entertainers who have launched legitimate mainstream careers all because they were discovered on YouTube. The most famous of these YouTube discoveries, of course, is Justin Bieber. He entered a local singing competition in Stratford, Ontario, Canada in 2007, when he was 12 years old. In the same year, his mother opened a YouTube account and began posting his singing videos to share his performances with friends and family. Soon, as other people discovered his videos, his YouTube popularity grew.<sup>9</sup>

Scooter Braun, now Bieber’s manager, accidentally discovered the young sensation while searching for another singer on YouTube. After meeting with Bieber and his mother and gaining their trust, Braun strategically built Bieber’s YouTube channel before launching Bieber’s “mainstream” career. “[Bieber] had a bigger YouTube channel before we even did a record deal with Usher,” Braun disclosed. “All the statistics pointed at the internet, and kids are spending more time on the internet as opposed to TV and radio, the mainstream didn’t realize the impact because there wasn’t validity till Justin became big. YouTube is bare bones and all we did was use a flip video camera. ... At the end of the day, the secret to the marketing was to keep it organic and authentic. Make the kids realize that it’s theirs. Don’t overproduce the videos. Don’t try and put in special editing. Just let the kids [sic] sing and play his guitar and if he’s the real deal, the kids will run with it

<sup>4</sup> Karch, Mariah, “Channel (YouTube),” [http://google.about.com/od/k/g/YouTube\\_channel\\_Def.htm](http://google.about.com/od/k/g/YouTube_channel_Def.htm) (accessed August 11, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> KinaGrannis, “The Sukiaki Song – Acoustic Cover,” September 22, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbxsiq-i384> (accessed on August 10, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> DavidChoiMusic, “AI Green – Let’s Stay Together – David Choi Cover,” May 15, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6-1Wp9XmjI> (accessed on August 10, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> FreddieW2, “Sandcastle Sensei – Behind the Scenes,” July 26, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZDStYlgMLA> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heZDStYlgMLA> (accessed August 10, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> FreddieW, “Sandcastle Sensei,” July 26, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X\\_QNBwvBV4Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_QNBwvBV4Y) (accessed August 10, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Herrera, Monica, “‘Time’ is right for teen singer Justin Bieber,” July 19, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/07/19/us-bieber-idUSTRE56I2BM20090719> (accessed August 9, 2012).

because they'll feel like it's theirs, and have their own self-discovery."<sup>10</sup> Today, 17 year old Bieber is ranked Number 3 as the world's most powerful celebrities, according to Forbes magazine.<sup>11</sup>

Some other YouTube success stories:

Cody Simpson – Cody Simpson (dubbed the Australian Justin Bieber) opened his YouTube channel in 2008, when he was 11 years old. Shawn Campbell, a Grammy-nominated record producer, discovered him on YouTube a year later. Simpson moved from Australia to Los Angeles and eventually signed with Atlantic Records.<sup>12</sup>

Esmee Denters – Eighteen year old Dutch singer Esmee Denters videotaped herself and started posting her cover performances of Beyoncé, Alanis Morissette, and Alicia Keys on YouTube in 2006. Her videos generated 21 million views and were eventually seen by Justin Timberlake, who signed her on as the first artist for his new record label, Tennman Records.<sup>13</sup> Her debut album, which was released in Europe in 2009, made it to the top 10 in several European countries.

Greyson Chance – After Ellen DeGeneres viewed a YouTube video of 12 year old Greyson Chance performing at his middle school recital on YouTube, DeGeneres invited him on her show in 2010. There, she announced that she was launching her own record label and was signing Chance as the first artist on the label.<sup>14</sup>

Arnel Pineda – Legendary 80s rock band Journey didn't have much success finding a replacement for their lead singer until lead guitarist Neal Schon found Arnel Pineda on YouTube, singing covers Survivor, Queen, and Journey in the Philippines. Pineda signed on with Journey and joined the group on its European tour. Their album, Revelation, became the fifth highest-selling album in the U.S. two weeks after its release.

Charice – A fan of Charice Pempengco began posting videos of Charice's musical performances in the Philippines on YouTube in 2007 and her videos were viewed by millions of people, including Ellen DeGeneres, who invited and flew in the 15 year old singer to guest on her show. Charice also guested in The Oprah Winfrey Show, where Oprah called her "the most talented girl in the world."<sup>15</sup> Charice has released several top-selling albums and is a regular cast member of the TV show Glee.

### **3.1 "Home-Grown" YouTube Celebrities**

People of a certain age may never have heard of the most successful people on YouTube, but people under 30 definitely would know of them. You don't have to move into mainstream media to achieve success through YouTube, as illustrated by the three sample success stories below.

**(1) Nigahiga:** Ryan Higa is a Japanese-American from the small town of Hilo, Hawaii. His YouTube channel, Nigahiga, became one of the most subscribed channels in the world in 2010, with over 2 million subscribers. To date, Nigahiga has over 5 million subscribers, 191 million channel views, and over 1,263 billion video views.<sup>16</sup> In 2010, socialtimes.com estimated that Higa made about \$151,000 from his YouTube channel.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Schawbel, Dan, "Inside the Brand of Justin Bieber: an Interview with Manager Scooter Braun," February 11, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/danschawbel/2011/02/11/inside-the-brand-of-justin-bieber-an-interview-with-manager-scooter-braun/> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> "The Celebrity 100," May 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/justin-bieber/> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.codysimpson.com/about> (accessed August 11, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Silverman, Stephen M, "Justin Timberlake Signs YouTube Singer to His Label," June 5, 2007, <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,20041427,00.html> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Indvik, Lauren, "Ellen Signs YouTube Sensation Greyson Chance to New Record Label," May 26, 2010, <http://mashable.com/2010/05/26/ellen-greyson-chance-new-record-label/> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Lapeña, Carmela, "Charice a Hot Item among Foreign Magazines, July 6, 2010, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/195341/showbiz/charice-a-hot-item-among-foreign-magazines>, (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> <http://vidstatsx.com/youtube-top-50-most-viewed> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> O'Neill, Megan, "How Much Money Do the Top Grossing YouTube Partners Make?" August 26, 2010, [http://socialtimes.com/money-youtube-partners\\_b21335](http://socialtimes.com/money-youtube-partners_b21335) (accessed August 10, 2012).

The 22 year old started making videos with his friends when he was still in high school. According to Higa, when he was 14, he and his friends were bored and didn't have much to do over the summer school break. They started making videos, using an old VHS camera. Their early work mostly consisted of lip synching videos, where they often wore wigs and dresses. They also did short comedic skits, which proved to be very popular. They used to bring the VHS tapes to other friends' houses to view and share them. By 2006, they eventually tired of bringing the tapes around and decided to upload them on to YouTube to make it easier to share with friends. When they checked YouTube several months later, they were surprised to learn that their videos had over a thousand views. At first, they thought only people from Hawaii were watching; they didn't realize that people from all over the world were downloading them. By 2010, Nigahiga became the most subscribed YouTube channel in the world.<sup>18</sup>

Most of Nigahiga's lip synching videos have been removed because of copyright infringements. However, Higa has long moved away from that type of genre. His most popular videos are music (such as *Nice Guys*, an original composition with 37,985,022 views); comedic skits (such as *How to be Gangster*, with 36,122,081 views); and parodies of commercials, television shows, and movies (such as *The ShamWOOHOO*, with 25,745,137 views and *Movies in Minutes – Twilight*, with 26,760,221 views).<sup>19</sup>

Shortly after the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011, Higa posted *Honk for Japan*, where he and his friends held signs that said "Honk if you Love Japan." Higa pledged to donate \$10 per honk to the Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. Moreover, he promised to donate another \$600 for every 1,000 views the video received. (The video received over 8 million views; Higa donated \$6,475 and inspired others in the United States, Canada, UK, and Malaysia to hold similar fundraisers.) Higa explained, "People keep saying, 'Why don't you just donate the money instead of trying to get people to view [your video]?' My biggest strength right now is that I'm fortunate enough to have a following. The purpose of this video was not only to support Japan myself, but to encourage others as well."<sup>20</sup> The video was picked up and broadcasted on *ULALA@7*, a Japanese television show, where the hosts expressed gratitude for Higa's support and encouragement. They commended him for the humorous and entertaining way he encouraged people to help the Japanese people and uplift their spirits.<sup>21</sup>

After high school, Higa enrolled at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Although he wanted to be an actor, he felt he wouldn't be able to break into the industry because he's Asian, so he decided to major in nuclear medicine instead. He later discovered he "hated nuclear medicine" and changed his major to film. He's taken a hiatus from college for the moment because he feels YouTube has given him "an opportunity that will not last forever," and he wants to make the best of it now.<sup>22</sup>

Higa's popularity has attracted the attention of Hollywood producers. For example, Academy Award-winning director James Cameron (*Titanic*, *Avatar*) didn't know much about what was happening on YouTube, so he invited Higa to a private dinner to learn more about the new media.<sup>23</sup> Higa wants Hollywood studios and traditional media to realize that new media is important and it's continuously growing. He feels that the Internet is going to become as big as TV, if not bigger. Like others from his generation, Higa himself hardly watches television any more. Everything is online now, he points out.

To stay relevant on YouTube, Higa knows that he must continuously post videos. He's observed people who used to have huge followings on YouTube but took a break and stopped posting videos for about a year.

<sup>18</sup> FiveYear, "My YouTube Story: Ryan Higa," May 12, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbo3JxUdimQ> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Nigahiga videos, sorted by "most popular," <http://www.youtube.com/user/nigahiga/videos?sort=p&view=0> (accessed August 10, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Nigahiga, "Honk for Japan," March 14, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cciUXpITsu0>, (accessed on August 11, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Tokyomx, "Honk for Japan on ULALA@7," May 22, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zzzodu64DIE&feature=plcp> (accessed on August 11, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Wilcox, Leslie, "LongStoryShort," PBS Hawaii, January 3, 2012.

[http://www.pbshawaii.org/ourproductions/longstory\\_transcripts/LSS%20513%20Transcript%20-%20Ryan%20Higa.pdf](http://www.pbshawaii.org/ourproductions/longstory_transcripts/LSS%20513%20Transcript%20-%20Ryan%20Higa.pdf) (accessed August 15, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Wilcox, Leslie, *op. cit.*, (accessed August 15, 2012).

Viewers started to unsubscribe to their channel and eventually forgot about them. These formerly popular channels have now become irrelevant on YouTube, according to Higa.

Higa reads his viewers' feedback on his videos, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media and tailors his video content towards what his audience wants.<sup>24</sup> He says he cares more about the ratings (likes) and comments than the number of views his video gets. He prefers a video with fewer views and good ratings over one with substantial views and poor ratings.

**(2) KevJumba:** Like Ryan Higa, Kevin Wu started his KevJumba channel in 2006 when, as a high school student in Sugar Land, Texas, he began uploading video blogs he recorded from his bedroom. In an interview with the *Texas Monthly*, Wu explained how he got started on YouTube: "During high school, I was so bored I would watch YouTube for, like, six hours a day. One afternoon, I decided I would just put out a video. I had to find one of my parent's old cameras to start recording. I didn't have experience. I was never into film.

"At first I had fifty subscribers that I would actually email with — my first viewers. These were people from places like the Netherlands, Canada, and Asia who stumbled across my videos. I was so flattered. It encouraged me to post more because, in a sense, I could make new friends.

"I had only been video blogging for two weeks when my second video got featured on the home page of YouTube by some guest editor. It was a post titled I have to Deal with Stereotypes. It went up on a school night around midnight, and I didn't sleep because I was so excited. In one night, I went from 150 views a video to 500,000."<sup>25</sup> By May 2008, KevJumba was one of the top five of YouTube's most subscribed channels.<sup>26 27</sup>

The Chinese-American YouTuber disclosed that he wanted to make people laugh like Dave Chappelle, his favorite comedian. However, since he was "just an Asian kid without resources or an audience," he turned to YouTube as his medium. "As well as making people laugh, I try and send a message across with my videos. I think what seems to make people enjoy them is the fact that they can sort of relate to what I'm talking about. I'll do videos about dating, addictions, materialism, internet dating, or anything that's on my mind," Wu explained.<sup>28</sup>

In 2008, Wu set up a second channel, called JumbaFund, where he donates proceeds from advertising to charity. In 2011, Wu teamed up with The Supply Educational Group and raised \$7,134 to help build a secondary school in Lenana, Kenya.<sup>29</sup> The "About" section of JumbaFund explains how funds are raised: "As a YouTube partner channel, JumbaFund earns ad revenue every time someone watches a video from this channel. Every two months JumbaFund donates all the revenue earned from YouTube to a school we built in Kenya called the Jumba Lenana Academy. Just by watching the videos on JumbaFund, you are raising money for our school."<sup>30</sup>

KevJumba is currently the 14th most subscribed channel on YouTube, with over 2 million subscribers. It has over 62.7 million channel views and over 299.5 million video views.<sup>31</sup> Wu has collaborated with NBA players Baron Davis and Jeremy Lin in some of his videos. He has appeared on the Cartoon Network and has been

<sup>24</sup> Miller, Liz Shannon, "NewTeeVee Live: YouTube Star Ryan Higa Does Not Think He's Famous," November 12, 2009, <http://gigaom.com/video/newteevee-live-youtube-star-ryan-higa-doesnt-think-hes-famous/> (accessed August 14, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Castro, Elizabeth, "Being a YouTube Comedian," August 2012, *TexasMonthly*, <http://www.texasmonthly.com/2012-08-01/thehorsemouth.php> (accessed August 15, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> PartnersProject, "KevJumba Interview: the Partners Project Episode 54," January 5, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RamCIJ3y0fw>, (accessed August 11, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> KevJumba Resume, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/KevJumba/67586096980?sk=info> (accessed August 15, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Wong, Nelson, "A-Profiler: KevJumba," <http://aaring.com/aprofiler/kevjumba.htm> (accessed August 11, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> TheSupply, "The Supply + KevJumba, Pt. 3," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhWrJNX6UJg>, uploaded video on June 21, 2011 (accessed August 10, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> JumbaFund, "About JumbaFund," <http://www.youtube.com/user/JumbaFund> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> <http://vidstatsx.com/youtube-top-100-most-subscribed-channels> (accessed August 10, 2012).



sponsored by JCPenney and T-Mobile.<sup>32</sup> Although Kevjumba has fallen to number 14 in the subscription rankings, it still remains a popular and influential channel.

**(3) RayWilliamJohnson:** Today's most subscribed YouTube channel was started by Ray William Johnson, a thirty-something former Columbia University law student, who showcases and comments on viral videos on his channel. According to Johnson, he spent so much time studying and needed a form of diversion between study breaks, but couldn't afford a TV set. He discovered YouTube: Its short videos were easy to squeeze into his schedule and became his main source of entertainment. Since he found video blogging "very appealing," he decided to try it himself. For almost a year, he used an old, borrowed MiniDV camcorder and sporadically shared his videos with an online audience of about 30 people. Johnson recorded his videos from his dorm and basically talked about his life and what he had learned in class. Like video bloggers at that time, Johnson did not follow any format or structure.

Over time, Johnson concluded that people watched YouTube videos because they want to watch one of two things: (1) viral videos or (2) their favorite blogger. He explained, "Using that analysis, I conceived my first formatted show, 'Equals Three.' The idea behind 'Equals Three' was to combine video blogging and viral videos and place them within a rigid format, so that only the actual blogging and viral videos would change [during] each episode."<sup>33</sup> When he started using this new format, he called his YouTube channel "RayWilliamJohnson." (The original channel, opened in 2008, has been shut down.) He said he spends hours searching for interesting viral videos to share and comment on, then posts his videos on his channel on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Johnson brings his own brand of humor to YouTube. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, "Ray William Johnson curses constantly, often gives his audience the finger and sometimes dresses up as a penguin, but he is attracting more than five million regular viewers to his twice weekly video commentaries, making him the biggest draw at Google Inc.'s online-video outlet."<sup>34</sup>

In June 2011, William Morris Endeavor (MME), a global talent agency, signed Ray William Johnson as a client.<sup>35</sup> Johnson is also now part of Maker Studios Online Network. Maker Studios gives YouTube channels the resources to produce their YouTube shows (directors, editors, extras, costumes, technical support, studio space and equipment) in exchange for a portion of the channel's ad revenue generated on YouTube. Today, a Maker Studios staff member combs the Web, looking for videos for Johnson to use on his channel.<sup>36</sup>

Estimates put Johnson's YouTube earnings at about \$1 million a year. Popular YouTube partners, such as Johnson, make somewhere between \$3,000 to \$9,000 for every 2 million views. Johnson's videos, which air twice a week, generate an average of 10 million views a week.

#### **4. Other Popular YouTube Channels**

Up until mid-2011, YouTube used to rank and display the 100 most subscribed channels "of all time" and most subscribed channels by category. Today, it places more emphasis on the number of video views, rather than the

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.kevjumba.com/about/> (accessed August 10, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Humphrey, Michael, "Ray William Johnson: =3 Adds Up to Most-Subscribed on YouTube," <http://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelhumphrey/2011/06/28/ray-william-johnson-3-adds-up-to-most-subscribed-on-youtube/>, June 28, 2011 (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Glazer, Emily, "Who is RayWJ? YouTube's Top Star," <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204624204577179073123148432.html>, February 2, 2012 (accessed August 12, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Patten, Dominic, "SME Signs Online Host Ray William Johnson," <http://tv.yahoo.com/news/wme-signs-online-host-ray-william-johnson-201456182.html>, June 20, 2012 (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Austen, Ben, "The YouTube Laugh Factory: a Studio System for Viral Video," [http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/12/ff\\_youtube/2/](http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/12/ff_youtube/2/), December 16, 2011 (accessed August 9, 2012).

number of a channel's subscribers. The YouTube home page now displays top-viewed videos and "YouTube Charts" shows the most viewed and most popular videos.<sup>37</sup>

Having a large number of subscribers is a badge of honor. It means that, through your channel, you've been able to build a solid fan base, a loyal audience who wants to be notified as soon as you upload your video. Your subscribers feel engaged, that you're someone they know and want to see more often. They are the ones who will go to bat for you, share your videos with friends, comment and chat, and extend your audience.

Having a large number of views, on the other hand, is just as important. It brings a "reality check" to the big picture of a channel's popularity. For example, a channel with a large number of subscriptions but a very small number of views, it could be indicative of a substantial number of inactive, duplicated, fake, or even "purchased" subscriptions. To see a balanced picture when you gauge a channel's popularity, you should not only look at the number of subscribers, but also the number of views as well.

The 10 most subscribed YouTube channels are listed in the following table. Data was compiled from vidstatsx.com.<sup>38</sup>

**Table 1. Ten Most Subscribed YouTube Channels**

Sub Rank	Channel	Date Joined	Number of Subscribers	Video View Rank	Channel View Rank	Number of Videos Uploaded	Founder(s)
1	RayWilliamJohnson	05/28/2008	5,682,127	9	1	310	Ray William Johnson
2	Nigahiga	07/20/2006	5,471,810	24	4	123	Ryan Higa
3	Smosh	11/19/2005	5,203,956	15	9	246	Anthony Padilla and Ian Hecox
4	Machinima	01/16/2006	4,727,828	2	6	20,994	Hugh Hancock
5	JennaMarbles	02/16/2010	3,752,638	85	35	103	Jenna Mourey
6	Freddiew	02/22/2006	3,461,634	80	30	151	Freddie Wong and Brandon Laatsch
7	CollegeHumor	10/09/2006	2,856,033	20	26	1,690	Ricky Van Veen and Josh Abramson
8	ShaneDawsonTV	03/10/2008	2,828,610	76	7	205	Shane Dawson
9	EpicMealTime	09/29/2010	2,650,975	163	42	103	Harley Morenstein
10	FPSRussia	04/19/2010	2,528,200	155	92	97	Kyle Lamar Myers

RayWilliamJohnson is the most subscribed YouTube channel (with 5.6 million subscribers), followed by Nigahiga (with 5.4 million subscribers). Other popular YouTube channels are:

**Smosh** – Anthony Padilla and Ian Hecox, who have been friends since middle school, started their Smosh channel in 2005. Lev Grossman of *Time* magazine described the duo: "Padilla and Hecox go by the joint nickname Smosh, and they are the *Saturday Night Live* of YouTube. Their videos are insanely popular. Their genius, if that's the right word for it, is in their unswerving, unwinking commitment to idiocy. It may also be in

their shaggy haircuts."<sup>39</sup> Some popular video titles include: [Pokemon in Real Life](#), [Super Powers!](#), and [Siri Tried to Kill Me!](#)

<sup>37</sup> Go to <http://www.youtube.com/charts> to check on the most viewed, most discussed, most liked, and top favored videos. You can find the Ten "Popular Channels" (the 10 most subscribed channels) in the lower section of the page.

<sup>38</sup> <http://vidstatsx.com/youtube-top-10-most-subscribed-channels> (accessed August 9, 2012).

**Machinima** – The word “machinima” is a loose hybrid of the words “machine” and “cinema.” It describes “the process of creating real-time animation by manipulating a videogame’s engine and assets.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, it generally involves the use of graphics engines (usually from video games) to create a cinematic production to tell a story. The practice began when video game players recorded their game play, usually of how they leveled up very quickly or when they engaged in multiplayer games. Machinima.com, which was founded by Hugh Hancock in 2000, features tutorials, interviews, and articles about the subject. The Machinima YouTube channel describes itself as “the number one video entertainment network for gamers around the world, featuring gameplay videos, trailers, original series, live streams, and the most up-to-date news for the gamer generation.”<sup>41</sup> Some popular video titles include: [\*Mortal Kombat: Legacy Episode 1\*](#), [\*Counter Strike for Kids\*](#), and [\*Star Wars: the Force Unleashed – Launch Trailer\*](#).

**JennaMarbles** – Jenna Mourey is the girl behind the JennaMarbles channel. Mourey has a Bachelor’s degree in psychology from Suffolk University and a Master’s degree in sports psychology from Boston University. She first uploaded videos on to YouTube for class projects; she created her YouTube channel in February 2010. When she uploaded a video called [\*How to Trick People into Thinking You’ve Good Looking\*](#) in July of the same year, the video went viral and the popularity of her channel skyrocketed.<sup>42</sup> Other popular video titles include: [\*How to Avoid Talking to People You Don’t Want to Talk to\*](#), [\*What Girls Do in the Car\*](#) and [\*How Lady Gaga Writes a Song\*](#).

**FreddieW** – Freddie Wong and Brandon Laatch started the FreddieW channel in 2006. They met while they were students at the University of Southern California and discovered their mutual love for video games, action movies, special effects, and “blowing things up.” Their YouTube videos are based on things they themselves would like to watch.<sup>43</sup> Most are takeoffs from video games or war/fighting action scenes, such as [\*Real Life Mario Kart\*](#), [\*Medal of Honor Cat\*](#), and [\*Cereal Killer\*](#). Wong and Laatch have a second channel, called FreddieW2, where they frequently do a “behind the scenes” explanation of how they made their main video.

**CollegeHumor** – Back in 1999, when childhood friends Ricky Van Veen and Josh Abramson were college freshmen, they started a website where they and their college friends posted funny pictures and videos of themselves doing “stupid college stuff.”<sup>44</sup> Today, CollegeHumor Media is an online entertainment company targeting a core audience aged 18 to 49. It is made up of several syndication partnerships, including [\*CollegeHumor.com\*](#), [\*Jest.com\*](#), [\*Dorkly.com\*](#), and [\*SportsPickle.com\*](#). On YouTube, CollegeHumor Media posts humorous videos, pictures, articles and jokes, created and/or put together by the CollegeHumor staff. Many of the videos contain sexual innuendo; others are pranks and parodies of commercials, cartoons, and video games. Some popular video titles include: [\*Really Hot Girl\*](#), [\*Matrix Runs on Windows XP\*](#), [\*Prank War 7: The Half Court Shot\*](#) and [\*Siri Argument\*](#).

**ShaneDawsonTV** – Shane Lee Yaw was such a great fan of the movie *Titanic* that he changed his last name to “Dawson,” after Jack Dawson, the main character in the film.<sup>45</sup> In an interview with *USA Today*, Dawson, who joined YouTube in 2008, noted that he was unemployed and it was a time when people couldn’t find jobs. Since he was already doing YouTube, he applied to be a YouTube partner. After he started receiving revenue from

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<sup>39</sup> Grossman, Lev, “Smosh,” December 16, 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570729,00.html> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.machinima.com/about> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/user/machinima> (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> PartnersProject, “Jenna Marbles Interview: the Partners Project Episode 41,” September 22, 2011 (accessed August 9, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> PartnersProject, “Freddie Wong Exclusive Interview: the Partners Project Ep. 6,” January 20, 2012 (accessed August 9, 2012)..

<sup>44</sup> St. John, Warren, “Sophomorically Incorrect,”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/24/fashion/sundaystyles/24COLLEGE.html?pagewanted=all> July 24, 2005 (accessed August 11, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> Dawson, Shane, “Meeting the Director of Avatar & Titanic,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulkVHriOKag>, January 29, 2011 (accessed August 11, 2012).



YouTube, he decided to focus his energy on this venue.<sup>46</sup> When *Forbes* magazine listed him as one of the top 25 Web celebrities in 2010, it said this about him: “This 21-year-old YouTube idol posts short comedy videos to the Web, donning wigs and using corny accents to play a variety of characters. So far his videos have been watched more than 204 million times, and more than 1.2 million people subscribe to his YouTube channel.” Some popular video titles include: [\*Fred is Dead\*](#), [\*Lady Gaga Tried to Kill Me\*](#), and [\*“Telephone – Dude’s Version” Lady Gaga Spoof\*](#).

**EpicMealTime** – This YouTube channel, which was started by Harley Morenstein in 2010, is described as a cooking show, but it’s not the kind one would ordinarily expect. It started when Sterling Toth videotaped Morenstein eating a gigantic hamburger with six patties and 18 strips of bacon at a Wendy’s restaurant in Montreal, Quebec, with the theme song from *The Terminator* playing in the background. Morenstein and his friends uploaded their first video, [\*Fast Food Pizza\*](#), on to YouTube on October 2010 and received a lot of positive feedback.<sup>47</sup> In their most popular video, [\*Fast Food Lasagna\*](#), the crew layered 15 McDonalds Big Macs, a liter of Big Mac sauce, 15 Wendy’s Baconators, 15 A&W Teen Burgers, 7 orders of onion rings, bacon strips, and cheese with Jack Daniels Meat Sauce (ground beef, onions, tomato sauce, and Jack Daniel’s whiskey) to make lasagna. Each episode ends with the crew eating their concoction. The videos are hosted by 27 year old Harley Morenstein and his friends. Some popular video titles include: [\*TurBaconEpic Thanksgiving\*](#), [\*Breakfast of Booze\*](#), and [\*The Sloppy Roethlisberger\*](#).

**FPSRussia** – This channel showcases a variety of high powered weapons, demonstrated by 26 year old American Kyle Lamar Myers from Georgia, who portrays a Russian named Dmitri Potapoff. Myers has an impressive arsenal of high grade weapons, which he uses to prove or debunk the way weapons are used in video games and movies. “FPS” stands for “first person shooter.” (Many popular war video games show the camera angle from the point of view of the shooter; hence, the term.) In an interview with asylum.com, Myers said, “There are just so many unrealistic things in the ‘Call of Duty’ games that I wanted to see if any of them could actually be done in real life. After seeing the viewer response, I decided to make a series out of it.”<sup>48</sup> Myers started his channel with videos of himself playing first person shooter video games. Some popular video titles include: [\*AA-12 Fully Automatic Shotgun!!!\*](#), [\*12 Gauge Dragons Breath\*](#), and [\*82mm Mortar Fail\*](#).

## 5. A Second Look at the Top Ten Channels

The people behind the top 10 YouTube channels started by doing what they loved (goofing off with friends, telling a story, or demonstrating how to do something). Their beginnings were simple and they produced their videos from beginning to end: they wrote the script (if there was one), acted, did the camera work (oftentimes using an inexpensive camera on a tripod), and did post production work as well. Many admit they didn’t have much technical know-how when they started, nor did they ever imagine the popularity and success they would achieve on YouTube.

Smosh began in 2005, the same year YouTube started. Four channels began in 2006 (Nigahiga, Machinima, FreddieW, and CollegeHumor); two, in 2008 (RayWilliamJohnson and ShaneDawsonTV), and three, in 2010 (JennaMarbles, EpicMealTime, and FPSRussia). Nine of the creators are under 30; one is in his 30s (RayWilliamJohnson). Five began while they were still in high school or college. With the exception of EpicMealTime, which started in Canada, all the other channels were established in the United States.

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<sup>46</sup> Graham, Jefferson, “Shane Dawson Interview | USA Today,” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_KC4QgOHco](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_KC4QgOHco), December 15, 2009 (accessed August 11, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> Forbes, Paula, “Interview: Epic Meal Time: a Bunch of Dudes, Just Making It Happen,” January 20, 2011, <http://eater.com/archives/2011/01/20/epic-meal-time-a-bunch-of-dudes-just-making-it-happen.php> (accessed August 15, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Massould, Justin, “Gamer and Gun Enthusiast Imitates Crazy ‘Call of Duty’ Stunts,” <http://www.asylum.com/2010/11/08/call-of-duty-black-ops-videos/>, November 8, 2010 (accessed August 11, 2012).

Although YouTube does not provide information about demographics *by channel*, it generally allows you to view demographics *per video*. Examining demographics based on the channel's *most popular* video gives a reasonable sampling of a channel's audience appeal.<sup>49</sup>

**Table 2. Top Ten Channel's Most Popular Videos Statistics**

Channel	Most Popular Video	Date Uploaded	Number of Views	Top Locations	Top Demographics
RayWilliamJohnson	Don't Call Me Fat	Aug. 23, 2009	23,471,170	No statistics available	No statistics available
Nigahiga	Nice Guys	May 31, 2011	38,326,731	United States Canada Australia	Female, 13-17 years Male, 13-17 years Male, 18-24 years
Smosh	Beef 'n Go	May 3, 2008	93,796,220	United States Turkey Indonesia	Male, 45-54 years Male, 35-44 years Male, 55-64 years
Machinima	Avatar: Trailer the Movie (New Extended HD Trailer)	Oct. 29, 2009	22,428,265	India United States United Kingdom	Male, 35-44 years Male, 45-54 years Male, 25-34 years
JennaMarbles	How to Trick People into Thinking You're Good Looking	Jul. 9, 2010	43,979,346	United States Canada Australia	Female, 13-17 years Female, 18-24 years Male, 25-34 years
FreddieW	Future First Person Shooter	Dec. 22, 2010	24,062,494	United States Canada Australia	Male, 13-17 years Male, 18-24 years Male, 25-34 years
CollegeHumor	Un-Safe Sex <sup>50</sup>	Jan. 10, 2008	26,662,826	India United States Malaysia	Male, 45-54 years Male, 25-34 years Male, 18-24 years
ShaneDawsonTV	Fred is Dead!	Sept. 12, 2008	21,834,001	No statistics available	No statistics available
EpicMealTime	Fast Food Lasagna	Apr. 26, 2011	15,975,927	United States Canada Australia	Male, 18-24 years Male, 25-34 years Male, 13-17 years
FPSRussia	AA-12 Fully Automatic Shotgun!!!	Apr. 25, 2011	26,764,122	United States Canada Australia	Male, 13-17 years Male, 18-24 years Male, 25-34 years

<sup>49</sup> Statistics in Table 2 were gathered by using "YouTube Insight," YouTube's video analytics functionality. To check a popular video's statistics: (1) display all videos for a selected channel, (2) sort videos by "most popular," (3) view the most popular video, and (4) click on the "Show video statistics" icon (on the lower right side of the video, next to the number of views). It should be noted that some YouTube channel owners may elect to disable the display of statistics, as in the case of RayWilliamJohnson and ShaneDawsonTV.

<sup>50</sup> This is CollegeHumor's second most popular video. Their most popular video, Realistic Hollywood Sex-Scene is rated "S" and requires a YouTube account to view the video (due to its possible mature content) and gather statistical information.

People who watched the videos were not only from the United States, but were also largely from Australia, Canada, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

For 6 out of 8 channels, all viewers were exclusively male, mostly aged 13 to 34. Surprisingly, Smosh, with its juvenile-type of comedy, appealed to an older audience (35 to 64). Nigahiga and JennaMarbles appealed to both males and females.

Eight out of ten channels routinely sprinkle their videos with curse words or profanities (RayWilliamJohnson, Smosh, Machinima, JennaMarbles, CollegeHumor, ShaneDawsonTV, EpicMealTime, and FPSRussia). Nigahiga and FreddieW keep the language clean.

**Table 3. Top 10 Channel's Popular Video Age Demographics**

Channel/ Video	Male 13-17	Male 18-24	Male 25-34	Male 35-44	Male 45-54	Male 55-64	Female 13-17	Female 18-24	Comments
<b>RayWilliamJohnson</b> <i>Don't Call Me Fat</i>									No statistics available
<b>Nigahiga</b> <i>Nice Guys</i>	2	3					1		Female, 13-17 years Male, 13-17 years Male, 18-24 years
<b>Smosh</b> <i>Beef 'n Go</i>				2	1	3			Male, 45-54 years Male, 35-44 years Male, 55-64 years
<b>Machinima</b> <i>Avatar: Trailer the Movie (New Extended HD Trailer)</i>			3	1	2				Male, 35-44 years Male, 45-54 years Male, 25-34 years
<b>JennaMarbles</b> <i>How to Trick People into Thinking You're Good Looking</i>			3				1	2	Female, 13-17 years Female, 18-24 years Male, 25-34 years
<b>FreddieW</b> <i>Future First Person Shooter</i>	1	2	3						Male, 13-17 years Male, 18-24 years Male, 25-34 years
<b>CollegeHumor</b> <i>Un-Safe Sex</i>		3	2		1				Male, 45-54 years Male, 25-34 years Male, 18-24 years
<b>ShaneDawsonTV</b> <i>Fred is Dead!</i>									No statistics available
<b>EpicMealTime</b> <i>Fast Food Lasagna</i>	3	1	2						Male, 18-24 years Male, 25-34 years Male, 13-17 years
<b>FPSRussia</b> <i>AA-12 Fully Automatic Shotgun!!!</i>	1	2	3						Male, 13-17 years Male, 18-24 years Male, 25-34 years

Six out of the top ten channels have comedic elements (RayWilliamJohnson, Nigahiga, Smosh, JennaMarbles, CollegeHumor, and ShaneDawsonTV). Three involve or deal with gaming or action-adventure (Machinima, FreddieW, and FPSRussia), but some, such as FreddieW, also combine comedy with action and special effects. EpicMealTime describes itself as a cooking show, but targets a “macho” audience with extreme food combinations and humongous quantities of meat, bacon, and liquor. FreddieW, FPSRussia, and EpicMealTime cater to their demographics’ love for guns, action, and food.

In spite of geographical boundaries and distance, these YouTubers occasionally reach out to each other and may even collaborate on videos. The Epic Meal Time crew went down to Georgia to team up with FPSRussia for their first collaborative video, [Russian Meal Time](#), released on July 2011. True to form, the video involved massive amounts of meat, liquor, and guns.<sup>51</sup> Six months later, they released a second collaborative video, [Meat Ice Cream Party](#).<sup>52</sup> After the release of these videos, both channels enjoyed an increase in viewership.

FreddieW worked with Nigahiga in [Kung Fooled](#), a parody by Wong Fu Productions about Asian stereotypes. The video featured popular YouTubers: Freddie Wong, Ryan Higa, Wesley Chan, Nathan Moore, DeStorm, and Brandon Laatsch.<sup>53</sup>

Wong Fu Productions is the YouTube channel of Philip Wang, Wesley Chan, and Ted Fu – three friends who met at the University of California San Diego and formed a YouTube/film making group after graduating in 2006. Their goal is make high quality videos on a small budget. They typically write, direct, film, and edit the videos themselves. Their work has been recognized and praised by organizations like CNN, NPR, Cannes, Sundance, and the Los Angeles Asia Pacific Film Festival.

Wong Fu Productions also collaborated with KevJumba to make [Funemployed](#), an 11-episode series about two recently unemployed friends who try to find ways to make a living. The video series starred Kevin Wu and Philip Wang and featured YouTubers Ryan Higa, David Choi, Kina Grannis, Chester See, Natalie Duran, Matt Koval, and Anthony Falcon.<sup>54</sup>

Ryan Higa and Kevin Wu first met during the filming of this video series. Approximately a year later, they collaborated to produce their most popular video, *Nice Guys*, a musical parody about how “bad” guys, not “nice” guys, get the girl.<sup>55</sup> The video also featured Chester See, who they met when they filmed *Funemployed*. Higa, Wu, and See have gone on to do many other collaborative videos.

All of the top 10 channels are YouTube Partners, which means that they receive revenue based on how often their videos are viewed. YouTube Partners receive additional income when a viewer clicks on an advertisement displayed on their channel.

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<sup>51</sup> EpicMealTime, “Russian Meal Time,” July 18, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMyPD1VKk60> (accessed August 15, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> EpicMealTime, “Meat Ice Cream Party,” January 24, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLpttwk4-FA&feature=plcp> (accessed August 15, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> WongFuProductions, “Kung Fooled,” May 5, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN8E8L5c9WI> (accessed August 15, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> WongFuProductions, “Funemployed – Ep 1 – You’re Fired, I Quit!” June 22, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7f7udgXREY>, “Funemployed – Ep 2 – Excuses, Excuses ...” June 22, 2010 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkiLLaXoiro>, “Funemployed – Ep 3 – Milking It,” June 25, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IJgBvo3y8w>, “Funemployed – Ep 4 – Rock the Interview,” June 29, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1Q-PBc06oc>, “Funemployed – Ep 5 – Follow Your ... Dreams?” June 2, 2010, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YXIIdD\\_Ntc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YXIIdD_Ntc), July 2, 2010, “Funemployed – Ep 6 – Videos Don’t Make Money,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xiPWmAEQmHU>, July 6, 2010, “Funemployed – Ep 7 – The Music is in All of Us,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xP6eo1frzCA>, July 9, 2010, “Funemployed – Ep 8 – Caught Cheating,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGUJzfHICcw>, July 13, 2010, “Funemployed – Ep 9 – Lonely, Lonely Kyle,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vx1ZaN5mzTc>, July 16, 2010, “Funemployed – Ep 10 – Hug It Out,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdhunaqceP4>, July 20, 2010, “Funemployed – Ep 11 – Series FINALE – Gave It a Shot,” July 27, 2010, (accessed August 15, 2012).

<sup>55</sup> Nigahiga, “Nice Guys,” (Ryan Higa’s version), May 31, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfeys7Jfnx8>, (accessed August 15, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> KevJumba, “Nice Guys,” (Kevin Wu’s version), May 31, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Fz3zFqLc3E>, (accessed August 15, 2012).

Some channels now work with media studios. These studios provide production support (such as shooting space, production offices, props, costumes, extras, editors, animators, etc.), technical tools, promotions, and expertise for these channels. For example, RayWilliamJohnson has signed up with Maker Studios; ShaneDawsonTV, with The Collective; and EpicMealTime, with Revision3. When Shane Dawson joined The Collective, he gained access to producers, editors, and musicians. With these additional resources, Dawson was inspired to make a music video. “Before us, Shane wouldn’t have had the time or the knowledge base of the music industry to execute it efficiently,” Dan Weinstein of The Collective observed.<sup>57</sup>

With the help of Maker Studios, RayWilliamJohnson launched YourFavoriteMarian, a secondary YouTube channel featuring animated music videos. Smosh also has a cartoon channel, called Shut Up Cartoons. Coincidentally, both RayWilliamJohnson and Smosh have separate Spanish language versions of their channels.

Other YouTubers have more than one channel as well. Aside from his main Nigahiga channel, Ryan Higa opened HigaTV, a second channel where he posts more casual, random videos, including bloopers and “behind the scenes” shots of videos from his main channel. FreddieW uses its second channel, FreddieW2, to show “behind the scenes” footage and tutorials of how their videos were made. These popular YouTubers are also cashing in through the sale of merchandising. Their channels feature an online store with T-shirts, hats, bags, bracelets, posters, and numerous other items bearing their brand.

## **6. From YouTube to Television?**

What is the next step for these channels? Will they use their YouTube celebrity status to launch careers in television and movies? Or would they even be interested?

If you are starting out on YouTube, you don’t have to worry about low viewership numbers. You can continue to produce videos for as long as you want, regardless of how many viewers you have. You can create and produce your own shows with a \$0.00 budget. This is a luxury not enjoyed by television producers: television shows with low ratings are often cancelled after only a few weeks. On the other hand, through interaction and feedback with your YouTube audience, you can adjust and fine tune your content to improve your shows and eventually increase your viewership. Danny Zappin, one of the founders of Maker Studios, explained why YouTube is more advantageous than “traditional Hollywood”: “YouTube is the anti-Hollywood, the anti-TV ... because there are no decisions by committee, no casting calls, no gatekeepers to pass just to get started. Distribution is global, instantaneous, and free, and shows can’t be canceled.”<sup>58</sup>

Some YouTubers, such as Ryan Higa, have expressed interest in working in television, as long as they can continue their work on YouTube. Higa noted that whenever he gets a vision or an idea, he can create what he wants on YouTube. Television, on the other hand, involves a team and a much longer process before an idea can be approved. Higa also said he enjoys his connection with his audience, “when people watch you, they feel like they’re friends with you. And I feel the same way. I feel a bigger connection, because I interact with them a lot.”<sup>59</sup>

Others, such as Ray William Johnson, feel that television would be a distraction and would take time away from their YouTube viewers. In an interview with *Forbes* magazine, Johnson explained that he loves what he does now and loves connecting with his audience. He also loves not having a boss. When asked about his future goals were, Johnson responded, “I find it intriguing that your question equates television with ‘future goals,’ when current trends suggest that television may not be the future of entertainment.” Johnson observed that a

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<sup>57</sup> Graham, Jefferson, “YouTube Stars Get Hollywood Superagents,” April 13, 2012, <http://www.usatoday.com/tech/columnist/talkingtech/story/2012-04-12/hollywood-collective-agency/54233860/1> (accessed August 16, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Austen, Ben, *op. cit.* (accessed August 15, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> Wilcox, Leslie, *op. cit.*, (accessed August 15, 2012).



steadily increasing number of television shows are now being broadcast on the Internet, and he expects that trend to continue until all or nearly all broadcast programs are on the Web. He continued, “If such were the case, I would be left with two options: I could transition to television, only to have said medium turn around and broadcast my content on the Internet, or I could broadcast my content on the Internet myself. My immediate intuition says that I should just broadcast the content myself.”<sup>60</sup>

Hollywood is just beginning to take notice of the level of creativity on YouTube and the power of its viewership numbers. Hollywood director Jon Faveau approached Freddie Wong and Brandon Laatsch to make a video about his movie, *Cowboys and Aliens*. Faveau gave Wong and Laatsch free reign to write and shoot their video, financed the production, and gave them access to the facilities and equipment at Universal Studios. In less than 24 hours after Wong and Laatsch uploaded their video, [\*Cowboys & FreddieW\*](#), to their channel, it had been viewed over 1.5 million times.<sup>61</sup>

Typical YouTube videos are about two or three minutes long, but some YouTubers are making feature-length 30 minute videos (such as [\*Agents of Secret Stuff\*](#) by Nigahiga, in collaboration with Wong Fu Productions) or web series (such as [\*Video Game High School\*](#), an eight episode series by FreddieW). Both of these special features have accompanying “behind the scenes” videos, which offer a peek into how the videos were made and conversations with the actors.

Older generation of viewers may be reluctant to give up their television sets and embrace the Internet as an exclusive electronic source of news and information. To people in their twenties (and younger) who grew up with computers, cell phones, and “instant” communication, the Internet is just part of everyday life and many, if not most, turn to electronic media as their main source of entertainment and information. With time, this generation will replace the old one, and television will have to adapt to the new generations’ taste. New generations of television sets that offer access to the Internet are already being sold in stores. Google has invested millions of dollars to launch “YouTube Original Channels” aimed at developing original content to rival television and cable programming.

## **7. Launch Your Own YouTube Channel**

If you’re just getting started on YouTube, you might feel overwhelmed or intimidated by the competition or by what you may perceive to be a daunting task. Many YouTubers, particularly the top ones, have years of experience over you. Top YouTubers’ videos have been viewed literally over a million times.

Instead of being intimidated, however, study and learn from their experience and success. Keep grounded and be realistic. Do not assume that you will have a meteoric rise to fame a few weeks after you publish your first video. With very few exceptions, top YouTubers took years to cultivate their audience, develop their brand, and rise to the top. If you open a YouTube channel, don’t do it just to become rich and famous. Do it because it’s something you really enjoy: that’s how the top YouTubers started. Listed below are a few guidelines, based on what has worked for other YouTubers.

1. Do videos about something you like and find interesting. If you’re not happy with what you’re doing, your lack of interest will manifest itself in your videos.
2. Develop a brand, a point of view. Let your personality shine through. What makes your channel different? Who is your target audience? Why would someone look forward to viewing your next video?

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<sup>60</sup> Humphrey, Michael, “Ray William Johnson: =3 Adds Up to Most-Subscribed on You Tube,” June 28, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelhumphrey/2011/06/28/ray-william-johnson-3-adds-up-to-most-subscribed-on-youtube/2/>, (accessed August 20, 2012).

<sup>61</sup> Scott, Jeremy, “YouTube Star, FreddieW, Takes Huge Step toward Hollywood Stardom,” n.d., <http://www.reelseo.com/youtube-star-freddiew-takes-huge-step-hollywood-stardom/> (accessed August 20, 2012).



3. Know your target audience. If you find other channels whose point of view and style are similar to your own, run YouTube analytics on their videos. The audience might not necessarily be what you had originally expected (e.g., the videos may be attractive to an older or younger audience or they might be more popular in other countries).
4. Watch a lot of YouTube videos that appeal to you and read viewers' comments to gauge what works well on YouTube. You will have to wade through dozens of inane or trivial comments before you come across one of value, but it could be a real gem.
5. Use engaging titles, tags, and icons for your videos to catch viewers' attention.
6. Write a script (or at least write down your talking points if you're a vlogger) and plan your camera shots.
7. Keep your videos short.
8. Be willing to take risks and move out of your comfort zone. Try different styles, if you can (vlogging, music, sketches, etc.) If you fail (as evidenced by low viewership or an abundance of negative comments), learn from your mistakes.
9. Post a video response on a popular YouTuber's channel. Select the channel and your message carefully and make sure they align with your brand and target audience. If the people who watch your video response like you, they might be compelled to watch your other videos and perhaps even subscribe to you. (Try not to post a response video until you have uploaded several videos on your channel; this will give your "visitors" the opportunity to view them and see you are all about.)
10. Engage your audience on YouTube. Ask them questions in your video and invite them to comment. Don't forget to ask them to "Like" your video and share it with their friends.
11. Engage your audience through other social media (Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Pinterest).
12. If appropriate, conduct a contest and ask your viewers to post a video on a certain topic and offer a prize. The prize does not have to be expensive. If you sell your own branded T-shirts on your channel, for example, you can offer your T-shirt as a prize. If you use an unusual prop, such as a telephone shaped like a guitar, you can offer the prop as a prize. Prizes such as these make your viewers feel they're part of your channel.
13. Find out if your target audience has any networking groups, clubs, or websites. Participate in these groups: comment, exchange ideas, or offer advice. If appropriate, post a link to your videos.
14. Participate in other forms of social media (Twitter, Facebook, Google+). Read viewers' comments on your videos. Be professional and positive when you respond to your viewers.
15. Be prepared to be "thick-skinned." Even popular YouTube channels have haters and negative comments. Learn ignore them and let these comments "roll off your back."
16. Post videos regularly. If you can set and stick to a schedule, let your audience know when to expect your next video.
17. Be sure to obtain the proper permissions if you use copyrighted materials. Keep in mind that many channels have had their videos removed because they used copyrighted music without permission. Also be careful about using branded materials in your videos. If your video goes viral and you are wearing a branded shirt, for example, the company (that owns the brand) might demand a portion of your profits.
18. YouTubers consider themselves a community, and with the YouTube community, it's all about giving back. YouTubers are open to meeting, exchanging ideas, and talking about "all things YouTube." YouTube Meet-ups are user-organized events planned specifically for this purpose. Make it a point to attend YouTube Meet-ups and network, network, network!

19. Reach out to other YouTubers who share your view or style and explore the possibility of doing collaborative videos with them. It doesn't matter if you and the other channel have small audiences. By collaborating, you each expose yourselves to new viewers and could expand your reach. (You don't have to be in the same city or location to do the video. With proper editing and imagination, you can work wonders!)
20. When you are ready, join a contest that will expose you to a wider audience. In June 2012, for example, YOMYOMF (an Original YouTube Channel and YouTube partner founded by Hollywood director Justin Lin) began airing "Internet Icon." Similar to *American Idol*, the goal of the Web series was to find the next YouTube sensation. They received thousands of entries from across the country and narrowed down the field to the top ten contestants. The series aired every Tuesday and Thursday, from June 12 to August 16, 2012.

The competition was won by real-life brothers Chris and Nick Riedell, who joined YouTube with in December 2011, only four months before the search for contestants was announced. As winners of Internet Icon, The Brothers Riedell, as they call themselves, received \$5,000 in cash, an upgrade of computer equipment, a 14-day European trip, a one year development deal with the YOMYOMF network, a meeting with a top Hollywood agent and manager, and a meeting with Hollywood film director Andy Fickman. Over the course of the Web series, the brothers' viewership and subscriptions more than doubled and continue to climb. The other finalists also witnessed dramatic increases in viewership and subscriptions; in addition, they met people in the business to help them grow and nurture their YouTube careers.

21. Read "Creator Playbook" on YouTube's Creator's Hub for tips on how to build "a loyal and engaged audience": <http://www.youtube.com/yt/creators/playbook.html>. Join a YouTube Creator Club (or create one of your own).
22. Read "Next Creator" on YouTube's Creator's Hub to learn how you can receive YouTube promotions to build your subscribers and increase your views, find out how you can learn new skills and receive a \$5,000 video equipment package; and discover how you can be mentored by YouTube star vloggers. <http://www.youtube.com/yt/creators/next-vlogger.html>
23. Become a YouTube Partner. According to YouTube, "The YouTube Partner Program provides creators with resources and opportunities to improve their skills, build larger audiences, and earn more money. Membership is free." To learn more about the YouTube Partner Program, visit the "Become a Partner" page: <http://www.youtube.com/yt/creators/partner.html>.
24. Be patient. It takes skill, content, time, marketing, and luck to build a following.
25. Have FUN and don't take yourself too seriously.

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