



see**3**communications

# A Little Goes A Long Way

January 2009

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## The Impact of Documentation

Online video is changing the world. It is providing a window for policy makers and average citizens to connect to the critical work that is being funded by foundations of all kinds. It is changing opinions and priorities and bringing resources to much-needed projects that would have, in the old days before 2004, gone unnoticed.

A project's real success comes when the project is replicated, expanded, and influences how people see the world. By documenting their work, organizations create visibility that allows them to increase funding, share their successes, and promote change. Foundations can help their grantees succeed in this new world of online video by providing resources specifically for documentation along with project grants. A push from foundation funders to say to nonprofits "we see the value in documentation and the creation of video" will go a long way.

By adding funds for online video to existing grants, and thereby strengthening their initial investment, foundations also get their own story told—the story of how their grant dollars are making a difference.

## How Broadband Changed the World

In early 2005, I attended a conference of foundation and nonprofit staff to talk to people about the future and potential of online video. My message was simple: broadband was coming—real, always-on, high-speed Internet access was about to become reality. This change would, I said, fundamentally alter how all organizations communicate. With real broadband, the web will support online video in a way heretofore unseen. It would be a revolution in communications.

I was greeted with perplexed silence. Online video, I was told, was already available and had been since 1995. What in the world was I talking about?

A few months after this conference, in mid-2005, Verizon and SBC (now AT&T) announced that they were reducing their DSL prices to \$19.95. What was significant about this price was that at the same time AOL was still selling dial-up for \$21. This footnote of telecom history is in fact a critical turning point in the history of communications. The pricing change made broadband possible for the masses. Users who had waited and waited for photos to appear or video to play were in heaven—and would never go back. This one pricing move signaled the impending death of AOL's core business and the death of the dial-up business more generally. More than anything else, this change in pricing signaled that the online video era had begun.

If the pricing change in 2005 was the start of the online video era, it was roughly one year later that everyone finally took notice. On October 9, 2006, Google announced that it had acquired video start-up YouTube for \$1.65 billion. My phone started to ring. "What was the online video stuff you were talking about?"

## Watching Online

comScore, a market research firm, recently released a study of video viewing habits. Their report indicates that more than 75% of U.S. Internet users watched a video online, averaging 3.25 hours of video per person during the month. The time spent watching video online was up by nearly 30% from their report less than a year before and much of the increased time spent online comes at TV's expense. While YouTube is the biggest site by far, more than 65% of online video is viewed on sites other than YouTube.

So what does this all mean for grantmakers? It means that "film" and "media" are no longer niche areas for funding. The web and TV are coming together and it means the website of your foundation—and the websites of the nonprofits your foundation funds—are becoming like TV channels. How will you program

this channel? The PDF report will no longer hold the audience. Producing video for the web is now an essential ingredient in any thoughtful theory of change.



Most nonprofit organizations that receive foundation funding face two realities. The first is that they need to diversify their support and build a “retail” fundraising base of individual donors. The second is that if they are to achieve their goals, they have to convince people that their issue should be a priority. From legal aid to early childhood education, from service for low-income families to support for the arts, leveraging government dollars, changing regulation, and changing the habits of everyday people are keys to lasting success.

For nonprofits, the web generally—and online video, in particular—is the most powerful tool to build broad support for their work. Nonprofits that have had video experience mostly have produced what we call “the dinner video”. “The dinner video” is that 12-minute video of mostly talking heads that plays at gala events. These videos often cost between \$10,000 and \$50,000 and, most often, are used only once.

The new paradigm of watching video online requires a new paradigm for creating video. That dinner video isn’t appropriate for a website because people are unlikely to watch more than a few seconds before they click away. The online audience isn’t that captive audience of a gala dinner.

People today expect to see the work of an organization, not simply be told of this work. Whether it’s a tsunami or a war, people have been conditioned to see the news up-close and immediately. They expect no less of nonprofits, and the mindshare—the attention and dollars—will flow to the projects that compellingly show the impact they are having.

The new paradigm is that organizations need to document their work all the time. They need to capture the interesting and important things they do every day and use this material to build a media library. This library, in turn, houses the media that can be re-used and re-purposed for many different online videos. The dinner video project is often a good way to begin building the media library.

## The Hybrid Approach

One of the great benefits of YouTube has been that people have become used to seeing video that is not professionally produced. With a compelling story, a video can be shot by an amateur and still hold its audience. For organizations, this means that they can supplement or replace video shot by professionals with video shot by their staff. A little training goes a long way, and an organization that invests staff time to shoot video will reap the rewards for a long time to come.

However, what is true for shooting video isn’t always true for editing video. As media professionals will relate, the best stories are made in the editing room. Editing is not as easy to learn as video and requires a substantial investment of time.

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps, is a small nonprofit with operations in New York, Chicago, Washington D.C., and New Orleans. AVODAH is a year-long program for young adults to live together and work full-time on urban anti-poverty work. AVODAH’s challenge was to introduce the corps members to their constituents and show how the organization was enabling young adults to leverage the resources of urban nonprofits trying to address poverty in American cities.

AVODAH added video training to their service-learning curriculum in one of the houses. They then sent corps members out to capture their placements as well as life in the AVODAH house. AVODAH then engaged professional video editing services to turn this amateur video into professionally produced pieces.

Through this hybrid model, AVODAH was able to create three videos for their website, outreach, and fundraising needs at a fraction of the cost of a full professional production.

## Building a Media Library

The American Jewish World Service (AJWS), a New York-based nonprofit that raises money in the US and gives grants to grassroots organizations worldwide, was hosting President Clinton for its big annual dinner in 2006. It certainly needed a good dinner video. But they didn't want this investment to be used only one time. AJWS used the opportunity afforded by this high-profile event to begin building their media library.

They sent a camera crew to Uganda, India, and El Salvador and conducted interviews in New York. With this material they made an 8-minute dinner video. But since the dinner, they have made more than 25 other video products from the same source material! For example, they made a video about each of the grantees mentioned in the dinner video. They did shorter versions for their website and they did direct response videos for fundraising campaigns.

Because sending professional crew overseas is so expensive, AJWS also trained several of their staff to shoot their own video and add this video to their content library. A person with no training in video shooting will make many mistakes, including moving the camera around too much and not capturing good sound (which is critical for watchable video). A one-day camera training is supplemented by follow-up consultation where the professional reviews the materials and gives feedback. The employees who learn to shoot video get substantially better each time they shoot.

The AJWS video library now includes video shot from a number of sources, from the expert professionals to the staff. The library also includes audio recording and photographs from all over the world. This material together constitutes the raw material for more online media products.

AJWS's biggest challenges are to advocate for more government support of foreign assistance, and to build a broad base of funders in the US. What online video allows AJWS to do is to close the gap between the people they are trying to reach and the work that they do. By seeing this work in action, the public can relate emotionally and intimately with the needs in another part of the world.



Online video is an ever-increasing way that people stay connected to their friends, to the news around them and the issues that they care about most. It is critical that nonprofit organizations understand the power of showing their work and have the resources to do so. Online video is also a powerful mechanism for transparency and conveying the very real human emotions behind the issues. It is the story and the emotion that allow people, key influencers and the general public, to connect to the issues — to get active and make change.

As broadband moves to the mobile phone — a phenomenon already prevalent in many parts of the world including developing countries, the percentage of people watching online video and connecting to the causes that they care about through the web will increase rapidly. Foundations of all types and sizes have a unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership by investing in the documentation that will allow organizations to make new and critical connections and advance their missions. At the same time, the benefits that flow to the organizations will flow to the funders, who will be able to show their work, become recognized for the critical support they provide and the community leadership their funding represents.

## About Michael Hoffman

Michael Hoffman is CEO of See3, a communications firm specializing in video, web development, and online outreach for nonprofits, foundations, and social causes. Hoffman, an expert in online business development and marketing, is frequently asked to consult with organizations about marketing strategies and new media development.

His blog was named a must-read by the Nonprofit Times and he is frequently quoted in trade journals, industry blogs and the mainstream press. He is a co-founder of DoGooderTV and EarthFirst.com, and is a nationally sought-after speaker on topics such as online cause marketing, web video, and Web 2.0 for social change.

Watch him in the “Guide to Online Video” at [www.see3.net/guide](http://www.see3.net/guide)

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## Resources and References

**comScore Study:** <http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=2616>

**Select AVODAH “Hybrid” Video:** <http://www.avodah.net/apply/>

**Select AJWS Repurposed Videos:** <http://www.dogooder.tv/Orgs/AJWS/default.aspx?MovieID=274>

**“Telling Moving Stories: Charities turn to online video to connect with supporters”:** <http://www.see3.net/article-telling-moving-stories.asp>

**“Doing Good On TV: How Nonprofits Are Taking Advantage of an Old Medium”:** <http://www.see3.net/article-doing-good-on-tv.asp>

**“Documenting nonprofits’ good work”:** <http://www.see3.net/article-philanthropy-journal.asp>

**More articles on nonprofit video:** <http://www.see3.net/in-the-news.asp>

