

Using Short, Silent "Data Story" Videos to Engage Contemporary Extension Audiences

Abstract

Online video can be an effective way for Extension to share data stories. Short videos that convey their messages without sound can maximize impact on several social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter. A pilot video was produced in this style; shared on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube; and evaluated on the basis of the social media platforms' available metrics. To meet clientele where they are, Extension must stay up to date with the latest trends in online information sharing. This article addresses the rationale behind and techniques for creating short videos that communicate without sound.

Keywords: [online video](#), [data visualization](#), [on-farm research](#), [data story](#), [YouTube](#)

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Introduction

In an era of digital communication, providing Internet-based information is necessary for Extension to remain relevant (Rader, 2011). Video can be a highly effective tool in communicating data-centric research information in engaging ways. An impressive example is a segment from the BBC series "The Joy of Stats," in which Hans Rosling, a Swedish statistician and physician, tells the story of the world in 200 countries over 200 years using 120,000 numbers in just 4 min. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbkSRLYSojo>). The information presented in this "data story" video is not only research-based but also data-centric.

Although the use of videos and YouTube in Extension has been explored (Case & Hino, 2010; Kinsey & Henneman, 2011; Langworthy, 2017; Parish & Karisch, 2013), other platforms—Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter—all offer video publishing as well. Over 100 million hr of Facebook video are viewed every day (D'Onfro, 2016). In fact, Cisco has predicted that Internet traffic from videos will make up 82% of all Internet traffic by 2020 (Cisco Visual Networking Index, 2016), representing a sizable opportunity for information sharing. However, new techniques are needed to stay up to date with the latest video presentation methods. For example, according to Patel (2016), 85% of Facebook videos are viewed without sound—highlighting the critical value of visual production techniques.

Can we in Extension capitalize on this considerable market and enter this space as presenters of research-based

information? My objective was to evaluate the opportunity to present data-centric on-farm research results in the popular short, silent video format.

Pilot Project—Can We Enter This Space?

The Nebraska On-Farm Research Network, a University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension program, works with crop producers and agronomists to conduct approximately 70 on-farm research studies annually. The data from these studies have been shared at in-person meetings, published in a hard-copy book, and made available online as a PDF version of the hard copy book. Recently, additional digital methods for sharing these findings have included publication of online articles, development of an interactive online database, and dissemination using e-newsletters and social media posts.

My interest was to explore the short, silent video space as a viable means of sharing on-farm research data stories with farmers and agronomists. I produced a short video, 2 min 47 s, to tell a data story from the Nebraska On-Farm Research Network. This video summarized results of on-farm research on starter fertilizer use in corn. Instead of the more traditional video format, I sought to use the video style that is popular on Facebook. Most notably, I used text overlay without sound to convey all the information in the video (Figure 1). The video I produced can be accessed on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiDVzvec5ow>), Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/OnFarmResearch/videos/vb.133798170075605/1179998895455522/?type=2&theater¬if_t=like¬if_id=1492741732754930), and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/AgTechLaura/status/854763473024188428>).

Figure 1.

Screenshots from Nebraska On-Farm Research Data Story Video Showing Text Overlay Used in Place of Audible Narration



Within 72 hr of posting, the video had been viewed 79 times on YouTube, 128 times on Facebook, and 534 times on Twitter. Additionally, on Twitter, it generated 2,697 impressions, 15 retweets, and 13 likes. In sum, the video was viewed 741 times in 3 days, supporting the concept that these short, silent videos may be a useful avenue for sharing data stories.

Guidelines for Application in Extension

Compiling and publishing these videos requires techniques different from those used with traditional, narrated videos. Additionally, due to the way social media platforms currently present information, strategies can be employed to optimize the viewer experience. The suggestions that follow are based on my experiences and the sources cited.

1. *Develop a concise data story.* It is helpful to sketch the story out before beginning production.
2. *Keep videos short.* Many Facebook videos are in the 1- to 2-min range.
3. *Share all information without sound.* Facebook and Twitter allow auto play of native content (see item 8 for information), and the default is without sound. If narrated, videos should have captions; if there is no narration, large, plain, and often animated text should be used to tell the story.
4. *Hook viewers immediately.* Early on (i.e., during the first 10 s), use engaging graphics or video and introduce an interesting question or topic to let the viewer know what the video is about.
5. *Standardize and brand your videos.* Sticking with similar graphics, the same font, and a set style helps brand a series of videos. University style guidelines may dictate some of your options in this regard. Besides making your videos more recognizable, standardization also speeds up video creation by eliminating the need to completely redesign each time. Find a theme and a style that works and stick with them.
6. *Post videos frequently.* With blogs, posting consistently is important. The same applies with videos. Posting numerous videos with the same branding will build awareness and let people know you are a producer of this type of information.
7. *Ensure that production of the video will be quick.* Langworthy (2017) noted that development of short-form educational videos created from existing content requires approximately 40–60 hr. Because videos should be posted frequently, you need to be able to produce them quickly and relatively easily. Available tools, such as Adobe Spark, allow for the quick production of short, silent videos. For comparison, the starter fertilizer video discussed previously took around 15 hr to complete.
8. *Post videos as native content.* Native video is uploaded to a social network site rather than hosted elsewhere and linked to from the social network site. Simply posting a video on YouTube and sharing a link on your social channels is not optimal. Facebook favors native video, and native Twitter videos receive 2.8 times more retweets and 2.5 times more replies than nonnative video (Taylor, 2015). Native video posting also enables auto play—an important feature for hooking the audience.

Conclusion

Given the associated social media metrics, the initial on-farm research results video I produced shows promise for Extension's entrance into the short, silent video space. Providing bite-sized pieces of information may be a new avenue for content sharing in the digital age.

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