

Get the Vlog Mindset

chapter 1

New videobloggers often have the same questions:

- What should my videoblog be about?
- Should I record my life?
- Should I make a TV show?
- Will I make money from putting videos online?
- How much will this cost me?
- Who will be watching?
- How many viewers can I get?

This chapter answers those questions and more, preparing you for the rest of the book.

Videoblogging: The Big Picture

When it comes to videoblogging, the best way to understand the medium is to see what other people in the community are doing. Whether you love or hate what you see, it'll give you a sense of the diversity and abundance of approaches people take to creating videoblogs. The best way to locate and view videoblogs is to take some time looking through the current batch of what's available in the following directories:

- www.FireAnt.tv
- www.Mefedia.com
- www.VlogDir.com
- www.VlogMap.org

Mefedia was the first directory devoted specifically to videoblogging. Peter Van Dijck started it in 2004, and it has grown to track more than 6,000 videoblogs as of this writing. Figure 1-1 shows the Mefedia home page.

in this chapter

- ☑ Exploring the Videoblogging World
- ☑ Deciding What to Vlog
- ☑ Sharing Your Vblog with Others
- ☑ Creating a Viral Video

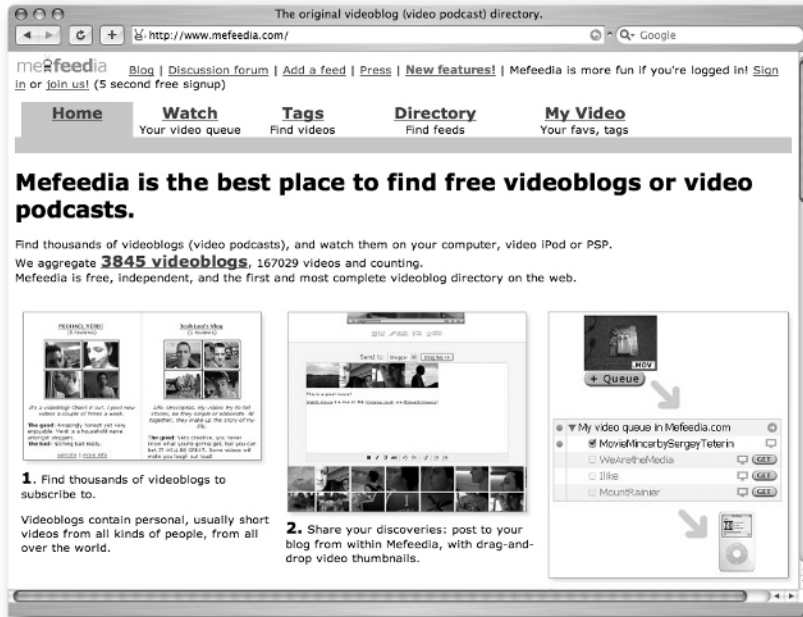


FIGURE 1-1: Mefedia was the first place to track videoblogs.

You may also want to look in the Podcasts section at the iTunes music store to find and view different videoblogs as well. (Follow the Podcasts link under “Inside the Music Store” on the main page.)

Videoblogging sprang from the drive of people who communicate visually. Writing is a great way to communicate, but not everyone can write well. In addition, writing can’t always express the true intent of the author—written sarcasm, for example, can sometimes lead to unintended consequences, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings.

With videoblogging, however, each person can express herself in a personal and highly effective manner. In the brief history of videoblogging, journalists like to ask, “Who needs millions of hours of home video on the web?” They plant the idea that there is enough to read and watch already, so we don’t need more media made by inexperienced people.

Every new medium goes through this stage of being blown off: talkies, color movies, television, and the web. All of the aforementioned were supposed to fail, yet all of them have overcome their initial roadblocks. In 1957, Francois Truffaut (Figure 1-2) said, “The film of tomorrow will not be directed by civil servants of the camera, but by artists for whom shooting a film constitutes a wonderful and thrilling adventure . . . it will be enjoyable because it will be true and new. . . the film of tomorrow will be an act of love.”

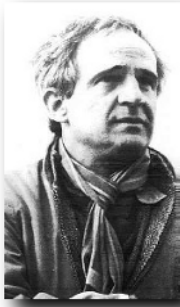


FIGURE 1-2: “The film of tomorrow will be an act of love.” — Francois Truffaut.

Throughout history, practitioners of an old medium make fun of the practitioners of a new medium, as the early adopters learn their craft and explore its boundaries. Often, the new medium grows, culture adopts it, and a new industry is born.

A national television network can play only a certain number of shows in a day, one after the other. Newspaper and magazines have only a couple hundred pages they can fill in a given day. Videoblogging gets in no one’s way. If you don’t want to see someone’s videos, don’t type that URL.

A Global Community

The web is nearly infinite in its capacity for distributing information. The videoblogging world is one of vision and shared experiences. Every person can have his own videoblog. This is beautiful because a person’s voice and vision is important whether he wants to post videos of his baby growing up, make a weekly comedy show with friends, or do video reporting of important events in his neighborhood. Politicians (see Figure 1-3) are even videoblogging to connect with their constituents on a more personal level.

Why is video so powerful on the web? Much of what we know and interpret is done through visual communication. When someone talks to you, you are learning and interpreting her intentions through her unspoken gestures, such as facial expression and speech patterns, as much as through what she actually says. With a videoblog, all of this unspoken expression is communicated.

Video creates empathy, and videoblogging enables people from opposite sides of the world to see what life is like in another country, through the eyes of another ordinary citizen. People in the United States can watch videos made by people in Iran. People in Japan can watch videos made by people in Chile. This is unprecedented.

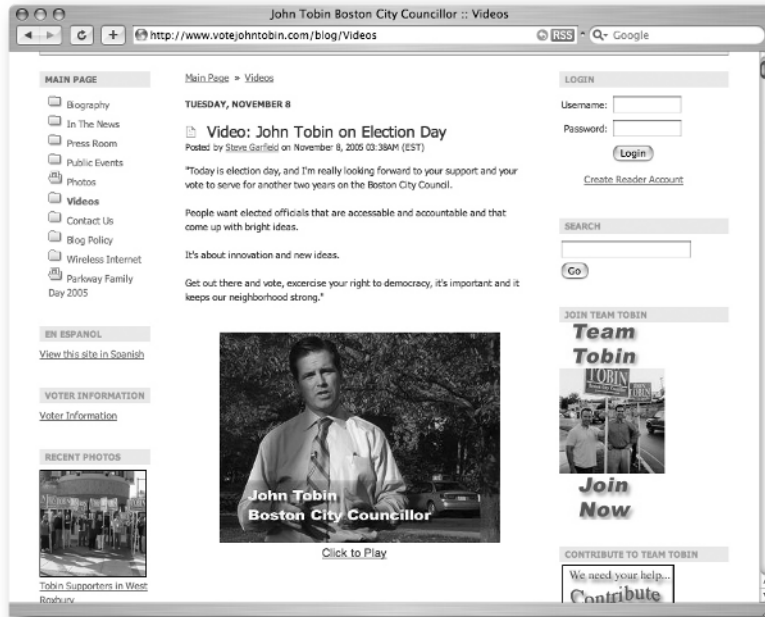


FIGURE 1-3: Boston City Councillor John Tobin's videoblog.

Videoblogging enables person-to-person communication, with no gatekeeper in between. It breaks down geographic and cultural barriers. Even in China, a country physically and metaphorically walled off from the world, blogs enable individuals to communicate on a global scale.

Videoblogging: Up Close

What does it take to make a videoblog? The rest of this book goes into greater detail about the specifics, but here's a simple outline to get you started:

1. Have an idea.
2. Record a video.
3. Transfer the video to your computer.
4. Edit the video.
5. Make a screenshot of your video.
6. Set up a blog.
7. Upload your video to a server.
8. Post the screenshot and video to your blog.

9. Create a feed on your blog so people can subscribe.
10. Tell people about your post and videoblog.

FreeVlog.org (www.freevlog.org) is a great site that walks you through the steps of setting up a videoblog, and its own videoblog provides tutorials. Michael Verdi and Ryanne Hodson, who created the site in the spring of 2004, run it.

Interview with Ryanne Hodson of FreeVlog.org

What made you create freevlog.org? What were your motivations?

Michael and I had been getting so many emails asking how we had actually posted video to a blog, what was RSS (Really Simple Syndication), where did we host videos, etc. Some folks had dismissed videoblogging as a tool only viable for video professionals. Since both of us came from an art background, we decided it was time to set the record straight and illustrate the steps it took to videoblog and, most importantly, how to do it for free.

What kind of people do you see using your tutorial?

We see lots of different people using the tutorial, from techie nerds to artists to moms and dads to teenage kids. This is one of our goals, to make the tutorial easy enough for your grandma to understand.

What are some of the unique videoblogs that you've seen made?

One of the videobloggers who came through FreeVlog was Alan Larson, who created Alan's Bird Cam Blog (<http://birdcamblog.blogspot.com>). Alan's an avid birdwatcher who videotapes and describes birds at his window feeder. The vlog is so simple and beautiful, anyone would be interested to watch.

Another interesting vlog is A Pilot's Life (<http://lear60.blogspot.com>), which is an in-depth look at the life of an airline pilot in the US.

Since you came from commercial TV, what do you see in videoblogging that isn't in TV?

Videoblogging was like my saving grace from a life of editing for television. I found that TV is severely limiting for artists because there are no open distribution methods, no chance for feedback, and no dialog with viewers. Plus, there is such a high barrier to entry.

Videoblogs allow individuals to produce video with no censorship, there no producers manipulating content for ratings or sponsors. Artists and non-artists alike have a level playing field for producing and expressing themselves through a visual medium in a way never before available. Videobloggers can have their voices heard just as loudly as any network television show.

Videoblogging Motivations

So why do you want to make a videoblog? All good videoblogs start with a strong idea. Remember, a videoblog is made up of many videos that build up over time. You are not making a movie (although you could), so you shouldn't feel pressured to have it "right" in one video. Very often, you will write text along with your video to give it context.

A videoblog can be that of a couple documenting their first baby, extreme videos such as the beheadings that occurred in the Middle East, a fictional story of hunting the Loch Ness monster, a girl interviewing her grandparents about their lives, a . . . well, you get the picture.

Maybe you'll choose to distribute video of the things that happen to you daily, or your business, or a specific hobby you do on weekends. Through a videoblog, you are sharing your ideas with other people. Choose a topic that you are really interested in. Doing so will help you stay focused and motivated.

Videoblogging is not necessarily another form of TV. Most videobloggers post short videos because they don't have time for anything longer and because most people don't want to sit through more than a few minutes of "web video." And as with most rules, every guideline presented here can be broken.

Documenting the World Around You

Personal videoblogs are about the people who make them. They use the blog to keep up with ideas, share what's going on in their lives, and comment on things they've seen on the web and in the world. A personal videoblog is really just for the person who makes it, but it can help friends and family keep up and in touch.

If you choose to create a personal videoblog, you'll probably meet people online with similar personalities. But ultimately, you are keeping a record of your life and ideas. Steve Garfield is a prolific videoblogger known for producing "The Carol and Steve Show" (http://stevegarfield.blogs.com/videoblog/carol_and_steve_show), which is about his and his wife's life together, among other videos.

Interview with Steve Garfield

Steve, you posted a video in January 2004, declaring that year to be the "year of the videoblog." This turned out to be true. No one else was posting video like this. What prompted the idea of videoblogging?

I'd been posting videos to web pages and blogging but hadn't combined the two. Thinking back on it, it might have come to me in a dream. It was New Year's 2004, and I wanted to challenge myself with something. Figuring out how to add video to a blog was something that I felt should be easy but wasn't. So I decided to post a video to my blog, declaring 2004 as The Year of the Videoblog. Little did I know what would follow.

You have extensive experience doing professional video; why do you vlog?

A lot of times my professional projects need to be perfect. Some videos need to be edited down to the frame level for accuracy for broadcast (that's 1/30th of a second). With vlogging, it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, video for vlogging has no rules! That's what's so exciting about it.

The audience also does more than just sit back and watch. They respond. I'll get comments on my vlog and emails from as far away as Australia. That's what's so different from doing traditional video. With vlogging, there's an ongoing conversation that can happen about the work.

Do people understand what you're doing? How do you explain it at a party?

Most people don't understand what I'm doing. A lot of them are not interested. Most of the time people want to talk about themselves. Once in a while I might meet someone who gets it. Maybe an artist looking to expand the audience for his work, or a band that wants to get greater exposure. But when I hit it right, and explain it to someone who is receptive to the idea, then the magic happens.

I explained it to Boston City Councillor John Tobin. He became the first U.S. elected official to vlog. He loves it, and his constituents love it, too.

Do you have any advice for new vloggers?

My advice for new vloggers is to look at vlogging as a continuum. There are four steps: Watch, Learn, Create, and Teach.

First, go out and watch some video blogs. See who is out there and watch what they are doing. Leave some comments on people's sites. Second, learn how to create a vlog. Then third, create one for yourself. After you've gone through these steps, help others start their own. That's what I've done. It's very rewarding.

Now get out there and become a vlogger. Send me a link and I'll be watching.

So pick up a camera. Even a digital still camera that records video clips can be a highly effective tool for vlogging. If you record a bunch of the little moments that happen in any given day, edit them together on your computer, and post them regularly, you'll have an incredibly amazing record of your life that anyone can see.

With vlogging, you can be anonymous or attempt to become a superstar. You can vlog for free. . .or spend a lot of money. You can have an audience of 5, 50, or 50,000 people. . .maybe more.

The majority of those who do vlog do so with no aspirations of making money from their work. Others actively try to create revenue models that will let them vlog fulltime. Remember, you don't need permission to vlog. It's essentially free, open, and without rules.

As with any open system, you will get stuff of varying quality, which holds different relevance based on who is looking at it. If I make an unappealing vlog, no one needs to watch. They

simply don't have to type the URL. But someone, somewhere, may like and be interested in what you find unappealing. The point is: Videoblogs are available for whoever wants to see them. You can pick and choose what to watch and when to watch it.

Blogging is a culture of sharing. People comment, link to each other, remix each other's work, and quote each other. This helps the community grow. . .and growth leads to a global conversation. By videoblogging, you are joining this culture.

Making a Show

Commercial producers are starting to see Internet distribution as just another way to showcase their existing content. You already can purchase episodes of the television shows "Lost" and "Desperate Housewives" for \$1.99 through the iTunes music store. The concept is that people will download these shows so they can watch them on their TV or portable device such as Sony's PlayStation Portable or Apple's iPod.

Interview with Andrew Michael Baron of Rocketboom

How did you discover videoblogging? What inspired you to do Rocketboom?

I didn't really discover videoblogging; I just figured out on my own that it would be another dimension for blogging. I was volunteering for John Edwards in the primaries already in 2003, and in the spring of 2004, I was creating a site for Senator John Edwards' DVD. I noticed after making the site that people were able to view the video without problems. For the first time, I noticed, most people didn't complain about plugin or buffering problems.

So it dawned on me that the time for video online was now. I decided I would create a videoblog and that I could use it as a tool to help defeat Bush. Well, I got side-tracked because I was hired at M.I.T that summer, but I used those months to brainstorm my plan and save up money and create one when I got back to NYC and that this is what I would do after the election was over (because it would take me almost until then to launch it). I also thought to myself that it would be really big, so I figured that I would be able to realistically, somehow, sustain from it (mostly from other opportunities it would bring, I thought).

What other formats did you think about doing?

I considered how Rocketboom could be great for people in general and how it could be used in so many ways, but I was interested mostly in apolitical things, actually, like computers, art, design, and Internet culture. So, I knew that it would be short wit commentary because that's what I was inspired by, stylistically, in the other blogs that I liked to read and also wrote for.

Do you have any professional video background?

I co-created and designed the Motion Capture/Motion Tracking Lab at Parsons (School of Design), where I taught grad students for a couple of years. My mission statement and site design are still the same on the current site, at <http://a.parsons.edu/~motion/>.

What most people don't realize is that they can do essentially the same thing. Budding filmmakers can now make a videoblog to showcase their work. Also, they can submit their videoblog to iTunes and enable people to subscribe to their videos from the iTunes store. This presents a possible future where even the worst movie will be seen by at least several hundred people. Now that is a huge audience that couldn't have existed just a few years ago.

Filmmakers do not need to appeal to a mass audience but can instead tell stories for specific audiences. Niche audiences are becoming the norm.

Many people want to make documentaries. Videoblogging enables people to tell stories in segments, which are perfect for documentaries. No longer does a producer have to limit her documentary to less than two hours, because she can produce a story that spans years, told over the same amount of time. Again, this is unprecedented.

Another option people can choose is to make a regular TV-like show, in the form of episodes and storylines. As with TV, you choose a topic, choose a host or characters, choose a format, and publish the video on a regular basis. Through this format, a videoblog can build an audience of people who know what to expect and when to expect it.

One example of this model is Rocketboom (www.rocketboom.com). Andrew Baron started the Rocketboom (see Figure 1-4) videoblog at the beginning of 2005. Each day of the week he posts a three-minute video where Rocketboom's host, Amanda Congdon, shows some cool stuff they've found on the web. As of this writing, the show has more than 250,000 downloads a day and is also distributed via TiVo (<http://research.tivo.com/rocketboom>).

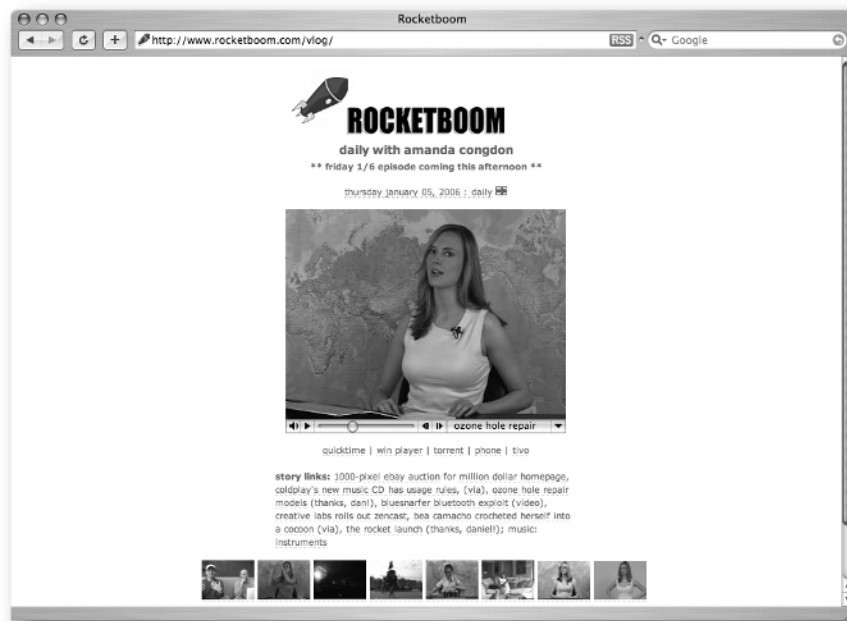


FIGURE 1-4: Rocketboom is hosted by Amanda Congdon and viewed by more than 100,000 people daily.

The funny thing is, Rocketboom is shot in Andrew's apartment, using a simple DV camera, audio microphones, and small lighting kit. He does all of the editing on a laptop. Yet Andrew has a larger audience than that of some cable television shows. Rocketboom proves that if a videoblog is regularly distributed, with content that is interesting, large numbers of people will subscribe and watch.

So, where's all the money in this? No one has that answer yet. But if you can get lots of people to watch your videoblog regularly, making money just becomes a detail.

Distributing Worldwide (or Just to Your Neighborhood)

Never before in human history could a regular person create and distribute video worldwide for little or no cost. Your audience may be half the planet or half your family. There is no difference in your videoblogging process.

For example, my girlfriend is eating dinner, and I think she's beautiful. I pull out my little camera and record her. When I get home, I import the videoclip on my computer, edit it a little, and upload it to my videoblog. The whole process takes about 10 minutes. Now, all my friends and family around the world can see what I saw that night and know why I'm so happy. In fact, anyone can watch this video. Maybe someone will link to it because he can understand where I'm coming from, and he and I start a conversation and become friends. . .and he's halfway around the world.

Videoblogging breaks down barriers and borders and opens lines of communication. When you start videoblogging, you may find that you have more in common with someone who lives in another country than you do with your next-door neighbor. It happens, often.

Making a Video Viral

Once you post a video to a blog, anything can happen. You are putting it out there to the world. You may one day be (un)lucky enough to have one of your videos linked to and emailed around the world and watched by hundreds of thousands of people in a single day. This phenomenon is called *viral video*.

It happened to Gary Broolsma, who distributed a video of himself dancing (see Figure 1-5). The video became known as the “Numa Numa Dance” and has been downloaded more than 1 million times from www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/206373. It has also been emailed to countless people around the world and has appeared on “Good Morning America” and “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno” as well as being parodied on a number of web sites and television shows.

A video can become viral if it is compelling and resonates with the people who view it. It also needs to be small enough to be emailed, which means it should be less than 10MB and preferably 5MB or less. Whether it's humorous, heart warming, or gut wrenching depends on your personal taste and that of the people who find it worthwhile to email it to their friends.



FIGURE 1-5: Gary Brolsma performing the Numa Numa Dance.

Archiving for Future Generations

When you make a videoblog, your videos live online so people can find them at anytime. Taking this to the extreme, your videos could be stored online and available in 50 years. If you videoblog, your grandkids will be able to see and hear the world through their computers in a way that traditional news, whether written or televised, never could because people from around the world can choose what they want to show.

This is opposite of traditional “big media,” which follows a top-down model. Traditional news media starts with raw material and filters it for you, deciding which stories are important to fill a certain amount of space (such as the pages of a newspaper or time of a news broadcast). The web, however, is bottom up — everyone has access to the same raw material, and anyone can decide how to arrange it with essentially no limit on the amount of space of time they fill.

The web is a huge archive that lets you arrange the pieces anyway you want. If you don’t want to be your own editor, sit back and relax. . .there are plenty of people with interests similar to yours who will do it for you.

Explaining to Others What You’re Doing

Videoblogging is still a couple years from becoming mainstream, which is why it’s so exciting to be involved in it right now. People will look at you like you’re crazy when you talk about putting video of your life online and technology such as Really Simple Syndication (RSS). The best way to talk about videoblogging is to talk about how people use the web currently.

Most people go online, check their email, and check a couple of their favorite web sites. They more than likely use a search engine like Google to find things they are researching or interested in. But there's a new way to consume information that is on the web. It is through the use of an RSS reader, and it enables people to subscribe to sites they want to follow. Some video-capable RSS readers, also known video aggregators, are iTunes (www.apple.com/itunes), FireAnt (www.fireant.tv), I/ON (<http://openvision.tv/home/ion.html>), and Democracy (www.getdemocracy.com). With a video aggregator, you can subscribe to videoblogs, and the application will download a new video whenever one's available. When using the web this way, a person simply opens the aggregator of his choice, and any new posts are automatically brought to him. It's all made possible through RSS.

So with videoblogging, not only can you create your own video channel, but you can also subscribe to the feeds or channels of those you want to keep up with. All a person has to do is open his aggregator and watch.

Summary

To become a videoblogger, you need to get into the right state of mind, or, as Ty Webb (Chevy Chase) says in *Caddyshack*, "Be the ball." To "Be the ball" in videoblogging, you need to understand the technology behind it at a very basic level.