

- » Understanding the importance of being on YouTube
- » Becoming a viral video star
- » Making your channel unique
- » Producing video for fun and profit

## Chapter **1**

# Understanding the YouTube Ecosystem

**F**or its first decade, YouTube was the new business-and-entertainment frontier, which meant there was as much excitement and creativity associated with creating and managing a YouTube channel these days as was the case during the early days of television, when the sky seemed the limit. YouTube — like television before it — was caught up in the same adventure that comes from defining its target audience as well as finding out what audiences are willing to watch.

At this point, YouTube has grown into something even bigger than TV itself, with global reach and ever-expanding content types, from live television, to music, to gaming, and much more. But one important thing hasn't changed: YouTube remains open 24x7 to anyone who wants to create content and establish their own channel to promote it. And that's what this book is about: helping you establish your own distinct place in what we call the *YouTube ecosystem*.

On the surface, the YouTube ecosystem seems to consist of little beyond content creators and an audience looking to be educated or entertained. But there's so much more that you, as a YouTube channel creator or viewer, need to understand even if your expectations are modest: monetization, MCNs (*Multi-Channel Networks*), subscriptions, and so on.

It doesn't matter whether you're a proud do-it-yourselfer working on your house, a fashion and beauty influencer commenting on the upcoming *Fashion Week* lineup, a consumer brand launching a new product, or a Fortune 500 company providing instructions on industrial equipment. We've got you covered in this book. For all of you creating your own YouTube channel, it's much more about meeting the diverse interests and needs of an audience that attracts more than a billion people from all over the planet.

## The YouTube Creator Phenomenon: Why You Need to Be on YouTube

Having more than 2.5 billion monthly active users — that's not a typo — can make getting noticed on your channel feel like searching for a virtual needle in an online haystack. Yet, regardless of the steep increase in competition, the intention has always been the same — get people to watch your channel. But it's not all bad news: You also have an advantage over your counterpart in the 1940s. Back then, it took a great deal of capital to get started on television. Today? Not so much. In fact, if you just want a platform for presenting some of your video work, YouTube can make that possible without your having to fork over one thin dime.

Knowing that YouTube is free to use should reduce some of your worries — at least from a financial perspective. Couple that with the size and diversity of the YouTube audience — and the endless number of topics that interest them — and it's easy to believe that you have a fair chance of success for your channel. That's true, up to a point — if the point is you want your channel to thrive, you need to provide your viewers with compelling content.

Saying that your channel needs to host solid content that people actually want to see seems as glaringly obvious as saying a hamburger joint must make a good burger in order to survive. But content merely makes up the first part of the equation. The rest depends on how you bring viewers to that content: While YouTube is free, video production certainly is not. Unless you want to shell out money from your own pocket, you need to generate some funds to produce high-quality content for your channel. In the world of YouTube, one major way to generate such funds is with advertising revenue — and it should come as no surprise that the more viewers you can attract, the greater your potential to generate advertising revenue. How much depends on your needs and ambitions, but increased revenue can lead to better production values, which brings it all back to more revenue.

But before you start worrying about all that money you're going to make, let's take a look at what it takes for you and your business to get started on a YouTube channel.

# Gaining Success on YouTube

Like snowflakes on a winter day, or science with Mark Rober, YouTube has more topics that viewers can appreciate than any human can count. And because you already love making videos and most likely exhibit some expertise or viewpoint to share with the world, YouTube may be your best creative outlet.

On the downside, you're not the only one hoping to get noticed on YouTube. Many others with the very same intention are looking to build an audience for their YouTube channels, too. ("How many?" you may ask. The number exceeds the number of those preapproved credit card applications that plague your mailbox, so we're talking *lots*.)

Your journey on YouTube begins with knowing your strengths. Some users relish documenting the quirks of their existence to the gentle amusement of others. Others have some type of expertise to share. Then you have performers who regard the video hosting site as their personal stage — the list goes on and on. Even businesses realize it's a great place to inform consumers about their products or provide a great level of customer service. Regardless of your passion, a potential audience is waiting for you.

## Audience, audience, audience

Have you ever noticed the repetitive way people describe the most important aspect of a piece of real estate? Yes, we know it's all about location, so much so that real estate agents, among others, feel compelled to say it three times, as though saying it once doesn't get the point across.

Maybe that need for the special emphasis that comes with repetition is justified because, when it comes to success on your YouTube channel, we're of the opinion that saying the word *audience* just once doesn't do justice to its importance. In paying homage to our real estate buddies, we can agree that success for your YouTube channel depends on [drum roll, please] audience, audience, audience!

What's a YouTube audience actually like? You'll find people from all walks of life, and you'll soon discover that they can spend a great deal of time meandering through YouTube's seemingly endless virtual walls, sometimes just entertaining themselves, sometimes educating themselves, sometimes engaging quite passionately with what they see, sometimes letting it all just wash over them. Given the amount of time folks spend on the site, there's a good chance that someone ends up seeing your video. Not a great chance, of course, given that the site has so much content and only so many viewers to watch that content — but still a good chance.

So, how do you move from “good chance” to “great chance”? First and foremost, your success depends on the strength of your content. Right behind strong content, though, you’ll find that you need to be a virtual wrangler, capable of bringing to your channel people who may not know anything about you. To do that, you need to know what excites your viewers, what they’re looking for in video content, and how they consume what they like. With that information in hand, you can fine-tune your content to better serve your (current or potential) audience.



REMEMBER

Gathering information on the viewing habits of your audience is a crucial first step in determining what they want to see and how long they’re willing to watch your videos. YouTube makes it easy to gather lots of information about your viewers — YouTube Analytics, covered in Chapter 10, is a big help here — but consulting friends and family about their viewing preferences is sometimes a good place to start.

## Incorporating YouTube into your business and marketing plans

Just like cool sheets on a summer evening, YouTube goes perfectly with social media when it comes to your business and marketing needs. Why not? You already know that your presence on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, or X keeps you connected with all the right people. Guess what? YouTube can help raise your social media profile as well. (See Figure 1-1.)



**FIGURE 1-1:** Using social media can let people not on YouTube know there’s something for them to check out.

By integrating your video content with social media, you can drive interested parties to your channel; your channel, in turn, can point them back to your social media platforms and your contact information. This synergy helps build a strong following, because you can inform potential customers about your business via multiple avenues.



REMEMBER

Video is the perfect partner when it comes to showing products, giving demonstrations, providing tutorials, or showcasing other features designed to increase awareness of your brand. And YouTube is the perfect partner to host your videos.

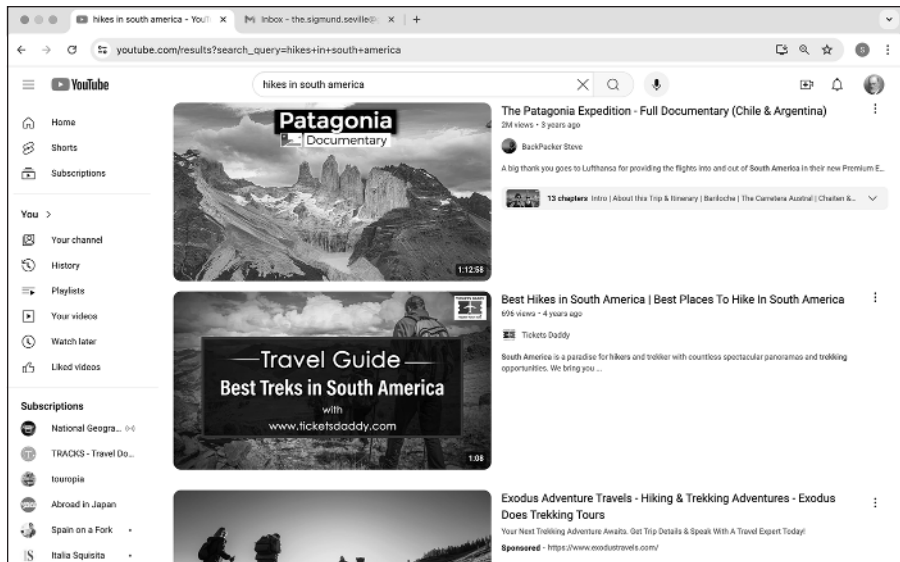
When coming up with a plan to incorporate your YouTube-based video content into your business and marketing plans, here are some areas to consider:

- » **Give your videos effective titles.** Your video should have clear and succinct titles. The titles should get to the point about your product or service so that people can easily find your video.
- » **Create eye-catching thumbnails.** Make your videos stand out from the crowd. Thumbnails are a great way to catch viewers' attention and compel them to click through.
- » **Add more metadata.** On YouTube, metadata is comprised of the title, video tags, and description of your videos. Coming up with a strong title is a good place to start, but it doesn't end there. You should also add a detailed description of the video, as shown in Figure 1-2, and use the appropriate *keywords* — specific words that are representative of your video's subject matter — that fit the content. The more information that's included with each video, the easier it is for viewers to find exactly what you have to offer in a Google search.
- » **Include your contact info on the video.** Always add your business or personal information to the video and its description fields, such as email address and social media sites.
- » **Think shorts too.** Even if you've made some awesome long-form video with your super-duper digital camera, don't run away from some vertical video content shot from your phone. Just make sure it aligns with or complements your overall channel objectives.

## Becoming a star!

Are you ready for your close-up? Or maybe framing a close-up is your thing. It doesn't matter, because YouTube gives you a platform right up there with radio, film, and television as yet another means of achieving stardom. By doing so, YouTube has created a dedicated community that offers one more way for the world to notice you.

**FIGURE 1-2:**  
The strong metadata of these videos allow them to show up on the first page of the search results for popular travel topics.



The thought of stardom often leans toward actors and musicians — and the creators behind them. Many have found great success after being discovered on YouTube. (Can you say “Justin Bieber” or “The Weeknd”?) The rock band Journey found its current lead singer on YouTube. You may not get a spot on *American Idol* or an audition with a music label, but you can get on YouTube. Our job here is to help you get noticed.

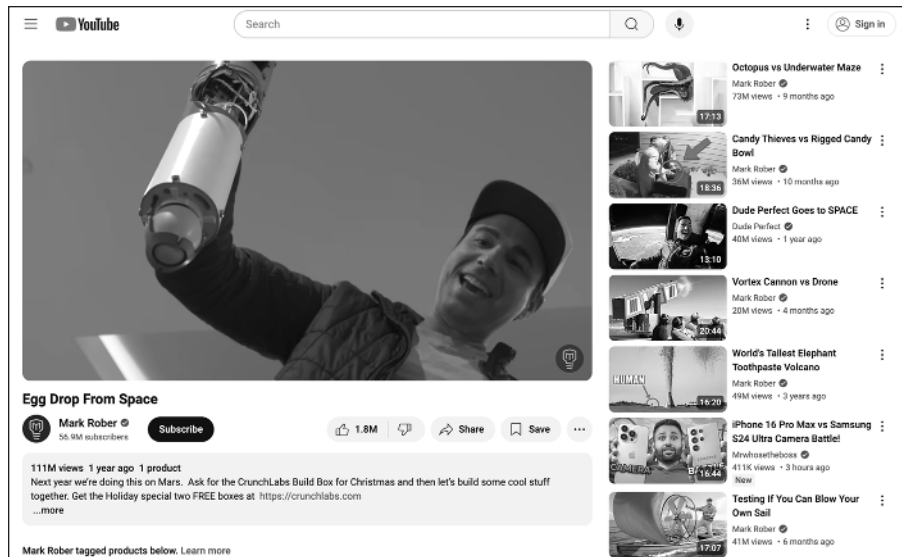
Actors have also found work by showcasing their clip reels, performances, and auditions. YouTube has made many stars of its own — personalities offering everything from rap parodies to lip-synching to video game analysis and commentary have made a name for themselves on YouTube. Mark Rober, to take one example, has been watched by millions of viewers. (See Figure 1-3.)

So, proof positive that YouTube can provide a stage big enough to start, and perhaps sustain, a career.

## Going viral

If you’re a millennial or someone who remembers the world before the turn of the century, the phrase “going viral” could have two different meanings. So, in addition to meaning the spread of a virus, which is a bad thing, the term refers to the rapid spread of a video, and that’s a great thing.

**FIGURE 1-3:**  
One of Mark  
Rober's more  
popular videos.



When an uploaded video goes viral in the good sense, it becomes a sensation that users share and share and share — in the process gathering more numbers of viewers than there are grains of sand in an hourglass. Having your video go viral is like releasing a hit record or having your book make *The New York Times* best seller list, except that you're unlikely to get anywhere near as rich from going viral even if you get a couple of million hits.



TIP

Planning on a video going viral is like planning on winning the lottery. It *could* happen, but you shouldn't bet on it. If you are seriously interested in earning some ad revenue from your video content, work on creating a range of compelling content for your channel, rather than hoping on that one-shot, grand slam home run.

There's no way of telling whether a video will go viral, but there are some traits that successful ones share. Although we discuss ways throughout this book to improve the odds of your video going viral, here are some factors that can make a video a runaway success:

- » **Be spontaneous.** There's a real in-the-moment feel to a viral video that captures a random and decisive moment that you could never repeat. YouTube Shorts are great for grabbing attention quickly. The popular short, "How Zach King Gets Away With Doing Graffiti" and its more than 1.2 billion views comes to mind.
- » **Be light-hearted.** People love stuff that's silly and that makes them laugh and think — or that even make them consider trying something, much like TikTok or YouTube blooper reels that draw hundreds of millions of views.

» **Get it out on social media.** Yeah, you can rely on chance that someone stumbles across your video, but that's sort of passive, like waiting by the phone for someone to "find you" for the job. A better tack is for you to let social media know about your latest masterpiece. Just a few tweets here, a Facebook post there, and then maybe an announcement on Reddit can instantly start turning the wheels of virality.

## Wasting lots and lots of time

One person's waste of time is another's quest for information, or someone's need to laugh or learn about something, so YouTube viewers simply spend a lot of time watching videos.

That's a good thing, and a win-win situation all around. The audience gets its dose of entertainment, education, and exploration. And your channel benefits because, as viewership increases, so does the potential for someone to find you. And, when that someone finds your channel and you happen to have set it up for receiving advertising revenue (the YouTube term here is *monetization*), you can earn some money.

Here are some numbers, provided by YouTube, that indicate how much (potential) time-wasting is really going on:

- » More than 2.5 billion unique users visit YouTube each month.
- » Billions of hours of video are watched daily on YouTube.
- » According to Nielsen, YouTube reaches more U.S. adults ages 18 to 34 than any cable network.

## Seeing What Makes a YouTube Channel Unique

Four walls do not make a home — but it does provide a good start. How you adorn those walls and furnish those halls is what makes it uniquely yours — uniquely your home, in other words. Well, your YouTube channel isn't much different.

When you first create a YouTube channel, it's nothing more than an empty template on a page. Over time, you add videos, organize videos into playlists, and create channel art with your own logo, designs, and branding. Obviously, your

video content plays a big part in what makes your channel special, but so does the channel's look and feel. Everything from the layout and font color to the type of content and its subscribers helps set one channel apart from the others.

Though this book takes pride in describing effective ways to create and maintain your YouTube channel for the next couple of hundred pages, let's look at some basics first:

» **Have people find your channel.** If a tree falls in the forest and nobody hears it fall, does it make a sound? Who knows? More appropriately, if you create a YouTube channel and nobody visits it, it's a safe bet to say that all your good work has come to nothing.

Viewers have to know that your channel exists before they can visit. The main way you have of letting people know you exist is by making sure your content shows up high in the search results of both Google and YouTube itself. (Don't forget that YouTube is the second-most-popular search engine, just behind Google.) To get those high rankings, you have titles, tags, and descriptive text to associate tons of search-engine-friendly keywords with each of your videos — doing that will bring viewers searching for content in contact with *your* content rather than with someone else's content. It's also important that viewers watch, like, comment on, and share your video — yet more indications to the search engines and YouTube's algorithms that your content and channel are important. For good measure, use social media to prep your audience for content that's coming down the pike — just like a movie studio creates a buzz for a big summer blockbuster by teasing you with previews and trailers weeks before release.

Users often take advantage of YouTube's personalized video recommendations, such as the Homepage Recommended feed (see Figure 1-4) and the Up Next feature. If a user clicks on your video and enjoys the content, there's a good chance they'll visit your channel to see what else you have to offer. The more appealing your channel looks at first glance, the more likely a viewer will be to stop and spend some time exploring your channel and your other videos.

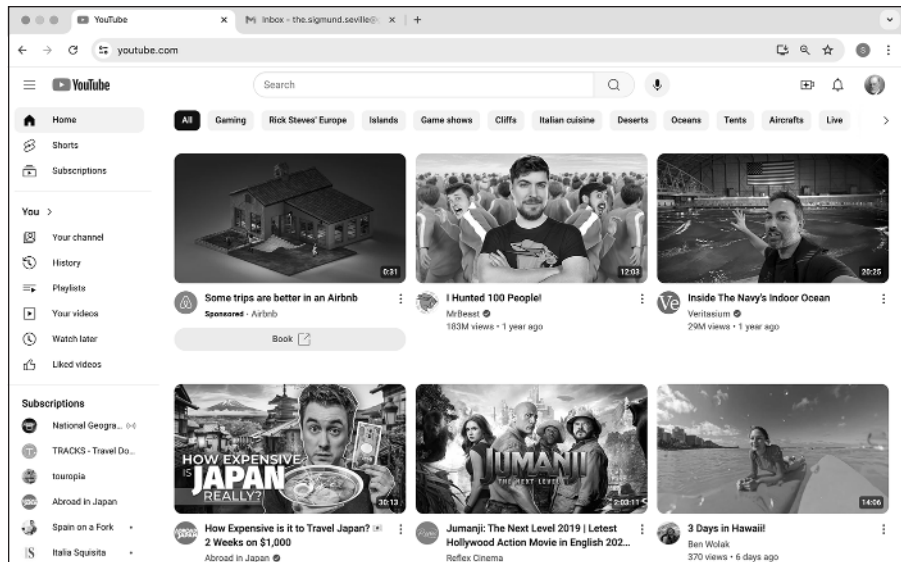
» **Connect with your viewers.** You definitely want to build a community of followers, and for that to happen, you need to actively communicate with them. That means everything from having them subscribe to your channel, engaging with them in your channel's Comments section and on the Community tab, and exposing them to your other social media accounts. You can do all this directly on your channel page.

» **Provide viewers with a clear description of your channel.** When viewers know what your channel has to offer and if it appeals to their interests, they're more likely to visit often and maybe even subscribe to it. But you need to get the word out.



REMEMBER

**FIGURE 1-4:**  
The YouTube  
Homepage  
Recommended  
feed.



## Angling for subscriptions

Viewers who like your content will come back and watch more, but viewers who love your content will want to subscribe. Why not? When you keep reaching for the same print magazine whenever you see it, eventually you just subscribe to it so that it regularly comes to the mailbox at your front door. YouTube offers repeat viewers of your channel the same option. Basically, all they have to do is click the Subscribe button, as shown in Figure 1-5, on a channel's homepage.

After viewers subscribe to your channel, you have to make it worth their while to view it or else they'll unsubscribe faster than you can say "Selena Gomez." Here's what "making it worth their while" entails:



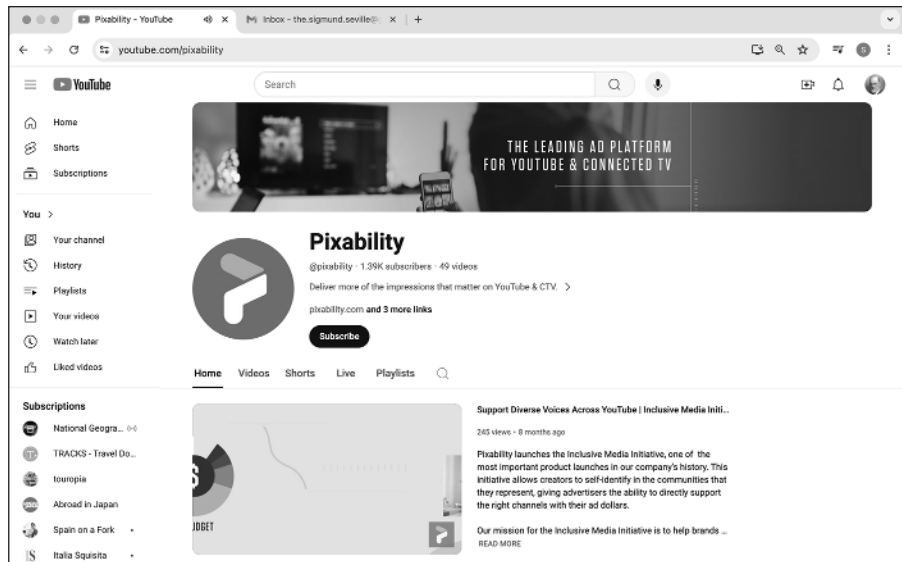
TIP

» **Stay in touch with subscribers.** According to YouTube, viewers subscribe to millions of channels every day, so it's important to stay in touch if you want to stay uppermost in their minds.

Suggest to your viewers that they follow you on social media so you can let them know when new content is available. This strategy helps your audience grow as you amass a devoted fan base.

» **Actively upload videos.** It's difficult to imagine a television station maintaining viewers if it doesn't add new programs. Even if it were all *Friends* all the time, chances are good that viewers would eventually drift off to something else. Well, the same concept applies for your YouTube channel. If you don't upload new video content, you'll lose the interest of your subscriber base. The takeaway here? Always provide new content.

**FIGURE 1-5:**  
The Subscribe button lets viewers become subscribers with a single click.



» **Pay close attention to tagging.** When you *tag* a video, you categorize it after uploading it to YouTube. When a video is properly identified, it increases the possibility of someone else finding it, and that extends to future subscribers.

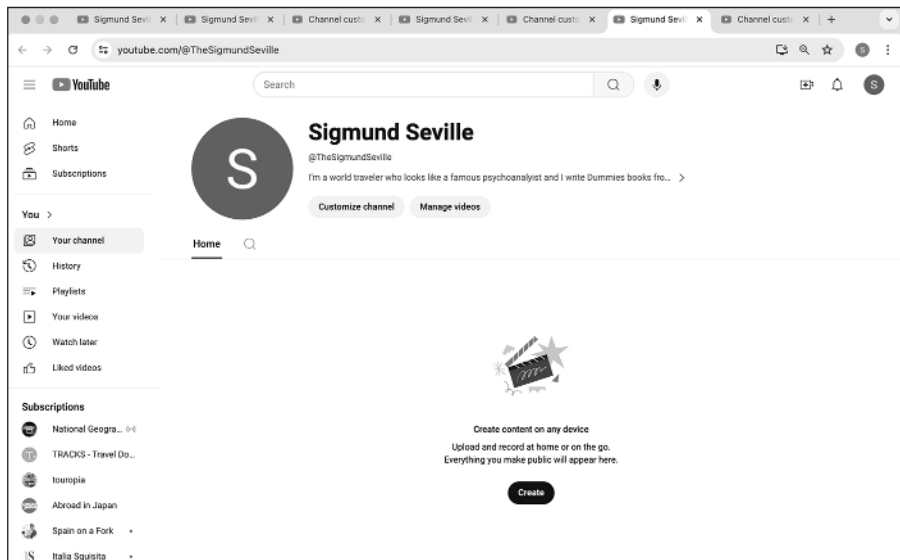
## Establishing your brand

Whether it's a consumer or a viewer, a brand makes your product or service immediately identifiable. Imagine that the Coca-Cola logo looked different every time you saw it, or maybe the apple on your MacBook Air wasn't the same apple you saw embossed on your iPhone. This lack of consistency could shatter your confidence in the product; you may start wondering whether what you had was a cheap knock-off of the real thing rather than the genuine article.

Branding is designed to restore confidence in the product — that familiar logo makes you relax, knowing that you're sure to get the real thing. When it comes to your YouTube channel, branding becomes the identifiable element that lets viewers know who you are and what you're all about, thus creating a similar feeling of confidence. Just like consumers flock to brands they identify with, your audience will do the same with your brand.

## Branding takes on many forms on YouTube:

- » **Intro clip:** Before each video runs on your channel, you can insert a three-second clip that acts as a label for your content. The torch-carrying lady wrapped in a flag for Columbia Pictures and the roaring MGM lion are good examples of a branding element. Your job, if you choose to accept it, is to come up with an intro of your own that is equally compelling.
- » **Channel header:** This element is the banner on top of your main page, and at first it's as empty as a blank page. (See Figure 1-6.) You'll definitely want to add a compelling picture or another graphic along with the name of your channel. The channel header can also include your contact info and specify how often you intend to upload new videos.
- » **Logo:** Companies spend millions on branding when they have to come up with a new logo, because they have to track down and replace every single instance of the old logo. We're guessing that's not your problem — you just have to come up with your own logo, perhaps using a simple image and your name. If you feel graphically challenged, you can find places on the web that can create one for you inexpensively. Or just have an artistic friend design a logo for you.
- » **Playlists:** If you have enough videos on your channel, you can create a running order of them. This playlist can provide an overview of your content or a specific subtopic of your videos. You can name every playlist, and even rearrange them.



**FIGURE 1-6:**  
An empty header,  
waiting to be  
filled with an  
image that  
represents  
your content.

» **Trailer:** In a YouTube context, a *trailer* is a video that can automatically play whenever visitors come to your channel. You can use the video most representative of your content as a kind of advertisement for your offerings, or you can make a short video that shows viewers what your channel is all about and how they can benefit from watching your videos.

## Managing Channels for Fun and/or Profit

Everybody has a reason for making a video, and YouTube doesn't discriminate on why you do it. Whether you were influenced a little too much by the silly, everyday situations depicted on a television series like *America's Funniest Home Videos* or you want to show off your post-film-school prowess or you're looking to educate the masses with a series of how-to videos, there's a place for you on YouTube — and (you hope!) an audience that's willing to follow your exploits.

In addition to the pleasure that comes from a job well done, there's (potentially) a business side to running a YouTube channel. If you post videos that draw a lot of views, it's worth your time to *monetize* your channel — generate some income from ad revenue, in other words. But that's not the only business purpose YouTube channels can help with: They can serve as a great showcase for your particular skills or services or act as a delivery system for product descriptions, tutorials, and testimonials associated with whatever your business is selling.

### Creating content

Whether you grab a ten-second video of a gathering of friends, have something meaningful to say on your video blog, or plan a highly structured production with sets and actors, you're creating content.

Almost every topic under the sun is represented on YouTube. That diversity in topics is matched by an equally broad range of production levels. Some videos are quite sophisticated, displaying amazing production values, but many are fairly average. And a great deal are just poorly done and end up getting shown in film classes as examples of what not to do.

Better production values increase your ability to grab viewers' attention — maybe enough for them to watch the entire video and maybe enough for them to even consider watching whatever else you have to offer. The holy grail, of course, is having them feel so enthusiastic about what they see that they then share it with others.

But great video quality doesn't happen accidentally; rather, it's done consciously, from conception to upload. Though the topic is more thoroughly represented throughout this book, here are some key suggestions to always keep in mind:



REMEMBER

- » **Plan before you film.** Great videos begin in preproduction. That means having an idea of the shooting location and working with some sort of script (or at least a storyboard of the kind of shots you want for the video).  
Great planning leads to great production.
- » **Know your audience.** When you're just getting started, you try to make solid videos with good descriptions and hope that your audience finds you. After you have attracted a following, it's still important to understand who they are and whether your content is right for them. For example, if you start a channel that talks about SAT and college prep, you should use language that's consistent with a high-school-age demographic. Don't overlook the importance of being highly aware of your potential audience.
- » **Keep viewers entertained.** Regardless of the subject matter, it's important for viewers to enjoy the experience so that you hold their attention. Remember that hooking a viewer's attention starts with the first five seconds of the video. (Why? Because viewers may leave before the good stuff starts!)
- » **Let them learn something.** People generally click on a video description link in search of information. If they find it quickly and they were entertained, chances are good that they will love you and click through to products or services mentioned in the video.

## Building an audience

After you create great content, you have to find people to watch it. After all, isn't that the entire purpose of sharing your video with the world? Whether it starts with the ten people who just happen to run across your student film or a million people viewing your talking puppy video, building your audience is essential.

YouTube is no different from other media when it comes to emphasizing the importance of building an audience. For example, you may have the catchiest song of all time, but if no one has ever heard it or even knows it exists, then that song cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called a success. The same is true for your videos — you need to work at getting as many people as possible to watch them.

Successfully building your audience depends on understanding their needs and making sure you can deliver on what your channel promises. Catering to your audience — whether it consists of one person or ten million — centers on understanding them and satisfying their appetite. (For more on building your audience, check out Chapter 8.)

## Building a business

In addition to letting you upload your videos to satisfy the fun side of your personality, YouTube can work wonders for your business side. You can easily set your account to monetize video content, as mentioned in the next section; as long as you meet the minimum requirements for monetization and enough viewers watch your videos, you can earn some extra money. If you have something to sell or a service to offer, you can also leverage YouTube for some pretty cool and powerful advertising. As you can see in Chapter 12, it's simple enough for anyone to do it.

## Monetizing

Years ago, it was a bit complicated and somewhat perplexing to become a YouTube partner so you earned a cut of the money from the ads placed against your videos. If you became a stand-out influencer and personality in fashion and beauty or gaming, you would be earning well enough to quit your day job. And it still works, but many YouTube creators seeking gold came up short, which wasn't necessarily a good thing for many creators and their passionate viewers.

YouTube knew this, too, and over time, continued to improve (and clarify) the YouTube Partner Program (YPP) and expand the monetization options well beyond ad revenue sharing. If your objective is to make money on YouTube as either a full-time job or a side hustle, it behooves you to understand your options. Motivated entrepreneurs get this and are setting up shop in the hopes of striking it big with their YouTube channels.

As you might expect, not everybody will strike it rich. In fact, very few will strike it rich. Nevertheless, you can make money more easily than before with the changes to the YPP discussed in Chapter 13. Our goal is to help you take advantage of the multiple ways you can make money by way of your YouTube channel, including advertising revenue, channel membership, your merchandise shelf, Super Chat and Super Stickers, Super Thanks, Shorts Funds, Channel Memberships, YouTube Premium, and more. Just keep in mind that slow-and-steady wins the race — making money takes time, or at least it will take time until you build a massive following. (For more on monetization, check out Chapter 13.)

Initially, you can earn money with your YouTube channel every time someone views a YouTube ad before watching one of your videos. The more people who view your content, the more money you can potentially make. The minimum eligibility requirements to turn on monetization features for your channel have dramatically changed over the past couple of years, primarily because of what are referred to as brand safety issues with advertisers.

So, what’s all this about “brand safety”? Actually, it’s not that complicated. An advertiser wants to place their ads on videos that are suitable for their brand image, culture, and vision. An advertiser doesn’t want their brands associated with bad press or negative content. What is suitable for one brand advertiser might not be suitable for another brand. For example, a video game manufacturer might be okay with advertising on first-person-shooter videos, but a beauty brand may find that kind of content inappropriate for their video’s ads or just not relevant for the target audience. YouTube works hard on brand safety. No matter if you’re a creator or a company, you shouldn’t lose too much sleep worrying about this.

## Partnering

Assuming things are going well, but you feel you’re getting bogged down by lots of administration and analysis work around rights management, sales, audience development, production space, and more, you might want to look into validated third-party service companies, known as *Multi-Channel Networks* (MCNs), another important part of the YouTube Ecosystem. The goals of MCNs are to amplify your channel and help you make money. They’re not a charity, so they’ll be taking a cut of your earnings. You’ll need to determine whether it’s worth it for you.

Some other considerations for working with MCNs include:

- » **Rights management.** There are two types of MCN frameworks, called Affiliate Channels and Owned & Operated Channels. With the latter, you turn over exclusive rights to your channel and content to the MCN.
- » **Market focus.** If you’re going the MCN route, make sure you find one that understands your market. Someone with gaming channels shouldn’t join an MCN that focuses on cooking. In that instance, you’d also have to question how good the MCN is.

MCNs are independent companies from YouTube, so you have to understand exactly what services they’ll be providing you and how they manage payments. As a channel in the MCN, you’re not abdicating all your YouTube channel responsibility. You need to hold your potential partner accountable and monitor their obligation to you.

Before joining an MCN, speak with other YouTube channel owners who are working with that same MCN. Find out what other MCNs they considered and why they chose the one you’re looking at.



REMEMBER



TIP

It’s important to note that you don’t need an MCN to succeed on YouTube. Most do just fine without them. Regardless of the path you choose, don’t lose sight of the content direction — keeping the attention and excitement of your audience.