

MEDIA BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE

Has the internet finally created a truly democratic way for us to communicate? -- by Dominique Caron

Vlogging. No, its not a typo. Vlogs, (video blogs), not blogs, are the newest way for people to interact on the internet. Following the same concept as blogs, vlogs are a combination of both text and video to tell a story, keep a diary, make a statement, or to have a conversation. Since its humble beginnings just months ago, the community of videobloggers (makers and watchers alike) has exponentially grown into a far reaching and fast growing outlet for, well, anyone with a video camera and access to the internet. What does this mean? No one really knows, but many speculate that it is the arrival of a truly democratic form of media. Vlogging is unregulated, cheap, easy, and has the capacity to reach millions of people. Basically, it is accessible!

What is most interesting, however, is that vlogging, in its present state, is a form of media that is completely free of outside pressures. Vloggers don't have the FCC regulations to follow, nor do they have the pressure from producers and viewer ratings to make their work cater to the masses. Vlogging is totally free: it cost next to nothing to make, it doesn't have guidelines or restraints regarding content, and it doesn't discriminate who can and cannot post a vlog (well, one has to have internet access). People can make whatever they want, post it wherever and whenever they want.

With so much possibility at vlogger's fingertips, what are these media makers putting out there for all of us to see? As expected, content varies widely. Some have seen the new medium as a cheap alternative from television and theatres to distribute and advertise their work. Some

independent film and video makers are using the outlet to advertise themselves. Others are using the outlet to bypass the studios and immediately start distributing their own work. Rocketboom (<http://www.rocketboom.com/vlog/>), a vlog that mimics television, posts a news show daily. Despite their low production value (a desk, a map, an actress, a one man crew, two lights, one microphone, and a mini-DV camera), they have become extremely popular among the video blogging community. According to Business Week Online, they have an estimated 200,000 viewers. NBC News estimated that if they sold 15 seconds for each new episode, the show's yearly income would be \$250,000 per year. The two makers of the vlog have reportedly already sold a week's worth of advertisement for \$40,000. This seems to be pointing to the direction of the future of video blogging as an industry: a reiteration of

the television industry but with a more personal flare.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are those out there who want a small audience, as small as one. People are seeing video blogging as an opportunity to keep in touch with family and friends that live across the country, abroad, or next door. First came mail, then telegraphs, then the telephone, then e-mail and blogs. Now, it's vlogs. A college kid can post a video up for their parents to see what their daily life is like, or a mother can show her parents the first few steps of her new born child. People can also use vlogs to tell those they care about "Happy Birthday" or "I miss you". What makes video blogs so much more interesting than all the other forms of communication that preceded is the fact there is audio, video, and the person viewing it can watch it whenever they want, and as many times as they want. No other technology has been able to offer that before.

Somewhere in between television shows and personal pages, there are video blogs that are nothing like what television and movie

watchers are used to seeing. Video blogs can be personal, experimental, socially and politically involved, business cards, or simply a way for people to share their videos with others. It appears to be, though, that most of the vlogs out there can and are often all of the above. This is something new, something that people have never seen within the communication mediums before: online pages that provide entertainment that doesn't follow a mold, that doesn't provide consistency.

Zadi Diaz, a correspondent for Rocketboom and owner of Smashface productions, has a vlog of her own. Her vlog is not a television show nor is it simply a personal page for her and her loved one. It contains political messages, experimental pieces, new posts about her and her work, and personal videos intended for her family. It is, in fact, a little bit of everything. When Zadi moved from New York City to L.A., she decided to start a vlog to keep in touch with her family. She posted short edited videos that expressed her struggles, her experiences,

and her feelings. After a few months, however, her video blog morphed into something grander than a personal page. She explains, "In the beginning all my aspirations [for my vlog] were personal. As time went on, I found it a great way to communicate with a larger audience about issues I cared about and wanted to bring attention to in addition to having personal posts". Zadi's vlog is now a link on her production company's website, and therefore an additional outlet for the work that she does.

Zadi's small production company, Smashface, produces social documentaries and other independent projects. It was "built on the belief that digital media can promote healthy discussions that can lead to social reform". In addition to the short films she produces, Zadi uses her vlog to post short social pieces that may not have had an outlet otherwise. By connecting her production company web page www.smashface.com with her vlog, she allows her vlog to be viewed by many, in the hope of sharing political and social

messages with her viewers.

The link between her company and her vlog also creates a third purpose for the video posts. They are, in a way, a portfolio or “business card” for her. It allows potential employers to not only see the type of work that she does, but also see what kind of person she is.

With so many different possibilities for video blogs, where is this all going? Michael Verdi, one of the first video bloggers on the internet as well as co-creator of popular vlogging websites such as freevlog.org and node101.org, stated in one of his posts that “we don’t know where this is going to go. . .nobody knows what will happen. . . I’m pretty sure that when we look back on today ten years from now what will have happened will totally astound us” (*Vlog Anarchy*, michaelverdi.com, 02/20/05). I agree. There is no way for any of us to know where it will go.

Is it possible that vlogging will take over the entertainment industry? Zadi Diaz noted that “videoblogging is a revolution. There was just an article in the NYTimes that stated that TV is dead

and that videoblogging killed it. Vlogging is pushing it's way in - just like TV did in the radio days. Everything finds its place. I think it's a powerful tool and the landscape of media is changing right before our eyes. These are exciting times.”

Is Rocketboom’s monetary success a glimpse into the future where video blogs will take over the entertainment industry? Vlogging is offering such diversity because there are no restraints on it, yet. It seems only a matter of time until vloggers will begin using their popularity to make a living. Is it possible that before long, the internet will be saturated with vlogs produced for the masses, making it more difficult for the individual and unique vlogs to be found and watched? Nothing is certain except one thing: today, vlogs are democratic and they do fuel creative juices. “The people have the power back in their hands. We get to say what we want, when we want, how we want, and no one can tell us no because there isn't a budget, or advertisers won't like it, or

whatever. It's total no-barriers” (Zadi).

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