10 FUNDAMENTALS OF A CREATIVE STRATEGY ON
10 Fundamentals of a Creative Strategy

Some of the most creative people in the world are on YouTube.

They often build such loyal fan bases because of a creative show or series idea that catapulted them to success.

It can be tough to predict a hit, but there are certain fundamentals that we’ve identified as being key to developing new ideas.

We found these by talking to YouTube’s most successful and most talented creators.

As you evaluate new ideas or existing ones, it can be helpful to consider the fundamentals to the right.
10 Fundamentals of a Creative Strategy

Notice also how these all contribute to building a loyal fanbase -- one that comes back again and again.

The Fundamentals also fall into the three basic categories of Get Viewers, Keep Viewers Happy, and Keep Yourself Happy.
10 Fundamentals of a Creative Strategy

**What this is:**

It’s a guide to help you brainstorm new, creative ideas for YouTube, with an emphasis on developing ongoing show ideas.

It’s a filter to help you improve your existing shows and videos.

It’s a tool to help you evaluate all the creative decisions you make for your channel.

**What this is not:**

It’s not a checklist! You don’t have to do all of these 10 Fundamentals to have a successful show on YouTube. In fact, there are many top creators who only do a few, but they do them extremely well.

It’s not a hard science! We’re talking creative here. It’s often subjective and amorphous. Therefore, consider these as general guidelines, not hard and fast rules.
First things first: Understand the importance of a hit.

One new creative idea or format can completely change the trajectory of a channel. Consider the channels ZeFrank1 and TheFineBros, who were doing just fine on YouTube. They then launched new show formats, “True Facts” and “Kids React”.

True Facts About The Angler Fish

Kids React to Viral Videos #1 (Double Rainbow, Obama Fail, T...
First things first: Understand the importance of a hit.

As you can see from Ze's channel analytics, he benefitted immensely from a breakout, creative show idea. More importantly, it was both popular and sustainable, which has upheld his channels' success to date.
First things first: Understand the importance of a hit.

It was a similar case with The Fine Bros., who had been experimenting on YouTube for years. With the launch of Kids React, and then spin-offs Elders React, Teens React and YouTube React -- their channel took off and never looked back.
Now let’s get to it.

Think about a creative idea you've been considering for YouTube. Or, revisit a show you've been uploading. Run it through each of the following 10 Fundamentals and see how well it's tailored for the platform. Is there any way to improve the idea?

Start with Fundamental #1 on the next slide.

And be sure to watch the video examples when you see this icon:
Will viewers share these videos?

We use “shareable” interchangeably with “viral” -- the idea that people watch your stuff and immediately want to share it.

It’s powerful because people are learning about YOU from the people THEY trust the most -- their friends and family.

We think people share mainly because of what the videos say about themselves. For example, sharing a funny video makes them look funny. Smart content makes them look smart.

How will your videos make people look when they share them? What was the last thing you shared in social media?

“What Does The Fox Say” was a music video and viral sensation that soared to 275,000,000 views in just four months. Much of the video’s success came from being shared.
Be Topical. When a story is breaking, see if there’s a way you can craft an episode of your show around it, to essentially join the conversation.

Be Relatable. Strike a chord with viewers on a subject that they can relate to, whether it’s a broad topic like cell phone habits, or a niche topic like life in New York.

Be Valuable. Try to provide practical value to the viewer in a way that is extremely helpful, such as with tutorials.

Be Remarkable. Upload a demonstration of exceptional talent or ability.

“Construction Workers React to ‘Wrecking Ball’” is a video from College Humor that tapped into the debate around Miley Cyrus’ music video. It achieved 1 million views in a week.
Examples of being Shareable

**Topical**

- The Dark Side of the iPhone 5S Lines
- 25 Ways to Wear a Scarf in 4.5 Minutes!

**Valuable**

- The Modern One Loop
- How to Piss Off Every New Yorker in 36 Seconds

**Relatable**

- Buzzfeed Video

“When we try to come up with ideas to go viral, we ask ourselves, **When people share this, what 10 words will they use to describe it to their friends?**”
CONVERSATION
Is there an element of speaking directly to the audience?

YouTube is an incredibly social platform. Viewers see their favorite stars as friends in their computer.

Talking to the audience is powerful because it builds loyalty and repeat views.

As you look at series ideas, consider ways to have a dialogue with your audience.

Establishing such a bond can be the difference between audience and obsessive fans.

The LatoyaForever channel has broken out over the past year thanks in large part to her directly addressing the audience in every video.
Talk to the audience in your core videos. The entire show can be made up of this element, or just a segment of it.

Talk to the audience in separate uploads. If you don’t want to have a “video blog” portion of your main content, consider making supplemental videos to check-in with subscribers, say thanks, or respond to comments.

Be authentic. It should feel like a conversation because it is. For full effect, it’s critical that the face of the channel come across as real, honest and genuine.

Ways to be conversational:

Vsatnce is a science channel with over seven million subscribers. Key to its success has been the consistent face of Michael Stevens, who has spoken directly to his viewers for over six years.
Examples of being Conversational: In scripted series

LonelyGirl15, The Guild and Lizzie Bennet Diaries are three iconic YouTube scripted series. While the shows have storylines, all three actually opened with a vlog format which helped connect viewers by having a conversation directly with them.
Examples of being Conversational: In supplemental videos

For those who don't want to incorporate conversation into their main content, another option is to do so with supplemental videos. The creators above make additional videos just for the sake of speaking directly to their subscribers.
“It’s a different relationship. YouTubers are more like friends, brothers, or sisters to the audience -- rather than celebrities who are seen as idols.”
INTERACTIVITY
Is there a way to involve the audience with this show idea?

Imagine if you had the power to affect what happens in favorite TV show. How thrilling would that be?

One of the unique advantages of making content on YouTube is that you can give the audience a chance to participate.

Interactive videos are effective because it shows viewers that the channel is as much for them as it is the creator.

So, as you develop show ideas, see if there is a way to install an element of interactivity.

Every Halloween, Jimmy Kimmel invites parents to submit videos of them playing a “I ate all your candy” trick on their children. The funniest clips are then featured on both the TV show and his YouTube channel.
“Epic Rap Battles of History” is a hugely popular series with a powerful interactive component. At the end of each episode, they ask viewers who won the battle, and who should be next. If they use your suggestion, they show it by way of a graphic.

Ways to be interactive:

Directly ask the audience questions, or to submit opinions. Be sure to respond to them in a subsequent video.

Ask the audience to submit ideas for future episodes. And if you use their idea, be sure to give them a shout-out.

Incorporate viewer video submissions. With permission, feature clips that your fans have submitted to you.
“We’re completely scripted, but we write-in comments from the audience that help inform character and move the plot forward.”

- Bernie Su
creator, The Lizzie Bennet Diaries
CONSISTENCY
Are there strong recurring elements to this idea?

Top YouTubers agree that consistency is critical in a channel’s success, though many will define it in different ways.

Some talk about consistent formats, by way of a clearly packaged show. Others speak of consistency in the upload schedule, with videos delivered, every Tuesday and Thursday for example.

Some simply employ the same rituals in every video, such as an intro sequence.

However you define it, the more consistent the better, as it gives viewers a sense of comfort, and something to look forward to.
Have a clearly packaged show format. Come up with an overall idea that can be spread out over multiple episodes.

Upload on a regular schedule. Stick to delivering videos on a certain day, and communicate this to your audience.

Have a consistent personality of the channel. Sometimes it’s a likeable and charismatic person who will be the “glue” of the channel.

Stay within the theme of the channel. Make sure this show idea isn’t too different from the theme and voice already established on the channel.

“Convos With My 2 Year Old” could have been a hugely successful viral video on its own, but the creators smartly made it a repeatable series, picking up 200K subscribers in just two weeks after episode 1.
Examples of Consistency

Consistency of schedule - TasteMade

Consistency in channel voice - Vice

Consistent personality - PewDiePie

Consistency of format - The Mythical Show
“For years I uploaded whenever I felt like it. Then I stuck to a schedule. That’s when everything took off.”
Is there a clearly defined audience?

Viewers love seeing videos they can relate to, so it’s helpful when your content is tailored to a specific group or demographic.

This could be a large group such as parents of toddlers, or a small niche, such as collectors of Disney toys.

Either way, we’ve found that the more you can say about your intended audience, the more traction you can get with an idea.
Ways to do it

Target audience from the channel level, such as with SkyDoesMinecraft, which is entirely devoted to players of the game Minecraft.

Target audience from the show level, such as with the series “Get Ready With Me” from MissGlamorazzi.

Target audience from the individual video level, such as Sh*t Sri Lankan Mother’s Say.

Target an audience that is underserved, meaning they have a lack of options on other mediums. See “Hello Cupid”.

SkyDoesMinecraft is a channel dedicated solely to the popular computer game. By targeting a strong niche, it has picked up over 7 million subscribers and 1.4 billion views.
If the audience loves it, can you make more of it?

Growing and maintaining a successful channel can be a long road. Some of our top creators have been uploading weekly videos for 300 weeks without stopping!

That may not be for you, and that's OK. Really. But it's important that you develop ideas that make sense on a practical level.

Ask yourself if you have the resources to sustain an idea over time, including budget, actors, crew, location and energy.

Phil Defranco has maintained his channel for over seven years thanks in part to a sustainable show format.
Comedian Jack Douglas reads terrible comments back to the camera in “Your Grammar Sucks”, a sustainable series recorded from his home. The show has been key to him reaching one million subscribers.

Ways to do it

Think light and nimble. Try to produce in a way that is less time and labor intensive. Typically, the less involved the production, the longer you can maintain it. Watch “Your Grammar Sucks”.

Be realistic. Have a clear understanding of what it will take to produce the series, and for how long it will provide content for your channel.

Block shoot. Record several videos in one day to maximize resources.

Know what’s next. Have a plan for what you will deliver to your audience after the current series of videos is finished.
“If we can't shoot at least three episodes in one day, we move on to the next idea.”

/TheFineBros
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DISCOVERABILITY
Will the videos get found through search or related videos?

YouTube is one of the most-used search engines in the world. People pour onto the site looking for video content around all kinds of subjects.

Sometimes these queries are around hot topics or trending events, like an amazing sports play, an election, or the Olympics.

Other times people search for information, such as how to fix a water heater, or how to do the “smokey eye” make-up effect.

Either way, having discoverable videos is powerful because it can pile on extra views and potential new subscribers.

“Speedrun” is a popular series that recreates entire movies with drawn animation, and reduces them to 60 seconds. The selected movies are always pop culture classics, frequently searched for.
Build trending topics into your show. Design your series in a way that the episodes can be relevant to trending topics in news or pop culture. Use resources like Google Trends, Twitter Trends, and sites like Trendspottr.com to find out what's being discussed.

Make “evergreen” content. Create videos that answer common questions or solve common problems. Videos like “How to tie a tie” continue to get searched for, every day.

Be an optimization wizard. Read our Creator Playbook and learn how to best optimize every video with effective titles, tags and descriptions.

The ongoing series “Key of Awesome” has had multiple hits by producing videos around pop culture. Their Ke$ha parodies have amassed over 130 million views combined.
“Every Monday we meet to talk about trending topics, videos, memes, tech, celebrity gossip -- anything we think people are looking for. From there, we brainstorm angles for a video.”

/barelypolitical
Can every episode be fully appreciated by a brand new viewer?

When looking at new series ideas, it’s worth considering that a significant percentage of people may end up there through a single episode on a social feed, a search result, or a related video. Therefore, it becomes important to have videos that don’t require a lot of context going in.

Having a show with “stand alone” episodes is helpful because, if you’ve uploaded 50 episodes, you have 50 chances for a new viewer to stumble upon, enjoy, and subscribe for more.

We’re not saying you have to have a fully accessible show, but it can help a channel grow faster.

Beauty and lifestyle creator MissGlamorazza creates multi-episode shows that require no prior context, regardless of what episode is watched. This is episode #9 of her short series, “DIY December Days”.

ACCESSIBILITY
“Jake and Amir” is a long running series from College Humor with over 500 episodes, none of which require prior context to appreciate.

**Ways to be Accessible:**

**Don’t tie each episode to the pilot.** Design the show in a way that each episode doesn’t have to rely on a specific backstory that is only described in episode 1.

**Show a brief recap of the situation.** Create an intro sequence that reviews what the audience may have missed, to help give context to what they’re about to watch.

**Make a strong call-to-action pointing back to the pilot episode.** Let viewers know where they can learn the backstory via annotations or links in the description.
Is there room in this idea to feature other YouTubers?

One of the fastest ways to grow subscribers on YouTube is to “collab” with those who have their own fans, and feature them in your videos.

It works because when the guest star promotes the video, you get seen by another loyal audience that already knows how to use YouTube -- how to subscribe, comment and favorite videos. If they like you, they subscribe to you too.

Collaborating is also a great way to build relationships inside the very vibrant and active community of creators.

Hannah Hart (left) created a series called “My Drunk Kitchen”, which is designed to feature guest stars. As a result, episodes with a co-host tend to get extra promotion from that person’s social media presence.
Build a “guest chair” into your show. Design the show in a way that makes it easy and logical to have guest stars.

Reach out to partners that fit. Find creators in your genre or niche with similar subscriber numbers.

Be as specific as possible. YouTubers are busy with their own channel, so when reaching out, be as clear and as specific as possible. A script is often welcome.

Make them proud. The point here is to get your guest to promote the finished product, so feature them prominently and in a positive light.
“It should feel exciting, organic and seamless; that it’s benefiting the audience as much as the creators.”

- Jake Roper
Is this idea coming from a place of genuine inspiration?

Top creators on YouTube will often tell you that this is of the utmost importance.

It’s powerful because true passion often comes through in the content itself -- and lack of it does as well.

If you’re an individual, we’d encourage you to make videos that will make you happy. It happens to be key to building fans.

And if you’re part of a company, strive to make content that is true to brand, and find talented people who are inspired by the mission of the channel.

Freddie Wong and Brandon Latch created the kind of videos they loved watching. The result has been a wildly successful channel with over 6.5 million subscribers.
Pay attention to what you love to watch. From TV, movies, news or blogs, consider what you enjoy, and consider making something in the same arena.

Iterate on your videos based on what you most enjoy. Try different shows and observe what audiences like best. But also observe what you enjoy. Hopefully they will be the same thing!

Avoid producing videos just because you think they will be more popular. In the long run, making videos you don't want to make will probably just bring misery.

For companies, think about content that is true to brand.
“If you love doing it, it will be a lot easier... and a lot more fun.”
- Tony Valenzuela

/blackboxTV
Quick Guide

Ask yourself the following questions as you develop new ideas, or look to improve your existing shows on YouTube.

1. Shareability
   Will viewers share these videos?

2. Conversation
   Is there an element of speaking directly to the audience?

3. Interactivity
   Is there a way to involve the audience with this show idea?

4. Consistency
   Are there strong recurring elements to this idea?

5. Targeting
   Is there a clearly defined audience?

6. Sustainability
   If the audience loves it, can you make more of it?

7. Discoverability
   Will the videos get found through search or related videos?

8. Accessibility
   Can every episode be fully appreciated by a brand new viewer?

9. Collaboration
   Is there room in this idea to feature other YouTubers?

10. Inspiration
    Is this idea coming from a place of genuine inspiration?
1. Shareability
What does the Fox Say?
Construction Workers React to “Wrecking Ball”
Grand Theft Auto V Mythbusters: Episode 1
25 Ways to Wear a Scarf
How to Piss Off Every New Yorker in 36 Seconds

2. Conversation
Why Do We Get Bored?
First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails
The Guild: Episode 1: Wake-Up Call
My Name is Lizzie Bennet - Ep: 1
Touring in Asia
A Quick Thank You
WFW 92 - Awkward Pandas at the Zoo!

3. Interactivity
YouTube Challenge: I Told My Kids I Ate Their Halloween Candy
Rasputin vs Stalin. Epic Rap Battles of History
The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

4. Consistency
Convos With My 2 Year Old - EPISODE 1
Tastemade channel
The Mythical Show
PewDiePie
Vice channel

5. Targeting
SkyDoesMinecraft channel
Get Ready With Me
Sh*t Sri Lankan Mothers Say
Hello Cupid

6. Sustainability
Philip DeFranco channel
Your Grammar Sucks

7. Discoverability
Speedrun: Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope
Ke$ha Die Young Parody

8. Accessibility
DIY Coffee Mugs
Jake and Amir: Get Rich Quick Schemes

9. Collaboration
My Drunk Kitchen
I was Kidnapped by Hank Green!

10. Inspiration
Freddiew (RocketJump) channel
Veratasium channel

Appendix of Examples
Thanks!