

Video for the web: growth opportunity for Twin Cities entrepreneurs?

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No doubt about it, online video is a growth industry, and we're not just talking about squirrels on skateboards.

Nielsen VideoCensus trend tracker estimated that nearly 139 million viewers spent an average of 212.5 minutes watching video online in October alone. So as the culture grows accustomed to seeing video online, expectations have ratcheted up as well, according to Edie French, president and CEO of [LOCATION IMAGES/iDream.tv](http://LOCATIONIMAGES/iDream.tv).

With technology making potential videographers out of virtually anyone carrying a cell phone, the need for high-quality, well-produced video for corporate websites creates an opportunity for professional video production companies, she believes.

But, with more than 500 video production companies listed in the Twin Cities area alone, differentiation, flexibility and creative networking are necessary to survive the current recession.

"We're problem solvers and logistics experts," French said speaking in St. Paul recently on a Minnesota Chamber of Commerce panel titled "Surviving the Recession: Ready to Grow." French and partner Paul Auguston, artistic director, had grown a successful media production company focused on the education and nonprofit markets. They had built their reputation on getting the picture when no one else could, she said.

She recounted their first assignment with U of M researchers more than 20 years ago, filming a solar eclipse in minus-20 degree temperatures. The hardy Minnesotans stuck it out and got the footage when other production companies headed for the warming shack. And they successfully adapted to video technology when the market moved away from film.

But when the recession hit last year, their business from traditional clients fell off. Admitting she'd never had a formal business plan before, she and Auguston had to ask themselves: "Who else needs our services?"

Recognizing that video needed to scale across iPods, mobile phones, laptops as well as televisions, French saw an opportunity beyond big budgets and big projects. Not only does she believe video is the visual language of the web, she also said it is increasingly necessary in our multicultural, multilingual world to use video to reach across multiple audiences.

French cited market research showing a three-times increase in the number of visitors who will return to a website if it has video on it as a compelling argument for why businesses need to add quality video content.

In response to the new market opportunity they saw, French and Auguston launched a low-cost offering for small businesses to put video on their websites — an offering they christened Project Green Screen. Finally, after 20 years in business, French joined the Chamber of Commerce as a way to network and meet potential new clients. And she's been networking every since.

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