

## An Interview With George Strompolos, Content Partnerships Manager For YouTube

Hello, my name is Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*, published by John Wiley & Sons, the most comprehensive book ever written on the subject of Social Media.

Today we are here with George Strompolos, *Content Partnerships*' Manager for Google at YouTube, and we will be speaking today about YouTube, video sharing and Social Media. That's why we're here!

So, George, we are really glad to have you here today.



**GS:** Thank you, it's good to be here, Lon.

**LS:** This is great! Can you tell the listeners a little bit about who you are your background, what you do at YouTube?

**GS:** Sure, so as you mentioned I am the *Content Partnerships*' Manager here at YouTube and that's really a fancy way of saying that I reach out to content creators and help them engage on YouTube and to distribute their content and to connect with audiences around the world. And so YouTube being an open platform, those content creators can take on many shapes and sizes. They can be someone as small as a video blogger producing videos in their bedroom, up to what we call a "broadband studio" or a "digital studio" which creates original content just for internet distribution. And this goes all the way up to traditional media companies and premium content providers that we are all familiar with; CBS and the National Basketball Association.

**LS:** Wow. So you've really covered the gamut!



**GS:** We try to. There are a lot of videos out there.

**LS:** Geez! Well, just to get started, I don't think that there is actually anybody on the planet that doesn't know what YouTube is, but if there is someone living in a cave, can you explain a little bit about what YouTube is.

**GS:** Sure. So at its core YouTube is a website where people can upload videos to share them with the world. It's also a great place to watch videos. It's actually an interesting fact that YouTube currently receives 13 hours of video uploaded to the site every minute!

**LS:** Oh!

**GS:** ...And so that's just a massive amount of content being added for sharing, and so chances are if you go to YouTube and you have anything at the top of your mind you can search for it and there's going to be an abundance of videos to (sort of) address that topic.

Another kind of thing to take away is that over one billion videos are viewed on YouTube every day, so it's really this juggernaut of entertainment and information sharing and Social Media, and actually a great community that has resulted as part of that. And basically, at its core, it's video sharing.

**LS:** Wow! Those are staggering numbers. Those are absolutely amazing! And you mentioned this “trusted network,” this network of video-sharers; what’s the typical demographic? Who is actually using YouTube?

**GS:** Actually, that’s a good question! I think we get characterized as a site where teenagers are watching videos of dogs on skateboards...

**LS:** (Laughter).

**GS:** ...and to be fair, there’s a lot of that happening on YouTube. YouTube is so big and so great, though, that the people who are watching tend to spread across all demographics. It’s really a pretty even bell curve. I thought it’s kind of interesting that we have approximately the same percentage of viewership under the age of 18 that we have over the age of 55.

**LS:** Wow!

**GS:** And I think it’s really a testament to the infinite choice of content that we have. You know, I am sure there are dogs on skateboards and there are videobloggers and teenagers discussing issues and fun sketch-comedy things on the site; but there are also serious political discussions and lectures and content from universities and filmmakers on the site, too. So it is really touching all audiences.

**LS:** And that’s really true! I go to YouTube continuously for just about any subject matter. I saw the *Saturday Night Lives*’ skit of Sarah Palin, and I also saw the debate from last night. So you can see comedy and you can see real serious news.

**GS:** Exactly right! I have been particularly excited that the full debates have been posted by C-Span on YouTube so you can watch them in their entirety; which is great because I actually wasn’t able to catch the first Presidential debate, but then later that night I sat down on YouTube and watched the whole thing.

**LS:** And I was kind of surprised. The full one-hour and 32 minutes of it was actually posted there this morning.

**GS:** True. I should clarify, though, that if you go to YouTube today and create an account, your uploads will be capped at 10 minutes. We do that for a number of reasons, but with our content-partners (which C-Span is one of), we remove that cap. So they are able to upload a video, which is clearly much past 10 minutes.

**LS:** And that’s a really good point. What actually is the business model? It sounds like you have the traditional “Freemium.” You’re allowed to use it for free with a 10-minute cap, but then you can buy your way into other services?

**GS:** Not quite “buy your way” into the services, but your first point is definitely correct. It is a free service. You know, it’s free to upload videos and it’s free to watch videos. We don’t have any immediate plans for a, sort of, pay-to-download model which some other platforms use today. We like to keep the videos free to watch and that really keeps the content and the experience more fluid.

What you’ll find is that people upload videos to YouTube for different reasons. Some of them just want to share pictures of their baby (or something like that), or videos of their baby, or their vacation footage. We

certainly are happy to support that. However, it's becoming more and more common for amateur and professional content producers to produce content for YouTube and make a living out of it.

The way that they do this is they become a "partner" through my team, and they also have the ability to apply online at YouTube.com/partners, and basically tell us, "Hey, we're producing original content and not only do we want to share it with the world through YouTube, but we want to give you the ability to run ads against that content..."

**LS:** Huh?

**GS:** ...and then we will share the majority of that ad revenue back to the content creator. So I call it a "performance-based" model. In other words, you can become a content partner and if you upload video and it gets zero views, well there's clearly no ad revenue there, so nothing is being shared. But if you upload a video and it gets one million views, for instance, we put an ad on every single view. And so that ad revenue starts to accrue and, in many cases, can become significant for a lot of the Content Partners we have.

**LS:** That's a really great idea that I never even really thought of, YouTube actually partnering with the content providers. You just thought that you would provide the service and everybody "free-for-all's" it; but if you can actually control and work with the content providers to produce good content, and to create some kind of a business model where they can actually benefit from it, then that really sounds like a win-win.

**GS:** It is a win-win! And one thing I would like to clarify there; we do work closely with content providers. We're very clear, though, not to cross the line in creating or having a hand in the production of that content. It really is more of a platform-type of plan. We like to say, "Here are some great tools and here are the best ways to share videos (that we know of on the web) and amass an audience that is eager to watch your stuff. We'll give you the ability to use that as a commercial partner, but the content that you create is still up to you."

We are not going to tell you to shorten your intro or to spice things up a little bit. That's really always going to be on the content creator. That's probably a good thing, too, because I've made some videos in my day, and they are not very good.

**LS:** (Laughter) Well, and I think by allowing them to have their own creative license, really, you're setting yourself up to show that you have integrity and that the content has integrity.

**GS:** Absolutely right! And just in case you are curious, one other thing I would like to add...The signing of *Content Partners* and sharing in ad revenue is definitely core to our business. But in case you or any of our listeners out there are curious as to other ways that we generate revenue, we do a lot of other projects on YouTube; large marketing sponsor-driven programs like "Battle of the Bands" kind of things, or "Film-maker Contest." And those are typically things that are sponsored by a major brand along the lines of Hewlett-Packard and Singulair, or Verizon Wireless, Guitar Center, etc., etc.

So we do generate revenue in that sense, and we also sell ad space. So ad space against partner content, as we talked about, but also all throughout the site. What is fun to think about, actually, (and people often forget this) is YouTube is a huge search engine.

You know, with a site that is doing 1.7 million video views every day, most of the people are finding those videos by search.

**LS:** Sure.

**GS:** So just thinking about that, naturally, we traffic ads on search-results pages and things along those lines. And that's another way we generate revenue.

**LS:** And that's a really good point, too, because just to catalog and turn back the search-engine results to the viewers is an amazing task just in itself. So are you doing contextual-type advertising with that?

**GS:** Yes, that's actually kind of one of the specialties of Google, who acquired YouTube back in 2006. And Google is sort of the expert in contextual advertising, and not only serving ads against content, but making them as relevant as possible so those ads become useful.

We have made some pretty tremendous strides in terms of incorporating useful ad formats that don't really get in your way, but still provide value for the advertisers who are purchasing that space.

**LS:** And that really is a good point. I don't mind looking at ads that pertain to what I'm working on at the time. I don't like the banner ads where it says, "click this monkey." And I also like the way you do the ads on YouTube because they are innocuous. You can see them if you want to, but yet they are not obtrusive.

**GS:** Thank, I appreciate that. I have to agree. The main format of advertising that you'll see on YouTube when you are watching a video (if you're watching a video from a partner) is what we call "in-video" advertising. And it is, essentially, a transparent overlay that shows up towards the bottom of the video window; and it's cool. It can be animated, and a cool example is when the Simpsons' movie was premiering the studio behind that movie ran an "in-video" overlay of Homer Simpson chasing a donut across the bottom of the screen. It goes pretty quick, you know, and it's usually relevant. I think they targeted that against comedy and animation content, so to that audience it was probably actually a nice surprise. And as a user, you can "click" on Homer Simpson and see, maybe, the movie trailer, or you can choose to close that overlay out, or just wait a few seconds and it will just disappear.

**LS:** Yeah, that's pretty cool! And you are absolutely right, that is really appropriate for that audience and it actually adds entertainment value to the video.

**GS:** Exactly right.

**LS:** With YouTube, the thing that I really love about it is you can embed YouTube videos, say, in *The Social Media Bible* website, or the Lon Safko website. And wasn't there a recent change in the quality of the video recently?

**GS:** A couple of months ago, we released something, which we refer to as "High Quality," and it's essentially a higher quality stream of the video that has been uploaded to YouTube. You know, without a doubt there are videos of varying quality, not content-wise but just visual quality on YouTube. Because it's a platform where actually the content owner is uploading the videos that for a large part, depends on the encoding ability and the way that the content creator has really treated that video before they upload it.

That said, if the content-creator is pretty good at what they are doing and they encode the video to a nice, high quality file when they upload it to YouTube it looks great.

If the user has opted into the high-quality viewing option, it looks particularly crispy, I guess the word is.

**LS:** Yes.

**GS:** And the challenge there is that not everyone in the United States, or the world for that matter (because we are absolutely a global site) has a high-speed connection. So, of course, the higher quality the video stream, the slower it's going to stream. If you happen to have a broadband connection, you won't have any problems watching video in high quality, you can even use YouTube to bump it up to the full-screen during loading; sit back and relax, and it looks pretty good.

**LS:** Those are pretty good. Now is there an extra fee for the higher quality?

**GS:** Absolutely not! And for all the tech-heads out there, you can upload a video to YouTube up to 1 Gigabyte in file-size; and as I mentioned earlier for most accounts it is a 10-minute cap. If you become a Content Partner, that cap is removed.

And so, really you can...let's say you are a partner and you upload a video 1 gigabyte in file size, it looks really good. And one thing I would actually like to mention is in addition to viewing content on your laptop or on your desktop computer (which is probably the most common right now); we do a lot of work on the syndication side.

What that means is we do partnerships with the likes of Apple. For instance, YouTube has a button on the iPhone where you can watch YouTube videos. We also partner with Apple T.V. which is a device that hooks up YouTube streams to your television set. We also have partnerships with a lot of other mobile carriers and several of the top television manufacturers (as early as this Christmas) are going to be releasing flat-screen television sets with, essentially, a YouTube button on them.

So the content that is uploaded to YouTube is now available on more screens than just the computer or the laptop; and it's really empowering from a content creator's perspective with one upload suddenly you're distributed to all these different places for viewing. So it's a powerful thing and it's really just a way to have, sort of, our mission of every video on every screen.

**LS:** That really is powerful! Some of the interviews that we have done with mobile and some of the other comment-marketing people, and even Kakul Srivastava was saying that there's three cell phones for every human being on the planet. That I thought was absolutely staggering; and this is in most countries. As you just said, a lot of people do not have broadband and in some of the Third World countries, and even countries like Russia and South America they cannot afford computers. So their entire link to the outside world is through mobile phones.

**GS:** That's absolutely right! It's kind of a funny story. I had spent some time in China about a year ago, and I was in a rural area doing a little hike just for fun, and I'm trekking up this trail and here comes this older looking man on a mule. He looked like he was from, literally, like a pre-historic time. And as he passed me, I

saw a brand-new cell phone on his belt, clipped in; and it was probably a better model than I had in my pocket. (Laughter) So you are absolutely right with that.

**LS:** Yeah, well that's pretty slick because without broadband, and (the fact that) they cannot afford computers, and they don't have a place to set them up, the cell phone really becomes their access to the internet. And to be able to access YouTube from a cell phone, I think is just awesome. That's a great application!

And you talked earlier about advertising and some of the number of views that some of these videos get. And some of my favorites are, and of course, I'm sure you will recognize, "Will It Blend," Tom Dickson?

**GS:** Yeah, yeah.

**LS:** That just absolutely cracks me up, and what a great business story where he has a \$600 blender, puts up his "Will It Blend" with the rake, generates over a million views, and sells out every blender in 24 hours. That's a really powerful business-marketing tool.

Do you see yourselves as a marketing tool?

**GS:** Absolutely! So, you know, creating original content and sharing in ad revenues is one way to approach YouTube, and that's more from an entertainment perspective. But from more a marketing perspective, I've just been amazed at the way that companies actually think of clever ways to use YouTube. And "Will It Blend" is also one of my favorite examples.

I should defer to them, of course, but I did read an article at one point, that their sales actually went up 300% as a result of their presence on YouTube.

**LS:** Oh my gosh!

**GS:** This is from a marketing effort that essentially cost them nothing; create a YouTube channel, no cost; set up a guy on camera with a blender (they make blenders so it cannot be that expensive for them), and blend a couple of cool things. And they were smart enough to blend things that are kind of hot and in the news. So the new iPhone comes out and they buy one on the first day and they blend it. And of course, people are searching for the iPhone video and things like that, and just the controversy of destroying something in a blender that is so sought-after, is something that translates to a lot of video views.

**LS:** Well, yeah...

**GS:** Here you have this tremendous marketing tool in YouTube, and for a company like Blendtec. What's interesting is that I read a blog post a few months ago from a well-known guy in Silicon Valley who said, "I see a future where your marketing can become a profit center." And if you look at "Will It Blend," that's a perfect example, so their marketing is clearly driving sales, but also they are providing original content.

So they are certainly welcome to join our partnership program and if they are comfortable having other ads running against their videos, they can actually make money off those ads. So it's kind of an interesting situation there.

**LS:** That is a clever situation, because this morning when I checked, (because I use “Will It Blend,” (and particularly the iPhone because, as you said, it’s almost sacrilegious to put a brand new iPhone in) they had 5,487,071 views! Wow! Five and a half million views! And if they partnered with you and did advertising, not only could they make money on the advertising, but also they can actually probably even advertise their own company.

**GS:** Exactly right!

**LS:** Wow! That’s powerful! And then, of course, the one other favorite that I just have to mention; Jan Young Min, also know as Fun Too, in his guitar rendition of Pachebel’s “Cannon”.

**GS:** What a talented guy! You know, just in posting a video to YouTube showcasing his guitar prowess, has really opened up a lot of doors for that fellow. I believe we are actually having him at an event that we are doing called, “YouTube Live” which is taking place in San Francisco on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November; A sort of celebration of examples like that; you know people who have really just become celebrities in their own right because of simply posting a video to YouTube.

You know, one of my favorite examples, Lon, is a young guy named Lucas who has a character that he does on YouTube called “Fred.” Lucas is about 15-years-old, I think, and he plays this character named “Fred” who is a 6-year-old; and the schtick is that he is a 6-year-old with anger management problems.

**LS:** (Laughter)

**GS:** It’s kind of one of these things that are really made for kids, like a lot of Pixar Films for instance; but it is also funny to adults. It’s kind a bizarre thing and you can see it at YouTube.com/Fred; and it’s really just taken off like a rocket.

I think it’s actually the fastest growing channel in YouTube history.

**LS:** Really!

**GS:** And Fred is a partner, so we traffic ads against his videos and we share the majority of that ad revenue with him. He’s at a point where he’ll post a video, and within a matter of days, that video will have at least 3 million views, I guarantee.

**LS:** Oh my God!

**GS:** Sometimes as high as eight to 10 million!

**LS:** Oh my goodness!

**GS:** So that is about one video every week, sometimes more.

**LS:** Oh my goodness....!!!

**GS:** There’re cable programs, even network television producers that would die for those numbers.

**LS:** For sure!

**GS:** And I think it was the season finale of American Idol that did 35 million viewers...

**LS:** Right!

**GS:** Absolutely an impressive feat, and if you look at someone like Fred who uploads a video and gets 3 million views at a minimum, all he has to do is post 10 videos and he's going to get that number of American Idol viewership. But don't forget that people are constantly watching these other videos, too.

**LS:** Yes.

**GS:** It's really a powerful thing, and I won't get into the details of this partnership, but he's making decent money off of YouTube, substantial...

**LS:** Good for him!

**GS:** ...and he's, naturally, being approached by all kinds of brands, because he's (kind of) hitting that "tween" audience.

So it's fun for me to think that a young kid from Middle America is actually creating something that's on par with the likes of some of the biggest television programs that mankind has ever known.

**LS:** And isn't that great that you are actually promoting this kid as an entrepreneur. I mean, he's an entrepreneur creating original, viewable, desirable content, and you're providing a channel to build this guy's career.

**GS:** Yes, and it makes me really happy, actually.

**LS:** You should be really proud of it. I know that you have to catch a plane, so I will try to wrap this up. Is there anything else that you would like to share about YouTube, to summarize, to let our listeners know a little bit about? Any other thoughts that you might have?

**GS:** You know, a couple of things. I would say, if you haven't been to YouTube, check it out. [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). Hopefully most of you have seen a video or two. I would encourage anyone that's out there that's been to YouTube casually, to go ahead and create an account. It's a free thing to do, even if you don't intend on uploading any of your own videos, creating an account is actually a great way to really enrich the YouTube experience. And this is because suddenly you can start to comment on videos and you can rate videos, and you can build play lists and you can share your favorites with your friends; things like that.

It really takes this casual viewing experience to much more of an enriching and meaningful experience. That way, if you find videobloggers who are very opinionated that you like hearing about, you can subscribe to their channel. Subscribing is really important. It actually means that every time that channel posts a new video, as a subscriber you'll be alerted of that video. And so it's a great way to keep tabs on your favorite creators.

So watch some videos, create an account, have fun with it. Hopefully upload a couple and just look out for the “Fred’s” of the world, because there’s going to be a lot of them.

**LS:** (Laughter) I love that! George, thank you, really, for being here. I appreciate you taking all of this time. I would like to thank George Strompolos, the *Content Partnership’s* Manager for Google at YouTube, for being here today.

George, truly thank you so very much for taking the time today.

**GS:** My pleasure, Lon, take care. I appreciate it.

**LS:** Thank you.

This has been Lon Safko, the co-author of *The Social Media Bible*. Be sure to check out our other valuable Social Media tactics, tools, and strategies that can be found in *The Social Media Bible* book, as well as its companion website at [www.thesocialmediabible.com](http://www.thesocialmediabible.com). And also check out YouTube for some of The Social Media Bible interviews that we are going to be posting up there. Take advantage of this great marketing tool.

And for more information about me please go visit Lon Safko, [www.lonsafko.com](http://www.lonsafko.com).

And again, George, truly thank you for being here and sharing all those great ideas with us today.

**GS:** Thanks, Lon; have a good one.