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## Web site video puts businesses in the lead

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EASTHAMPTON - When videographers approached him last summer about making a corporate video for his company's Web site, Ray MacKenzie admits feeling mixed.

"At first, I didn't want to spend the money," said the president of Northeast Fasteners Inc., of Granby. "It was like hoping something good would happen, like throwing a seed into the ground."

MacKenzie's 24-year-old company sells nuts and bolts, screws, washers and hardware items at its 254 Taylor St. warehouse and through its five-year-old online store, NutsandBolts.com.

Despite his hesitancy, MacKenzie followed a hunch and hired the video experts who own a small Easthampton company called ETown Videos to produce a short introductory video that features himself and a purchasing agent talking about the company's philosophy and showing off its 8,100-square-foot warehouse.

Since posting the video on its Web site, sales have skyrocketed. MacKenzie attributes the videos - ETown has since produced a 10-part educational series for Northeast Fasteners - with a 50 percent uptick in sales.

"I would highly recommend it to other businesses," he said. "Video is new and it's uncharted waters, but it will grow."

Northeast Fasteners is one of a small number Valley companies that have turned to video to help them boost their Internet presence using what many believe is the next big online marketing tool: corporate videos.

"We will soon start to see an increase in using videos on Web sites," said Gregory Getner, production manager and a co-owner at ETown Videos. "It wasn't too long ago that people wondered why they needed a Web site. Now they can't imagine being in business without it. The same thing will happen with video."

National experts agree.

Bart Feder, the president and chief executive of New York online video company The FeedRoom, told Forbes Magazine last May that he thought video would play a significant role on every major corporation's Web site by the end of 2008 and that businesses have yet to scratch the surface of this video phenomenon.

That's what videographers like ETown Videos are banking on. Launched in 2006 by a pair of telecommunications specialists whose individual businesses still compete against each other, the Easthampton company has landed about a dozen clients and by the end of the year expects that number to grow significantly as word about both the effectiveness of corporate videos on Web sites and the quality of their product spreads.

"Businesses don't quite get it yet how powerful video is," said Sven Kielhorn, ETown co-owner

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Gregory Getner, center, and Sven Kielhorn, right, of ETown Videos, prepare for a shoot with David DelVecchio, of Innovative Business Systems in Easthampton Tuesday.



and producer. "Video, two or three years ago, was not practical. But now the floodgates are about to open."

Other local videographers agree.

"Lately, the Web video focus has become more marketable and attractive; it's becoming huge," said Gretchen Siegchrist, owner of a Northampton video production company called Media Shower Productions.

Siegchrist, a former journalist and photographer who earned a master's degree in video production five years ago, has produced "how-to" videos for the popular information Web site About.com for the last three years. When she launched Media Shower Productions, she said most of her business came from weddings, mainly because "that's the one area where people were hiring videographers at the time."

That's been changing of late with a shift toward videos for the Web, so much so that now about half of her business involves video production for companies and nonprofit organizations.

Those in video production say the growth of their industry is being spurred by a convergence of several factors, including the rise in popularity of sites like YouTube and Google Video. Additionally, the digital technology required to produce video is less expensive, and computer users now have the needed bandwidth to easily view videos on their computers.

Even with its recent growth, video is still in its infancy in western Massachusetts.

"In this area, I don't think it's quite caught on," said Siegchrist.

### **A powerful message**

One business owner sold on the concept is David DeVecchio, president of Innovative Business Systems, Inc., in Easthampton. He admits that posting a video on his company's Web site as a way to explain what services they can offer hadn't even crossed his mind until ETown Video contacted him and agreed to produce a sample for his viewing.

"Video was not even on our radar, but when I saw the power of the video message, I emailed Sven and asked him how fast we could get it up on our Web site," DeVecchio said.

He said the video gives a visitor an overview of what the company does without having to navigate through multiple pages of information.

"The difference with the video is you can't find a more succinct way to get your message out in a condensed amount of time," DeVecchio said.

Other companies use the video service as a way to attract new clients. ESCO, an energy services company, uses its six-minute video as a succinct way to explain what its retrofit energy lighting projects can do for a company.

The video features testimonials from facilities managers at an RR Donnelley plant in Connecticut where ESCO completed a job. The people featured in the video include maintenance chiefs and purchasing agents who play a critical role in making their plant run smoothly.

The video was given to the head of energy at the RR Donnelley, who sent it to all of the company's plants in the United States. In the end, eight more sites inked deals, said Mark Kenny, who worked for ESCO at the time and has since joined Applied Energy Management, a North Carolina company that has a direct sales division located in Lee.

"We couldn't have paid people to say what they were saying in the video," said Kenny. "The video is a powerful tool now and is a standard part of what we do."

Kenny believes the video worked so well for his former company that he helped convince Applied Energy Management to hire ETown Videos for several upcoming video projects.

### **The process**

Once a business signs on as a client, ETown Videos spends some time learning about what its leaders hope to achieve with the video.

Some businesses, like Northeast Fasteners, want to increase sales. IBS, on the other hand, wanted to provide information about its services in a condensed fashion. And instead of posting its video to a Web site, Applied Energy Management hands its video out to potential clients with whom they hope to make a direct sale.

Getner and Kielhorn then travel to the business headquarters with their mobile studio to take footage and to conduct interviews. The studio includes two HD cameras, four lighting apparatuses and a green screen that's used as a backdrop for the interviews.

Getner, a former radio DJ, conducts the interview. Unlike television commercials that usually feature "phony actors" who follow a set script, Kielhorn said ETown Videos interviews chief executive officers and others who are passionate about their business. It's these unscripted comments that make up the meat of the video.

"We do several takes before someone feels comfortable and gets "in the zone,"" Kielhorn said. "What you see is from the gut. Putting that into the video has an effect. I don't know how to quantify it."

For some of these interviewees, talking in front of a camera and under the glare of lights is a daunting task. DelVecchio and MacKenzie said Getner has an interview style that put them at ease, and makes it seem like its a two-way conversation.

"They'll ask the same question two or three times to capture the perfect take," DelVecchio said. "They are the experts. It's a pretty easy process."

Kielhorn and Getner said the best responses usually come through in the last 10 minutes of filming.

Once the footage is complete, blending the individual snippets into a cohesive, condensed message begins. This postproduction process is the most time-consuming, despite the fancy editing software he owns, said Kielhorn. One hour of footage usually equals 30 to 60 sound bites that are broken down by units and reassembled. Music and color are added, as are backdrops, superimposed behind a speaker where the green screen had been located.

The entire process takes six to eight weeks to complete, assuming two to four people are interviewed. The cost varies from about \$1,000 for a single professional presentation to between \$3,500 to \$4,000 for a more complicated production that requires multiple visits and several interviews.

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