



Video SEO Playbook

White paper

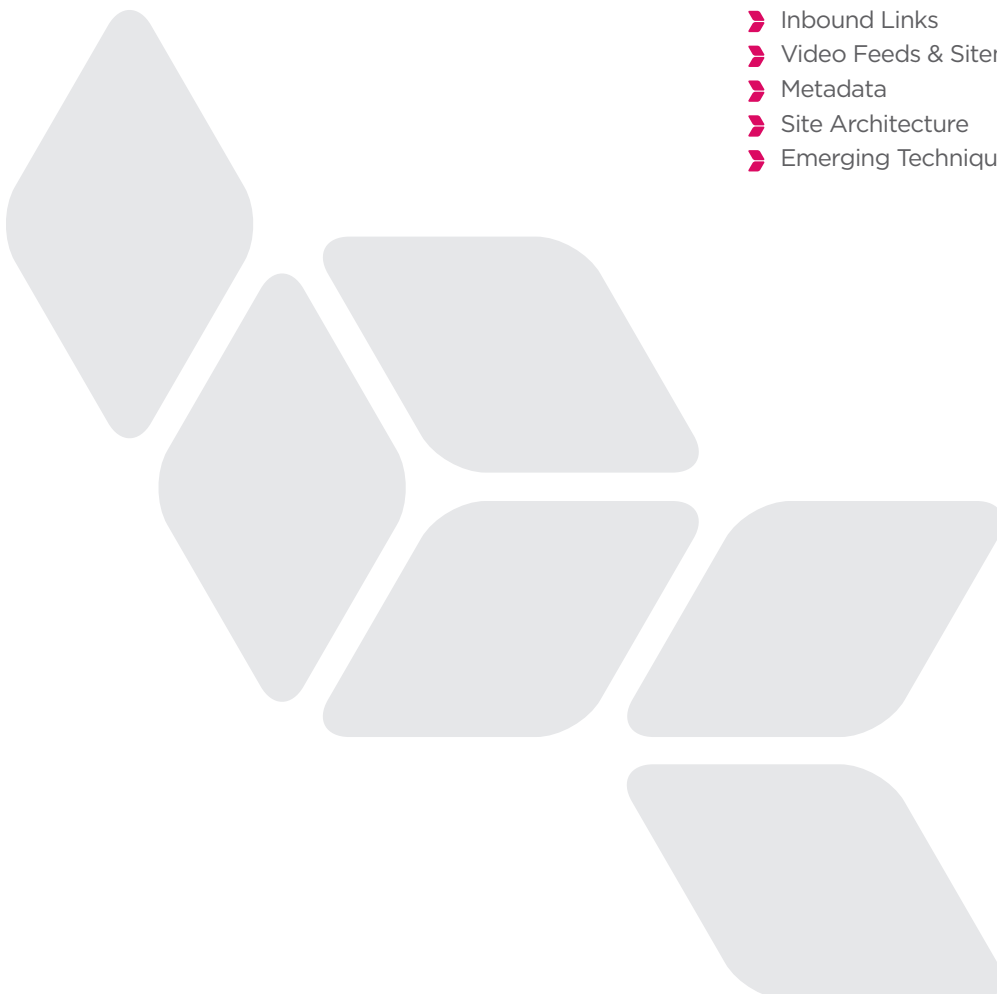
- ▶ According to comScore, the number of videos viewed online now exceeds the total number of Web search queries. With over 11 billion monthly streams in the US alone, online video is thriving. With this comes the challenge of ensuring your content rises above the crowd.¹

Introduction

Search engine optimization (SEO) has been firmly established as a critical aspect of building and operating successful Web properties. Although SEO, or the lack thereof, is directly linked to a website's traffic profile, relatively few people have fully come up to speed on the mechanics of this impact. As a result, best practices within SEO are often regarded as an elusive "black art" known only to a privileged few—especially when it comes to video. With this white paper, we hope to de-mystify the world of video search, and in doing so, provide you with a practical framework for video SEO that lets you maximize the value of your video content.

We will take you through the following topics:

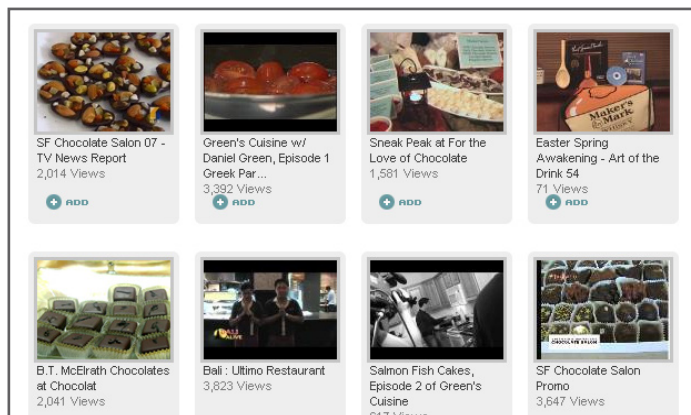
- De-mystifying Video SEO
- Contextual Publishing
- Inbound Links
- Video Feeds & Sitemaps
- Metadata
- Site Architecture
- Emerging Techniques



De-mystifying Video SEO

With the explosive growth of online video, traditional SEO has taken on a new dimension: namely, video search and discovery. While video search shares many characteristics with traditional text-based search, it also has several unique elements that make a nuanced strategy essential. For example, video search engines and text search engines use similar heuristics and metadata to determine rankings, and video sitemaps are, in essence, equivalent to text sitemaps. However, while text search engines index all the pages of your website, video search engines index only those places where video content appears—a smaller “tree” contained within your site’s overall sitemap.

While there are important differences to keep in mind between video and text content, SEO should be approached as a “whole site” or, even better, “whole brand” initiative that applies across all of the content on your website. Many search engines now even include video results alongside text search results, part of an effort to deliver universal, integrated results. With this in mind, there are several new ways to think about holistically optimizing your entire website, while at the same time more deeply integrating your video content.



Search results from Brightcove.tv

According to MarketingSherpa, SEO is gaining in popularity among marketers: 57% of those surveyed in 2007 said it outperforms other tactics, compared with 45% in 2006.²

Benchmark your success

One of the primary challenges of SEO is the lack of a clearly defined starting point; instead, where you begin with video SEO is entirely dependent on your current site’s performance and needs for improvement.

To evaluate your site’s performance, consider the following tactics:

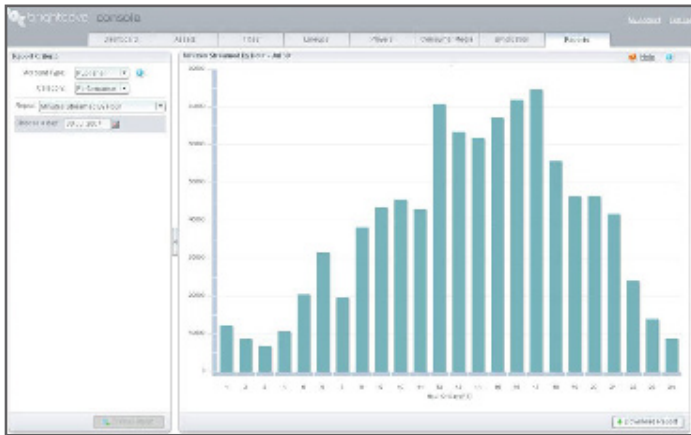
- **Check your referrer logs** - What do your logs say about how visitors arrive at your most popular video pages? What percentage of that traffic has a search engine referrer?
- **Perform sample test searches** - Search for your content on popular video search engines using keywords that you expect to return your content. How frequently does your content appear? Does each word in the search result listing convey relevance to the user and invite a click?
- **Analyze your users’ behavior** - What percentage of visitors are grabbing links to videos or sharing your content beyond your site?
- **Test your curb appeal** - Evaluate your site architecture from the perspective of visitors arriving from search results. Do your most popular landing pages encourage video viewing and make it easy to grab video links?

These are just a few ways to measure your current level of search engine optimization; we’ll cover even more later in this white paper. It’s important to recognize that your SEO actions have measurable results, which will shed further light on the most effective places to optimize.

Observe, Tune, Observe

You can think of your site traffic as a variable stream of activity that fluctuates by time of day, by popular trends, and by your own efforts to optimize the discovery of your content. Your ultimate goal should be to channel this stream, without disrupting its flow. Therefore, the best approaches to SEO are iterative and geared towards continual refinement.

Your content is dynamic, your brand and audience are evolving, and new tools for content discovery are being created all the time. Optimizing your website for video search should be an ongoing process. However, it is not advisable to completely redesign or rebuild your site purely to drive improved SEO. A short-term disruption to your audience may well offset most if not all of the traffic gains you realize with better SEO.



Performance report generated within the Brightcove Console.

Uncover New Insights

Insight into your site's SEO success can only be as good as the tools you use. Your ability to make the right choices about where to optimize is affected by the degree to which you can understand what is currently working.

Different tools are needed for different strategies. For example, you may use Web analytics on all of your website's pages, but what about your viral videos? What insight do you have into a viewer's habits when he is not viewing content directly on your site?

To gain a better understanding of your audience, try one or more of the following tactics:

- **Analyze Drop-off Rates** - If you're monetizing your video with advertising, it's important to observe drop-off rates. Losing viewers not only means fewer impressions, but also leads to a reduction in potential linking activity that could boost your rankings.
- **Observe Viewing Habits** - Watch your content's performance on other sites, whether virally distributed on a blog or profile page or syndicated through a trusted affiliate relationship. The data you get about viewer behavior can be used to improve your own site, or to make changes to your video syndication strategy to optimize your performance on affiliate sites.
- **Profile Your Audience** - You may want everyone with an Internet connection to view your video content, but drop-off rates from viewers outside your target demographics may unfairly skew your results. Defining and understanding your target audience will enhance the success of your video SEO efforts.

Employ a Project-based Approach

To maximize the impact of your video SEO initiative, it is critical to build a strong foundation by:

- Benchmarking your current performance across major search engines, as well as existing traffic patterns for target visitors who arrive at your site via search results.
- Investing in analytical tools to gain deeper insight into your SEO performance.
- Defining a concrete SEO project plan that includes crisp goals and clear metrics that will be used to track the progress towards these goals.
- Choosing specific, finite SEO improvements that have a defined beginning and end.
- Iterating on your improvements over time by defining additional projects that allow you to continue making incremental gains.

With this approach in mind, we will now explore specific improvements you can make on your site to maximize the power of video SEO.

Basic SEO Strategies & Techniques

Search engines use a variety of proprietary algorithms to rank websites and display the associated metadata on their search result pages. This ranking is primarily driven by the number and quality of inbound links, keyword density within content, and overall site architecture. Successful SEO requires you to optimize your site for those algorithms.

In this section, we'll cover the fundamental strategies and techniques you can use to kick-start video SEO initiatives.

Contextual Publishing

Creating context isn't a new phenomenon; it's a core tenet of the Web that users follow links, and websites have long optimized their performance by linking to related content from each page. Optimizing for video requires finding the right context and the right content, and knowing which tools to use to dynamically build more engaging experiences.

If video is the primary type of content on your site, you can help create context by providing a list of related videos, dynamically updated based on the video currently being played, or by organizing and displaying content in themed "playlists." If you also have text articles, photos, or audio content, you can bring all of this content into the page as well to create a true multimedia story around a particular topic.

Community and social features now play a central role in building context around specific content. The ability of consumers to comment on, rate, favorite, share, and organize content can dramatically increase the amount of the time they spend on a given website.

Comments and ratings are also a great way to encourage participation and transform visitors into contributing members of your community. Trackback URLs in comments help boost the ranking of your site by encouraging cross-linking between your site and other pages visited by your audience.

Success with contextual content strategies will be measurable, with optimized pages showing an increase in the average time spent and lower drop-off rates. If you require authentication or are otherwise tracking repeat visits, you may also see an increase in the number of users returning to the site. If you are monetizing your content through advertising, increased Time-on-Site (ToS) will result in the ability to deliver more ad impressions.

Key Takeaways:

- Put your content to work by incorporating related links, articles, blog posts, photos, audio—every type of content on your site—around your videos to build context.
- Ensure that the contextual content is dynamically driven, so it can be associated with the video currently playing.
- Incorporate community features to drive traffic and retention, encourage cross-linking, and leverage your audience for new content types.
- Prominently position "Get link," "Grab code," and "Email to a Friend" calls-to-action to encourage this behavior, which can also improve your ranking in search engines. Ensure that these links point back to pages you have optimized.

Inbound Links

Almost all of the search engines utilize the number and quality of pages on the internet that are linked to your pages (a.k.a. “inbound links”) as a way to rank search results. All else equal, pages with more inbound links enjoy a higher ranking. As a result, generating inbound links remains one of the best methods for improving your ranking in video search results. There are several techniques you can use to encourage linking and distribution of your video content.

Viral Distribution - The best way to create inbound links to your video content is to enable viral distribution. Choose titles that are highly viral in nature (short, compelling, and applicable to a broad audience) and make it very easy for your users to either grab the embed code or post to their favorite social bookmarking site. Consider adding an HTML link to the player embed code to receive full credit for any inbound links from other sites (in most cases, you will need to customize this outside of your video player).

Social Bookmarking - This is the process of tagging or sharing content or links that you find online. Users may want to share your content on sites like del.icio.us or Digg or post to their MySpace or Facebook profiles. In either case, this is a great way to build inbound links and/or distribute your video content virally across the web. Services such as Clearspring and Gigya offer quick and easy ways to get started with social bookmarking on your site.

Comments & Ratings - Not only do comments add organically to the metadata surrounding a particular video, but they can also drive spirited discussions that help to create inbound links. Encourage your users to interact with your video by adding comments and ratings. JS-Kit, Disqus, and SezWho, among others, offer tools for enabling comments and ratings on your site. Your Content Management System (CMS) may also provide built-in capability.

Video Sharing Tools - RSS feeds, video links, and “email to a friend” functionality are easy ways to drive more traffic back to the videos on your site. Surfacing the embed codes for your videos is a decision that you should consider more carefully. By providing embed code to end users, you will allow your video content to be posted anywhere on the Web.



Showtime encourages viral sharing with highly visible social bookmarking options on their video pages.

Video Feeds & Sitemaps

Don't make the mistake of waiting for the search engines to find your content. Major search engines allow you to submit your content directly via Media RSS (MRSS) feeds. MRSS feeds allow content to be described at a level of detail beyond standard RSS and include the metadata for your video and the URL to access the video.

To submit your content directly to Google, you must create a video sitemap. A derivation of the Web sitemap protocol, video sitemaps are another way to define where video appears on your site. This is the only method to submit your content directly to Google given that MRSS is not currently supported.

We encourage you to submit your video content directly to search engines as the best means of ensuring that your content appears in relevant search results.

Metadata

Metadata represents the defining characteristics of your content. In its simplest form, it is data that describes other data. For video content, key metadata includes everything from the video name and description to relevant tags and duration. For your website, metadata can include title, H1 tag, meta description, and meta keyword tags in the underlying code of your Web pages.

Website Metadata Optimization

Let's start with simple ways to improve your title, H1 tag, meta description, and meta keyword tags. Although the latter two are becoming less important, it is still a best practice to optimize all of these elements on your site; although easily overlooked when adding video to your site, they remain critical to search engines. We will explore best practices for site architecture in a subsequent section of this white paper. For now, regardless of your current site architecture and video player format, here are a few guidelines that are widely applicable to video optimization:

H1 Tags - A title describing your video(s) with relevant keywords should be included in an H1 tag on the page. These headings help search engines to categorize the content on that page and indicate its level of importance. You can use H2 and H3 tags for other sub-section titles on the page.

Meta Description Tag - This tag is typically 2-3 sentences long and is different for every page. Include keywords describing any video content on the page. This is where it becomes very important to group related titles together to help boost the overall strength of a page.

Meta Keyword Tags - Determine the 3-5 words that best describe the content on a particular page. Focus in on a key topic or category on each of your video pages.

Beliefnet uses many SEO best practices including contextual publishing, html metadata, and ratings throughout their site.

Video Metadata Optimization

The metadata that you create for each of your video titles is the only visible information about your content that is available to search engine spiders on your site. Here are a few tips to make the most of your video metadata:

The Basics - Your video name, description, and tags should be surfaced in HTML outside of the player when possible. You should also make sure that this metadata is located in close proximity to the actual video on your page. Keep in mind that search engines have rules that content must be human-readable to be indexed.

Video Name - The naming convention of your video titles should clearly express the subject matter and its unique characteristics. For instance, you would not want to name a video of a squirrel on water skis "Waterskiing at Lake Tahoe"; you would be missing the most identifiable aspect of that video.

Video Description - This is your chance to describe the contents of the video. Be thorough and rich with your use of relevant keywords.

Video Tags - Use as many tags as possible but ensure they are actually describing your video. You can display these near your video title and description or graphically in a tag cloud. Although not a widely proven SEO technique, tag clouds are a unique way of displaying relevant keywords and helping your users navigate your site.

Anchor Text - Links on your site that drive users to your videos should have descriptive anchor text. Try to steer clear of non-descriptive anchor text such as "Watch Now" and instead opt for "Watch the Waterskiing Squirrel Video!"

Harness your Metadata

The metadata associated with a video is potentially the most important aspect of your SEO strategy. As discussed previously, metadata uniquely identifies the content of the video (and page) to search engines.

Video metadata, however, is often trapped inside back-end systems, Flash-based player interfaces, or in the video itself, rather than being surfaced properly on the site. Unless content actually resides on the website, outside of Flash or JavaScript, it is not exposed to search engine spiders/crawlers, and therefore does not help your ranking. Getting metadata onto the generated page (i.e. not using Flash or JavaScript) will improve your ability to drive organic traffic to your content.

Why Outside of Flash and JavaScript?

Search engine crawlers cannot execute dynamic code. If content isn't displayed in pure HTML form on the page delivered by the server, it will not be made available to the search engine crawlers. To get metadata onto the page dynamically, use server-side code.

Therefore, optimizing for video metadata becomes very much like optimizing for text—and requires many of the same tools you may already be using on your website, such as a Content Management System (CMS).

Improving the quality of your pages by adding more metadata will significantly boost your rankings, though it may not be immediately obvious. To more accurately measure the benefits, implement a metadata project separately from other video SEO projects.

Key Takeaways:

- ▶ Leverage server-side APIs to query your video metadata and place it in the page in the main tags like <meta>, <title>, and <h1>.
- ▶ Incorporate metadata for related videos and content.
- ▶ Consider building video navigation, “now playing” information, and any other data-driven portion of your UI in server-generated HTML rather than Flash.

Advanced SEO Strategies & Techniques

This section explores more sophisticated projects that can deliver additional value beyond the tactics discussed so far.

Site Architecture

One of the most significant SEO investments you can make is to modify your underlying site architecture, though it comes with risks. Unless you are creating a new site, rearranging content and site structure will, in the short-term, refresh your rankings as search engines try to re-create their picture of your site and its content. Fortunately, there are a number of ways to redesign the layout of existing pages to realize many of the same benefits as a site re-organization, without a complete site overhaul.

In which of the following ways do you find online videos?³

Discover online videos randomly while on the Web

44%

Go to certain Web sites specifically to watch videos

43%

Click links in emails from friends/family

43%

Use search engines to find online videos

39%

Click links in emails I've registered for

27%

Via RSS video feeds

4%

Make it easy for people—and search engine crawlers—to find the videos on your site. Each video should have its own unique URL, which becomes the focal point of your SEO efforts. In other words, though a video may be viewable on multiple pages of your site, the URL visitors grab when requesting a link or emailing to a friend should point back to just one location. This helps provide added focus on the subject matter of that particular page and improve your ranking.

For similar reasons, popup players are not an ideal way to present your video. By taking visitors out of the context of the website, popups make them more likely to close the player window and drop off when the video ends, rather than becoming engaged with contextual content. If you are using popup windows for video players, migrating to embedded players will improve your rankings.

Options for Existing Sites

If you are not developing a new Web property, there are still many options to improve the architecture of an existing site. For instance, altering your site navigation to imply a new video-centric structure allows you to keep the same URL structure and sitemap while adding a new “thread” of navigation to the site. To achieve this, you can place links to video on your site’s homepage that take visitors to video-centric pages (think dotted lines in your sitemap). These can be existing or new pages that employ some of the contextual content techniques discussed earlier and bring in additional site content to support the video.

By directing incoming video links to new or revamped video-centric pages, you can create an entirely new destination for video on your site. Combining this with fundamental changes to the ways content is linked on your site will have a very positive effect on your video SEO.

Architectural changes can have the biggest impact on your traffic, but can also risk losing your existing audience. Keep an eye on your rankings for top keywords and visitor traffic to ensure that your changes are improving your standing, not undermining it.

Key Takeaways:

- Focus your SEO efforts on a unique URL for each video. This will help drive traffic and overall ranking.
- Create navigational paths specifically for video, starting at the home page. This will draw in potential viewers and make it easier for crawlers to find content.
- Create new pages (or enhance existing ones) to be video destinations—for example, one main video page for your whole site, or a few pages that are specific to categories, shows, or topics. These pages can also drive rankings because they aggregate metadata from numerous different videos within that section.
- Keep changes small and gradual if you have an existing site. Disruptive changes, such as changing the title of a page, can cause your rankings to disappear.

Emerging Techniques

As video continues to proliferate online, there are new and innovative features cropping up that help to improve video SEO. Here are a few being used by cutting edge publishers and the unique benefits that they offer.

Voice Recognition & Transcribing - Companies such as Everyzing use voice recognition to build a transcript of your video and make that text searchable on your site. Users can then do a search and click through to specific points in a video where that search term is mentioned. This is one of the most advanced SEO tactics that you can employ, as it truly opens your video and makes it fully digestible to search engine crawlers.

In-Video Commenting - Allowing users to add comments or tags to specific points in a video, then surfacing that commentary in an organized way on the page, is an interesting way to increase user interaction with a video and the organic creation of metadata.

Chaptering with Cue Points - Leading Internet TV platforms provide out-of-the-box functionality that allows you to segment a particular video into chapters or sections and link directly to these points. This is a great way to create sub-headings for the subject matter in your video and additional data for search engines.



CONCEPTS IN THIS VIDEO
[General Motors](#) | [global warming](#) | [climate change](#) | [Wall Street](#)

INSIDE THE VIDEO (3)

[global warming](#) -- clearly a lot of discussion about and people's -- talking at least about the willingness to pay more you made headlines recently when you -- you called [global warming](#) a crock of the word that I can't compete on TV. And and I guess what I wonder is. Why did"...

▶ "... for. Doing what we're doing and whether it be your concern over [climate change](#) or whether it's the desired to get ourselves independent

MarketWatch provides full transcripts of video content within their site that allows users to jump to a specific reference or topic within a video.

Conclusion

Chances are that you are already employing one or more of the various video SEO methods discussed in this white paper. At this point, the best way to proceed is to take inventory of your existing SEO efforts, with time set aside for thorough analysis. Understanding your current situation, as well as who your users actually are and what they value, will help you create achievable goals and milestones. Take a project-based approach where incremental changes can be made to your site and results can be closely monitored. Online video continues to grow at a blistering pace, and you can rest assured that your focus on optimizing performance now will serve you well in the months to come.

To learn more about Brightcove and how we can help you implement your online video strategy, visit our website at www.brightcove.com or contact our sales team directly at (617) 500-4947.

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