Lesson: Search and discovery on YouTube

We know you put a ton of time and energy into making videos and it's important for you to understand how they get discovered. The goals of YouTube's search and discovery system are twofold: help viewers find the videos they want to watch, and maximize long-term viewer engagement and satisfaction. Get a better understanding of how the system works, where your content is surfaced, and what you can do to give your videos the best chance for success.

- The algorithm follows the audience

Introduction

YouTube tries to match each viewer to the videos they are most likely to watch and enjoy. With over 400 hours of video uploaded every minute, that can be a challenge. YouTube's recommendations systems provide a real-time feedback loop to cater to each viewer and their varying interests. Our goal is to get people to watch more videos that they enjoy so that they come back to YouTube regularly.

Creators often ask, “What kind of videos does the algorithm like most?” Our systems have no opinion about what type of video you make, and doesn't favor any particular format. Rather, they try their best to follow the audience by paying attention to things like:
• what they watch
• what they don’t watch
• how much time they spend watching
• likes and dislikes
• ‘not interested’ feedback

Instead of worrying about what the algorithm ‘likes’, it’s better to focus on what your audience likes. If you do that and people watch, the algorithm will follow. So, which videos do they enjoy most? How often do they like to watch your channel? Check your YouTube Analytics to answer these questions.

Fluctuations and seasonality
Over time, it’s natural for the performance of your channel to fluctuate. Today’s audiences have a lot of options. They may love you one week and not so much the next week -- or maybe they’re on vacation and not even watching next week. Expect fluctuations and seasonality, and try not to jump to conclusions based on one or two uploads. Take a higher level view of your overall channel performance.

Experimentation
Creators also wonder “What if I want to try something new on my channel?” Experimenting is super important for creative people, and when starting a channel, you should feel free to try all sorts of videos until something works. After that, if you’d like to try something new, listen to audience feedback.

If you have been doing the same thing for a long time and it isn’t driving as much engagement as it used to, this could signal it’s time to try out something new. Even the best video formats have a finite shelf life, and experimentation can help you identify the next wave to maintain or grow your engagement.
Like Google's search engine, search on YouTube strives to surface the most relevant results according to keyword queries. Videos are ranked based on a variety of factors including how well the title, description, and video content match the viewer's query. Beyond that, we look at which videos have driven the most engagement for a query. Search results are not a list of the most-viewed videos for a given query.

Tips:

- See what words people use to find your channel in the YouTube Analytics Traffic Sources report by clicking in the 'YouTube Search' box. Consider incorporating the most relevant search terms for each of your new videos. You can add them as titles and descriptions -- as long as they're accurate (and not excessive).

- Write robust descriptions up to 1-2 paragraphs long, if relevant.

- Consider implementing YouTube's Translation tools to reach an international audience.

- Brainstorm new video ideas by looking at search results for popular and less competitive queries. Identify opportunities to serve an audience that isn't already well-served.

- Remember to check the 'trending' tab for topics that appeal to you or may be specific to your niche.

See it in action
How YouTube Search works

○ Suggested Videos
Suggested Videos are a personalized collection of videos that an individual viewer may be interested in watching next, based on prior activity. Studies of YouTube consumption have shown that viewers tend to watch a lot more when they get recommendations from a variety of channels, and suggested videos do just that. Suggested Videos are ranked to maximize engagement for the viewer. Signals that contribute to these recommendations include:

- Videos that viewers watch along with the current video, or videos that are topically related. They could be videos from the same channel, or from a different channel.
- Videos from a viewer's past watch history. Learn more about YouTube watch history.

Suggested Videos are shown to viewers on the right side of the watch page under ‘Up next’, below the video on the mobile app, and as the next video in autoplay.

You can see which videos bring viewers to your channel from Suggested Videos in the Traffic sources report by clicking on the ‘Suggested videos’ box. You can also compare Traffic Sources.

Tips:

- Make strong calls-to-action for viewers to watch another one of your videos.
- Long endings may delay viewers from watching more, so try to be mindful of how your videos end.
- Use playlists, links, cards, and end screens to suggest the next video.
- Develop a series of videos that are organically connected.
- Make videos related to popular formats on YouTube such as challenges or lists.
How YouTube's Suggested Videos Work
Home is what viewers see first when they open the YouTube app or visit YouTube.com. It’s the one-stop destination for YouTube, a place where we aim to deliver the most relevant, personalized recommendations to each viewer. It’s also a great place for your videos to be found by non-subscribers. Over 200 million different videos appear on Home each day for viewers around the world.

When a viewer visits home, YouTube displays videos from their subscriptions, videos watched by similar viewers, new videos, and more. The selection of videos is based on:

- **Performance** -- How well the video has engaged and satisfied similar viewers, among other factors.
- **The viewer’s watch and search history** -- how often the viewer watches a channel or topic and how many times we’ve already shown each video to the viewer.

Note: subscribers watch more from their subscriptions via Home than through the Subscriptions tab.

**Tips**

- **Upload on a consistent basis** to give your audience an expectation of when they can see your videos.
- **Keep viewers engaged** for longer and encourage them to come back for more. Whether it’s with a long video, or several short ones, the longer you keep people watching, the more your content may get surfaced.
- **Keep doing what works.** When you create something that’s working for your audience, keep at it. We surface more of what your viewers like. Don’t be afraid to experiment but do so mindfully. Observe feedback from your audience and give them time to adjust.
- **See how often your channel appears on home, globally,** by going to your YouTube Analytics Traffic Sources report and then clicking the ‘Browse features’ box. View the stats under ‘Home’.
- **Avoid making content that violates YouTube policies:** ensure you title videos accurately, use appropriate and non-spammy tags, and avoid misleading thumbnails.
How YouTube's Home Screen Works

Trending
The Trending feed is a single list of what videos are new and popular on YouTube in a viewer's country. Some trends are predictable, like a new song from a popular artist, or a new movie trailer, while others are completely surprising. Therefore, we aim to combine popularity with novelty. This list considers view count (especially the rate of growth in views), where views are coming from, and many other signals. Therefore, the video with the highest daily view count may not necessarily be #1 on Trending.

Trending also includes Creator On the Rise and Artist On The Rise, where each week, up-and-coming creators and artists will be featured for a full day. Learn more in our blog post.

Tips:

- Consider making broadly appealing, shareable videos. These could help you to reach new fans who might not yet know your channel.

- Keep up your channel’s momentum. Creators and Artists are eligible for On The Rise based on subscriber level, as well as metrics such as videos uploaded, growth in views, and growth in subscribers.

- See how often your videos appear on the trending tab by looking at YouTube Analytics Traffic sources report, clicking the ‘Browse features’ link, and looking at the data for ‘Trending’.
How YouTube's Trending Tab Works

- Subscribers and the Subscriptions tab
Subscribers are viewers who have opted in to see more of your videos, and they watch them from all areas of the site. They're your core audience and biggest fans, who often provide important initial signals about new videos you release.

The Subscriptions tab is an area of the site that shows a collection of videos from channels a viewer is subscribed to. This feed includes highlighted videos, and a list of all the most recent uploads.

As a reminder, subscribers also see some Subscription content on Home and in Suggested Videos.

Tips:

- Ask viewers to subscribe in a genuine way, explaining both the benefits and how it supports you.

- Ask them to subscribe in your videos when viewer sentiment is at its highest (such as after a big laugh or a scene's climax).

- Educate viewers on where they will see your channel's videos once subscribed.

- Make videos public when you think your viewers are most likely watching.

- Understand it's common to have more subscribers than views.

- Make a repeatable show out of your ideas.

- Remember that it's normal for uploading to be met with unsubscribes.

- See how many people subscribe to your channel by clicking into the Subscribers report in YouTube Analytics. It can be helpful to compare your watch time from subscribers with watch time from other traffic sources.
How YouTube Subscribers & the Subscriptions Tab Work

Notifications

Notifications are alerts sent when a new video is made public. They can be sent via mobile push alerts or emails. These tend to kickstart early traffic to your new uploads, but don't necessarily drive the bulk of traffic.

By default, YouTube only sends occasional notifications from channels you watch a lot, or those you’re subscribed to. If subscribers want to receive notifications every time you make a new video public, they can tap the bell icon next to the ‘Subscribed’ button. Learn more.

In order to maintain a healthy ecosystem on YouTube, we offer viewers choice in frequency of notifications they receive.

- = Do not receive any notifications from this channel.

= Receive notifications for some uploads and live streams.
= Receive all notifications.

When viewers receive too many notifications, they often unsubscribe from notifications altogether. Therefore, notifications are limited to 3 per upload/live stream per channel in a 24-hour window.

Tips:

- The best way to understand how notifications work is by subscribing and ringing the bell on other channels.
- Thank your dedicated group of fans who have tapped the bell.
- Make videos public when you think most of your viewers are awake and ready to watch.
- See how much watch time is generated when your channel appears in notifications, globally, by viewing your YouTube Analytics Traffic Sources report.
- If you think you should be getting notifications but aren’t, make sure on your mobile device settings that notifications are turned on.
Restricted Mode

Restricted Mode is designed to be an optional feature that helps filter out more mature content from view, so that institutions like schools and libraries, as well as people who prefer a more limited experience, would feel comfortable offering access to YouTube. Viewers must manually turn Restricted Mode on.

You can see if your videos are viewable in Restricted Mode by turning Restricted Mode on and going directly to your video's URL. You can send us feedback if you think your video should be viewable in Restricted Mode. Restricted Mode does not affect whether your videos are eligible for monetization.

Your video may not be seen in Restricted Mode if it contains potentially mature topics such as violence, drugs, sex, etc. Learn more.

We strive to give everyone a voice, and we value stories where individuals discuss their personal experiences and share their emotions. Sharing stories about facing discrimination, opening up about your sexuality, and confronting and overcoming discrimination is what makes YouTube great, and we will work to ensure those stories are included in Restricted Mode. But just a reminder, to be included, your content must follow the guidelines above! For more details about Restricted Mode, check out this Help Center article.

Try it

Look at your more popular videos. Write down 3 characteristics of these videos that work for your audience.

Check your knowledge

Why is it important to add appropriate metadata and not attempt to “game” YouTube’s search and discovery systems?
Your channel’s reputation could be damaged if you add incorrect metadata.

Watch time may not increase if you use inappropriate metadata.

Your channel could get flagged if you use misleading metadata.

All of the above.

Sign in first if you want to save your results.