

YouTube optimisation best practice guide

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1. Ranking factors: How to optimise YouTube for search

When optimising videos there are two things to think about, ranking in search engine results pages like Google, and ranking within YouTube to users who search directly within the platform. Both are important and the considerations are slightly different for each.

Through a number of client case studies, research and industry expertise, iCrossing has identified the below as ranking factors for videos appearing in both Google and YouTube search results:

Channel Strength

- Trust: Age of channel, total channel views, interaction on channel
- Subscribers
- Subscribes after viewing
- Channel keywords: Title, description, playlists

Keyword relevance (videos)

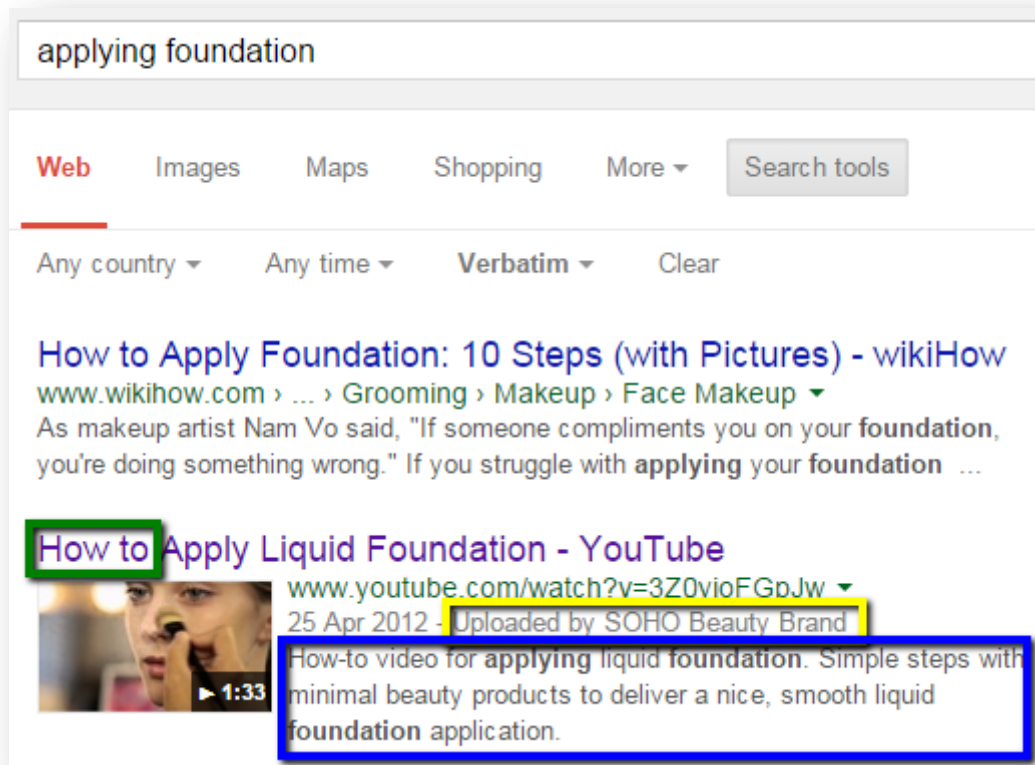
- Title
- Description
- Annotations
- Transcription

Number of views & reactions

- Views
- Favourites
- Likes
- Like/dislike ratio
- Comments

In general, Google embeds videos in the search engine results pages for certain types of keywords:

- How to queries ("how to fly a kite")
- Reviews ("MAC eyeliner review")
- Tutorials ("how to airbrush in Photoshop")
- Funny videos ("funny cats and animals")



Notice that the search query does not contain "How to" or a brand name. Yet Google has ranked this video highly on the search results page. We can see a number of keywords in the description too such as 'foundation', 'simple', 'minimal', 'beauty products' & 'how-to'.

2. Channel title & description

Similar to content optimisation for regular web pages, this is one of the most important elements.

- Think of your video title as a headline
- Try to keep each title less than 60 characters
- At least 5 words long, giving yourself room to add a keyword, brand and function of the content; Guide, tips, how to & reviews

For search engines

Since the HTML page title is one of the most important on-page factors for a search engine, it's important that this contains the relevant core term/brand name where possible. It also appears as the link within a search engine results page and therefore a descriptive title also helps to generate a higher click-through-rate.

If you create a brand channel, the YouTube Channel's title should be a balance between the relevant core search terms and the main marketing message for the campaign. This content helps search engines to decide which terms the channel should be visible for within the search engine results pages.

YouTube search

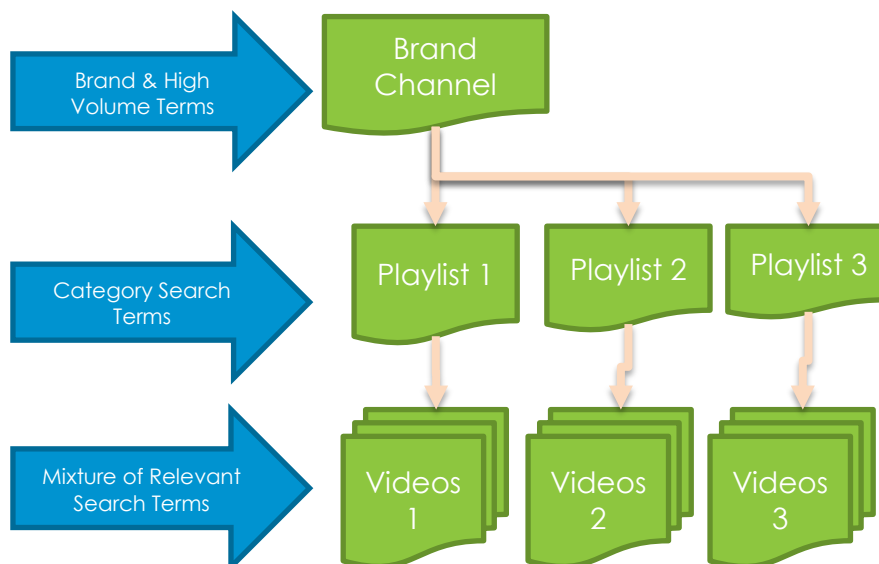
The channel title is also used in YouTube's own internal search engine results page, and therefore should contain copy that encourages click through from potential visitors. In almost all cases it should also include the brand name.

For brands, there are a number of extra features only available by purchasing a premium brand channel. Features include channel banners (and a branding box with space for brand creative and descriptions) and certain page factors that will improve visibility in the internal search engine (i.e. channel ranking highly for brand queries and displaying customised description details). An example of this is the official YouTube channel for Rolex, which can be seen [here](#).

3. Channel structure

For search engines

It is good to think of your channel as a website of its own. Similar principles apply when organising your video content. The diagram below shows how search terms could be assigned across your channel using playlists.



Examples of this for iCrossing could be:

Channel – iCrossing

Playlist – Digital marketing case studies

Videos – Milestone moments with Visit Wales, Orla Kiely for UNIQLO etc.

Channel – iCrossing

Playlist – SEO tutorials

Videos – Optimising for YouTube, SEO tips for SME's etc.

For YouTube:

Playlists often feature highly in YouTube's internal search results. Therefore it's important to make sure they are fully optimised.

Typically playlists are used to group together related videos; therefore they're ideal for covering category type search terms. For example if a channel were to centre on financial products, it would be best to create a playlist, and optimise it for each product i.e. credit card, home insurance etc.

4. Individual videos

In order to make sure videos can be found in both YouTube and other external search engines it is important to make sure that videos include a relevant title, description and tags, as well as being categorised correctly.

Search engines and YouTube

Title: Video titles should be descriptive and take into account the relevant search terms. They should be written to encourage potential visitors to click through to the site.

It is a good idea to do some keyword research, prior to naming your video - just to see if the keywords or phrases you are about to use in the video title have any interest in Google search, and which terms should be used based on their popularity. Since the YouTube native keyword tool was disabled back in 2014, the Google keyword tool remains one of the few sources which may help to give you a rough estimate of how many searches (not views!) you'll get on YouTube.

Similar to SEO for regular web pages, this is one of the most important elements.

Description: YouTube & Google can't watch or listen to your video. So having a well optimised and written description is very important in allowing these algorithms to understand what your video is about.

- YouTube allows 5,000 characters in the description, so don't be timid. Give a thorough description with supporting information.
- Your description helps your video rank for long tail keywords
- Proving links back to your YouTube channel page, as well as encouraging viewers to like the video and leave a comment (if applicable to your content) is also recommended.
- Use your keywords naturally and be careful not to "keyword stuff"

Tags are your opportunity to tell YouTube which keywords and phrases you think are relevant to the video. Therefore it's best practice to include the search terms with the highest volume (including brand terms).

Whilst you can include a large number of tags, it's important to only use the ones which are relevant, including a large number of irrelevant tags is likely to result in reduced engagement with your video and lower performance ratings.

This is also relevant in regards to the video title. When deciding on tags it is key to think about what terms people will use when looking for your video. If it is a television advert that you are uploading be sure to include "TV ad" and variations of this, combined with your brand name.

YouTube only

Thumbnails are very important and have a direct impact on clicks. Since YouTube traffic comes not only as a result of ranking well, but also relies on users browsing and clicking related content (a video strip on the right, or the videos displayed in the video player window, once the playback has been finished) – it's important to have an engaging custom thumbnail to attract as many clicks as possible.

It's a good idea for a thumbnail image to also contain some text or a message which complements the title of the video but is not used as a page title. This is applicable when the call to action phrase doesn't have any search volume but is simply there to 'engage', in other words increase the chances of users clicking through to the relevant videos.

Category: Categorising your video correctly helps potential visitors to find the video easily through YouTube's internal search, related videos and the category browser within YouTube.

Search engine only

Transcripts: YouTube has the ability to add transcript information and captions. This text can be crawled and indexed by search engines which will further increase the chance of ranking for related search terms. You can manually submit this or create one using Google's app at captiontube.appspot.com

It is best practice to add a transcript of your video wherever possible, or even better to add a few paragraphs which complement the content described in the video, rather than just copying the actual transcript.

Cards vs annotations

As of March 2015, YouTube introduced a new feature which allows you to make your videos even more interactive by using YouTube cards. YouTube cards work in a similar way to annotations and allow you to link to other videos, merchandise, playlists, websites etc. While the annotations were only visible on desktop devices, cards are now visible when watching the video on mobile and work across screens. This new feature is especially useful considering the fact that the number of views from mobile and tablet devices now exceeds the number of views coming from desktop. More information can be found in this post on [YouTube Partners & Creators blog](#).

5. Other ranking factors to consider

The factors responsible for ranking a video on YouTube and ranking the same video in Google search results are different but there is a little bit of cross-over between the two.

Backlinks and video embeds are important to search engines the same as with other content types but not important for YouTube search. Further ranking factors to consider for YouTube:

- Video ratings
- Number of comments
- Audience retention (% of users watching the video by duration, if users drop off quickly – the video is not likely to rank well; YouTube analytics provides this information)
- Using relevant playlists
- Shares on Google+, Facebook, Twitter etc.
- Frequency of uploaded content: a similar one off video is not likely to outrank a video from someone who uploads regularly

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