



# A Survey of A/E/C Video Marketing

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What does video marketing look like in the visually-oriented A/E/C industries? Marketing at large has been trending toward the widespread use of video for a while. *Forbes* even called 2017 “The Year of Video Marketing,”<sup>1</sup> but when I recently attempted to answer the A/E/C video question, I was surprised at the lack of quantitative information available.

The only information specific to A/E/C I could find boiled down to “A/E/C marketers *should* include video in their content marketing,” which was not what I was hoping to find. There was little-to-no information about its actual prevalence or what kind of quality, length, content, or hosting practices that were commonly used.

Since explicit answers were unavailable, I decided to review 2,288 videos from 50 of America’s top firms<sup>2</sup> to create the following picture of the A/E/C video marketing landscape.

## Prevalence: Is my firm behind with our content marketing if we are not doing video?

Yes. The A/E/C firms surveyed were on a spectrum: Some had more than 200 videos, while others had none. However, since 84 percent of firms had *some* video content, those with none were squarely in the minority.

## Quality: Is there a standard?

We all know that the way you tell a story is almost as important as the story itself, and

we all want to put our best foot forward. But professional video production can be prohibitively expensive for smaller firms. Thankfully for the cost-conscious, not everyone is publishing perfect, professional videos. Rather, 70 percent were either candid (home video-style) or semi-professional quality videos.

If you need examples of semi-professional video, think of student films: better than your typical home movies, but not quite as polished as professional products. This means, with some online tips<sup>3</sup> and a little bit of training, an A/E/C firm could theoretically conduct video production in-house while keeping up with competitors.

## Length and hosting practices: What is most common?

Producing video doesn’t mean you should tank your SEO by bogging down your site with hour-long movies<sup>4,5</sup>. The vast majority, 77 percent, of videos were 30 seconds to five minutes long. While 30 percent of firms hosted videos on their own sites, 70 percent hosted on a third-party site like YouTube.

## Content: What are A/E/C firms filming?

The videos I surveyed were divided into four main content categories:

- Project spotlights (40 percent)
- Company culture (34 percent)
- Firm expertise (26 percent)
- Firm-related news stories (1 percent)

While the first and last categories are relatively self-explanatory, since both explicitly show off the firm’s achievements, the two others are worth diving into a bit.

**Company culture videos.** These videos focused on the human side of the firm, i.e., what working with that company and its members was like. These were typically candid videos of employees participating in charity events or A/E/C competitions like CANstruction, or personal interviews focusing on individual employees.

While more technical-minded readers might question the logic of humanizing a firm using videos with a more personal, relaxed tone, veterans of the A/E/C industries know that relationships are a non-trivial factor in winning bids or forming bid-winning teams. If your firm and a competitor are equally qualified for a job, an emotional connection<sup>6</sup> formed during the client’s research phase could tip the balance in your firm’s favor, even if the client never personally interacted with your firm before.

However, even though they were the second most common, company culture videos should be considered secondary to a firm’s skills and aggregate knowledge. Clients and potential partners want the best possible firm for their needs first and foremost, which brings us to firm expertise.

**Firm expertise videos.** These videos, called “thought leadership” in the general marketing sphere<sup>7</sup>, typically involved a member of the firm explaining the

complexities of an area of practice or presenting at an industry gathering. In both cases, members of the firm demonstrated their expertise without tying it exclusively to any one project.

Since potential clients are typically more interested in the firm's knowledge over "having their thoughts lead" on a given subject, "firm expertise" strikes me as a more accurate name for what is possibly the most important A/E/C video category. Of course, project spotlights are real-life examples of the firm's expertise, but divorcing the knowledge from a single, specific project makes it easier for potential clients/partners to apply it to their own cases.

These videos elevate the firm's perceived value by framing it as an expert among experts<sup>7</sup>. They show that the firm is willing and able to share its expertise in a way that audiences can understand and respect, a critical element in overall marketing. After all, from selection committees to individuals to fellow firms, everyone wants to work with people who not only know what they're doing, but also know how to communicate effectively.

## Going Forward

Now that we all know where we are, we can map out a path to where we should be, and where we should be going. A/E/C videos are meant to make the viewer want to work with your firm by reflecting its skills, expertise, and personalities. So, get your leaders and high-performing employees talking concisely about an area of practice they're excited about, point a camera at them, and get yourself familiar with some editing software. Otherwise, you will miss out on the great opportunities video presents for your firm, its members, and yourself.

Happy filming! ■



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