



The New TV Show Development Path: RocketJump's *Video Game High School*

Goals

- Launch *Video Game High School*, a crowd-funded, long-form video series on YouTube

Approach

- Built an audience by producing video game-themed videos
- Honed production skills by incorporating jaw-dropping special effects into every upload
- Gained the trust of—and collaborate with—Hollywood and brands
- Raised a combined \$1.9 million from fans for the production of *Video Game High School*

Results

- More than 110M views for the three-season run of *Video Game High School*
- 400% increase in week-over-week viewership for the previous seasons

The brainchild of Freddie Wong, Dez Dolly, and Matt Arnold, *Video Game High School* (VGHS) was not an overnight success story. An original series released on the YouTube channel RocketJump, VGHS was supported by crowdfunding campaigns, brands, and Collective Digital Studio (CDS), which produced and helped fund the series. The culmination of years of hard work and production practice, VGHS' massive success is due to fan support and the creative team's unique visual style.

Having just finished its third and final season, VGHS has paved a new path to success by showing that an original, scripted, long-form show could be a massive hit on YouTube.

The early years: Live action video games

Uploaded in 2010, a short film about a real-life portal gun provided RocketJump with the template that it would use to thrive. Melding live-action video effects with video game style, [Real Life Portal Gun](#) represented a leap forward for the channel and foreshadowed VGHS's success.

By creating video effects that emulated certain video games, RocketJump also piggybacked off of these games' popularity. For instance, *Real Life Portal Gun* viewership closely tracked the search volume for "portal gun" on Google and YouTube search.

Real Life Portal Gun Views / Portal Gun Search Popularity



Source: Google Trends and Google/YouTube internal data February 2010–December 2014.

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"You have a really devoted audience; you do really innovative stuff and it's a lot of fun. [...] Thank you for having me. I can't wait to be part of it."

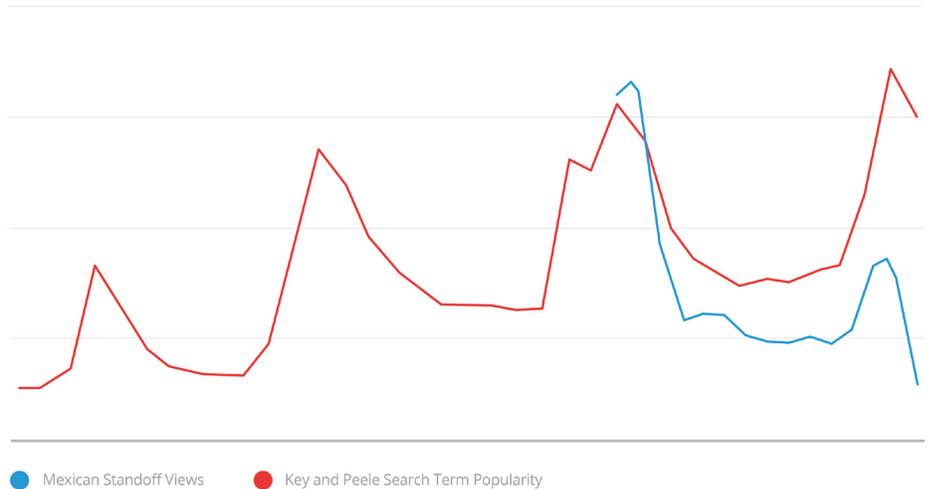
— Jon Favreau, Actor

Working with Hollywood, YouTube-style

RocketJump's ability to make videos that felt like live-action video games drew interest from brands and celebrities alike. Two notable examples of Hollywood collaborations include the channel's *Cowboys & Aliens* spoof (with a cameo from director and actor Jon Favreau) and [Mexican Standoff](#), featuring comedy duo Key & Peele.

In *Mexican Standoff*, both Key & Peele and RocketJump benefited from the collaboration. Key & Peele received promotion in November 2011 before their launch on Comedy Central in January 2012, and RocketJump got new bumps in viewership with future Key & Peele promotions.

Mexican Standoff Views / Key and Peele Search Term Popularity



Source: Google Trends and Google/YouTube internal data December 2011–December 2014.

It wasn't just RocketJump's audience that Hollywood wanted; it was the channel's unique visual and comedic style, too. Favreau says as much in the [Cowboys & Aliens behind-the-scenes video](#). "You have a really devoted audience; you do really innovative stuff and it's a lot of fun. [...] Thank you for having me. I can't wait to be part of it."



Source: Wong and Favreau in *Cowboys & FreddieW* (ft. Jon Favreau).

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Industry expert

Wong's credibility as a YouTube expert is largely due to his expert use of YouTube's tools to build a loyal fan base. A great example of RocketJump's audience development strategy occurs at the end of [Real Life Mario Kart!](#) The clickable end card is not just a simple promotional tool; it also enhances the video's creativity.

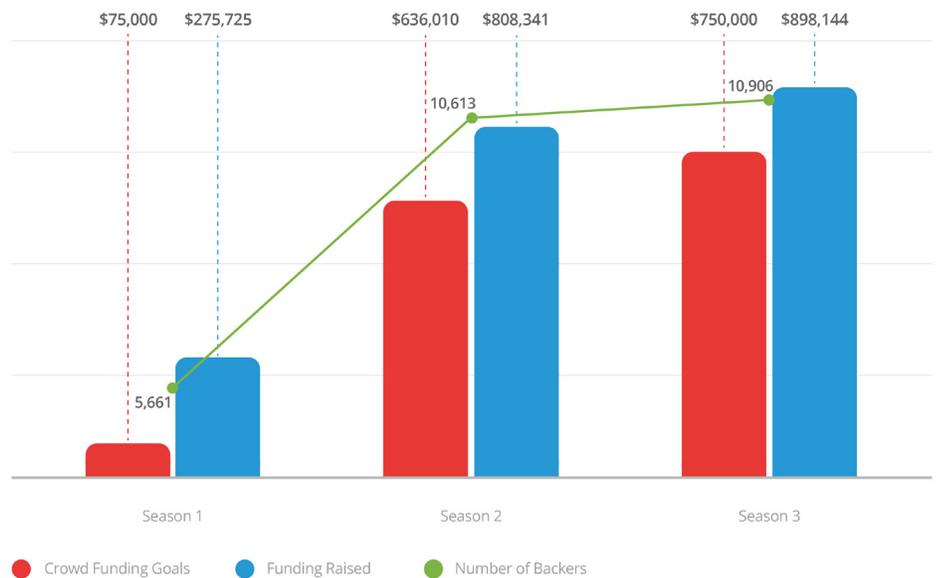
This video's end card has a click-through rate 10X that of the average YouTube annotation. Pioneered by channels such as RocketJump, this strategy is now standard practice on YouTube, with everyone from [The Tonight Show](#) to [American Express](#) employing this audience-building tactic.

VGHS: A new chapter for RocketJump and the power of fanship

After honing its production chops, finding its creative voice, and building a rapport with Hollywood stars, it was time for RocketJump to combine these ingredients into its signature show, VGHS.

RocketJump's fanbase wanted VGHS to air, and their willingness to back the project is one of the main factors for its success. Across three seasons, VGHS raised nearly \$2 million from over 25,000 backers.

VGHS Crows Funding Goals, Funding Raised, and Number of Backers



Source: Kickstarter and Indiegogo public campaign reporting.

Due to ambitious production elements, crowdfunding alone couldn't cover the cost of each season. To buttress RocketJump's fan funding, each season of VGHS had some mix of media (Collective Digital Studio and/or YouTube) and brand (Monster Beverage Corporation or Dodge Dart) support, as well.

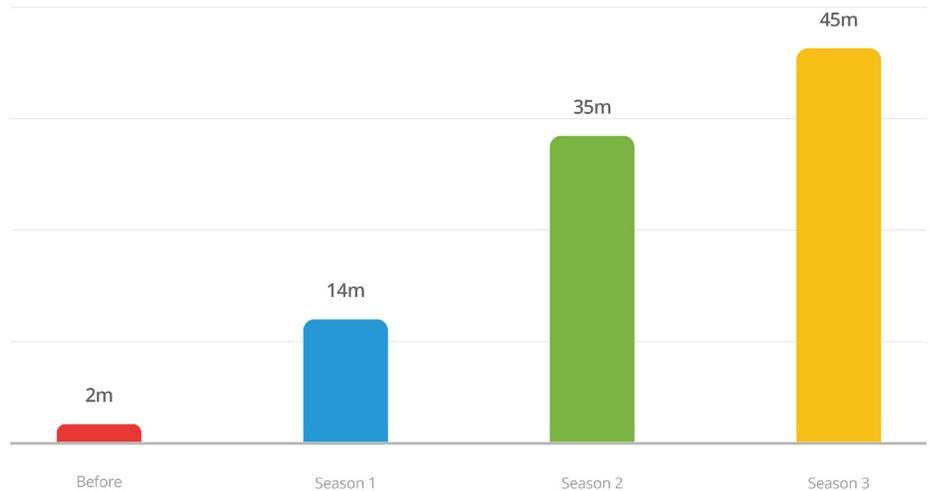
Even with a groundswell of fan support and brand and studio sponsors, could a long-form, made-for-YouTube series actually succeed?

Would YouTube audiences watch longer videos?

Before the first episode of VGHS aired, RocketJump's average video was two minutes long. The channel had been built by making shareable, bite-sized videos with amazing special effects and unique humor. But the fans wanted more from the channel: specifically, their most requested video was a full-length movie. From that daunting request, [VGHS was born!](#)

Although stylistically similar to previous videos uploaded to RocketJump, VGHS was a huge departure for the channel with regard to episode length. For instance, the third season's average video length topped 45 minutes, equivalent to "hour-long" TV series.

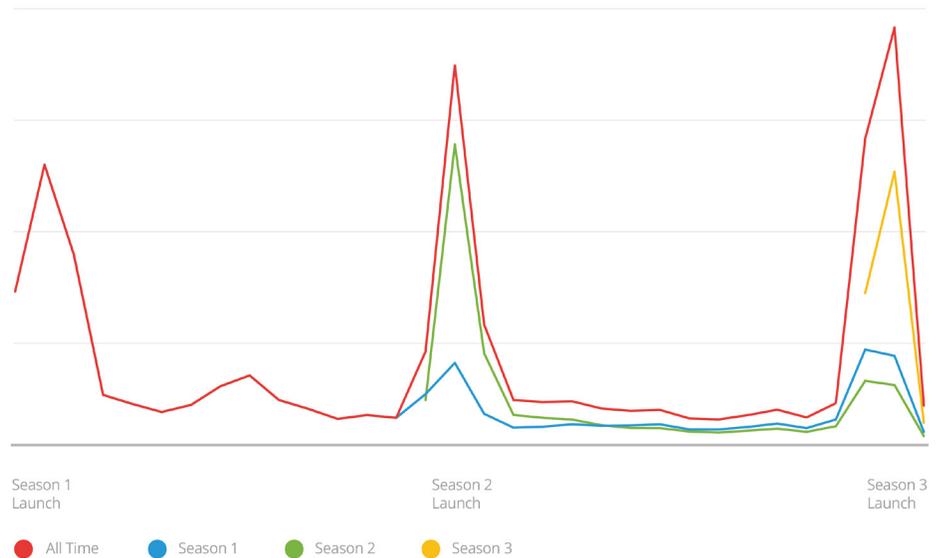
Average Video Length on RocketJump



Source: Internal Google/YouTube data February 2006–December 2014.

Even as run times increased for each new season, VGHS achieved massive levels of viewership. To date, the first three seasons have generated more than 110 million views.

VGHS Total Views



Source: Google Trends and Google/YouTube internal data May 2012–December 2014.

When each new VGHS season launched, fans of the series drove a 400% increase in week-over-week viewership for the previous season(s). These catch-up viewers also created a significant halo effect for the channel's overall viewership. By creating a story arc that spanned multiple seasons, and by making earlier seasons readily accessible to viewers, VGHS fully capitalized on each new season's launch.

What's next?

Utilizing mind-melting special effects, YouTube savvy, and live-action videos that appeal to gamers, VGHS was the logical next step in RocketJump's evolution. But what's next for Wong and company?

In April 2014, Wong partnered with Lionsgate to better market and distribute RocketJump's digital entertainment. The partnership allows RocketJump to maintain its creative freedom while providing a strategic foothold in traditional media. The partners are already working on their next project: Dimension 404, which Freddie describes as "*The Twilight Zone* for the Internet generation."

New to VGHS? Start with [Season 1, Episode 1](#).