



# How ITN Productions found a new voice on YouTube and built a community of more than 500,000 fans

## About Truthloader

- News channel on YouTube
- Created by ITN Productions
- Launched November 2012
- [www.youtube.com/truthloader](http://www.youtube.com/truthloader)

## Goals

- Introduce a fresh perspective to the news landscape
- Engage audiences and build a loyal fan base
- Deliver topical stories and current affairs in innovative and compelling formats
- Showcase work of citizen journalists from around the world
- Integrate amateur eyewitness reporting with experience and professionalism of ITN Productions

## Approach

- Launched a groundbreaking news channel powered by YouTube
- Leveraged Google+ Hangout technology to drive views and subscriptions
- Collaborated with carefully selected channels
- Invited fans to share, comment on and participate in the conversation

## Results

- 2.3 million monthly video views on average
- 580,000 subscribers
- 6.5 million minutes watched on average each month

In November 2012 ITN Productions, the news agency behind ITV News and Channel 4 News, launched an innovative YouTube channel called Truthloader. At that time, news on YouTube generally followed a basic strategy that centred on high upload frequency and very little audience engagement.

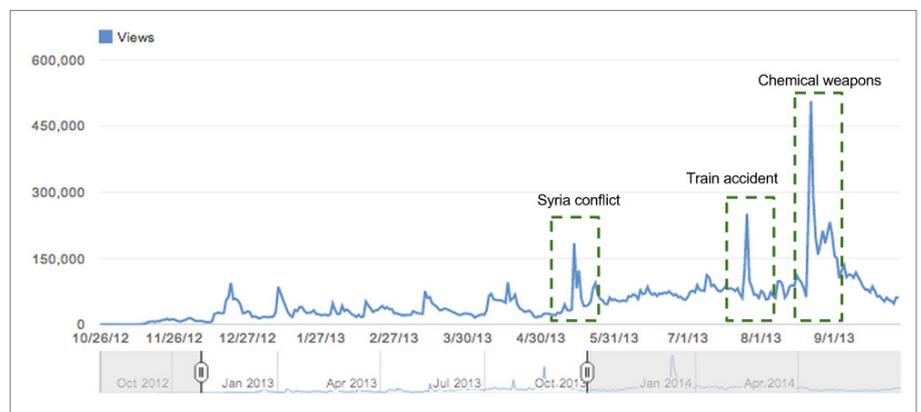
Truthloader’s goal was to introduce a fresh perspective to the landscape, delivering topical news stories and current affairs in innovative and compelling formats. The channel aimed to showcase the work of citizen journalists from around the world, integrating amateur eyewitness reporting with the experience and professionalism of ITN Productions.

In just 18 months, Truthloader managed to become one of YouTube’s most successful news channels, with over 550,000 subscribers and a strong, recognisable brand. Five key strategies drove its success.<sup>1</sup>

### Build credibility through a strong, consistent editorial voice

Created as an alternative to mainstream media, Truthloader promised to present carefully selected stories that wouldn’t make it to national television. Preeya Naul, ITN Productions’ Head of Digital Syndication, explains the approach. “We set out to deliver a news offering with a distinct point of difference; to look deeper into stories, questioning the mainstream narrative and providing context to the news with alternative views and opinions.”

With controversial, independent footage at the core of the strategy, the channel saw views increase notably whenever a timely news story was uploaded. For example, a segment on the conflict in Syria was the first video to exceed 100,000 views within 24 hours from release. A month later, a story about a train accident achieved 170,000 views. Both videos established the channel’s position as the top destination for timely, unbiased news. The channel’s growing reputation helped secure the huge success of its footage on chemical weapons in Syria, which gained 273,000 views and 4,120 subscribers in only 24 hours.



Truthloader saw views increase notably whenever a timely news story was uploaded.

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*“Our strategy is to be immersed with our viewers so that they feel connected with the channel and the editorial. We invite debate and take a steer from the audience on what topics and issues they want covered and we then deliver in-depth, well-crafted packages.”*

— Preeya Naul, Head of Digital Syndication, ITN Productions

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## Don't be afraid to experiment

Although Truthloader's initial success was built upon timely content, the team understood that focusing solely on trending topics wouldn't be enough to build a sustainable channel. In order to discover more evergreen formats, the channel experimented with over 20 different shows, keeping the best and discontinuing the others.

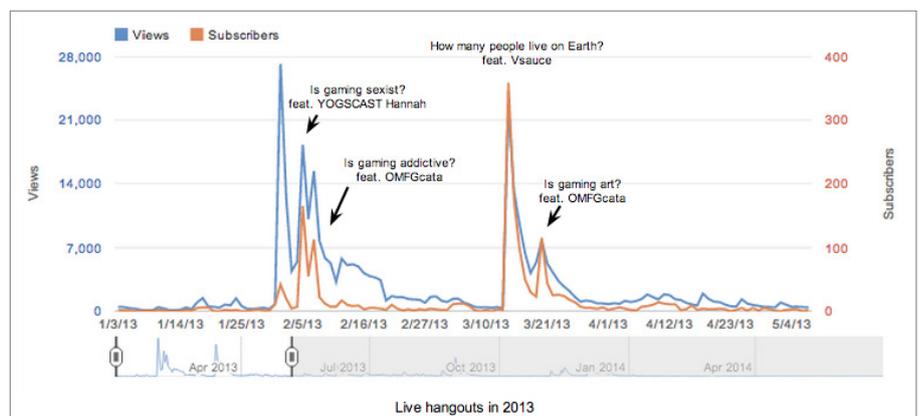
Truthloader tested a "Top Five" formula with the release of "[The Five Worst Weapons Still in Use](#)." In the week following its upload, it became clear that the format appealed to the channel's fans, with 30% of the channel's views coming from subscribers. Thanks to direct traffic as well as being included in the Suggested Video feature (the list to the right of the video player suggesting what to watch next), the numbers picked up again a month later as it became the most watched video on the channel with over 6 million views.

Another evergreen format – "Fact Hunt" – centred on trivia-style content around various topics such as sex, drugs and space. The new weekly show immediately resonated with Truthloader's subscribers, who contributed 40% of the views. The bite-sized formula gave viewers a reason to return to the channel regularly, and also made it easily shareable.

## Go live to stimulate real-time engagement

Introducing new evergreen formats brought sustainable viewership growth, but Truthloader wanted to drive community engagement, too. The channel achieved this through a series of live debates enabled by hangout technology from Google+.

Topics and panelists were carefully selected with an emphasis on controversial issues and charismatic guests. For example, a [live "ask me anything" session featured internet phenomenon Darien Long](#). Better known as "Kick Ass Mall Cop," this Atlanta security professional gained popularity on Reddit thanks to a video of him teasing an unruly woman outside the mall. The debate gained 27,000 views and set the tone for future live events.



*A series of Hangouts on Air successfully drove fan engagement, with popular debates sparking conversation and generating thousands of comments.*

## Collaborate with carefully selected YouTube channels

To build audiences quickly, Truthloader also collaborated with other established YouTube channels to host live hangouts featuring authors, politicians, historians and internet personalities. The team got started by organising four collaborative hangouts: "[Is gaming sexist?](#)" "[Is gaming addictive?](#)" "[Are video games art?](#)" and "[How many people live on Earth?](#)" Each of these brought a spike in subscriptions, but it was the last one in this list – co-presented with [Vsauce](#) – that generated the most dramatic results.

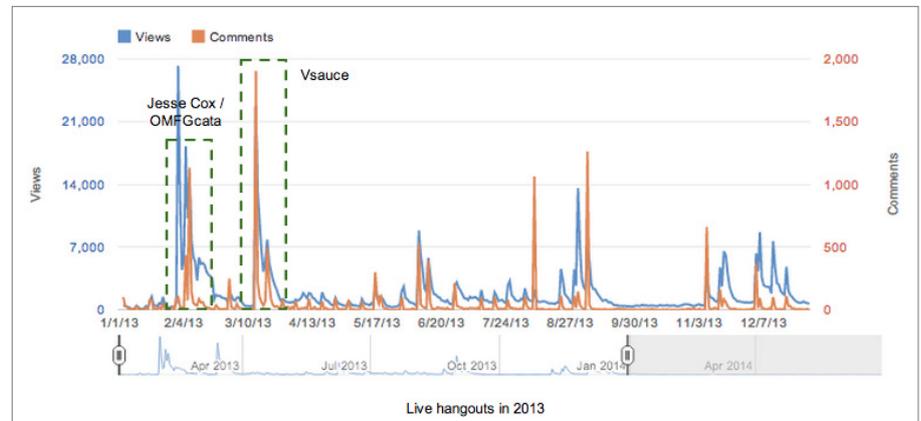
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"A key focus for Truthloader has always been to exploit the technological advances of the platform so that the content appeals to a 'digital-first' audience. The live capability of the platform and the Google hangout integration enables us to facilitate live interviews with people across the globe."

— Preeya Naul, Head of Digital Syndication, ITN Productions

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Vsauce is an educational channel with an engaged, loyal audience of over 2.5 million subscribers. The collaboration helped Truthloader gain 1,418 subscribers within 24 hours, exceeding the average daily subscriber growth by 711%. What's more, the debate produced 934% more comments than the average live hangout that year.



Successful collaborations brought a spike in likes, comments and subscriptions.

### Make your fans part of the conversation

From the start, Truthloader asked viewers to participate in discussion, either directly via the hosts or through video descriptions that encouraged the audience to co-create future content. To reward participating fans, Truthloader made it a policy to include them in videos both through shout-outs and credits.

Comments also help build ongoing dialog and a sense of community. Truthloader's team takes time to moderate comments, answer questions and take feedback, making it possible for the audience to develop friendly relationships with the relatable hosts. A live "ask me anything" hangout with Truthloader's hosts generated 1,066 comments with only 2,228 views – which means almost half of the viewers participated in the live conversation!



Host comments stimulate connections with fans.

In summary, Truthloader's experience shows that on a social platform like YouTube it's not enough to upload high-quality, timely news. In order to build a sustainable following, it's critical to follow best practices for audience development: introduce a regular schedule, experiment with formats and invite your fans to be part of your channel.

<sup>1</sup> Source for all statistics cited: YouTube Analytics data