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Rebuilding a Defunct Television Show

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Rebuilding a Defunct Television Show

With UT's 'VolTalk'

Honors Thesis Project

The University of Tennessee

Fall 2018

Shelby Kast

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Lastly, I would like to thank my amazing team at VolTalk, especially my partner-in-crime and co-executive producer Danielle Apgar. I cannot wait to see where you guys will continue to take this show.

All episodes of VolTalk can be found at The Volunteer Channel's YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKLO-dYmoNqp_pX0zHdccZw/featured

Introduction

At the University of Tennessee, students have access to several opportunities to gain more hands-on experience in the video production field. Included in this, is a full-service production facility with in-house technologies and equipment that is used in the professional realm. However, up-to-date equipment does not guarantee a successful show, as proven by my work over the course of this semester. As the countdown to graduation begins, I reflect on my semester-long involvement with The Volunteer Channel – a student-run television network. As the executive producer and director, my direct involvement and decision-making have rebuilt that crumbling foundation in order to help a television show find their brand again.

Background

Established in 1996, The Volunteer Channel is a student-run television station at The University of Tennessee. The Volunteer Channel, or TVC, allows students to get hands-on experience in many aspects of television and film in a professional studio. There are currently four shows in production, which feature news, entertainment, sports, and sketch comedy. TVC also launched a commercial production unit last year. TVC exists to create informative, entertaining, and inspiring broadcast-quality television for the University of Tennessee and Knoxville community, while at the same time giving students real-life experience in television production and related fields.

The Volunteer Channel reaches nearly 7,000 UT students in residence halls and 100,000 residents in surrounding counties on Comcast Digital Channel 194. However, there has been no promotion or support for UT in recent years, who do not broadcast TVC's content on televisions on campus, like the Student Union. The audience analytics has also been at an all-time low in

recent years online. According to TVC's YouTube channel, the only content gaining any traction come from 'TorchLight' news segments and 'UnWarranted' comedy sketches.

The show that has seemed to blend into the background the most is the entertainment segment, called 'VolTalk.' VolTalk was created and led in 2015 by students Justin Crawford and Mika Carr. The original concept that Crawford and Carr wanted was a 30-minute entertainment show that interviews and features different groups on campus. However, when I joined VolTalk in 2017 as an intern, that was far from how it is ran today. While the show itself had expanded, the content being created was varied and skewed, ranging from national entertainment news that occurred days before to awkward featured guests. There has been overall lack of enthusiasm in the studio, which has led to dry content that the university understandably no longer supports.

Rebuilding 'VolTalk'

In order to improve VolTalk as a whole, it was important to completely break down each segment and build it back up from the beginning. When rebuilding VolTalk, my team and I had to ask ourselves, "What do we want to represent, and how will this segment depict this over encompassing ideal?" I had made the executive decision that our personal brand should revolve around the University of Tennessee and its students, which was the original intent of the show. There are now three segments that each revolve around our concept, which include a featured guest around campus, a Hot Topix segment that features news and tips for students, and a musical guest that originates from Knoxville and the University of Tennessee. These three segments premiere in a 30-minute episode each week, which keep campus informed and connected with their fellow peers.

It was also important to reevaluate our logistics, more importantly how efficiently we were running the show. It was important to emphasize the need for a foolproof schedule, in order

to premiere a smooth show each week. Segment producers and their respective hosts chosen for each segment are based upon their hosting and producing abilities relevant to each segment. In doing so, each segment producer is responsible for ensuring that each segment's rundown, information, media, and field packages were made available in a timely fashion. In doing so, the alleviated many stresses on recording day.

I also conducted changes within our recording day, as well. The first order was to discontinue going live for the time being. It was a difficult decision, but myself and my mentor felt that our show was not efficient enough at the time to handle a live broadcast. In the meantime, everything is prerecorded. I also enlisted many of our interns to help out with audio, which has also been our largest time constraint. These small decisions and changes have helped a great deal in speeding of the set-up process prior to recording. My biggest stressor was ensuring that not only do the interns go through intensive training on how to use the studio, but for all producers and returning members do the same. In order to have a true fresh start, it was important to retrain everyone.

Outcomes

With the new set-up, VolTalk launched the new show in slow increments as to not overwhelm the process. There are small changes in each and every show broadcasted this semester. While there were growing pains and small hiccups, the show was already running much smoother than in previous seasons. There was also a different aura about the show, as if everyone regained the fire and passion needed to refuel this show. It was an amazing process to be a part of and to witness.

While there are over ten shows that were produced over the Fall 2018 season, I would like to highlight our Halloween Special. This episode exemplifies the potential our show has

when every step of the production process is successful, as well as an enjoyment for both the crew and the audience. With the help of special guests Smokey and Joe Blackstock from sketch comedy show 'UnWarranted', we achieved one of the most successfully run shows to date. The show can be found at the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rc7JVePtz8k&t=441s> .

The Halloween Episode is the show our crew likes to promote and broadcast, as it was one the most efficient yet fun shows we have broadcasted since rebuilding VolTalk's concept. We came to the studio on film day early to decorate the studio, transforming our show to a 'VOLoween' Special. Through extensive networking, I was able to book Smokey the mascot as our featured guest. The segment incorporated a fun game with a school spirit twist that highlighted the University of Tennessee. Our Hot Topix segment was a great success, where I enlisted the help of our sketch comedy neighbors to do. While our weekly host talked about tips and suggestions for students on Halloween, a zombie was "destroying" the set. It was hard to keep myself from laughing in the control room. We also incorporated our own "Vol on the Street" field segment to ask students on campus of their Halloween plans. Lastly, I was able to book a musical guest, The Ladies Choice, which is an all student band.

These features exemplified everything I envisioned for the show. VolTalk's concept needs to revolve our students on and off campus, who are looking for entertainment and news. Our once dry content was fun and uplifting, while also staying informative and concise. If we can continue to make episodes like the one above, I think this show can gain traction in now time - with the help of further marketing and social media outreach.

The Future of 'VolTalk'

While we have succeeded in properly changing the shows format and execution, there is still a lot of potential growth to be had. As I graduate, I will be handing off the show to my trusted peer, whose mission is to continue this growth. VolTalk has plans to continue tying their content to what students at the University of Tennessee would like to watch. They will also be executing my rebranding ideas, which includes creating mugs and cue cards with our logo on them. Simple things like these make a massive on difference of setting ourselves apart and promoting our own brand.

The better the content and the more efficient the show runs in the future, the better of a chance that the University of Tennessee supports our role in the community. It will also open doors to potential marketing and sales propositions, which encourages the show to further improve and update their equipment to ensure the best possible show. The future of VolTalk rests in the hands of great students with amazing stories to tell and I could not be prouder of them. I am honored to leave this show with such an amazing cohort.

Personal Growth

While there has been immense growth for the television show as whole, I have also found my owns strengths and improved my weaknesses along the way. I think I have always had the traits to become a natural leader, but my lack of confidence always hindered me from doing so. After taking the risk and being promoted to not only director but also executive producer, I have been able to garner that confidence I needed. As a former student of the public speaking for the speech anxious, seeing myself lead confidently and garner respect from peers has been so rewarding. Not only have I learned how to be confident in myself, but I have also learned how to be a fair and respectable leader.

My time at VolTalk has proved to me just how much I love to be in the studio and I hope to continue in the Knoxville video production market. There are several career paths I could take, but I feel that the experience I gained at VolTalk will follow me wherever I end up – whether that be producing, directing, or coordinating. Being able to direct in a full-service control room that resembles much like one would in professional studios is such a rewarding experience. I can confidently walk into interviews or new job training with an already immense amount of knowledge that comes with being in a studio.

Conclusion

After producing and directing ten episodes for the Fall 2018 season, I am pleased to leave behind a once dying show that is now sparkling with hope and potential. There is still a long way to go, but by rebuilding the necessary foundation and prioritizing our mission to become a television show for the students at the University of Tennessee, I believe the sky is the limit. My leadership and involvement with VolTalk during my semester of undergraduate studies has been such a rewarding experience. I look forward to the future of VolTalk, and everything they achieve.