

VIDEO AS A RECRUITMENT TOOL AT “BIG FOUR” PUBLIC ACCOUNTING FIRMS: WHY VIDEO SHOULD BE PART OF ACCOUNTING CURRICULA

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ABSTRACT

John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems Inc. recently stated, "Video is the new voice... If a picture is worth a thousand words, a multimedia video is worth a million words" (Jander, 2010). This assertion is consistent with the increasing use of video in the business world. Today businesses are using video for everything from video conferencing to public relations. This paper describes the ways the "Big Four" public accounting firms are currently using video as a recruitment tool. This evidence suggests that global public accounting firms are relying on video as an important medium for communicating with college students. Further, employees at all levels of public accounting firms are being called upon to communicate through videos. Thus, the ability to communicate using the video medium is a relevant skill for accounting majors. Expanding the communication experiences of students by incorporating the video medium requires minimal resources, but nevertheless there is scant evidence that video assignments are being used to any great extent in accounting courses. Our descriptive analysis of both the extent and nature of the video content used on Big Four firms' recruiting websites makes a compelling argument for incorporating student-produced videos into accounting curricula. Doing so requires little investment but has the potential to better prepare students for both initial interviews and performance at various levels in public accounting firms.

INTRODUCTION

The “Big Four” public accounting firms (Deloitte, Ernst & Young (E&Y), KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)) are consistently ranked amongst the best employers for young professionals. *Bloomberg Businessweek's* 2009 list of the “Best Places to Launch a Career”, for example, ranked the “Big Four” public accounting firms as the top four employers on its list. Each of these accounting firms was also ranked in the top sixteen firms included on *Bloomberg Businessweek's* list of the “Hottest Jobs in 2010”. This ranking says a lot about the vitality of these accounting firms and also suggests that they have successfully built images and developed significant online presences that are attractive to young professionals (Di Meglio, 2010; Rose

2007). This is remarkable given that accounting was long regarded as a solid, if unexciting, profession dominated by “bean counters” (Baldvinsdottir, Burns, Nørreaklit & Scapens, 2009). Now, accounting firms are sharing space on the list of “hot” jobs with the firms like Apple, Google, Walt Disney, and the Peace Corp.

The Big Four public accounting firms clearly have incentives to invest in building images that are attractive to college students. These firms operate in a professional service industry where recruiting and retaining talent is critical to success. Each of these firms hires thousands of new college graduates every year (Gilmore, 2010), and thus each is constantly engaged in recruitment. Image or branding is very important in these recruiting efforts (Furness, 2008). PwC, for example, conducted a “Personal Brand Week 2.0” in 2011 and provided a variety of daily online content related to the idea of branding (PwC, www.pwc.com/us/en/careers/pwctv/personal-brand-week.jhtml). While helping students to become more aware of their personal brand, the emphasis on branding makes it clear that PwC is quite aware of its own brand. Although the Big Four public accounting firms use a variety of methods of communicating with students and new college graduates, they are increasingly incorporating video as a recruitment tool. This is consistent with a focus on being innovative in trying to cultivate a youthful recruiting image and making use of a variety of online recruitment channels (Rose, 2007; Ruiz, 2007; Peacock 2008). Since the accounting profession has identified communication as a core competence (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, 2006-2010), understanding the ways that accounting firms are using video as medium for communication is relevant to accounting faculty who are responsible for developing curricula designed to prepare students for careers in public accounting.

The balance of this paper is organized as follows: the next section provides a descriptive analysis of the use of video by Big Four public accounting firms on their U.S. campus recruiting web sites, the following section discusses implications of these findings with respect to the incorporation of video experiences in accounting curricula, and the final section provides concluding remarks.

USE OF VIDEO AS A RECRUITMENT TOOL ON BIG FOUR WEB SITES

The U.S. websites of Deloitte, E&Y, KPMG, PwC, collectively known as the “Big Four” public accounting firms, were reviewed in February 2011. Although their approaches to presenting video content varied to some degree, each of these firms includes video content on the web pages devoted to U.S. student/campus recruiting. PwC, for example, structures its web page based on “channels”, even using the name “pwc.tv” (PwC, <http://www.pwc.com/us/en/careers/pwctv/index.jhtml>). While the PwC web pages accessible under the tabs careers/campus also contain text and other interactive features, it is quite clear that the entire structure of the pages is designed around the medium of video and these pages contain extensive video content.

Ernst & Young, a firm that has been recognized as a pioneer in online recruiting (Di Meglio, 2010), takes a different approach. Its web site provides an extensive amount of text and links to brochures under its careers/students tabs (Ernst & Young, <http://www.ey.com/US/en/Careers>), but it focuses attention on video content by using a separately named website. Visitors to the firm's career page are also invited to gain "real insight into what we are about" by clicking to access its "exciting website experience, "EY Insight" (Ernst & Young, <http://www.ey.com/eyinsight/index.html>). At the "EY Insight" page, a substantial amount of the content is video. This site has three major sections: "EY 360", "Picture Yourself" and "Interview Insider" (Ernst & Young, <http://www.ey.com/eyinsight/index.html>). While the "Picture Yourself" component is an interactive tool (Ernst & Young, <http://www.ey.com/pictureyourself/index.html>), the remaining two sections are quite video-intensive. The "EY 360" section includes "profiles" featuring employees discussing their professional lives at different times of the day over the course of a year and "snapshots" which feature video clips of employees discussing a particular dimension of their career with the firm (Ernst & Young, <http://a59.g.akamai.net/f/59/46486/1m/ernstyoung.download.akamai.com/46486/EY360/index.html>). The "Interview Insider" section includes a "video gallery" featuring videos of staff providing interview tips and advice. (Ernst & Young, <http://www.ey.com/interviewinsider/index.html>).

KPMG's website incorporates video throughout its pages, but provides a media player where visitors can easily access video content in one location. The US Campus web page opens with a cycle of photos set up as a running slide show (KPMG, <http://www.kpmgcampus.com/index.shtml>) where the content underlying each slide includes video content. One tab is labeled "Media Center" and clicking this title opens a media player where videos in different categories can be selected and played. This dedicated location for accessing video content makes it easy for visitors to view multiple videos and even limit their visit to viewing video content. A link is also provided to videos available on the firm's YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/kpmggo>).

Deloitte's careers/student website integrates text and video throughout the various levels and web pages (Deloitte, <http://careers.deloitte.com/united-states/students/studentgrad.aspx>). This approach is similar to KPMG's, as a link to a dedicated media player allows visitors to view a variety of videos at one location (Deloitte, <http://careers.deloitte.com/united-states/students/medialibrary.aspx>). Similarly, links to videos viewable via YouTube are available throughout the firm's careers web pages and links are provided to Deloitte's YouTube channel (Deloitte, <http://www.youtube.com/user/YourFutureAtDeloitte>).

Thus, although the four firms take different approaches to structuring their campus recruiting websites and integrating video content into these sites, each of the Big Four public accounting firms makes extensive use of video in recruiting students. Table 1 summarizes some the ways the Big Four public accounting firms provide video content on their U.S. campus recruiting websites.

	Deloitte	Ernst & Young	KPMG	PwC
Videos Included on Website	Ys	Ys	Ys	Ys
Separate Video-intensive Website	N/A	EYInsight	N/A	N/A (but use name PwC.tv)
Direct Link to YouTube	Yes	No	Yes	No
Name of Firm's YouTube Channel	YourFutureAtDeloitte	The Ernst & Young Channel (Ernst and Young Global)	KPMGGO	PwCUSCareers

A review of the videos included on U.S. campus recruiting websites found that the big four public accounting firms use a variety of types of video content. Although there was some diversity in approaches, commonly used types of video content included messages from the CEO and/or leaders of the firm, profiles of employees at various stages of their careers, videos featuring student interns, footage of student programs and comments from the student participants, and tips on interviewing, dress or other dimensions of performance at the firm. While the overall web presentation varies, there is a lot of commonality in the elements of video content that the big four firms include on their U.S. campus recruiting websites. Table 2 summarizes the use of four types of video content included on the campus recruiting websites of the Big Four public accounting firms.

Content	Deloitte	Ernst & Young	KPMG	PwC
Profiles of Employees	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Videos Featuring Student Interns	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Messages from Chairman / Firm Leaders	Yes	No	Yes	Limited
Tips	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Diversity	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Global Opportunities	limited	Yes	Yes	Yes

Interestingly, a significant portion, if not the majority of the video content included on these recruiting sites features employees and/or student interns. All four firms place a heavy emphasis on video featuring employees at relatively early stages of their careers. While the most typical approach is to include various forms of profiles of individuals, the content featuring students/interns/employees takes a variety of forms. Deloitte's website features an intern interviewing the firm's CEO in "The intern and the CEO" (<http://careers.deloitte.com/united-states/students/medialibrary.aspx?mediaID=94>). KPMG includes links to intern-produced videos that have the feel of informal video journals (http://www.kpmgcampus.com/kpmggo/gip_where_in_the_world.shtml). Finally, on some sites individual students/interns are

featured as part of a group. In “Deloitte in a word” (<http://careers.deloitte.com/united-states/students/medialibrary.aspx?mediaID=64>), student participants in the 2009 Deloitte National Leadership Conference are featured. In PwC’s “Leadership Adventure” (<http://www.pwc.com/us/en/careers/pwctv/channel-3-events.jhtml>), student participants in the firm’s 2009 Leadership Adventure program are featured.

Not only do the firms develop video content themselves, but they also promote the production of video content through a variety of mechanisms including sponsorships of video contests. At various times each of the Big Four firms has sponsored at least one student or employee video contest. Table 3 lists information about video contests that have been sponsored by the Big Four public accounting firms.

Firm	Video Contest	Title	Participants/Dates
PwC	PwC’s Elevator Pitch Video Contest	“Making an Impression in only 30 seconds”	Student Video contest (2/11-3/25/2011), videos will be posted on Facebook page.
Deloitte	Deloitte Film Festival	“What is Your Deloitte?”	Deloitte employees, 2007 (videos at https://webcasts.deloitte.com/deloitte_com/dfwinners/ or http://www.youtube.com/user/DeloitteFilmFest)
Ernst & Young	Reel Influence Campus Video Competition	“Why Professional Services?”	Students at 75 campuses 2007/2008 (winning videos at https://www.ey.com/us/reelinfluence)
KPMG	KPMG Intern Video Contest	“Through Their Eyes: Integrity at KPMG”	KPMG summer interns 2010(winning videos at www.kpmgcampus.com/whoweare/ethics.shtml)
	KPMG Canada National Student Video Contest	“What Makes a Top Employer?”	Students; 2010 (winning videos at http://www.youtube.com/kpmgfit#p/u/0/qw8joRCRMEU)

IMPLICATIONS OF BIG FOUR VIDEO USE FOR ACCOUNTING CURRICULA

The descriptive evidence regarding the use of video on U.S. recruiting websites by Big Four firms suggests that global public accounting firms are rely on video as a significant medium for communicating with college students. Further, interns and student participants in other programs sponsored by Big Four firms are prominently featured in videos used on the firms’ websites. This makes it clear that employees at all levels of public accounting firms are being called upon to communicate through videos. The extensive use videos produced by and/or featuring students, interns, and employees at early career stages makes a compelling argument that the ability to communicate using the video medium is a relevant skill for accounting majors, particularly those planning to pursue careers at the Big Four public accounting firms.

For some time, the accounting profession has identified communication skills as critical for success in the profession. The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, for example, developed a Core Competency Framework that defines a set of skills that are important

for students entering the accounting profession. Three sets of competencies are identified, “functional competencies”, “personal competencies” and “broad business perspective competencies” (AICPA, 2006-2010). Communication skills are explicitly and implicitly identified in a number of the competencies identified in this framework, and many accounting programs include the development of good communication skills as an objective. Despite a lot of attention on developing oral and written skills in accounting programs, there is little or no published pedagogical literature on using student-produced videos in accounting courses. Further, an Internet search revealed that it is difficult to find solid evidence that student projects assigned in accounting courses incorporate video as a medium of communication. One notable exception is the IFRS video contest developed by Mark Holtzblatt and Norbert Tschakert as a form of experiential learning for graduate students. (Holtzblatt and Tschakert, 2011). The Purdue Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) awarded a grant to fund a related video project, suggesting that this use of videos for accounting education is regarded as innovative (Purdue CIBER, 2010). A search of YouTube suggests that students are producing videos to fulfill accounting assignments (e.g., Internal Controls in Accounting posted by treestan111 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXvOp853Om4>), but it is difficult to identify the nature of these assignments and whether making a video was a requirement.

Despite scant evidence about the incorporation of student-produced videos in accounting courses, the Big Four firms’ extensive use of video makes it difficult to dismiss the proposition that familiarity with communicating within the video medium relevant for accounting students. Producing a video requires communication skills, but also creativity, personal presentation skills, teamwork, and technical/computer skills. Thus, the video medium facilitates development of several of the personal and functional competencies identified in the AICPA Core Competency Framework including reporting, professional demeanor, interaction, communication and leveraging technology to develop and enhance functional and personal competencies (AICPA 2006-2010). The fact that Big Four public accounting firms sponsor student video contests suggest these firms are interested in identifying and attracting future employees that possess the mix of skills necessary to produce and be featured in a quality video. In addition, the video medium facilitates self-assessment, which may be a valuable tool in enhancing the accuracy of students’ self-perceptions with respect to their communication abilities and professional demeanor (O’Donoghue and Cochrane, 2010).

Incorporating student video projects into the accounting curriculum requires minimal expense and technical resources. Video cameras are quite inexpensive, and students often have the capacity to record video using their personal cell phones. Colleges often have video cameras available for student use. Video editing software is available as a standard feature on both Apple (e.g., iMovie) and PC (e.g., Microsoft Movie Maker) computers and included tutorials are sufficient to help even the most inexperienced users produce a relatively polished video. Finally a variety of resources are available to assist instructors in developing well-articulated video assignments and assessment rubrics. One particularly useful web sites is “Media Projects at

Dartmouth” accessible at <http://dartmouth.edu/~videoprojects/wp/> (Simon, 2010). Thus, technical constraints are minimal.

Identifying appropriate content for a student video project is not challenging; the possibilities are infinite and can require minimal effort. One of the simplest ways to incorporate a student video project is to adapt an existing assignment for the video medium. Rather than requiring students to write a paper or make a classroom presentation, an assignment could require students to produce a video. For example, students could produce a video explaining the results of their research on a technical accounting issue. Rather than preparing a write-up of a case, students could prepare a video presenting their analysis and decision. In either of these examples, a video could be required in addition to a paper or written analysis. It is also simple to introduce a video assignment by requiring students to produce a video meeting the submission requirements of a student video contest. The PwC 2011 student “Elevator Pitch” competition asks students to make a 30-second video highlighting what makes them unique as a professional (PwC, http://www.facebook.com/PwCUSCareers?v=app_148823098508172&ref=ts). This project would be appropriate as an assignment in almost any accounting course, even those at the most introductory levels. Students earning course credit for internships could readily be required to prepare a video journal of their internship experience. A video project designed to develop interviewing skills might require students to produce videos featuring interviews of alumni, recruiters, and other accounting professionals. Such an assignment might refer students to the Big Four websites for tips on interviewing styles and personal presentation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The descriptive analysis of Big Four accounting firms’ recruiting websites reveals an extensive use of video content featuring students, interns, and employees. This emphasis on video content is consistent with the assertion made by John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems Inc. that "Video is the new voice... If a picture is worth a thousand words, a multimedia video is worth a million words" (Jander, 2010). Further, as the Big Four accounting firms will likely continue to focus on a youthful recruiting image, their use of video may very well increase in the future. This suggests that command of the video medium is a relevant business skill for students planning to pursue careers in public accounting. Expanding accounting students’ communication experiences by incorporating the video medium requires minimal resources, but nevertheless there is scant evidence that video assignments are being used to any great extent in accounting courses. Our descriptive analysis of both the extent and nature of the video content used on Big Four firms’ recruiting websites makes a compelling argument for incorporating student-produced videos into accounting curricula. Doing so requires little investment and has the potential to better prepare students for both initial interviews and performance at various levels in public accounting firms.

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