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You Tube videos turn local residents, landmarks into instant celebrities

BY FRANK LEE • FCLEE@STCLOUDTIMES.COM • MAY 15, 2010

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Mentos-fueled soda geysers, boy band karaoke by camera-mugging children and the evolution of dance performed single-handedly in a six-minute video — YouTube has it all.

But the worldwide sensation features more than just the wacky and weird. The proliferation and ease of the pop culture website can make St. Cloud locals and landmarks instant celebrities.

"It's kind of neat ... to see it and say, 'Hey, that's where I work!'" said Jessi Mayer, a bakery assistant at Dutch Maid Bakery, which was featured in a YouTube video by Tempur-Pedic beds.

Mayer has not been mobbed for her autograph yet, but the ad for the Tempur-Cloud brand of mattresses has gone nationwide — such is the nature of YouTube, which can make anyone a star.

"It's the human desire to share, but it's using technology — that's the only difference," said Glen Tuomaala, who is responsible for marketing and promotions for St. Cloud State University's music department. "It is how people share, it's how people communicate now."

Viral sensation

The Tempur-Pedic commercial — which has been viewed more than 7,400 times as of Thursday — features real people talking about how much they love their new Tempur-Cloud mattresses.

"They had sent someone up here to look for bakeries and they had found ours, and they happened to like ours the best, so they came in and asked my boss if they could shoot here, and he said something like, 'Sure — why not?'" Mayer said of the commercial, which was shot in December.

"And now I've had people come and tell me they've seen it in Arkansas, Arizona, Georgia, San Francisco — all over."

Local high school athletic events, homemade skateboarding videos and quick clips of the St. Cloud "Superman" at the Dairy Queen by Byerly's have all made the rounds on the popular website.

"I don't think it's anything that hasn't happened since people were scrawling on the walls of caves," Tuomaala said. "They didn't have to draw these things on the cave walls. They did it because they wanted to tell other people how cool this was, how they hunted down that buffalo."

Founded in 2005, YouTube is the world's most popular online video community that allows millions of people to discover, watch and share originally created videos, according to the website.

"A friend of mine's friend in Wisconsin actually called me and said they saw St. Cloud in a commercial ... and thought it was pretty exciting that part of his hometown was featured," said Dylan Edwards, a former marketing assistant for the Paramount Theatre.

The marquee of the downtown venue was also featured in the Tempur-Pedic video, as well as St. Cloud State University's hockey arena and St. Cloud Public Library.

"They actually paid our fee that we had to put a sign up on our marquee," Edwards said. As soon as he learned of the St. Cloud connection, he put a link to it on Paramount's Facebook page.

Instant fame

YouTube is an independent subsidiary of Google Inc., having been acquired by the leader in search and online advertising services in November 2006.

Tuomaala is director of the Husky Sports Band, and his job in part is to run the St. Cloud State music department's YouTube site. It has more than 160 videos.

"I posted a master class performance by Jeff Hodapp, who is a tuba player (formerly of Owatonna) and it got all kinds of hits — and it's about a tuba. It's not like the Ark of the Covenant or something," Tuomaala said with some reverence.

The Emporia State University professor died Dec. 30, and visitors to the Tuomaala-posted video of Hodapp spiked soon after his heart attack at the age of 52. The four-minute, 26-second video recorded at St. Cloud State in 2007 has had more than 77,000 views as of Thursday.

"This is the only video performance of him that was easily available online, and his family, friends and former students were all going online to watch this ... and people were using YouTube as a memorial — and they still are — to reminisce," Tuomaala said.

YouTube's user base is broad in age range, 18 to 55, and evenly divided between men and women, spanning all geographies. Fifty-one percent of users visit YouTube weekly or more, and 52 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds share videos with friends and colleagues, the site says.

"I don't believe at all that YouTube makes people mean or evil. I think YouTube amplifies what people already are," Tuomaala said.

A friend of Edwards was paid to be in the Tempur-Pedic video on YouTube, but only her elbow and the top of her head made it into the final edit.

"She's been pretty proud about pointing out her 0.05 seconds of fame. She was going around, showing everybody and pausing it at that exact time and saying, 'That's me in the library!'" Edwards said. "They're celebrities — almost just by being on TV or in a video."



Purchase this Photo
Jessi Mayer, a bakery assistant at Dutch Maid Bakery in St. Cloud, is seen Wednesday. She watched the filming of the Tempur-Pedic mattress commercial that used the store for one of the scenes. The commercial features landmarks around the city and is playing on television and on YouTube. (Jason Wachter, jwachter@stcloudtimes.com)

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