

GOAL Productions Creates Webisodes for American Humane

Contributed by Dawn O'Keeffe

American Humane approached GOAL to help create a webisode in the hopes that it would "go viral" and raise awareness of the important role they play in the entertainment industry...

Corporate video distribution has evolved from the self-distributed home video to a world-wide market through the Internet. With this evolution small non-profit and corporate companies are seeking innovative ways to promote their businesses. The old office interview in front of a well-placed plant has been replaced with humor and scripted stories. Smaller production companies are given new challenges with how to use creative filmmaking techniques to deliver specific corporate messages.

GOAL Productions specializes in feature films, broadcast television, and corporate communications. They are celebrating their 40th year in business and sales are up 22 percent. Based in Pasadena, California, they are currently in production on a feature film, producing a PSA campaign for Donate Life California, and are regularly in production on material for the Tournament of Roses, a client of 28 years. Aware of the recent challenges corporations face with creating videos for the web, GOAL has started to pitch new ideas to their existing clients in hopes of utilizing the Internet to tell their story in a fun and innovative way.

American Humane approached GOAL to help create a webisode in the hopes that it would "go viral" and raise awareness of the important role they play in the entertainment industry. Established in 1940, American Humane's Film & Television Unit is the leading authority on the safe use of animals in film. They are the only animal welfare organization in the world with on-set jurisdiction from the Screen Actors Guild to supervise the use of animals, and the only organization with the authority to issue "No Animals Were Harmed"® end-credit disclaimer.

Jone Bouman, communications for American Humane, explained that "we thought it was time to dip our toes into the internet waters because in the past three years the amount of technology available on the internet has really affected American Humane. We not only have a YouTube presence, but a Facebook presence, a MySpace presence, and our website has been completely redesigned so all of a sudden we have all this capability. We thought that creating a webisode was a smart move, an obvious next project that we should do, and we had complete confidence in Robert Ballo and GOAL Productions to be able to deliver."

American Humane plans to send the webisode out to producers, directors, executives, and industry professionals with the Writer's Guild, the Director's Guild and the Television Academy. They compiled a long list of entertainment industry contacts in the hopes of taking their message to the target audience, people who know and work with them on a regular basis and as a tool for those who are unaware of their services. "I think anyone that spends any time in a personal way on the internet," says Bouman, "is aware that the majority of pieces that are most frequently virally transmitted are the ones that tend to have a more comedic sense to them so that is the direction we wanted to go with our production."

The production team, led by cinematographer and owner of GOAL Productions, Robert Ballo, and Director Jim O'Keeffe, knew that the final result had to be compelling enough that it would have a life of its own virally. But as Bouman states, they "were not necessarily trying to reach three hundred million public citizens of America, but were looking to reach a much smaller group of entertainment professionals."

Ideas were kicked around with Bouman and the collaborative process led to a concept that everyone agreed was a great way to achieve their dual goal of entertaining while also reinforcing the mission of American Humane. The webisode

begins with a group of animals watching an old film at a movie theater. When the movie begins, the film's narrator tells the animal audience that the movie they are about to watch has humans in the role of animal actors and depicts what movie sets were like before animals were protected on the set. (Stick with us you'll get it.) A behind-the-scenes film crew from the 1930's visits the set of a western production titled "Protecting Your Ass from Harm" starring Ted Guy. They document Ted acting in a variety of scenes where he is asked by the director to do stunts that horses were once expected to do for the movies. The comedy derives from watching a group of humans act like horses, while being forced to do outlandish stunts to realize the director's vision.

Ballo and O'Keeffe found a unique location that looked like a miniature western town and when the life size characters were placed in this setting, it was "funny to look at, a real gold mine and a huge component in capturing our vision," said O'Keeffe. They shot the entire webisode in one day, which led O'Keeffe to design a lot of traveling master shots so they could go through the script in a way that was simplified but still entertaining. "Actors love this," explains O'Keeffe, "because they get to play a scene all the way through and you don't chop it up in to a variety of different small moments but everybody has to play the whole moment of the scene and that allowed us to shoot it in one day. The time constraints forced us to be creative which ended up adding a nice, delightful, comedic, semi-documentary kind of style to the whole piece."

Ballo and O'Keeffe, who both teach cinematography at USC, found it easy to collaborate with each other and American Humane to get exactly what they all envisioned. According to Bouman, this webisode is the big focus, the centerpiece of American Humane's marketing budget for this year. "Every year our marketing efforts include one centerpiece in our attempt to build awareness and familiarity of American Humane, as well as educate the general population of professionals that work with us," Bouman went on to say that working with GOAL Productions over the past few years has been a real Godsend. "Robert Ballo is someone from the day I met him I knew we were going to make a great team. He is smart, professional, and has a quick understanding of our needs as an organization. He reacts to our needs in a way that makes us feel that we are being taken care of and that we are all on the same team. I've come from many, many years in the entertainment business myself and Robert just gets it."

American Humane has already launched their campaign with a new website featuring not only the webisode, but also a behind-the-scenes trailer of "Protecting Your Ass From Harm." You can watch these videos by visiting www.ProtectingYourAss.org