



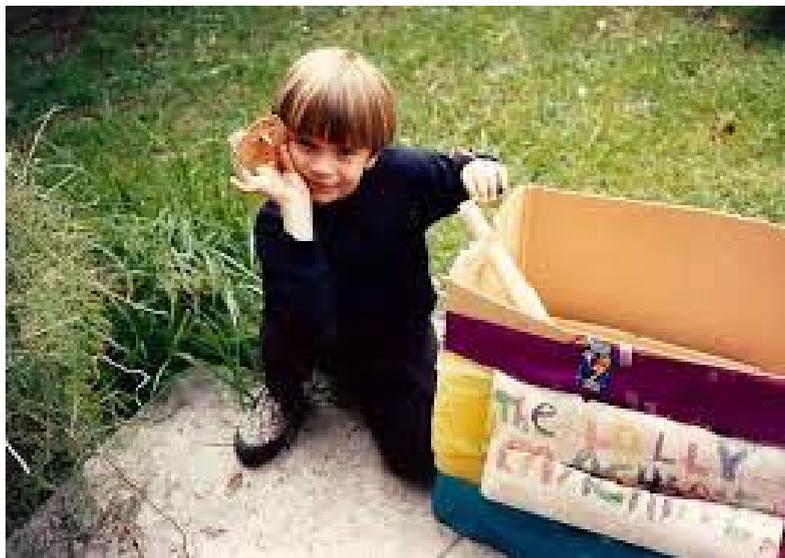
Ten Top Tips
from the
**JOSEPH'S YOUTUBE
(AND OTHER) SECRETS**
Workshop

TEN TOP TIPS FROM JOSEPH'S YOUTUBE (AND OTHER) SECRETS

Joseph Herscher is one of Aotearoa's most successful online video creators, with a billion video views across all of his *Joseph's Machines* accounts, and two series on HEIHEI: *Jiwi's Machines* and *What's Your Problem?*. Workshop presented by Aotearoa Screen Publicists Collective in April 2022 with support from NZ On Air Irirangi te Motu.

1. Follow your passion (and follow the laughs).

VIDEO: [Joseph's First Inventions](#)



Joseph made his first contraption, the Lolly Machine, at age six. “It was a machine for storing my lollies, very useful for a six-year-old. But I also noticed that it made my parents laugh. And that was the combination for me that spurred me on, making practical things that legitimately helped me, but also entertained people around me.” In other words, your audience will usually tell you what's working.

2. Patience, perseverance and playtime.

In his twenties, Joseph began building a machine with his flatmates. They lost interest, but he persevered. “It really awoke my childhood passion. I kept building and building for seven months. I got it on camera after 600 takes. 600, all in one shot, because that was important to me, to prove that it was real. [And it went viral](#). It got like a million views quite quickly. I was like, wow, I wasn’t expecting that.”

But going viral doesn’t automatically equal sustained success. It’s taken a decade to build Joseph’s current following. “It took a long time, because even if you have one viral video, that doesn’t mean you have a million followers. But, if you keep doing it regularly, it starts to build up.”

Playtime is hugely important to Joseph’s process. “It’s hard to play when you have a deadline, but it’s really the key to the most creative, innovative thinking.”

Joseph will give himself four hours and several ingredients and just play with them to see what they can do with no predicted outcome. “I might discover all these cool things that don’t even make it into the video but one day later on, they’ll make it into something else.”

“It’s hard I know, as adults, we kind of forget how to play. Even though it’s really hard, when you’ve got a boss breathing down your neck and you have deadlines, to give yourself time to play, it’s really important, because that’s how you find the most out-of-the-box solutions.”

3. Prioritise the right platform for your project...

YouTube remains Joseph’s most important platform even while he services other social networks, because that’s the one that earns him regular income. While it took only a year to build up a TikTok following that took him ten years to build on YouTube, “ultimately, YouTube is where I make my money, so this is what I prioritise to make it sustainable.”

A YouTube channel needs a steady supply of content, and the algorithm favours longer videos. Joseph’s biggest machines take between 2-3 months to build, around 200 takes to film, and last only a couple of minutes at the most. But the algorithm wants videos over six minutes, preferably around 10-11 minutes, to maximise advertising.

This is where extra content comes into its own: bloopers, fails, behind the scenes secrets, and trying his machines out on unsuspecting friends. All of this content can be included in the main video, and carved off as exclusive extras for patrons, so plan to film more than your “hero video”.

But don’t make things long for the sake of the algorithm. “Yes, video length is, longer the better, in a way. But if that means it’s boring people stop watching and that’s not going to work. You can’t just make things longer and longer forever. What it comes down to is if you’re making content that people want to watch, and it’s good content, it just has to be there on its own merit.”

Find a balance between quantity (posting lots of videos, regularly) and quality (videos that take longer to make, are higher quality, attract more views over time). Joseph’s biggest machines have 20-30 million views, whereas his shorter, faster machines might get around 4 million views. This is counter to what most YouTubers do. “I don’t always follow the normal YouTube standard of advice.”

4. ...And find ways to make the other platforms work for you.

Joseph’s assistant makes edits of his content for TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, all of which deliver some income (much less than main YouTube), but importantly, promote his main work. “But I’m not on Twitter, for example, wouldn’t make sense. My stuff’s got no dialogue, so why would I be on that platform? That’s all about dialogue.”

As well as repackaging old content for these short-form platforms, Joseph and his assistant spend Fridays pumping out short TikTok videos, such as [Mask Contraption](#), [Put Your Book Away](#). This was a suggestion from Joseph’s assistant, which he agreed to as a way of empowering his younger team member.

“He was like, ‘it takes two months for us to make every video. Can we do something faster? How about every Friday, we spend two hours and we just come up with one idea for a really quick video, and just pump it out and cut every possible corner to make it as fast as possible?’”

Not all of the work is done by Joseph or his crew. He has given the rights to a third party to access his video library to make Snapchat content, they take 30% of the proceeds.

5. Have an ‘Ideas Bank’

Joseph realised alongside his big machine ideas, he also needs ideas that are quicker to execute. A few years ago he invested two weeks of time into creating a list of 100 ideas, which he adds to over time.

“Each one requires a lot of thought but it’s just helped so much, because normally when you’re a creator, and you have just one idea, you get kind of swept away with it. But sometimes it’s better to have to step back and go, ‘okay, this one over here will take one day.’ It’s just more bang for my buck.”

[In this short video](#), Joseph recycled a concept he had used in a longer video, “but it only took me two days instead of three months.” The result: three million views, “pretty good considering the amount of time put into it.”



6. Make videos *for* the audience

Sounds obvious, isn’t always so. “I have to make sure that, for YouTube, it has to be funny and it has to be surprising. I’ve built that in right before I start.”

In the case of [How to Pass the Pepper](#), Joseph knew it would do well on YouTube, because it was about food and had a machine. But he pushed the audience reaction further by playing with the comedy “rule of three”, switching up what the audience would anticipate would happen by asking “how can I make this more funny?”.

Test your content with your audience. An important part of Joseph’s process is showing his creation to people as he is building, and editing.

“That can just be grabbing a neighbour. I can make the coolest, cleverest idea in the world but if people don’t understand it, then what’s the point? I’m trying to entertain you, not just trying to make clever things.”

7. Thumbnails, thumbnails, thumbnails!

The thumbnail is the single most important decision you will make for your content on YouTube—because if people don't click the thumbnail, they don't watch the video.

Before Joseph starts building or filming, he is already **thinking about the thumbnail**. “I don't want to ride myself into a corner where I've created this amazing content but I can't get a good thumbnail.”

An unsuccessful thumbnail.

[This Whiskey Pouring Machine video](#) did quite poorly, compared to Joseph's usual stats. “When you upload to YouTube, you can put anything you like as a thumbnail, you don't have to choose a still from the video. Nonetheless [it doesn't work well] because I'm not in it, and it's not feeding me or interacting with me in some sort of funny way.



Successful elements of a good thumbnail.

- “An **open mouth** gets more views, preferably if food is heading towards that mouth.”



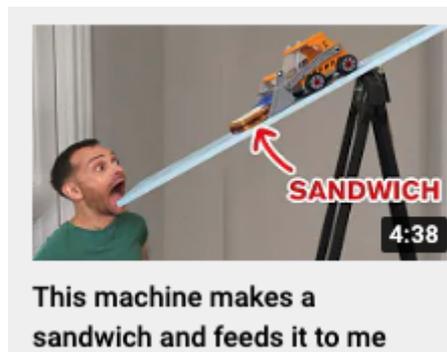
- “I found that **having myself in the thumbnail** gets more views. So most of these have me in them even if they're just in the background.”
- “It's well known that **red arrows** give you more views. So if you just put a red arrow anywhere on the thumbnails, you'll get more views. I'm not kidding.”



- **Numbers in your video** will get more views. “‘3 Christmas Devices’—using a digit like that gets more views. Or, ‘3 easy contraptions’.”



- **Movement.** “A big lesson I’ve just learned is the big thing that’s missing from some of my thumbnails is movement. [See the car coming down towards my mouth?](#) The car is staged, it’s just stuck to the track. There’s no motion blur on that. And so something about it doesn’t quite feel real, it feels static, a little bit contrived.”



“Whereas this one is a still [from the actual video](#). This is actually one of the few thumbnails I didn’t contrive at all. It’s my most viewed video, 116 million views, a click rate of something like 13%, which is very high for YouTube (the percentage of people who, when shown the thumbnail, click it)”:



“In the last month, I’ve been going back and redoing some of these and adding movement. So [here](#), I added a motion blur to the train, so it looks like it’s really heading towards me.”



Try out different thumbnails, and look at them the way the audience will see them (tiny!) to ensure the story is clear. “It’s way more important to look at them at a tiny size.” This Chocolate Dominoes thumbnail has Joseph’s highest YouTube click-through rate of 18.5% (the average is 4-5%):



[This cleaning invention video](#) does quite well, says Joseph, because it’s a standalone, funny visual that tells a whole story already. It has a 15% CTR:



Test your thumbnails. Joseph’s (current) secret weapon is [TubeBuddy](#), a tool that plugs into YouTube for testing different thumbnails for their click-through rates. Every 24 hours the tool switches the thumbnail between the two you have chosen for it to enable you to gauge the image’s success. (Costs \$50/month, “well worth every penny, the best \$50 I’ve ever spent.”)

The beginning is important, but don’t forget the end. Create great End Cards!

Keep your audience within your ecosystem by suggesting next videos from your channel, and getting them to subscribe.

8. Playing in post-production

Whether you are working to your own YouTube deadline or to a broadcast network or other platform’s delivery schedule, don’t rush the post-production process.

Give yourself time to get the edit right—especially the beginning and the ending—and to show people along the way to ensure everyone is getting the story and the joke. “There needs to be something happening, a hook, within the first five seconds on YouTube.”

Hire an editor who really knows YouTube (and other short-form platforms).

Build in a budget to be able to tell your story differently on different platforms.

Film everything in 4K so that you can punch in for all the different formats and ratios, as well as have broadcast-level quality clips for international broadcasters who may want to licence your content for clip shows.

When making *What’s Your Problem?* for both YouTube and TVNZ, there was an agreement in the contract that two episodes could premiere on YouTube first in order to test what worked with the audience. The first episode to launch on YouTube was [The Cat Feeder](#). Joseph notes that the intro includes a long machine title sequence, with the title coming at 1:13 into the video, plus crew introductions and problem explanation.



The analytics showed that for audience retention—“one of the most important graphs to look at”— 67% of viewers are still watching at around the 30-second mark, which is about average for Joseph’s videos, but not great. The introduction was good for linear television, but for YouTube it was too drawn-out.

Joseph and his team changed up their edit for subsequent episodes to get a faster introduction, for example: [Hands-Free Snacking](#), for which audience retention rose to 70%. The time for this was built into the production budget and schedule.

9. Prepare for The Drop.

When it comes time to post, Joseph advises that it’s best not to just drop a video into your channels, but to whet people’s appetites.

- On YouTube, post images or gifs to your fans saying, “hey, I’ve got a release coming up in two days.”
- You might choose to do a YouTube Premiere, where everyone watches it in real-time when you first publish it, and comments in real-time (if not children’s content, where commenting is disabled).
- Time of day doesn’t matter when you post, Joseph advises. It’s an old fashioned view, and doesn’t affect the lifecycle of the videos. It’s months before a video builds up views.

Spend money where it matters.

- Buy pre-rolls, mid-rolls and targeted posts to reach exactly the audience you want—if it’s in your budget to do so.
- Create a teaser-trailer, post it on YouTube, put some money behind it and target it to the region/audience you want. \$10,000 NZD garners approx 5 million views. “That is the most valuable, the most direct way to turn money into the views that lure the eyeballs you’re trying to get.”
- Commission original, local music. YouTube knows when you have ripped something off. You want music that suits your show, you want the worldwide rights on all platforms, and you want the stems for that music so you can use snippets of a track instead of the whole thing.

10. Don't sweat the small stuff.

Leave room for experimentation and failure with your release. Favour excellence, but don't sweat the small stuff.

Joseph has posted videos with bad edits in the middle and not discovered this until a video has a million views. “Even though that’s deleting a million views, for my integrity’s sake, I needed to have the correct one. The correct one did end up getting still like 5 million views or 10 million views, it ended up doing better in the long run.”

“You need to give yourself room to experiment. That’s really what’s so beautiful about these platforms is that we can experiment and you can post content and you can delete it, and you can post it slightly differently the next time and be prepared to fail.”

It can be quite hard, says Joseph, but “that’s how I’ve learned what not and learned what to do. And that’s part of the fun: it is experimentation, a great opportunity. You can’t do that with broadcast television. But you can with TikTok and YouTube.”