How the YouTube Shorts Algorithm Works, According to YouTube

YouTube Shorts has had an incredible run since it was first released in 2021. It’s a natural next step for anyone who watches long-form YouTube videos to also watch short-form videos on the platform – and there are nearly three billion of those people.

However, most people don’t engage with short-form content the way they do long-form (I know I don’t). So, YouTube has a big task keeping content engaging.

Rene Ritchie, YouTube’s Creator Liasion, and Todd Sherman, Product Lead for YouTube Shorts, sat down to share how the YouTube Shorts algorithm works (spoiler alert, it’s not the same as YouTube’s long-form video algorithm).

[embedded content]
In this article, we’ll dive deep into the YouTube Shorts algorithm, drawing insights from these YouTube insiders.

The signals that influence content ranking on YouTube Shorts

Before we get into what the algorithm means for you, it’s crucial to understand the signals influencing how your audience sees your content.

- **User Engagement**: Likes, comments, and shares play a significant role.

- **Watch Time**: The longer a viewer stays, the better.
- **User Surveys**: YouTube often asks viewers to rate the content they watch.

Now, these signals impact the algorithm, but the ultimate signal for what users see is what they already like to watch.

When someone opens YouTube Shorts for the first time, the algorithm starts by showing them random, popular Shorts. As the viewer engages – watches, likes, comments – the algorithm begins to build a profile of what type of content they like. It then explores that niche to find the "best" Shorts to serve the viewer. The goal? To keep the viewer on the platform as long as possible.

YouTube Shorts, much like its parent platform, focuses on **audience satisfaction**. The algorithm is designed to offer content that resonates with the viewer. As YouTube expert Paddy Galloway put it:

> *Ok, so for people trying to understand the shorts algorithm. This is all you really need to know:*
>
> *Youtube will personalise recommendations of shorts (i.e look at watch history to see what someone likes) and show enjoyable shorts that hold attention well to them.*
>
> *Simple.*
>
> *– Paddy Galloway (@PaddyG96) April 14, 2023*

So, if you're a creator, forget about gaming the system – **focus on what your audience wants to see.**

How does the YouTube Shorts algorithm work?

Although most short-form video platforms have the same

priorities for their users’ content (keeping audiences engaged), their algorithms optimize for different things. For example, contrary to popular belief, the time of day you post your Short doesn’t impact its performance. The algorithm doesn’t give preference based on timing, so focus on quality over timing.

The YouTube Shorts algorithm heavily emphasizes Average View Duration and watch time, aiming to keep viewers on the platform by serving them content that aligns with their past engagement and viewing history.

In contrast, TikTok’s algorithm prioritizes user interaction, such as likes, shares, and comments, and employs a “For You” feed that quickly adapts to user behavior to present a more personalized content experience.

Watch time vs. engagement

The algorithm favors Shorts that are engaging and keep viewers watching until the end. However, while watch time is a crucial metric, it’s not the end-all-be-all. A 15-second video that keeps the viewer engaged is just as valuable as a two-minute video that does the same. The algorithm considers other forms of engagement like likes, comments, and even the use of the “Not Interested” button.

This metric measures the percentage of people who actually watched your Short when they came across it in the feed versus those who swiped away. A higher VVSA increases the likelihood of your Short being served to viewers. Shorts with a VVSA between 70 and 90 could get hundreds of thousands of views.

The role of thumbnails and titles

Like regular YouTube videos, your Shorts’ thumbnails and titles matter. They’re the first thing a viewer sees and can significantly impact whether someone decides to watch your

video or scroll past it.

YouTube is leaning towards allowing creators to select a frame from their video as the thumbnail. While popular in long-form content, custom thumbnails may not hold the same weight in Shorts. As for hashtags, they're not mandatory but can be helpful, especially if they're topical or related to real-world events.

Views vs. impressions

In the world of YouTube Shorts, a view is not just an impression. Unlike some platforms where even the first frame counts as a view, YouTube aims for a more meaningful level of engagement. This ensures that the views your Shorts receive are indicative of genuine interest rather than mere scrolling.

The algorithm sees a high average view duration as a positive signal. Shorts with higher average view durations are likelier to be pushed to viewers. Data shows that Shorts with an average view duration between 50 and 60 seconds get around four million views on average.

Video length

There's a common misconception that there's an ideal length for a Short. The truth is, the length of your Short should be dictated by the story you're trying to tell. Whether it's 15 seconds or the full 60, what matters is how effectively you can convey your message.

> *Looking at average view duration and views, the gap becomes even bigger.*
>
> *Shorts where the AVD was higher than 50 seconds averaged 4.1 million views.*
>
> *Just making a long short isn't the goal, making a short that holds people for as long as possible is.*

> *pic.twitter.com/bwmQWDuFO3*
>
> *— Paddy Galloway (@PaddyG96) April 14, 2023*

Longer Shorts (between 50 and 60 seconds) tend to perform better than shorter ones. They can get more watch time and a higher average view duration.

Post frequency

There’s no magic number for how many Shorts you should post daily or weekly. The algorithm values quality over quantity. So, instead of churning out multiple Shorts daily, focus on creating content that resonates with your audience.

Is the algorithm for long YouTube videos the same as the YouTube Shorts algorithm?

First things first, the YouTube Shorts algorithm isn’t a total departure from YouTube’s long-form algorithm. The focus remains on delivering content that the audience wants to see.

However, people engage with Shorts differently—think swiping through a feed rather than clicking on individual videos. This calls for different metrics to measure engagement and success.

Even if you have a Short that does really, really well, it isn’t quite the same as having a longer video that performs well.

If you’re already a YouTube creator with long-form content, integrating Shorts into your strategy can be beneficial. The algorithm is designed to recommend your long-form content to viewers who have engaged with your Shorts and vice versa.

While Shorts are now monetized, they still lag behind long-

form videos in terms of revenue per thousand views. However, the gap is closing, and it’s expected that Shorts will start making more money in the coming months. When it comes to subscriber growth, long-form videos still have the edge, but Shorts require less time to produce, offering a different kind of ROI—Return on Time Invested.

Set up a strategy to post YouTube Shorts consistently

Understanding the YouTube Shorts algorithm is not just about cracking a code; it’s about understanding your audience, delivering content that they will find valuable, and doing that consistently. Consistency is key in any content strategy. The more quality Shorts you produce, the better your chances of hitting the algorithmic jackpot.

https://buffer.com/resources/youtube-shorts-algorithm/