

YouTube chemistry sensations share formula for success

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It started on an impulse, made unlikely YouTube stars of its scientific presenters and has grown to a global audience of more than 15 million.

Now the remarkable story of the meteoric rise of The University of Nottingham's [Periodic Table](#) of Videos has been hand-picked as a prize essay in this month's edition of the prestigious magazine *Science*.

The Periodic Table of Videos (PTOV) exploded on to the social media scene back in 2008 when scientists in the University's School of Chemistry and BBC-trained journalist Brady Haran embarked on their mission to document every single one of the 118 chemical elements in a fun, lively and often unconventional way.

Within a few short days the videos had become a YouTube sensation, attracting more than 100,000 hits and provoking a stream of enthusiastic comments and an online following dedicated to eccentric hairstyle and seemingly endless selection of chemistry-themed ties of 'the Professor', green chemistry expert Martyn Poliakoff.

Cut to almost three years later and the project has evolved into a chemical news channel covering topical events — themed videos on everything from the 2008 Olympic games, the chemistry of Christmas and the scientific creation of a perfume for Valentine's Day.

As of May 2011, the site boasts 320 videos with content covering molecules as well as elements which have been viewed a total of more

than 15 million times. Its YouTube channel has attracted more than 44,700 subscribers in more than 200 countries and territories, with dedicated followers ranging from Nobel laureates to a six-year-old boy in Nova Scotia.

The most-viewed [video](#), in which a cheeseburger was plunged into hydrochloric acid, has attracted nearly 458,000 views and overall 26 of the individual PTOV videos have attracted more than 100,000 views.

The project's spin-off sister channel Sixty Symbols, in which physics and astronomy are presented by Nottingham scientists, already has 29,600 subscribers and 138 videos, all filmed and produced in a similar format to The Periodic Table of Videos.

The project was inspired by the year that Brady had spent as filmmaker-in-residence for Test-Tube, an online showcase for the University's scientific research, presented by scientists themselves in their own words.

In *Science* magazine this month, Brady and Professor Poliakoff reveal PTOV's formula for internet success after their essay was chosen as winner of this month's SPORE (*Science* Prize for Online Resources in Education) Series.

They muse on the popularity of the videos, putting the enthusiasm of the response from the audience down to the spontaneity of the 'live chemistry' approach and soap opera or reality TV feel and the audience's affinity with the scientists themselves. Professor Poliakoff is joined by a wider regular cast of characters including lanthanide and actinide chemist Stephen Liddle, Peter Licence or Deborah Kays who demonstrate many of the experiments and the 'long-suffering and usually silent' technician Neil Barnes.

"PTOV does not hesitate to show scientists as human, sharing their moments of happiness and grief with the viewers. When demonstrations fail, they still appear in the videos, especially if they are amusing. Shortcomings are never glossed over or edited out, which ensures the team is seen as honest — they are not 'selling' anything apart from a shared love of chemistry," they say.

The impact of PTOV and its success as a resource in daily use in classrooms and home worldwide is probably best judged by the many thousands of comments and unsolicited comments received from viewers, including those from school pupils who say the videos have inspired them to pursue a career in [chemistry](#) and teachers who use them to support the learning of their students.

The ability of the filmmakers and [scientists](#) to work quickly, sometimes with a three-hour turnaround, has allowed them to react quickly and respond to breaking news, such as their explanation of the recent nuclear crisis in Japan. This has led to their material being featured in the UK national media and blogs worldwide.

More information: www.youtube.com/user/periodicvideos

Provided by University of Nottingham

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