

# Unboxing videos online chronicle the big reveal

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Lewis Hilsenteger of Toronto unboxes the recently released Far Cry 4 Kyrat Edition video game set. Hilsenteger is the founder of Unbox Therapy, where he unveils a wide range of tech and other products on YouTube. Unboxing, the recording and sharing of the big reveal, has become a phenomenon on the video-sharing site. (AP Photo/Courtesy of Lewis Hilsenteger)

Rrrrip goes the packing tape and squeak goes the protective foam. Are there sweeter, more seductive sounds than the opening of a new toy or gadget?

Not to unboxers and the millions of people who watch their videos on

YouTube.

For the uninitiated, unboxing is the recording and sharing of the big reveal, whether it's Dad behind the camera on Christmas Day or a geek reviewer fawning for his tech-specific fans.

The phenom covers everything from Happy Meals to gaming consoles, usually in minute detail accompanied by either great goofiness or hardcore earnestness—or both.

Unboxing videos leave toddlers wide-eyed by the surprises inside chocolate eggs cracked open by disembodied hands. Eager consumers watch the plastic wrap come off plug-ins and cables. Product reviewers young and older soak up advertising dollars through the unboxing of swag provided them by the makers of stuff.

With the mega-gift holidays nearly upon us and the start of the crazed shopping season, unboxing videos are more popular than ever. So says YouTube, which estimated 57 percent more views this year over last. While not the most popular activity on the site, unboxing is up there and has enjoyed steady growth since such videos first surfaced, believed to be in 2006.

Their allure hasn't been lost on brands looking to sell, sell, sell on social media. One in five consumers in a recent survey done by Google, which owns YouTube, said they've watched at least one unboxing [video](#). As of mid-November, there were more than 20 million search results on YouTube for the keyword "unboxing."

Google estimates that all these unboxing videos have more than a billion views, and uploads grew by 50 percent over last year. They're most watched during the holiday season, with 34 percent of views for products related to food, electronics, toys and beauty-fashion between October

and December last year.

"They're definitely integral to the way I buy things," said 20-year-old Willy James, a fan in Pittsburgh of MKBHD (aka Marques Brownlee), one of the top tech unboxers with nearly 2 million YouTube subscribers.

"They're therapeutic. My favorite is when they're doing the tablet reviews and they peel off the layer of plastic film on the glass. I check the unboxing videos before I check an actual company website," he added.

Is unboxing consumerism run amok? There's that, for some, but focused on the feels.

"I'm doing this in spite of a great urgency within myself to rip this box open and get to my iPhone," declares one unboxer who stretched his video—there's shipping and product packaging—to 18 minutes and 50 seconds.

He took his mindful time to combine the experience with that of another YouTube phenom, ASMR, the video-sharing shorthand for the controversial autonomous sensory meridian response. It's a specific tingling in the body that cult followers believe is brought on by whispering and certain sounds shared in videos also intended to help people fall asleep.

"I wonder if the box sounds any different now that it's empty?" muses our soft-spoken sharer, with only his hands present on screen as he presses lightly on the tape-fringed flaps of his cardboard shipping box to create a scrape-crunch.

You've got your full-time unboxers in search of a living, your companies looking to cash in and some professional comics looking for a laugh, but

you've also got your random folk who want to freeze that special moment, said Matt McLernon, a Google spokesman.

"It's one of the larger trends on YouTube," he said. "You can unbox a cell phone, a vinyl record, a Happy Meal. It's not just over-the-top consumerism as much as it's feeling this connection with the thing that you're watching."

Like most phenoms, unboxing videos have spawned a backlash.

"It even comes with an extra long twisty tie," jokes one tongue-in-cheek parody video, complete with magical music. Posted in 2011, it has earned several thousand comments both pro and con on unboxing.

Lewis Hilsenteger, 29, in Toronto is the open-faced Everyman on the popular Unbox Therapy channel, which has more than 1.6 million subscribers. He said he was motivated to "go pro" on unboxing nearly four years ago after becoming a fan of such videos.

Primarily tech-focused, his regularly posted videos on the channel have surpassed 211 million views, including a huge bump when he showed himself bending an iPhone 6 plus with his bare hands.

Before he hit it large on YouTube, the art school grad had a downtown shop where he repaired computers and mobile phones.

"If I'm not into it, there's no video. I have to be excited about it," Hilsenteger said, describing his audience as largely male between 18 and 40.

And then there was that time in March when he and his adorable son, who was 4 at the time, unboxed a giant Gummy Bear, with each chomping on an ear.

He sees the popularity of unboxing thusly:

"The unboxing video sort of fits in between what a brand wants you to know about a product and what it will feel like for you to have it," Hilsenteger said. "That's what I like about it. It's my reaction, which is impossible to fake."

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