Can you describe Unruly?

Ian Forrester: Unruly is a global platform for social video marketing. The company works with brands and their agencies to get their videos watched, tracked and shared across the open web.

Unruly’s primary goal is the distribution of social videos online for Advertising Age’s top 100 brands and their agencies. A brand like Coca-Cola, Dove or Microsoft will come to us with a piece of video content that it wants to be viewed by a certain demographic online, say 18- to 24-year-olds. We’ll use our proprietary platform to distribute the content where that demographic is discovering, watching and sharing videos.

We have a huge network of 25,000 sites, blogs and social games, which we can activate for a particular campaign. Given the targeting priorities of our clients, we can place that piece of content where it’s most likely to be viewed by that brand’s target audience. We have a potential reach of 1.17 billion consumers via Unruly Activate, our sophisticated social video distribution platform. Through our programmatic video platform, we can reach and engage the half of the global internet population that’s watching and sharing videos outside of YouTube.

We’ve delivered, tracked and audited 4.27 billion video views across more than 3,600 social video campaigns for over 650 brands.

We have clients across different verticals—CPG [consumer packaged goods], automotive and entertainment—and the common thing that unites them all is they have video content that they want to be viewed and shared by people online. Our specialty is video. My role is about taking the different data across all of our data sets and making it into one coherent story.

Data analytics is very much part of your business then.

Forrester: We have tons and tons of data at Unruly. Thanks to the Unruly Viral Video Chart, which we set up
in 2006, we’ve tracked more than 430 billion video views since the social web first exploded. We currently track more than 24 million shares a day.

We draw an important distinction between views and shares because we believe that shares are a much better barometer of a piece of content’s quality than views are. Any marketer can go out and buy views. But people choose whether they want to share a piece of content or not. Sharing is an endorsement, a social signal that shows that people care about your content.

Using Unruly Analytics, we can see what’s trending right now in terms of video shares and video views. If you want to see the number of shares your brand’s video has attracted in the past week, month or quarter, you can use our analytics dashboard to do that. We are testing Unruly Analytics in beta right now with key clients. It has 6 billion customizable data points, so it’s pretty comprehensive.

We’ve used our unique data set, combined with thousands of consumer panels and collaboration with academics, to produce an algorithmic tool called Unruly ShareRank. We are determining what makes videos go “viral.” We can test a piece of content and measure how likely it is to be shared, and in so doing, we can feed insight back to clients to make sure their future content is optimized for the social web.

What are your most important business priorities right now?

Forrester: One of our top priorities right now is expanding our addressable market opportunity.

We recently launched a format called “in-stream social skippables.”

The speed of video sharing has increased massively over the past 12 months. Unruly’s Social Diffusion Curve, which measures the speed of social diffusion for the top 4,000 videos across the social web, first launched in April 2013 and found that a quarter of the average online branded video shares occur in the first three days of a video’s launch.

A year later, that number has almost doubled to 42%, making the first few days even more crucial for marketers hoping to make their ads the talk of the web. To help marketers cope with the speed of social and maximize their video’s viral peak, we’ve launched a new skippable pre-roll format.

The format has marked our entry into the programmatic ecosystem. Integrations with 60-plus data management platforms offer online and offline behavioral targeting, and the unit features sharing and branding features to lift social and brand metrics.

We recently launched our Asia-Pacific headquarters in Singapore. The move marks our continuing investment and aggressive acceleration into the Asian market, where video ad spend is projected to grow at a rate of 37.5% CAGR [compound annual growth rate] year on year, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers. Unruly’s social video products have been established in the region since 2008, delivering over 150 video campaigns to date for brands such as Samsung, Unilever, Procter & Gamble, Hyundai and LG remotely from its offices in Europe and North America.

What are the greatest challenges facing marketers that you’re working with?

Forrester: The first is how to make their video more shareable. Marketers are very used to creating TV content and 30-second spots. With the explosion of online video sharing and viewing, we are helping them make their online content more shareable.

Marketers also need to maintain their brand message within their content. It’s no good creating a shareable video if no one attributes it to your brand. Marketers shouldn’t be afraid of branding their videos.

For advertisers, it’s about combining their brand message with the story of the ad in order to make it sharable. It’s a concept called “valuable virality.” If you do that, then our research suggests with a really sharable piece of content, you can maximize your brand-attributable earned media.

Understanding that process and how some videos will get shared while others don’t is what brand marketers want to talk to us about all the time.

What are the top three trends that you’re keeping your eye on right now, and where do you see them going?

Forrester: First, big data and the fact that data is proliferating at an unheard of rate—2.5 quintillion bytes of data are created by sales and marketing organizations every 24 hours.

It shows that the true value of big data lies with determining what’s useful and what isn’t. The “so what?”
test has never been more useful for marketers looking to make the most of the vast amounts of data they now have at their fingertips. We’ve taken shares and views on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, and we distill that information into our understanding of what makes shareable content.

“eMarketer has been helpful in offering specific information about different demographics and how they are interacting with digital media across mobile and tablets.”

We are also helping brands with their World Cup strategies. The World Cup is pushing TV ad spend growth by 7.7% to $3.6 billion in 2014, according to UBS. In order to maximize the investment in the World Cup, smart advertisers are making content that is designed to be shared online to drive earned media and word-of-mouth marketing. We are currently distributing World Cup campaigns such as Castrol’s Gymkhana, which has attracted almost 1 million shares and 15 million views so far.

Since the previous World Cup four years ago, social video has moved a long way, and I want to see if some big advertisers are going to move along with it. Will they still create similar ads to the ones that they produced last time, or are they going to adopt more of the social video principles that we espouse at Unruly?

We’re also seeing the emergence of new tools and platforms to support the macro trend toward content marketing and real-time marketing, with more brands becoming newsrooms and creating their own content. This will lead to greater investment in content discovery, curation and creation as brands vie with each other for consumers’ share of mind on social platforms.

Brands will need a bigger tool kit that allows them to spot which content is trending (such as news stories, images and videos) and respond quickly. The rise in short-form content has been a significant help here, as it has whittled down the length in production lead times and enables brands to develop deeper relationships.

How do you and your team use eMarketer?
Forrester: We use it in a lot of ways. eMarketer has been really useful for us in terms of understanding general digital trends—not just video, but advertising as a whole. It’s also been helpful in offering specific information about different demographics and how they are interacting with digital media across mobile and tablets.

As I mentioned, we just launched an office in Asia-Pacific and have 12 offices around the globe, so eMarketer has been really useful for us to understand the digital consumption habits of consumers across different territories.

What do you gravitate to in the eMarketer database?
Forrester: The information is distilled into nice bite-sized chunks. I always keep an eye out for your reports. The native advertising report was really interesting, and your mobile reports have been, too. I like to read reports regularly because they help with strategy formation. When we enter a new territory, we use eMarketer reports to help form our go-to-market strategies and product set.

Your clients are multinational marketers, but when you use the database, is the US information of interest to you, or are you very focused on the UK?
Forrester: The US is really important to us, as it’s the biggest ad market in the world. We have offices in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles, and a lot of our clients are headquartered in the US.

We also have offices in the UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Norway and now Asia-Pacific. We have an international team that runs campaigns across the world for clients, so we can activate any territory.

We’ll get questions from any corner of the globe, and it’s great to have eMarketer to be able to go back to clients with some useful insight about their market to help supplement our own insight and technology.