As a JCOM student in the early 2010s, Travis Chambers (JCOM 2011) witnessed “an entrepreneurial spirit among millennials that just exploded. It’s because of the internet.”

Now he’s an entrepreneur himself in the changeable and wacky world of producing ‘viral video’ ads. Founder of chamber.media, Chambers has been recognized by Forbes magazine in its most recent “30 Under 30” feature recognizing the country’s most influential young people.

One chamber.media employee said on Facebook that your flexibility and willingness to change course are what make you successful as an entrepreneur. Do you agree? Yes. I just wrote a LinkedIn post about that, how I reinvent myself and my company every six months. Whatever your model is in the media world becomes irrelevant every six months. It’s crazy.

It’s Moore’s Law of Technology: As things evolve, they don’t evolve incrementally, they evolve exponentially. I think it’s because of the pace that people communicate now. It’s the same with media.

How do you stay ahead of the curve?
I find that the biggest thing has been a personal network of people I’ve met. I’ve met a lot of people through conferences. But even in college, I was a part of a bunch of Facebook groups. One in particular, Utah You tubers, included all these people who were having incredible success with their YouTube channels. This was back in 2009. Since then, I probably get half my information from Facebook groups — communities of people in a certain field who share insights and articles and learning.

Is social media a reciprocal type of industry?
It’s a very sharing community. People in the ad business are very political; I’m playing politics all the time. I’m always pushing my personal brand all the time. To provide value, you have to give away free information. You’re never going to give away your most valuable information. But you’re always going to give away things that have value to people. I think that’s just how the world is now — information is a commodity, and execution is what’s valuable.

One other trick I use is I will pay people to talk to me. There’s a lot of online courses — most of them aren’t very good and people are selling their least valuable information. What I’ve made a habit of doing is finding someone I want to learn from and literally asking them if I can pay them for a half hour of their time and ask as many questions as possible. Half the time they don’t even accept payment; it’s just the fact that I offered.
I talk to people in all sorts of industries. I’ve even called people to pay them to talk to me about crypt currency. It’s anything that’s emerging and might be of interest. Recently I’ve been talking to people in product development, which I’ve never done. Now I’m picking people’s brains on that.

**Why are people fascinated with videos, particularly the viral type?**
It’s just evolution of content. In the 1920s, the family would sit around the living room and listen to the radio. It was audio only. Then the TV came out, and it was audio visual. You could only watch it with a TV. Now we’re at the point where you can consume audio-visual content anywhere you are. It is the final evolution of the technology of getting information. I think people are so fascinated with video because you can consume information so quickly.

A lot of people think virtual reality is going to be the next evolution. I personally don’t. I think it’s going to leapfrog into augmented reality. I just don’t think anyone wants to wear goggles on their head.

It used to that video only accounted for maybe 10 percent of all the information on the internet. It’s predicted that over the next few years, over 70 percent of all consumable information on the internet will be video.

**Are businesses beginning to understand that trend?**
A lot of businesses are. We saw online video exploding three years ago. That is why we focused on it. When I started as an intern in 2009, digital ad spending was only 2 percent of all media budgets in the United States. Now, it accounts for over 50 percent. When I started, people were still saying that social media was a fad. Now, it accounts for more budget than any other source — TV, radio, print, anything.

**Chamber.media specializes in scalable video. What is that?**
It’s a video that is created to be sharable and is optimized to handle millions of dollars in ad spend. The video has been fully prepared from the writing to the production to be very powerful and entertaining. It has to be high enough quality to get dozens of millions of views — Super Bowl level. You don’t put a cheap ad on the Super Bowl because you’re spending a million dollars for two or three 30-second spots.

**What is the magic that makes a video go viral?**
Viral videos don’t exist anymore for ads. Three years ago, all we did was make viral ads. We’d have a small ad spend and a lot of press and we’d get millions of viewers. But that just doesn’t work anymore. There’s too much competition. Facebook and YouTube have changed their algorithms so that they do not prioritize viral-ity anymore because they want advertisers to be giving them money. They would allow content to go viral because
they wanted to add people to their platforms, and it worked. But it was a bait-and-switch to get people to spend money.

So, now it’s all focused not on “Can we make this go viral?” It’s “can we get a certain percentage of people who watch this to engage with it and share it?”
There were times when 10, 15, 20 percent of people would share or comment. Now, if you’re getting 2 percent, you have extreme success.

People perceive ads with a lot of views as being viral, but they really aren’t. They just have a big media buy behind them. And the reason there’s a big media buy is because it’s netting sales. If you can drive sales, you can spend millions of dollars, and you’ll have tens of thousands of shares and comments and press features. People pay attention to it simply because it’s so massive. People perceive it as viral even if it’s not.

**Is it the amount of money spent on a video that thing that makes it a sharable video?**
It’s writing. It’s good writing. Writing is like the beginning and end of a good video. I would say there’s a lot of companies with really great production and maybe a good outline, but they have just horrible writing.

**How many people does chamber.media employ?**
Twenty people work on our projects on a regular basis, and our core leadership team is five people. We also bring on unique writers, project by project, so there’s a unique voice on a project. I personally write all of the base scripts for our videos.

**It seems that a valuable skills would be the ability to come up with good ideas?**
True. It took me a long time to get good at coming up with ideas. It was the most difficult thing to learn in the business. But now, I can pump out ideas a mile a minute.

My first couple of videos I would spend 20, 30 hours to come up with one semi-good idea. Now I can sit down in an afternoon and come up with seven or eight ideas, vet them with people and narrow it down to one the next day. It was kind of excruciating to learn that you can’t just pull information out of thin air. It really takes a lot of practice. Now it feels to me like ideas are a dime a dozen.

**Your job title is Chief Media Hacker. What exactly is that?**
I call myself a media hacker because at the end of the day, I have my hands in so many disciplines, from writing to casting to building sets to wardrobe and makeup. Then I’m directing and producing and making sure the performances are delivered correctly. I’m doing all of this in a way that’s focused on being able to sell as effectively as possible, and entertain and delight people and bring them some joy.

Once all of that is done, we’re just starting the process. Now we have all the ad buying. We’re writing ads, and we’re trying to figure out what audiences to serve them to. We’re diving into the data and all this quantitative side. The only way I could really sum
the whole thing up is that I’m a media hacker; I’m not really *just* creative director or ad buyer or producer.

I want to make myself the glue of the team. That was the disconnect I saw when I was in Los Angeles (at Twentieth Century Fox). I was working with brilliant creative directors, designers and writers who knew nothing about how media and ads are delivered and bought. They were making stuff that was beautiful and amazing, but it had no relevance to what it was used for. It was these two core different roles not talking to each other.

I decided I’m going to do it all, and I’m going to pull together talented people. Someone has to know 80 percent of all of this stuff, and in doing so I’m not going to know 100 percent of any of it.

**As your company and video budgets grow, do you still have free rein to create?**

I have more creative freedom now than I’ve ever had at any job or place I’ve been. The reason is because we are very selective of clients, and we only work with clients who trust us to make what we need to make. We work with only about a tenth of the companies that approach us.

Because we’re not a massive agency, we’re not forced to take on projects we shouldn’t to keep the lights on. We could be three times bigger than we are, but we’ve decided that quality of life is important and we’ve decided that creative freedom and making truly good work is important. We’ve left a lot of money on the table in order to just feel happy and fulfilled.

**Why did you choose American Fork and Utah County as a location for your 3,000-square-foot studio?**

We used to be based in Los Angeles. We produced some stuff in Utah and found out it was half the cost and twice as good. There’s an emerging media community in Utah with these brilliant filmmakers and writers, and they don’t want to leave Utah. Because of that there’s less work in Utah than L.A., so there’s this amazing talent and they’re not L.A. cost. You don’t have to have to deal with egos and people are more collaborative. It’s been incredible.