

Why so many brands are making documentaries

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Atlanta based hip-hop artist Stic Ibomu reformed his eating ways when he turned vegan. His story is one of five that food **brand** MorningStar Farms chronicles in its new docu-series “The Veg Effect,” which is trying to get people to eat more vegetables.

The **Kellogg’s brand** is not alone. With the ascent of on-demand video platforms like **Netflix** and **Hulu**, **digital video marketing** is no longer just overtly promotional ads. Advertisers, including [MAC Cosmetics](#) and [Kleenex](#), are embracing **branded** documentaries.

“There is definitely more of this type of content than before with more and more **brands** jumping on the bandwagon,” said Jen Choi, senior **social marketing** manager at Huge. “**Brands** know that consumers today have a strong bullshit radar and are not as receptive to traditional ads as they used to be, and it also allows them to showcase a great **brand** narrative.”

For **MorningStar** Farms, the series was a logical extension of its larger campaign, “Just What The World Ordered.” It highlights the ways people can incorporate more vegetables in their diets and how simple changes can improve their health and the environment. The series was produced by **Red Tettemer O’Connell + Partners** and Washington Square Films and directed by **Alison Klayman**, an independent filmmaker and journalist. It’s available on-demand for free on **Amazon**, **Google Play** and **iTunes**.

“Being such an emotive and communal experience, food lends itself well to long-form video,” said Todd Smith, director of **brand** and **innovation marketing** at MorningStar Farms. “It could be made even more powerful by showing real people and their real stories.”

In the past, **brands** often repurposed their television spots for **social** media. Today, they’re betting original content can resonate better with consumers when it doesn’t look so much like an ad. With documentaries around **social** issues — like the transgender community in the case of **MAC** and running a sustainable coffee business in Illy’s case — **brands** hope to gain legitimacy in the eyes of consumers.

The documentary format doesn’t necessarily come naturally to **brands**, though. They’re expensive to make and require a strong voice and compelling narrative. That’s where companies like **SAV** Studios, a Los Angeles-based production studio, fit in. **SAV** has connected

brands like **Vizio** and **Gatorade** with award-winning filmmakers from Tribeca and Sundance. Some clients have even bypassed their agencies to work directly with these filmmakers.

“The stigma among filmmakers against **advertising** has started to fade away,” said James Shani, founder and **CEO** of **SAV** Studios. “**Brands** let them tell real stories from a point of view that isn’t coming from the **brand**.”

To this end, hiring accomplished directors and filmmakers like Sundance award winner Klayman is also another way to be more authentic, even though the end goal is still to boost sales.

“The key is to have a narrative,” said **Huge’s Choi**. “You’re not selling the value of function; you’re selling the value of emotion.”