

# The Video that Launched Viagra

It was 20 years ago that the FDA approved Viagra. We handled the final production and distribution of the video (our name was D S Simon Productions at the time) that was provided to media so they could air the story. And air it, they did. There were more than 235 million views of the video that showed those little blue pills. The hot new media publication of the time, Brill's Content, cited the video in a story titled "Hamburger Helper for News." Years after, we would still see B-roll of the pill shots and the couple, discreetly, holding hands while standing on a New York City street airing on TV news stations across the country.

Here are some things about the launch and the video that may remind you of an earlier time:

- There was no HD so the video was shot in the 4 x 3 frame size in what became known as standard definition.
- Stations were notified by fax and phone calls
- Unlike the digital distribution that is used today for content sharing, the only way the media could get the story was via satellite or video tape.
- Because nothing could be shared with the media until the FDA approval, tapes sent by overnight mail delayed airing until the following day in many markets. So much for the 24-hour news cycle
- NBC Nightly News reached 13 million viewers a week compared to 8.3 million today.
- CBS News, ABC News, Good Morning America and The Today Show covered the Viagra launch.

The biggest surprise was that the launch was not treated in a way that indicated expectations that this was a blockbuster-to-be that would change the pharmaceutical industry and our culture forever. Pfizer was content to wait nearly a week to receive its second usage report on the project. The first inkling that this was an extraordinary launch, was when a senior producer at NBC News personally came to our office to get the video tape. As we told the client, that had never happened before. Not sure a launch on the scale of Viagra has happened since.