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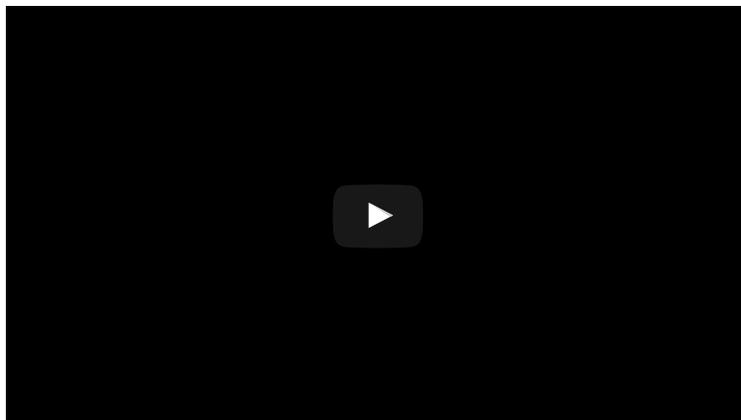
Why a Scientist's YouTube Lecture Series Went "Viral"

by [The Doctor's Tablet Editors](#) on February 17, 2017

Editors' Note: *Sunita Reed, director of multimedia at Einstein, sat down to talk with neuroradiologist and imaging neuroscientist Dr. Michael L. Lipton about his surprisingly popular [Introducing MRI course](#), which has attracted hundreds of thousands of views and a large fan base following its debut on our YouTube channel in 2014. Some international devotees of the 56-part course have even [come to Einstein](#) to meet Dr. Lipton and to learn more about MRI. What makes the course so popular and how did it come to be a "viral" success? Dr. Lipton shares his thoughts in this Q&A. You can also watch an excerpt of an interview with Dr. Lipton below. This transcript has been edited for clarity.*

So, what is the Introducing MRI course, and whom is it given to?

Introducing MRI is a course that I have been giving for more than 15 years to provide basic training in the technical aspects of MRI to radiology residents—radiologists in training—so they would be able to both understand and optimally use MRI as a clinical tool. For that reason, the course took an approach that was rather nontechnical, very much nonmathematical, and essentially assumed no prior knowledge of MRI, and only minimal knowledge of physical concepts—the kinds of things that a basic physics course, even a high school physics course, would confer. My administrator at the time suggested videotaping the course and that's how it ended up on YouTube.



I've been reading some of the comments from the viewers: "The man is a rock star" and "I've binge-watched the past few days." Did you expect those kinds of comments?

I have to say, I was a little overwhelmed by the number of people from different parts of the world and walks of life who commented on and expressed appreciation for the course. I just finished a trip to some conferences overseas and every place I went, at least one person, and in some places many people, walked over to me in hotel lobbies and the airport and said, "I know you from YouTube!" I don't think I really expected the scope of it.

So, what do you think it is that sets these videos apart? Why are they so popular?

I think that these videos are popular because they make something very complex very accessible to people. It's interesting because the types of people who are commenting on the video are commonly radiologists and radiology technologists. But I've also gotten a lot of feedback from electrical engineers, physicists, Ph.D. students, postdoctoral fellows—people who have a lot of technical, mathematical knowledge, but not in the field of MRI, who are moving into that area. They make comments such as, "I finally understand this after watching that video."

Could you give an example of how an understanding of these types of details can help somebody in a job—let's say as a resident or as a technologist?

Individuals who work with MRI and don't understand it feel out of their depth. Knowing what all the settings on this very complex machine are for, or why an image looks a certain way when things go wrong, can be challenging. By having a holistic understanding of the technology, you're able to do a better job in whatever way you interact with MRI, and the way you use it to ultimately help people. The difference between having a nondiagnostic image and a diagnostic image can be as simple as a technical problem, equipment failure or a setting that isn't quite right. By looking at the image and recognizing the problem, the user, whether a technologist, a physicist or a radiologist, is now able to step back and say "I see what the problem is, and perhaps even have a solution as to how to fix it."

Your schedule is packed, yet you take the time to answer every question that viewers post on YouTube. Why?

I try to answer them all for two reasons, one selfish and the other outwardly directed: On the former, I have a need to be clearly understood and not to be misunderstood. (Those are not necessarily the same thing.) Regarding the latter, it is simply because my motivation is to help people understand MRI in order to leverage its power to improve health. To fully realize the potential of MRI, the user has to truly understand what the images represent and how they are created.

Let's say a donor wanted to give you funding. What would your next YouTube course be?

I would want to address the area of what we refer to as quantitative or computational image processing, and how to make that accessible, both in terms of understanding how it works and actually using it, for clinical MRI users such as radiologists, other physicians and technologists. Those are areas where there is tremendous potential to add value to MRI in the clinic, using tools that are already available. Nothing new needs to be invented, but people need to feel comfortable and really understand how to use those tools—what their strengths and weaknesses are and how to apply them to maximize their utility.



The Doctor's Tablet Editors

The Doctor's Tablet is co-edited by **Gordon Earle** and **David Flores** of Albert Einstein College of Medicine's department of communications and public affairs.

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