

Hello Video

Greeting you with a smile!

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Overview

- everything is serious, breaking the proverbial ice with (cc)
- while 'funny', it pushes boundaries in video encoding, loading tech/performance, creativity
- universal, human, not dependent on text
- next level: with backend management tool, with schedules, reproducible format, vandalised player custom ffmpeg bulk processing & optimisation.
- inspiration from "I'm a mac" ads (approachable, friendly) and Harry Potter live paintings
- die-in with Amateur acting.

Grok's suggestions based on outline above:

In 2026, everything feels increasingly serious: AI writes code, generates images, even crafts entire conversations. The web is polished, efficient... and a little cold. I wanted to break the proverbial ice with a simple smile. So I replaced my static hero photo with something alive: 32 tiny, random videos of me waving, nodding, or just being there—sometimes with a bike helmet, sometimes holding kids' toys, always in black & white.

The Inspiration

- **Harry Potter's live paintings** — those Hogwarts portraits that move, talk, and feel sentient (though they're really just magical echoes of the person, limited by what the artist captured). I loved the idea of a "painting" that acknowledges you, adds a spark of life.
- **Apple's "I'm a Mac" ads** — Justin Long's friendly, laid-back "Hello, I'm a Mac" made tech feel human and approachable, not stuffy. That same warmth is what I aimed for here—no sales pitch, just a quiet "Hello, I'm Willem."

The Technical Side – Pushing Boundaries with Short Clips

This isn't just whimsy; it's a performance/encoding challenge.

- 32 clips, each 2–5 seconds, highly optimized for web (total payload tiny, often under 1–2 MB combined thanks to modern techniques).

- All start on a solid gray frame → seamless random switching with no visible jumps (pure <video>

element + simple JS random selector, autoplay muted, loop, ~~playsinline~~ for mobile).

- Encoding: Custom FFmpeg bulk processing pipeline (two-pass CRF for quality/size balance, AV1/VP9/WebM where supported, H.264 fallback). Key optimizations include strategic keyframes, entropy encoding, and motion-focused compression since movement is minimal.

- Backend management: Scheduler for reproducible formats, custom player, lazy loading → zero impact on Core Web Vitals. Fallback to static poster for reduced-motion users or slow connections.

It's "funny" in the sense that it pushes video tech boundaries for something so light-hearted—proving creativity and performance can coexist.

Why It Matters in the Age of AI

AI can fake perfection, but it can't replicate the unpredictable humanity of a real wave or goofy nod. These aren't generated avatars; they're me—unpolished, in the moment. In a world of sterile interfaces, a small, universal human gesture (no text needed) builds instant connection. Visitors smile back, linger, remember. Tech should amplify life, not replace it.

Conclusion

Small touches beat big gimmicks. What tiny, authentic thing could you add to your digital corner? I'd love to hear

me

Structure

- introduction: serious, polished, instead something alive, smile
- inspiration: I'm a Mac/ Harry Potter imperfect
- pushing tech for a smile: tech writeup, loading video, etc.
- why it matters: unpolished in the moment, an opening for human connect.
- Conclusion

Hello, Willem

Greeting you with a smile!

Just look around at the modern web today, thanks to AI generated texts and images everything feels polished, perfect... and a little cold. I want to break the proverbial ice with a simple smile. So I replaced my hero photo something alive: tiny, random videos of me waving, nodding, or just being there. There is more than meets the eye to make it work, let me explain in this post.

Inspiration

As father of two I often play with kids, from this I know that to make new connections it sometimes helps to overcome boundaries (like shyness) when you pull a crazy face, make a joke or wear a silly hat. Although my website is aimed at grown-ups, I figured that a little fun could still help to make things approachable.

[image]

John Hodgman and Justin Long in the award-winning "get a Mac" ad campaign ("I'm a mac" and "I'm a PC")

Maybe you remember the Apple ad campaign with just two guys playing a PC (John Hodgman) and a Mac (Justin Long), highlighting differences between Macs and PCs in a playful way. They captivated audiences with humor and relatable characters. Thanks to the simplicity of the format, I imagined that I could make it work for my own website.

since it works for my website, even without a marketing budget like Apple (ha!).

[image]

Live paintings in Harry Potter's Hogwarts

Inside the school of magic from Harry Potter there are paintings that move, talk and feel sentient. Instead of a static image, they appear to be alive. As they move they convey a much richer picture of the depicted person. Could I capture myself in a magical painting?

Making it

Instead of long and fully scripted scenes I decided to go for quick cameos, glances into my life as professional, endurance athlete, writer and father. By recording them in a standard setting (my livingroom) I can shuffle them and record additional seasonal shots (e.g. wearing a Santa's hat during Christmas).

[image]

The ultra professional movie studio ^{setup} - my living room and iPhone

Using some clamps, wood and furniture I positioned my iPhone facing a grey wall. Targetting the round "hero frame" on my homepage, I configured the camera to show a square grid giving me a sense of composition. Eventually I opted for the selfie camera so I could see the recording while looking in the camera. I remembered some lessons

From my amateur acting (Link), emphasising facial expressions and the power of looking at the audience. I recorded over 12 minutes of footage, producing a 7.3 gigabyte video file.

Pushing Tech

While it appears to be a simple whimsical thing, delivering high resolution video instantaneously on a high traffic homepage is a formidable challenge in encoding and performance engineering. To make it work I came up with several things:

- short fragments instead of long video: I cut the 7.3 gigabyte original footage in small chunks, producing clips of just a few seconds each
- cropping into a square: there is no need to load pixels you cannot see, square video footage is sufficient to fill my intended round target frame.
- dropping audio: with an international audience I didn't want to deal with speaking in different languages as it would complicate things, therefore I could safely drop audio data
- greyscale and crossfader: all fragments start and end with a solid grey colour, making it possible to seamlessly shuffle the footage adding to the magic of unpredictability.
- aggressive encoding: I pre-process individual clips using serious compute power to minimise filesize, making clips as small as

just one megabyte, some even smaller!

- integrated player: to minimise loading external sources, I created an videoplayer with shuffle and scheduling support that is integrated right in the homepage's HTML

[image]

Instead of one large video file, I use many different short, square, grey and audioless clips

[image]

All clips begin and end with a solid grey cross fade that I automatically add to the footage upon batch processing and encoding with Fmpeg.

[image]

Individual clips are managed and scheduled via tailored backend system driving the integrated video player on the homepage.

Why it matters

Instead of a sterile interface, the imperfect goofy clips illustrate the human element behind the formal story. The smile, the nod, the wave, they all provide an opening for connection. It's the perfect "hello".

[video]

The end result as seen on my homepage

Conclusion

You don't need a multimillion marketing budget to deliver a smile, a simple thing can get you a long way. By embracing human imperfection in short video clips, I set the scene for connecting in a better way than a perfect photo can.