



CORPORATE VIDEO PRODUCTION - A BASIC GUIDE

BY SHAUN PEARCE

Making Your Corporate Video Work For You

The meeting is starting to drag on when some bright spark suggests the solution to the problem: “Let’s get a video done!”. The mood in the room immediately splits into two camps - those who see themselves as a budding Howard Hawkes or Cecil B. DeMille, and others who are concerned about the cost and fear the whole exercise will be a waste of money. While commissioning a corporate video probably won’t put you on the next plane to Hollywood, it need not be a hassle or cost a fortune either.

The first thing to do is decide EXACTLY what your main message will be.

What is the most important thing people should be thinking when they’ve just finished viewing the video for the first time? If the purpose of the video is to stimulate discussion, what do you want them to be talking about? Your video should have ONE main message to impart. All the examples given, and all subsequent messages in the video, should support and reinforce the main message.

Be clear about what the video will be used for. Work out who is going to see it and where it is going to be seen.

Keep the purpose narrow and defined. Many companies try to take a “Swiss Army Knife” approach to commissioning a video. They want it for internal orientation. They want to show it at exhibitions. They want something for sales reps to take on the road. They want it to be downloaded from their web page - and so on. While it is perfectly possible to make such a thing, trying to make it fit a myriad of purposes will diminish the impact of the main message. Videos to be shown at exhibitions grab the attention of passers by and hold it long enough for them to collect other media - a brochure or price list - or to be spoken to by a representative, whereas a video shown by a sales rep on a laptop already HAS the audience’s attention and can go into more detail about the company’s products or services. Swiss Army Knives are great, but if you’re hanging wallpaper you’ll need a bigger pair of scissors; if you’re trying to repair a car engine, you’ll find the pliers really aren’t up to the job.

Videos aren’t cheap - although they’re not as expensive as they were, say, fifteen years ago - so the next thing to ask yourself is: “Do we really need a video at all?” Videos work best when they SHOW something - let the viewer see your machinery working, demonstrate new procedures in action, hear testimonials directly from the experts, and so on. If your message could just as easily be put across using text and graphics or simple animation, maybe a brochure, web page, or Power Point presentation could fit the bill just as well.

How is your video going to fit in with other materials?

like a web page, brochure, catalogue, or training materials - and how is it going to be distributed: VHS tape, CD-ROM, DVD, video streaming from your web site? All these factors need to be taken into consideration.

Work out how much you can afford to spend, and be realistic. Asking a production company how much a video will cost to make is like asking the length of a piece of string. It is much better to decide on a budget,



and then let them tell you what they can do for the price. The same goes for time constraints. The more time there is to prepare, the better the quality of the finished item will be.

When all the above has been worked out, start looking for a production company to make your video. Don't be tempted to do it yourself! There's more to making a video than just pointing the camera and pressing the button, and if you can't tell a "Blonde" from a "Redhead" or DVE from DVD, you're better off leaving it to the professionals. Something amateurish simply won't make your company look good.

Of course there are exceptions to this rule: if you're selling your old printing press to a client in India who wants to see it working but can't spare the time to come over in person, or you want to record the maiden run of your company's latest prototype golf buggy for posterity, then hiring a professional outfit to record and edit a video of the event probably would be a waste of money.

Leave plenty of time to find the right production company.

The Yellow Pages probably isn't the best place to start looking. Be sure to pick one that concentrates on corporate production rather than, say, features or commercials. Many corporate production companies also tend to concentrate on certain subjects - medical, aviation, commercial shipping, etc. - and have a pool of creative talent with lots of expertise and experience in making similar productions. Ask to see a showreel so you can judge the quality of their work for yourself.

Arrange a meeting with the producer and director to discuss your project.

If you have an idea about how you want the video to look, now is the time to say so; however, be sure to let them come up with some ideas of their own, too. Production companies generally don't charge for this initial consultation, so shop around and get several companies to come up with ideas and budgets. Then choose the one that works best for you. No production company worth their salt is going to gossip your secrets to your competition, and any reputable company will be happy to sign a confidentiality agreement if you ask them to.

Once you've agreed to work with a production company, let them guide you through the creative process.

This will basically fall into three stages: pre-production (planning, scripting, budgeting, etc.), production (filming), and post production (editing, graphics, and so on).

Be sure to include the producer and director in any meetings your organisation may have about the programme content, and make certain everyone involved is happy with what is being planned. Fundamental changes are best made at the pre-production stage. There's nothing guaranteed to make a director's heart sink more than a client wanting major script changes once filming has begun - although sometimes this IS necessary if, say, an interviewee suddenly becomes unavailable, or something happens beyond anyone's control (freak weather conditions, for example). Major changes after the video has been shot and is "in the can" will probably mean you having to part with more money, so getting it right "on paper" is well worth the effort.

Time is money during filming - think of it as a taxi meter ticking away - so get everything prepared beforehand. If people from your company are going to appear in the video, make sure they are happy about it. Not everyone enjoys being in the limelight, and an unwilling participant will not come across very well on camera.

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Once the programme has been edited, the production company will send you a copy on VHS to get your comments and feedback before the final master is made. Scrutinise the edited programme and make certain it gets your message across effectively and is not just something that will look good on the director's showreel! Within reason, the production company should be willing to keep re-editing the programme until you are completely satisfied, or they may ask you to sit in on an editing session to help get it just right.

Once everything is complete, order your copies of the programme and arrange for any cover artwork to be commissioned. The production company will hang onto the master for safekeeping, and to make it easy for you to order additional copies when required.

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