



PRIMELIGHT  
PRODUCTIONS

## **A DOZEN QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN PLANNING A PRODUCTION**

**DO WE NEED A SCRIPTWRITER?** – The creative of your project is a critical step in the evolution of your program. Some projects are more script driven such as actor role-plays and Voice-Over style videos. Others are more interview or testimonial driven. Either way, it is good to think if you would be handling scripting yourself or totally handing it over to a professional. What often works well is a combination of working with a client content expert teamed with a professional writer to make the language flow more easily. What is usually needed is at the very least a creative proposal from your production company to outline the creative and production style to make sure everyone is on the same page at the start of the project.

**DO YOU WANT IT FAST, GOOD AND CHEAP?** -The old axiom of “You want it fast good or cheap. Pick two” is very often true for video productions. If you want it fast and good it is not going to be cheap. If you want it to be cheap and fast, it very often isn’t going to be good. Production schedules vary in length primarily related to shooting time, editing process and the approval procedure. Give some thought to how many people will be involved in the critical decisions of script, casting, graphic approval, and edit reviews. Typical projects tend to run in the 5-7 week schedule, though they can vary greatly depending on complexity.

**IS THERE A PER MINUTE AVERAGE COST?** - People often speak of a per minute cost for the “average” video. Unfortunately, there is no average video and can range from a few thousand to tens of thousands. Some of the key elements that impact costs are days of shooting, complexity of script, if the shoots are taking place in multiple cities, amount of graphics, if there is stock footage needed, actors required, length of editing and approval process, to name a few.

**WHAT FORMAT SHOULD WE USE?** - There are quite a lot of formats today all delivering different levels of quality. The main format in use today is Hi Def. Within the HD formats you will hear things like 1080p, 720p, 30p, 24p just to name a few. And now the term 4K or even 6K are more in use. Which one do you need? It’s a bit too complex to discuss in this short summary, but all of these formats can deliver great results. It often depends on the final usage. The less expensive cameras are producing very compressed files, which can translate to less information in the captured image, which can impact projection, color-correction, editability, etc. A good starting point is to ask what camera is going to be used on your production. Look up the model and see if it is a consumer type or professional level camera. It’s a quick way to see what level of production is being delivered and a good way to see if they are comfortable discussing it at all.

**HOW MANY INTERVIEWS CAN WE SHOOT IN A DAY?** – This is often the most critical element to think about when planning an interview style production since this

greatly impacts budget. Is it a single interview conducted in one conference room or 10 interviews to be conducted in 10 cities, or 10 interviews to be conducted in one day? Also how much can be shot in one day? A good rule of thumb is it takes usually about 1 to 1 1/2 hours to set-up a typical interview, 1/2 hour to conduct the average interview and 1/2 hour to 1 hour to wrap up and leave a location. So even a "short" interview might take up to 2 1/2 hours of time to accomplish. It can often be more efficient to bring the interview subjects to one location so the reset for each interview is minimal.

**UNION VS NON-UNION ACTORS?** – Casting the right actors can be a critical step in a video program. There is often confusion about hiring Union SAG/AFTRA actors or non-union actors. A non-broadcast video for a corporate use can utilize Union actors very easily through an established production company. The costs for using union actors vs. non-union are often very close. There are certain rules when using SAG/AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild/American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) talent, but none of the rules are exceedingly difficult to comply with. For example, you must break after 6 hours of work for a meal. Most of the rules are pretty much common sense and the advantages of having the depth of choices and experience of Union actors far out weigh any work rules. Some exceptions might be if there are no lines in the script or if there are children needed. But when diversity of age and ethnic background is required, Union actors will offer a greater pool of experienced actors.

#### **WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT GREENSCREEN SHOOTING?**

A very common technique that has been used for years and getting more and more refined is Greenscreen shooting. (Sometimes Bluescreen shooting) What it basically consists of is shooting the subject on an evenly lit green backdrop that is replaced later with a background. Used in many sophisticated special effect movies, but can be used for simply putting a person on a backdrop color or texture. That's handy when you want to do a lot of interviews quickly and want to change the background for each. You shoot everyone the same and add different backgrounds in post-production. The other way it is commonly used is to put the person or thing in a different environment, say a country background by a river. In this case, more sophisticated lighting and time is needed to better match the person's lighting to the actual background lighting. You can even add a little wind to make the effect even more believable. It also can be interesting to put your subject in a virtual environment that they can touch and react to. The technique is only limited by your imagination. A head & shoulders shot can often be accomplished on location in a conference room, but if full-length shots are needed you are better off utilizing a studio with a green cyc (cyclorama) to insure an even background. One thing to remind all people on camera - DON'T WEAR ANY GREEN! Not even a little green necklace or tie. Whatever is green will disappear and your subject will have a hole in their body replaced by the background. Not the best look.

**WHAT DO WE USE FOR MUSIC?** – There are quite a lot ways to produce soundtracks today from the more expensive (original music) to less expensive stock music (paid for by a per music cue or blanket cost for entire production) Stock Music has come along way in recent years and can be very effective for most productions.

In most cases you are not allowed to use popular music off commercial CDs unless it is cleared through the publisher and recording artists which is often very difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. Even if it is an “in-house” only and going to be seen once at a sales meeting, it is not allowed to use popular copyrighted material without written permission and penalties can be steep.

**BUYING STOCK FOOTAGE/PHOTO?** - Very often footage of a specific event, place or situation is needed. There are great resources for footage of all types available for use on a per use cost or often buyout footage can be purchased for unlimited use. There are ranges of prices for NON-BROADCAST clips that can range greatly from \$250 per 5-second clip to just a few dollars. As a rule of thumb the more generic the subject, the easier and less expensive the clip. A shot of the Eiffel Tower or two executive men shaking hands can be found quite easily for a reasonable cost. But to find two executives shaking hands AS they are in front of the Eiffel Tower might be more problematic or IMPOSSIBLE to find. Try to keep it generic if cost is an issue. There are more and more subjects available today on a wide variety of topics from historical moments, to extreme sports, to people in various lifestyle moments, to common business situations to name of few.

As with music copyrights, clips from commercial movie productions are not legal to use without permission. Even if you want to do a spoof of “Top Gun” with just a few clips of Tom Cruise for your department ‘s year-end party, it is not a legal use. But you might find some great aerial dogfight style footage and a sound-a-like music track to have the same feeling. A little creativity on your producer’s part goes a long way.

**WHEN IS CLIENT SUPPLIED FOOTAGE USEABLE?**- Very often clients already have footage and photographs to utilize in a new production. One thing to keep in mind is the quality of this footage and if it will be useable in a new production. It is always best to have the highest quality available. High-resolution photographs if they are digital or clear large original prints are important. As far as video footage, usually a VHS of an old show is not useable to be reedited into a new show. Material that is on a non-copyrighted DVD can sometimes be a source if the client owns the rights. It is best to find an original master edit of the show for this purpose that would be on a more professional format.

**HOW LARGE OF A CREW DO WE NEED?** Crewing depends on what is being taped and level of production value required. Crews can range from as small as two or three people for a simple interview (Director, Cameraman, Engineer/Audio) to a dozen crew members for more complicated shoots. It’s best to describe the situation and expectations you have for a shoot with your Producer to see what kind of crew compliment might be needed.

Here’s a list of some of the key crew positions:

Director – responsible for directing interviews, arranging shots with Cameraman, working with actors to deliver a proper performance  
Production Manager – responsible for running of crew and location

Cameraman (sometimes referred to as DP, Director of Photography) responsible for overall look and set-up of shot

Gaffer – responsible for lighting and electrical

Grip – responsible for rigging of equipment

Engineer – responsible for set-up of camera and integrity of recording. Very often is also responsible for sound recording on smaller shoots.

Audio – responsible for set-up of microphones and integrity of recording

Media Wrangler or Digital Imaging Tech – responsible for saving and backup of media

Teleprompter Operator – responsible for set-up, inputting script and running of teleprompter

Make-up – for either men or women application of make-up is sometimes needed.

Video tends to exaggerate even the slightest shine and imperfection and a light make-up application provides a natural look

PA (Production Assistant) general helper

There are other positions that are utilized for larger productions (Dolly Grip, Script Supervisor, Prop Stylist, Assistant Director)

**WHAT IS A GOOD LOCATION?** – It is good to know when planning a production if you have access to a location to shoot the interview or actor scenes. Is it a role-play video in a doctor's office or sales office? Does it take place in a bar? Is it a series of interviews in a conference room? Is the location accessible for a crew with equipment? Any stairs? (Crews hate stairs since they are usually rolling equipment in on carts) Are the people at the location familiar with the disruptions of a video crew such as cases of equipment being brought in, quiet needed periodically, areas being isolated when needed for shooting.

Outside locations are available, (offices, homes, restaurants) but the fees can be very expensive ranging into the thousands of dollars.

These are just some of the things to think about when planning a production. A bit of forethought at the pre-production stage can save significant time and money in the actual execution. We hope this is helpful in planning your next project.

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