

A short guide to video production

Video is a powerful way to communicate with patients, clinical and general staff, the local community, potential employees and funders. But to make the most of your investment in making the video, it's very important to plan the production process as carefully as possible.

Four crucial questions

It is very useful if you can agree a short briefing document with everyone who has an interest and a stake in the video. It is important to involve key decision makers. There is nothing worse than a project being revised at the last minute because a key stakeholder was not involved as early as possible. Rather like a building project, we need to understand all the considerations we need to take into account as early as possible to avoid making costly major changes once production has begun. So, in developing the video we need to ask four crucial questions. We usually attempt to provide answers in our first report, but exact answers to these questions need to be agreed with your team at the highest level to ensure the project meets its strategic objectives.

1 Who is your audience?

Please define as precisely as possible who is your primary audience, and if there are any secondary ones. Please give as much information as you can, including age profile, gender split, preconceptions they may hold, prejudices or misapprehensions to be countered. It's also very important to identify the ways the audience will see the video. Do you just need short illustrative sequences to add to your website or do you need a five minute promotional video for your exhibition stand? And do you need different language versions for international audiences? Specific audience research can often be very productive.

2 What is the proposed content?

A simple summary that you have agreed between you will be a very useful guide for our thinking. You might have a list of essential points to cover or there might be a logical sequence of events or processes to relate. Do you simply require a set of individual movies to illustrate training material or website text, or do you need a fully scripted documentary film? Are you presenting a procedure or protocol, or creating a realistic drama? Are there difficult concepts to explain? (You may need to choose between live action and still or animated 2D or 3D graphics sequences). Does it include a large amount of data? Are there important safety messages? Do you want to include existing material (photos, video, archive material...)? We also need to know if there are any brand guidelines we need to follow in terms of your values, tone of voice and the look and feel of the images.

3 What is the deadline, and how soon can you start work on the project?

The production process needs to be carefully managed at all stages so that we can meet your deadline and budget. It is important to set out a realistic timetable, which takes people's other commitments into consideration. We will work with you to set deadlines for the scripting, production and post-production phases.

4 Do you have a target budget?

If you have a target budget in mind please let us know. We want to make sure our creativity is as relevant to your needs as possible. If we are asked to propose a creative treatment for a fully finished production, knowing the budget parameters we help to guide our thinking.

The video production process

The production process involves three key stages:

Pre-production when all the planning and scripting take place

Production when we shoot the film

and **Post-production** when we do all the editing, graphics and sound.

Let's look at each stage in turn:

Pre-production

Planning

The planning stage is an important part of any video project, in terms of both its success as a programme and its total cost. It starts with a kick-off meeting with your client contact/subject matter expert(s) to discuss such things as the aims and objectives, finances, and the treatment and style. Before the first meeting it is useful to answer the four questions asked above internally.

Scriptwriting & structure

It is almost always essential to write a script for a video. A script may take one of several different forms depending upon the style and content of the proposed programme. It may be possible to film with an agreed shot list, but if the material is to be included in a finished programme with a voice over, music and graphics, it is absolutely essential to agree the script in advance (just as you would architect's drawings etc for a building project). The first step is to write a **Treatment**. This is a written outline that describes the video and gives a really good impression of how it will be received by the target audience. If your project is an interactive DVD for

training purposes, a detailed interactive design will need to be developed to ensure the project achieves its objectives. Once the treatment has been agreed with you, the script will be developed through the key stages of **Draft**, **Working** and **Shooting** scripts. Please make sure that everyone who needs to has seen and signed off the script before shooting starts. With huge day-to-day pressure on time, we've noticed that clients are increasingly commissioning shooting without a script. This appears to save time and cost but in fact can result in greatly extended editing times during post-production with an associated increase in costs. Our advice, no matter how simple the project, is to work with a script as a guiding plan for the project.

Storyboard & menu

It is sometimes useful to prepare a storyboard, where a sequence of actions needs to be precisely planned. This is particularly useful for planning animated graphics.

Shooting timetable

All parties involved agree a timetable and access arrangements for the shooting days. Sequences are not necessarily shot in script order, but are arranged to be shot in as efficient a manner as possible. For example, two sequences might be shot at the same location one after the other even though one may be near the beginning of the video and one right at the end.

Production

Shooting

Most of the recording should be completed before moving on to the post-production stage. Good planning helps to avoid delays and minimise the cost of shooting. Locations and people need be organised in advance. Most programmes are shot using a single camera, which means that we have to stop and start frequently to obtain different views of the action and to ensure that the final programme flows smoothly. This can often be a surprise because it takes longer than you might think to shoot a short sequence. People may be asked to repeat the same action several times, because we need another shot of the sequence from a different angle for the purposes of editing. Graphics sequences and animation work may get underway while the filming is in progress. It may be useful for your subject expert to review the footage at this stage with our editor. All footage is archived for any future re-edits of your video.

Script revision

Changes are sometimes made to the script before editing begins to take account of unpredictable differences in the action that has been recorded. However, changes at this stage should be avoided wherever possible because they can cause expensive delays in completing the programme.

Post-production

Editing

Like scripting, editing progresses through a number of iterations. During **Shot Selection** the best shots are selected from the material filmed. An **Initial Compilation** is then created in script order, followed by the **Rough Edit**. You may be asked to view the programme at this stage and approve progress. The voice-over is not normally added yet, although a guide track is sometimes recorded to establish correct timings, especially for graphics, animation or other sequences that rely on exact timing. The last stage of editing is the **Fine Cut**.

Voice-over recording

A voice-over artist reads the narrative script in a sound studio. There are different ways to do this but we usually record the voice 'wild', that is, without pictures. Recording with picture can often take much longer and is most often used for feature films and TV dramas.

Final editing and post-production

A high quality master edit is completed using our non-linear editing suite. Titles, music and any effects are added and a final mixed master sound track is produced. The final master is graded to achieve the best colour saturation and balance. The time taken for this stage varies with the complexity of the programme.

Delivery

Once the final edit has been completed and approved, a master copy is then created on DVD or as a digital file, depending on the delivery method required. This master copy is also stored for future duplication. When distributing multiple copies of a DVD, a glass master DVD is produced and the disc sleeves and boxes are designed, printed and packaged, ready for dispatch.