

Ten tips on how to produce a short video

By Brian Hebb

Producing videos is a very competitive business and I'm often asked, "Why should I hire a production company to shoot my video rather than get a friend with a camera or hire film students to make my video for less money?"

Most people have no idea that getting someone to point a camera at a subject and then edit the footage into a creative, storytelling video is like asking a nurse to perform brain surgery or hiring a high school band to replace the Orpheum Symphony on Beethoven's Ninth. There is a learned skill, creative talent, artistic flair and years of producing films and telling stories that come with a professional.

This being the case, I will try to provide some tips and pointers on how to produce a short video of your speech or a podcast for teaching others about Toastmasters. These ideas can help you understand ways to focus your video toward your basic needs, and the needs of an audience.

One - Communication

Here I'll point you to something you know: the basic Toastmasters guidelines for a speech. Please re-read the basic Toastmasters Competent Communication Speech manual because this is where it all comes down to good communication skills: Organize your speech, Get to the point, It's how you say it, Let your body speak, Use vocal variety, Research your topic well, Get comfortable with your visual aids, Persuade with power, and lastly, and the most important, Inspire your audience.

Two - Story

Know the story you want to tell. Know what you are trying to accomplish with your presentation. Although this all sounds very obvious to the experienced storyteller; many people don't know what they are trying to say. What kind of ideas do you want to implant in your audience? What do you want them to take away from your message? Do you want to inspire them to be better, follow your teachings, carry your message to others?

Find the significance of your message and work on inspiring the people who you want to receive and remember it. And remember, you do not have the option of boring people to death.

Three - Inspiration

Just as the speaker is trying to get a point across by inspiring his or her audience, you must also grab an audience with inspiring content, visuals, sound and feeling. This is what a film, a video, a PowerPoint or any kind of presentation is: It is something for people to experience. And the way we all experience is through feelings.

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Four - Style

An audience will make the first and the fastest impression about something based on what they see. So the look of the subject is very important. Costume: Is the man wearing a tie or is he dressed in casual clothes? Is the woman in a dress or in pants; does she look business like? Do I trust this person? Is he or she communicating to me personally and visually? Can I see their eyes? Are there distracting shadows on their face? What do they sound like? Can I hear them clearly or do I have to strain over other noise to hear the message the speaker is trying to put across?

Five - Environment

The environment is where you place your subject. What do you see behind them? Do we see a view of a whole city outside a window in the background or is there a white wall? If there is a white wall, has it been lit and shaded so there are some shadows that contribute to a pleasing atmosphere? Are you photographing this speech in a lecture hall? In which case do you have a long lens to see your subject in close up rather than see the whole boring room? Do you have the opportunity to place your subject in the set of your choosing? It doesn't take much nudging to ask the subject to sit on a park bench or stand in an atrium with plants in the background; perhaps on a sofa or at the kitchen table. The point is, the world is filled with interesting environments that will help bring your video to life.

Six - Lighting

It is most important to make sure your subject's face is lit correctly. Invest in a lighting kit with at least three lights: Key light, fill light and back light. Bring the sparkle to their eyes. Bring the image quality up to standard with the help of lights. Among many things, there are two large stand-out things that make a bad production: The lack of good lighting and bad sound. No one goes out to make a bad video but they do. Usually it's because of ignorance of the medium. There is no excuse not to invest in a small lighting kit and a good sound recording device (within or outside your camera) and a good microphone.

Seven - Sound

Hearing is our second most important sense when it comes to participating as an audience. Hollywood spends a huge amount of money making sure that the soundtracks are up to excellent standards on their productions. In video, sound is much more than just hearing or listening; it is comprehension. Bad sound means bad production and audience dissatisfaction. Especially when it comes to recording a speech, sound is (almost) everything; Invest in a good lapel/lavaliere microphone, clipped at about one foot from the subjects mouth, either with a long cord connecting to your camera or recorder, or a radio lapel/lavaliere microphone that lets your subject roam. Sound, like the lights, should sparkle the production.

Eight - Camera

Cameras and technologies come and go, and next week you will probably find a better camera for the same price than you bought last week. It doesn't matter; Buy the best you can afford. You need a camera that is going to give you good image quality. It should have a good optical zoom lens (not

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electronic zoom) and you should be able to alter the aperture and sound inputs separately (plug in a separate microphone). Also, invest in a good tripod with a fluid head. Steady pictures with smooth pans and tilts will help make your product look professional. Aim for good composition, size of shot, look of subject, lighting of subject, background behind the subject and overall feeling and quality. The photography should be based on the story you are telling.

Nine - Editing

Presentation, photography and sound. That's it. Right? Well, no. Then comes your editing and that is a whole different story. It depends on your computer, software and storytelling abilities. There is some great software like Final Cut Pro and Adobe Premiere when it comes to creatively assembling your shots. So plan to shoot good pictures and lots of angles.

Ten – Use of the medium

The technicalities of producing a video are about creativity, art, photography, sound recording, lighting, environment, editing, music etc. The idea is to stimulate through the quality of the image, sound and use of the media. These, in turn, help manipulate feelings, other than with the content.

On YouTube you can see some of the finest films ever made. You can also see most of the worst. With visual storytelling, you need to be better than the next guy. There is no way your production is going to look like 'Lawrence of Arabia,' but that is what you are competing with in some people's imaginations. You must be able to propel your message with good photography and good sound. Look at print advertising or fashion photography and see how one image tells the story. Many times the message comes from what you don't see; through nuance, imagination and sometimes metaphor.

When it comes to making a video, there is a lot to learn, but after the basics you can then study the arts, sciences, theatre and the business to produce good videos. You can become quite proficient with much practice.

Remember it's always about your audience and how you inspire or motivate them. Know the story you are going to tell, and tell it with quality, style and creativity.

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