

# What Works vs. What They *Say* Will Work

## A Three-Minute History of Film and Video

First there was Speech – simply making noises to get another’s attention. This was the earliest form of communication and lives on to this day as the official language of New York City (act out comic grunt scenario)

Around 3,497,993 B.C., the Neanderthals developed a Language that attached specific thoughts and meanings to these sounds. No one knows what the first word was, but the first response to that word must have been, “Huh?”

“Gnanh!” “Huh?”

This was also where “trying to figure out what others were thinking” started hence the beginning of psychology and advertising. Neither of these disciplines has advanced much since then.

For the next 3.5 million everything important was word-of-mouth, printed on paper or painted on the sides of barns until 1877. Thomas Edison invented a technique for recording the human voice and for the first time in history people realized that they hated the sound of their own voice.

The Magic Lantern – basically a slide projector – was enormously popular at this time. Audiences delighted in seeing still photographs of moving objects. One of the most startling was a slide of a steam engine hurtling toward the audience, smoke billowing from its stack, steam streaming from its cylinders. It evoked screams of fear until it was learned that it was actually a photo of a parked locomotive on a windy day. This was the beginning of special effects and, until the invention of CGI (computer generated images) that was about as good as it got.

In the late Gay `90’s there were hundreds of filmmakers around the world capturing live action films and making crude animations to delight their audiences.

Oddly enough, it took a full 30 years for the sound recorders and filmmakers to start talking to each other about how they might work *together*. This was known as the Silent Era. By the `40’s Sound was as important as Picture and Television Broadcasting was developed to beat people over the head with the concept.

In the `60’s, Live Television captured the imagination of Americans and they decided to sit home and watch it “on the Tube” rather than walk the dog and see what was going on in their neighborhoods. Couches across America started sprouting Potatoes. Film was relegated to Art... and Video became Reality – a boring, repetitive, lowest-common-denominator reality.

Twenty years later, anyone could buy a video camera/recorder for \$1,500. and make their own Television. Home movies became even more unendurable. The images were fuzzy,

hard to edit and usually relegated to hobbyist and homeowner projects but, without it, America's Funniest Home Videos and Rodney King would be virtually unknown.

Now a near-Broadcast quality MiniDV camcorder that fits in the palm of your hand costs @ \$150. Television programs about wild animals and near death experiences – like *Catching Crabs in the Arctic* or *Living with a House Full of Snotty Teenagers* – are routinely shot on throwaway equipment after the throwaway scripts have been shredded to line Hollywood's innumerable cat boxes.

The most daring “new” Television is when they have a dozen cameras shoot hundreds of hours of tape that will become a one-hour tour of some Rappers home. A numbskull with a gold plated toilet is still a numbskull who occasionally runs out of toilet paper and turns to the last issue of *Rolling Stone*.

(Stare off into space for a long moment) Oops, must have dozed off there.

(Check Watch) I'm at 2 minutes, so I've got to hurry if I'm going to wrap this up in 60 seconds.

When Broadcast-quality equipment – figure a DV camera, PC- or Mac-based editing workstation, software and a special effects application – fell below the price of a used Geo Metro, suddenly everyone was a filmmaker. Overnight millions of out-of-work burger flippers put down their copies of *Learn Spanish in 30 Days* and picked up *Hang up your Business Suit, Work at Home and Make Load in your Pajamas!*

Suddenly everyone was an “auteur.”

And by that, I don't mean an artist who controls every aspect of their work to preserve its clarity and relevance... I mean Amateur with a blimp-sized ego. *That is to say, a person with little or no experience who thinks that recording is the same as directing, that typing lines is scripting and developing a creative strategy is being able to imitate something that has been made before - usually on TV.*

My point is, we are in a creative media slump unlike anything we have experienced in the past... specifically caused by inexpensive access to better-than-Consumer, and not quite Professional equipment. We are deluged by Pro-Sumer am-auteurs.

At one time, the high price and complexity of producing film and video kept the fumbler and scam artists at bay. But now the technology of High Definition video and hard drive storage – and a credit card afternoon spree at Costco – and a VistaPrint business card – and an off-brand cell phone is all it takes to cash-in on the multi-billion dollar Industrial Video market.

And who are the big losers in this techno-inverted, bait and switch situation?

(Check Watch) Well, that's my three-minutes. From caveman, clean up to VistaPrint phonies. Good.

Next topic:

### **How To Know When a Video Production Company Is Ripping You Off**

First of all, assume it at the outset. In fact, always assume you're about to be ripped off whenever you're writing out a big check for something that's invisible.

You're not paying for the pictures. Those are just light shining on a screen. The sound? Just vibrations that reach your ear. The cassette or DVD? Well, okay... if you must have something to enter into the expense ledger: a \$12,000. to \$20,000. piece of plastic.

Your project's product is an electronic stream of "0's" and "1's", invisible and indecipherable without a player when recorded on tape or lasered onto a disk.

Your project – your intended product – is a communication that explains, instructs or inspires an audience to action - an orchestrated appeal to logic or emotions. These sensibilities do not stick to videotape or DVD's. They cannot be deciphered by electronic equipment. They have never been projected on a screen for any of the millions of audiences who sat in a darkened room, ready to be entertained.

Emotions can only be created *within the viewer*. Logic can only be understood *by the mind of the audience member*. Entertainment is a *self-indulgent activity* that needs to be internalized to be understood. Everything else is propaganda.

What appears before the eyes, arrives at the ears and appeals to our logic are merely elements of what moves our primal emotions: love, happiness, anger, sadness or fear.

How do we communicate these and more complex emotions? Through *stories*.

That's all we really have. The Advertising Industry has stripped stories down to 30 seconds, placed the audience on both sides of the camera, made them heroes and victims and learned how to channel respect, jealousy, disappointment, irritation, pity, confusion, hope and courage into one overpowering viewer compulsion: Buy!

Others have used the same techniques for: Vote! Fight! Lust! Question!

Having a story to tell is the foundation of a media project. Otherwise, you're just chatting. You've seen hundreds of "chatty" videos. At least you've seen the beginning of some.

Self-preservation demands that you find an excuse not to subject yourself to the full program. "I have to go back to my office and wait for a phone call" or "I need to arrange my sock drawer," or "Do you smell smoke?" are worthy excuses.

The bare bones of the Chatty Video:

- Fade In - from Black
- Annoying Industrial music up (SFX to match)
- Stock shot of dreary-looking Industrial Park
- Announcer (way too pukey)
- *Stop Tape*
- Explain what v.o. puking is
- *Resume video*
- Assembly line and workers acting like no-one is taping them.
- *Stop Tape:*
- Point out HR officer's son-in-law walking through shot.
- *Resume video*
- Talking Head: Some lower-C-level mumbler used to "set-up" the CEO's appearance

Who makes such garbage?

The following list entitled "Steps to Video Production" was lifted from a small video producer's website and changed enough to avoid hearing from Jacoby & Meyers.

By the way, I'm incapable of expressing the list's numerous mis-spellings, punctuation and sentence construction errors verbally, so whenever I read one, I'll honk this little bicycle horn.

1. **CONSULTATION:** We identify a single point of contact who will be your company's expert (honk) during the initial phase of the project. This person must have the authority (honk) to sign the contract, dispense – spelt d-i-s-p-e-n-C-e (honk) milestone checks and approve the final version.
2. **RESEARCH:** The Producer becomes very well-versed (honk) in the details you want to highlight.
3. **SCRIPTWRITING:** The scriptwriter submits a first-draft of your script. All executives involved in this project must provide there (honk) comments to avoid re-writing the script further.
4. **VIDEOTAPING:** Make sure you participate in the taping so you can insure (honk) that what appears on the video monitors looks like it does during non-videotape times. Is there something that needs to be shown that is not in the picture? Let the Producer know as soon as possible. Its (honk) his job to make the video as true-to-life as he can.
5. **PRE-EDITING:** Here's where you get your choice of music that will be heard during your video. Well-known melodies (honk) can cost thousands of dollars to license, but you'll find we have hundreds of evergreen industrial/motivational (honk) songs that can be used for pennies.

*When I was working at Microsoft in Redmond, Washington there was a butcher shop just off-campus named "Evergreen Meat Company." Who was drunk the day he got that fictitious name license?*

6. And finally **EDITING**: All the elements of the project come together: images, voiceover, (honk) titles, graphics, background music. As they say in the business, "We can fix it in Post" which means after we shoot it. So nothing is unfixable (honk) unless you are unwilling to compromise. (honk)
7. REMEMBER! Every dollar spent on PRE-Production saves FIVE dollars of POST-Production "fixing." The planning and acquisition of everything you need to sit down to editing must be scrupulous. Otherwise, one "Ah, CRAP!" in editing – missed or blown line, blurred or wrong-screen direction action, missing cut-away shot, etc – means pulling the whole shoot back together again to save the piece. Plan, then plan and plan again.

Shady video producers fall into five categories:

- Wedding and Kid Party videographers who occasionally catch a "big fish" project
- Ex-Television people who washed out because they couldn't produce fast enough or couldn't handle the stress of corporate competition
- Budding filmmakers who produce videos to pay the bills while dreaming of going Hollywood
- Flat-out nobodies who sub-contract the production to one of the above
- One guy in South Dakota who is honest, hardworking and, unfortunately, retired.

Some crass generalizations about finding a production company:

- If you're being directed to a video producer by an Ad Agency, you are paying 2 to 3 times more than you should for the final product.
- If you look on Craigslist or in a business publication, you're paying twice the amount you should, plus the cost of his orthodontia.
- If you have an employee contract a friend who "does video" you're hiring someone who knows just *slightly* more about video than you do.
- If a video production company has a wall full of trophies, awards and citations – and none of them is an Emmy, Clio or Addie – you are getting the best that The Grove City *Spring* Film Festival has to offer.

Flat-out walkaway situations:

- Anyone with a lip-beard... and that includes women.
- Anyone with a monocle, more than one facial piercing or multiple neck tattoos.
- Anyone who keeps raising his thumbs and index fingers in a double "L" box to frame some object in the distance.
- Anyone who uses the phrase *mise en scene* when describing a sequence in your your "How to Use the Company Postage Meter" video.
- Anyone who was "let go" from a News Room because they couldn't attain the requisite ethical standards or has just "let him- or herself go to hell..."

- Anyone with a PhD in Film. Those people are destined for Multi-Level Marketing and should not be allowed to spend unchaperoned time alone with your dog.

### **The Gear:**

Until the early '90's nearly all video cameras were created equal. – be they Cathode Ray Vidicon, Orthicon, Saticon, Pasecon, Newvicon or Trinicon tube. It's not important to know the differences between all these gadgets. The important thing to know is that they all had two things in common: they were frightfully expensive and they're all obsolete for our purposes.

Now most video cameras use a microchip, called a CCD, or Charged-Coupled Device. The most important feature of this leading edge device? It's cheap.

You can have the same – or better – image than a studio-quality camera that cost \$50,000. ten years ago for a couple hundred dollars.

Here's a recent reality check from Craigslist:

### ***TV Studio For Sale - \$8000***

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Reply to: [sale-423092024@craigslist.org](mailto:sale-423092024@craigslist.org)  
Date: 2007-09-15, 10:23AM EDT

*This is a complete production package that will allow you to shoot national projects, television commercials, marketing video and DVD's. Gear was used for network shoots, infomercials and TV pilots. The package includes:*

- *Broadcast Betacam D-30 Camera with lens, camera plate, batteries, AC, case, etc.*
- *Fluidhead tripod with case*
- *Field Monitor*
- *Media 100 editing System on a G-4 Mac with harddrive, monitor and break-out box*
- *JumpBacks (Animated Backgrounds) volumes 1-8*
- *Mackie audio mixer 8 channel, cables, cases, etc.*

***It would cost you more to start an Auto-Detailing business.***

So, how do you know if the “Video Artist” who has submitted a competitive bid knows one end of the camera from the other? Or better yet, if he or she knows the difference between an instructional video, a VNR, an image piece, an instructional, a presentation, a slide show, a PowerPoint with embedded video, a point-of-purchase loop or a tradeshow attractor... or if the video is for staff, clients, shareholders, investors, vendors or present/potential customers/clients. They all require different approaches.

The answer is – start with your intended audience. Who is this program for? Don't worry if it's more than one group at first – we'll get to that in a minute. The more focused the project is; the more persuasive power the piece will have.

Knowing your audience helps shape the details of what you need to show. Those within the company are onboard with the history, stats and fluctuations of your company. Include these to an uncaring audience because you don't know how to focus the piece and the audience will start yawning.

Customers don't care much about the fine points of your battle with the competition. Go right to the product or service and let them know how THEY figure into your way of doing business. And if you have 15 seconds to get the attention of a tradeshow participant amid the wall of all the other exhibitors, hit them with something exciting, intriguing or daring every ten seconds.

So first; the Audience.

Second – the Budget.

Don't let this throw you, but this is where the bogus producer makes his or her move. Regardless of what you quote as your target budget, it won't be enough, but they'll claim to be able to make it work.

If you went to a restaurant and the Filet Mignon dinner costs \$45.00, you would either order it or get Sirloin and a second cocktail. If you told the waiter that you wanted to spend \$35.00 and have the Filet Mignon, he'd look at you a bit strange. He wouldn't say, "I think I can talk to the Chef... let me see what I can work out. Maybe a smaller cut of Filet, a half-portion of potatoes, only *one* basket of bread..." If he did that, you'd be looking at HIM strangely.

But that sort of thing happens every day in video production. The difference is, we're not talking about meat and potatoes – to keep the profit margin high the quack video producer eliminates a light or a boom microphone operator or an on-location monitor so you can't see what's being recorded. He cuts back on the very items you need to look and sound professional.

Audience. Budget. Method of distribution.

More importantly, the budget needs to conform to the final use of the video or more importantly the piece's "method of distribution."

If it's going to be uploaded to a server and run on desktops or transmitted over the Internet, you suddenly have a far lower need for Broadcast quality video. In fact, on the Internet, a deliberately "raw" looking video can have a greater impact than a polished piece.

This is heresy to some video producers who what – NEED – to have you project on their demo reel to attract more business. The current loopy rationale is, "Produce it to look Hollywood, then we'll make it look casual and spur-of-the-moment."

That was the concept behind all those “shaky-cam” commercials during the late ‘90’s; slightly out-of-focus, off-center camera framing, bad or flubbed line reads and poor performance “takes” that made the viewer think: “reality video.” “Too real to discard.” “Honest!”

*Bull Byproduct.*

Remarkably, most of those jerky, lopsided, Palsy-cam commercials were multi-hundred thousand-dollar productions that were made to *look* like they were shot by a Film 102 student after six Vente Macchiatos. Waste and undeserved - shall we say *gouged?* - profit for the producers and a gaping hole in your yearly budget.

Audience. Budget. Method of distribution. Story.

We’re back to the heart of the matter.

Here’s where the imposter impresario shows his hand. The most powerful messages – be they corporate, artistic or romantic – are emotional. How do you create messages that have emotion? Ah! Here’s where all the gear in the world can’t make a jot of difference.

If you don’t know the story you’re trying to tell, or if your low-bid producer buddy is clueless, stop. FULL STOP!

A story is not images or footage or music or sound effects or narration. Those are elements that HELP in telling a story, but a true story comes *from* the heart and speaks *to* the heart.

Years ago, when I was pitching online advertising to Coca-Cola, I summed up for the executives what the Coke story is: *Coke is a break in the ordinary - when people share a moment together - to reflect on their common hopes, dreams and achievements. Coke is a sacrament of the friendship ritual.*

Smiles all ‘round the room.

It’s not cold sugar water in a can. Not to them, anyway. It’s a communion of human kindness. The \$5.27 billion dollar-a-year variety of human kindness – *and some Coke doesn’t even have the gawd-darned 1.5 cents of fructose sugar in it.*

That’s the power of directed emotions, friends - gut-level dedication and warm-fuzzy feelings about sharing caramel-colored water with a billion other devotees.

### **How Much Should I Expect To Spend On A Video Project?**

The quick answer is “Not one dollar more than you HAVE to.”

I recently produced some commercials for a most outstanding client. I've produced for Ad Agencies and Fortune 500 companies, millionaires and non-profits, Microsoft AND host of Silicon Valley giants. But this guy has what all the others struggled with. He has a crystal-clear vision of who his audience is, what they respond to, how to get their attention and what to do with it when he has it.

He's unclouded and he answers to no one but himself. He's willing to risk his neck and refuses to live under the guillotine blade of being "creatively expendable."

So his projects are sharp, precise, targeted and succinct. He understands emotions and how they drive an audience. He's a storyteller and his best are only 30 seconds long. They're not ART, mind you. They'll never win a Film Festival or Clio, but he's reaching a huge audience and getting response from an admirable percentage of them.

The result is taking the money it would usually take to make one low-cost commercial and make three. The advantages are obvious: less repetition in broadcast rotation, the benefit of a more defined message and the ability to stack rank the spots according to efficiency. Smart... and destined to win.

### **How To Make A \$10,000. Video Look Like A Million.**

It's a toss-up at this point as to whether a film buff can tell the difference between film and video. It used to be immediately recognizable, but super-sophisticated High Definition camera chips, the availability of quality lenses, onboard computer compensators, image stabilization, progressive scan and new compression and decompression codes have nearly erased the recording differences between film and video cameras.

All those items I just mentions are irrelevant. Expect them from producers who are in the running, eliminate anyone who tries to equivocate anything less.

The TRUE difference between film and video is now what occurs IN FRONT of the camera: the lighting, the sound recording, the scripting and the performances.

Sometimes multiple cameras are used to make film editing easier or when shooting live television, or when a special effect or stunt is so costly that it needs to be captured without fail, as is the case in "blow-`em-up" action films. Huge explosions usually happen three times in a row as seen from three different angles. How puny reality is compared to a Hong Kong Director's imagination!

Good film and good video deserve to be scripted out and a concise list of shots drawn up to bring the intended footage into the editing room.

But let's take each issue by itself:

#### **1. Light for Drama, not Display**

If the star of your video is a crock of Boston Baked Beans or an on-sale watermelon, light everything like a supermarket. No shadows, everything flat and uninteresting. If your star is a person or group of people, create a sense of drama, comedy or excitement by controlling the light. One light creates a shadow, the second lessens that shadow and the third separates the talent from the background. You just learned the basics of Lighting 101 in a single sentence: the three light method.

## 2. Depth of Field and Sharpness

The biggest problem with cameras in general is that they are much better than the human eye. If you're looking at me, the wall behind me is slightly out of focus. At this point a lot of people look at the back wall and think, "No it's not." But to them, I appear a bit out of focus. Keeping the depth of field (the area that stays IN focus) very shallow, the viewer's attention is focused on what you want them to pay attention to. Important.

As for "sharpness," I have two examples that many people recognize as beautiful.

A "Boudoir Photo" done at one of those cheesy mall shops and your fondest memory of a long-passed loved one. The first uses a slightly out-of-focus, gauzy filter so blemishes, wrinkles and life's "wear and tear" disappear (after all, this is a photo shop *in a mall*)

The loved-one's memory has been blurred a bit by time and, in addition, your mind cobbles together other sensory enhancements to create a masterpiece: Grandma in her apron, stirring a big kettle of goulash, the tinny kitchen radio with a summertime ballgame on, two outs – top of the ninth, in the distance a dog barks, the smell of fresh biscuits... all those cops swarming in...

Ahem. Use a tiny bit of filter and soften your beauty shots.

## 3. Kill the Fluorescents and Cheat the White Balance

Even though I'm sure no one in this audience has ever had this experience, being hung over after a Tequila shooter blowout and seeing your face in an airport men's room mirror is enough to make you switch to Singapore Slings and Vicodin.

It's not the Cuervo *or* the airport's Muzak or the attendant who keeps trying to hand you a paper towel – it's the fluorescent lights. They're blue. Fluorescents make every vein in your face stand out like night crawlers on a bed sheet. No one looks good under fluorescent lights. Freddie Kreuger? He demands regular light bulbs. Three and a half pounds of raw roast beef in a butcher case at the Pay `N Pack? Happy under the fluorescents.

And here's snappy trick you can use to intimidate a harried videographer: walk up to the person they're getting a shot of, hold the palm of your hand up in front of

the person's face and look at it with a frown. Wait until you have the cameraman's attention and say, "Are you going to tweak the white balance or 'wing it' with a pre-set?"

*Guaranteed* he or she will hop around to the side of the camera and start monkeying with its knobs and switches. If the cameraman asks, "How's this? Better?" don't even look at the monitor. Smile and say, "What the heck would I know? I only write out checks when we're ALL happy."

Not only will you have his complete attention, but I assure you he'll wring every bit of warmth out of his gear. Expect a Rembrandt.

#### 4. Box or Letterbox – The Aspect Ratio

Since everyone in the video business would rather be at Cinecitta in Italy with Scorsese shooting *Gangs of New York II* in Ultra Panavision 70, expect a hard sell to go "widescreen."

Ordinary TV, having an almost square shaped screen is good for showing:

- 1 talking head up close
- 2 talking heads sitting at a desk
- Or four people sitting on a stanky couch like they do on *The View*

This makes last Wide Shot mess makes skinny people look gaunt and fat people look even fatter. Single talking head, keep the production simple – stay in the TV box.

Widescreen – also known as letterbox – is more like a bumper sticker. It's great when you want 2 or more talking heads up close at the same time or want to split the screen with one image on one side and text, a talking head or another image on the other.

If you're selling farmland in Texas – go widescreen. Showing employees how to adjust their ergonomic chairs – keep it tight. *Ben-Hur* looks like *junk* on old 4:3 ratio TV's. Bbut *Blair Witch kills!*

The truly important aspect of this "aspect ratio" issue is: once you have shot your piece, you're pretty much stuck with what you have. Shoot it Ordinary TV and it won't fit on widescreen monitors - like plasma TV's - without clipping the top and bottom of the image or squishing it to fit. Kooky and instantly stupid-looking.

Produce a wide screen video and, if you want to show it on an Ordinary TV monitor, you'll have to "letterbox" it which means making the image even smaller and leaving bands of black on the top and bottom. A letterboxed version of *The Sound of Music* looks like a Nazi Attack Musical *on an antfarm*.

## 5. Get a Grip - and I don't mean an Electrician's Assistant

The availability of cameras with built-in stabilizers, inexpensive fluid head tripods and made-for-video steadycams have taken away the excuses for clumsy camerawork. Pan – or turn the camera – slowly, lay off the Zoom button – in fact, don't zoom. Get a Wide Shot, stop the camera, compose your Tight Shot and start taping again. You can cut the two shots together better without the zoom.

Zooming and Moozing – reverse zooming - are vividly etched into our collective memories along with Dad's other cinematic gaffs:

- not having enough light to see the birthday cake, just 9 blazing candles in the dark
- Snap Pans where a shot of the family dog becomes a blur, then stops on Aunt Chickie sipping her Highball with a bra-strap hanging out of her dress.
- And most vividly, the record button being left on for ten or twenty minutes while the camera lies on its side on the kitchen counter while a family argument erupts about who forgot to buy ice.

Sorry. Some images are too intense to forget.

## 6. Sound is 51% of Your Video

The audio track is often relegated to a subordinate role when taping. Wrong. Poor sound is second only to a bad hairpiece when it comes to killing the effectiveness of your project. Get all the audio you can: empty room “tone,” background sounds, assembly line clatter, office sounds, the receptionist answering calls. All of these and more can be mixed in or out of your final video. Hey, record an airplane going over the building – it could SAVE your project if backed into a corner.

A sincere narrator and crappy music cut together with earnest interviews has become the ‘gold standard’ of industrial films. This is not only shortsighted but has become increasingly ineffective. Let your project live and breathe with the sounds you may take for granted. As long as the ambient sounds don't become a distraction, they belong in the piece and have a rightful place in overall depiction.

## 7. Editing

The last resort for those who have not followed each of the preceding steps carefully. If you have problems by the time you reach this process, YOU HAVE MAJOR PROBLEMS!

Yes, a good editor *can* put Madonna's head on Rosie O'Donnell's body – wow, why did I come up with that image? - a good editor can put *anybody's* head on *anybody* else's – WOW! That is a *hella-powerful* image...

Editors can do almost anything. Let's leave it at that.

But why show up in the edit suite with a bunch of problems that weren't figured out before the original proposal and script. Post-production should be – in restaurant terms – merely *garnish* and *plating*. The main course is a good, solid concept, a succinct script, first-class recording techniques, good talent and a touch of luck: fair weather where needed, silence where appropriate, a good hair day for the talent... and a craft services snack table with meats.

Let's jump back to the beginning of the project.

- What do you want to say?
- Who do you want to say it to?
- How much do you want to spend? (not “How much can you afford?”)
- How will the video be delivered? (Broadcast, DVD/Monitor, Intranet, Internet)

With these four questions answered, you're ready to dig into the details:

- How long should the piece be?
- Who show deliver the message?
- What is the tone? (authoritative, informational, comedic)
- How simply can the project be designed and still being effective?
- Who will be the final judge of the video's effectiveness?

### **Genre – The Flavors of Video**

Most of the videos you'll commission will be live-action non-fiction or documentary style - although I have produced some that stretch the limits of the viewer's imagination.

For business purposes, a straightforward approach, competently produced will serve you best, but occasionally there is a desire to break the humdrum and produce an unconventional Industrial video. This list is made up of project that I have either produced for corporations or appeared in.

Comedy:

#### **Film/Television Show Parody:**

- **Film Noir**  
Believe it or not, some people are still thrilled by the idea of having Humphrey Bogart deliver their pitch in his easily-imitable style. The trenchcoat and fedora yanked down over one eye remain, but Bogie's ever-present cigarette has been relegated to the p.c. trashcan. This is an excellent way to give your audience an hour's worth of eye-rolling exercise.

Recently I heard a radio spot featuring John Wayne and Walter Brennan sound-alikes. I asked my 19 year-old daughter if she knew who they were. She gritted her teeth and said, “Are they Black and White Actors?” Yup. That's her take on it.

Black and White films are crap because they are old and stupid. I told her, “No. They made Color films.”

But it was a lost cause. The person who wrote the check probably LOVED Rio Bravo, but the chemistry is lost on Millennial viewers.

Who is your audience and who do you want to impassion?

- **Mystery**

If the “mystery” is how to set-up an e-mail client, or some fuzzy HR directive, stop here and re-think what you’re doing.

I once performed in a High Tech company’s parody of the “X Files” that was used to introduce new employees to the health plan. Another had an “Inspector Clouseau narrator who lead the audience through a search for a misfiled document.

I also impersonated a psychologist that analyzed the quirks of a Major Brand Ice Cream taster whose tongue was insured for \$1M through Lloyds of London... I could go on, but my children might be listening in.

- **Comedy**

Unless the comedy is deliberately ham-fisted and amateurish, leave it alone.

Every year, Bill Gates often appears in a comedy parody at the yearly Microsoft company meeting – tens of thousands of loyal employees at a sports stadium. He’s appeared in spoofs with Napoleon Dynamite and Austin Powers, been skewered on Letterman, Conan and SNL, had a pie flung in his face... and, to date, all we hear is crickets chirping in the distance and the cat’s ID tag banging against the water bowl.

- **Historical**

After Braveheart, every balding exec with even a shosh of Scottish ancestry (or two sloshes of Scotch Blended) wanted to give his Sales team a battlefield rouser of a speech. Sadly, the bravado and irrepressible testosterone jolt of William Wallace’s words suffer greatly when recited chock-a-block by a pot-bellied middle-management reprobate with a denture whistle.

South Park did the definitive parody of Braveheart as loopy and insulting as it was... so if Historical video is your choice, stick to Jane Austen or Will and Ariel Durant.

- **Sports**

Salespeople love this genre, mainly because potential clients would rather talk about Sports than hear another limp sales pitch. So in order to sell, even Bryn

Mawr feminists must memorize Ken Griffey's RBI stats and Pete Rose's shoe size. Overheated Sportscasters make knocking the clay off your spikes with a bat sound like the parting of the Red Sea, so why not have them schmear a bit of that stuff on your Yearly Report?

I'll tell you why not - because Sports enthusiasts are actually afflicted with an Organic Brain Disorder that makes them prone to watch paint dry if it's applied to a Sports Team clubhouse wall. They get lost easily.

- **Musical**

For the love of all that's sacred, if you decide to do a musical video, hire a real composer who can write music, working musicians who can take direction and read music, professional singers who have something to lose if they sing flat or lounge-lizardly, and do not, repeat, do NOT do a parody of a popular song. I don't care if you think the lyrics are charming and innovative... the result will be no better than the Ernst & Young White-Boy Gospel version of The Edwin Hawkins Singers 1967 hit "Oh, Happy Day!"

It's linked to youtube from 246 websites with viewer comments that range from: "I just burned my resume... they'll never take me alive!" to "I couldn't even sit through that video to the end. I got to admit though: There's a little bit of painfully awkward cringe-humor in watching Accountants/Auditors trying to have Soul." and "Beyond parody - beyond imagination. This is the reason HR is so hated.... who authorizes such crap?"

Please allow me to elucidate. And since I'm not a professional singer, I'll leave the melody to your imagination.

*Oh happy day* Help me out here, (*Oh happy day*)  
*Oh happy day* That's it, sing it out! (*Oh happy day*)  
*When Ernst & Young* (*When Ernst & Young*)  
*When Ernst & Yoouung* (*When Ernst & Young*)  
*When Ernst & You-huh-hung* (*When Ernst & Young*)  
*Showed me a better way* (point to audience for response) (*Oh happy day*)  
*Oh yes it was a happy day!* (*Oh happy day*)

Not all THAT bad, eh? Just a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Christian hymn, sung for a third of a millennium, cherished by Civil-War era slaves, then sung by a stick skinny shiksa twit who does little more than change the name "Jesus" to "Ernst & Young." Watch the video on YouTube. She's a beaut, but I don't know, I like a bit more FACE to go along with outsized TEETH.

Remember that parable about the "Loaves and Fishes"? If Ernst & Young had run the transaction, most of the multitude's stomachs would have still been growling, three of the Apostles would have died of exhaustion and E&Y would have posted a profit of \$1.4 billion dollars on left-over crumbs.

I used to think the “E” in “E&Y” was for Ebenezer. Maybe I wasn’t that far off.

- **Science Fiction**

I once did a Star Wars re-dub for a German Software giant. It killed and they didn’t even speak English. Would I do it again? I don’t know... *what’s your upper limit budget?* I’m joking here, friends...

I don’t know what made the Germans laugh then and I’ll probably never be able to pull that stunt off again.

Now, a Buck Roger’s serial parody might work – IF you had exact duplicates of the costumes, hunky heros, busty babes, two-bit tin-can spaceships, goofy rayguns, lice-infested, space-helmeted gorillas and Ian MacKellen playing Ming the Merciless with an ever-so-slight Gay affectation. I’m riffing on the title here: “The Corporate Payroll Monster from Planet W4!”

Just an aside while I’m bantering around words like “parody” and “satire.” A parody is, by definition, the flawless – almost *reverential* recreation of something as seen from an ironic distance.

For instance, throwing a “Sock Hop” and arriving at an appropriately decorated dancehall in “poodle skirts” and cashmere sweaters, black leather jackets and greased pompadours would be a parody. Unless the *men* were wearing the “poodle skirts” and sweaters and the women were wearing the black leather jackets and greased pompadours. Now THAT would be satire.

*The logical extension of reality to absurdity. Satire, that is.*

- **Silent Film:**

In many ways, the “silent film” form is best suited to lower cost video. Most importantly, the story is shot without sound (known as MOS in the film business. There’s a theory that early German directors in Hollywood would call for a scene to be shot “Mit Out Sound” but that’s a bit of Hollywood making love to the myth of Hollywood. As any Apple owner will tell you, MOS stands for Macintosh Operating System)

Shooting video without sound (or Mitout for any Deutschlanders in the audience) eliminates wasting time due to dealing with extraneous background noise, flubbed lines, audio line static, wind noises, having the boom microphone droop into the picture and paying a sound operator to stand there, nodding and thinking about lunch and his lapsed Cialis prescription..

But “silent movies” are rarely silent. Music fills the empty space that semi-talented over-actors usually fill with unconvincing words, method-acting school

clichés and oddball ticks they believe conveys a “back story and depth” of their character.

I once had an actor - honest to Saint Nick - dressed in a banana suit. A seven foot tall banana wearing hightop gym shoes – whose scripted appearance in the junk-ola video was to walk up to woman in a dressed-for-success business suit at a singles bar and say, “Do you find me appealing?”

Don’t ask why. The client’s Sales Manager said he HAD to have it in the video. And I, being much more than an artist, care deeply what my name gets attached to.

Specifically, the endorsement side of my completion check.

The Banana – and he was a true banana in every sense of the word – asked me, “What’s my motivation?”

I’ve learned to count to ten before answering ridiculous questions, but I usually lose it at 2 or 3.

“Your motivation, my worthy thespian, is to graduate from playing small cereal-dependant fruits up to fibrous vegetables and hopefully, in the violet light of the Almighty, perhaps portray a slice of cold cut or an all-beef weiner. You bleeding idiot! YOUR MOTIVATION IS TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS FOR THE DAY, A SUBWAY SANDWICH AND ALL THE SNACKS YOU CAN EAT! BE A FREAKIN’ BANANA!”

The primary rule of production should be “Under-Sell and Over-Deliver.” It takes a fair amount of confidence to go into a meeting and not promise the moon. But the upshot of the “hungry sell” is days of frustration and recurrent nightmares about the final cut.

If I had a Yellow Pages I could riffle through the Video Production pages – they’re right between Veterinarians and Vitamins - and read you promise after promise. Professional... Cutting Edge... State of the Art... Fast and Friendly... (I love that one, but then I’ve hired so many slow and hostile producers I may be a smidge spoiled...)

Time for another Video Producer’s sales pitch from the Web – again with bike horn, but this time highlighting some of the warning signs we’ve talked about so far:

- We believe that in order for a corporate video to educate and inform its audience, it needs to first entertain its audience. (honk) *No, the first order of business is to communicate effectively and economically.*
- Our videos are crafted by veteran film and television professionals who are experts at taking your corporation's message and bringing it to life on screen. (honk) *Veteran film and Television professionals? Could they be a bit more vague? Are these camera operators from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, or tape*

- operators and production assistants from KJOY – Cable 87 – The High Voice of the Low Desert? Are they semi-retired or just out of Unemployment Benefits?*
- Our writers regularly train leaders in business and government and sales professionals in ALL industries. (honk) *How big are these guys? They're from Ontario, Canada and they list as one of their better reviews, "they somehow pull a funny but focused real-time story out of their collective ass."*

*Back to the pitch: This expertise ensures (honk) I hate the word Ensure, especially since its appearance as a liquid protein replacement for seniors. This expertise ensures our videos deliver the right message in a format that is engaging, informative and highly entertaining. (honk) If any video is not engaging, not informative and not entertaining what the hell is it? A security camera tape from a Pay `n Pak? And format just means form. Are they saying that some videos may need to be delivered carved on pumpkins or tattooed on hairless cats?*

- The "Name Deleted for Legal Reasons" team can create professional quality video that can jazz up a presentation, help fire up a sales team or add a comedic flare to any type of training. (honk) *Jazz up, fire up, add a flare... Jeez they sound like heroin-shooting, horn-blowing pyromaniacs.*
- From writing, to producing, to top notch (honk) *I'm sorry, but in English, the word notch does NOT begin with a 'k') ... top K-notch talent, the professionals at "Name Deleted for Legal Reasons" can handle all your corporate video needs!*

Friends, these clowns shouldn't be handling *plastic picnicwear* much less your Corporate needs.

That's it. A core-dump of what I know. Come at me. I'm ready to defend my piece of Scotland, then we'll all go out for Umbrella Drinks..

Q&A

MJH