



FREE GUIDE to Commissioning Video Production

STEP 1 - Writing a brief, the production companies response and researching the subject

The Brief. Your first step is to put together a brief. This need only to be a couple of pages, but it must identify the following, the messages you want to communicate, the intended audience profile, any time, budgetary or other constraints.

The production company should respond with a tender and 'treatment' which is an outline of how they intend to visualise your brief. It should indicate the provisional budget, outline any areas where additional expenditure may be required and should not hide any other charges. This should all be completed at no extra charge. Any reputable production company will be able to easily assess what your money will buy and the type of presentation you could expect to receive for your money.

Researching. The producer & scriptwriter will need to immerse themselves in the subject, and they will require access to all sorts of information. They will need to meet and discuss at length with colleagues from the company who have their own input. Visits to important locations and facilities will have to be organised. Time spent at this stage in thoroughly researching and finding out information is important, if costly errors are to be avoided later on. Research should be a two way process, with the client working at developing a knowledge of the medium.

STEP 2 - The Script, the Budget and Contracts

The Script. The next stage is to develop the script. Armed with the information from the client the scriptwriter will come up with blueprint for the production, this is the point at which you have the opportunity to go back to the drawing board if the objectives of the brief are not being met. This is the last opportunity to make changes which could otherwise prove very costly. Scripts should be read thoroughly and any misunderstandings ironed out. The script will hold all the visual shots (shot list) to the programme so anyone can easily imagine what they can expect to see alongside the dialogue.

Budget. The budget will come from the finalised script and be more detailed, this will also include the production schedule which will need to be agreed upon. It is advisable to get agreement that any additional expenditure by the production company be sanctioned in advance.

Contracts. Most production companies have a standard contract format which can be adapted to fit most productions, or your company may have a standard form of contract which can be adapted to suit the production company. You should make sure that you understand the copyright, ownership, financial and legal liabilities involved.

STEP 3 - The Commissioner's Involvement

The Commissioners involvement. As the commissioner you should discuss the level of involvement you would like with the production company and ensure that both parties are happy with the level of involvement. The key stages at which involvement is essential are for script approval, rushes approval (rushes are the raw shot camera tapes which have not been edited, they will have time data specific to every frame recorded) and edit approval. During filming on site in offices and factories to help in making things run smoothly and making the relevant people aware of what is going on and how they may be of assistance during the shoot.

Your Involvement is also required when it would be practical to interfere during filming if a particular piece of dialogue or shot is going to be factually inaccurate or unacceptable and can be corrected and re-shot there and then. When a scene or sequence will need to be replaced because the original idea simply does not work or is outside the brief. You would need to be able to approve a script change. When the production is being delayed or is not running to schedule because of some other reason which you can help to resolve. You may have an alternative of which the producer or director may not be aware.

You need to be able to communicate to colleagues the reasons why the production is so important to the company and how their help and assistance is required if certain obstacles are to be removed to keep the production on track.

STEP 4 - Shooting & Editing

Shooting. May be referred to as production, the producer will put together a schedule which will detail all the shooting times, places and shots required as well as any creative elements the script dictates. It is the responsibility of the commissioner to arrange any necessary people or resources from his/her company that the producer requires. Shooting whether it is on film or video is a costly business and can cause considerable inconvenience; there may be a lot of equipment and crew members. During filming quiet will also be needed to record the soundtrack. Shooting takes up only a short part of the total time during the programme making process but may take longer if special weather conditions or a lot of locations are required.

Rushes. Usually all the clips are run onto VHS with the Time code information displayed over the pictures this is to help in deciding which takes are best and to check if there are any mistakes to be rectified.

Editing May be referred to as post production, Editing goes through a multi stage process the first of which is called the off-line, off-line editing is carried out on special computers such as Avid or Media 100, this is where all the clips are digitised and put together in a rough running order with the scripts voice over, dialogue etc. It is patchy and low quality but gives you the chance to see how the programme is running, if there are areas to be cut or added, perhaps the running order may change slightly to give better emphasis to the section in question. The off-line may be re-edited several times until all are happy with the results.

The online stage is the final stage in the visual process this is where the programme is produced to the highest quality, changes at this stage can be very costly, online is either carried out on linear machines or top end non-linear editing computers depending on what sort of editing is required. All the special effects are rendered, and graphics added at this stage.

All the sound to be used in the programme is then prepared, mixed and "normalised" (all levels set up through the duration of the video) any sound effects and music are also added in a sound dubbing suite generally on special sound mixing equipment which is generally computer driven.

STEP 5 - Summary, a few final pointers

Summary. The previous sections should give you a good overview of the process involved, video production is something you should not be afraid of, you should embrace it and thoroughly enjoy the video making process, if you do you will end up with a video programme to be proud of and one which fulfils all of it's objectives to the full.

Just have a clear understanding of what you want to achieve and any good producer will know how to achieve it.

Quality. There is a lot of talk about quality and formats, I am not going to say that DV is worse than Digi Beta or linear is better than non linear. Equipment is changing all evolving all the time, Yes quality has to be very high. Why? because your audience expects it they have been trained very well with the TV they watch every day. You need to choose a production company very carefully, fully evaluate what they are giving you for your money and make sure it is good enough for all the intended uses. Ask questions, if you are unsure what they mean by tape formats etc.

Actors, don't be afraid if it is suggested that an actor plays a key role, remember that your staff are not trained actors. Although actors don't come cheap they will give the production the quality of performance you will want.

Good luck!

If you have any questions you can contact us in any of the following ways:

Tel: 0191 286 9800

E-mail: studio@tvv.co.uk

TVV Productions Ltd, Suite 310, Wingrove House, Ponteland Road,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE5 3DP

www.tvv.co.uk