

ComputerWeekly.com

Guide to buying Video Production services



**How choose the right
Video Production supplier
for your business**

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VIDEO PRODUCTION: A GUIDE

We live in a multimedia world, and video is finding its way into every walk of life. Video screens are found on buses; we carry tiny video players and can record video on mobile phones and computers; and video is increasingly used on web sites.

Though most of us are accustomed to the barrage of media with which we are faced, the impact of video can still be immense. Although video recording and editing hardware and software is constantly developing and dropping in cost, professionally produced video is invaluable – even if it is intended to have a home-made or amateur look.

Whether you need video for use online, on broadcast television or some other purpose, this guide will give you an overview of the world of video, including its uses and the production process.

THE MOVING IMAGE

History

English photographer Eadweard J. Muybridge is generally credited with creating the first moving image, when he captured the movement of a galloping horse named Occident with a series of stills cameras triggered by trip wires. The resulting photographs were shown in quick succession in order to demonstrate that all four of a horse's hooves leave the ground when it is galloping. Aside from settling this argument, Muybridge had invented the movie.

In subsequent years, the first practical moving image cameras were invented, and the film industry was born. Initially, films simply captured everyday occurrences (for example, the very brief "Fred Ott's Sneeze") and entertainers, remaining relatively obscure, but by the end of the 19th century filmmakers were producing creative films. G.A. Smith's "Santa Claus" of 1898 is an early example, depicting Santa visiting some children in their bedroom. Although it is less than a minute and a half long, it shows the foundations of modern techniques like set building, different shots, superimposition and a rudimentary special effect whereby Santa disappears.

During the next century, film makers became increasingly inventive, creating many of the effects and shots we are now familiar with in film and television, and developing the medium of film into large-scale and profitable enterprises.

Though it was not until the late 1920s that synchronised sound and dialogue was practical ('talkies'), by this time film was a global industry and Hollywood was already the epicentre of the phenomenon, producing on average 800 feature films every year.

Today, feature films are multi-million pound productions, but at the same time, virtually anyone can record video and potentially create a hit movie. With video now available online, on mobile phones and all over the internet, the production of moving images is still a growing industry, particularly in London and the UK.

The power of video

Though we are inundated with video from a variety of sources, motion pictures still maintain a power to captivate. Video has the ability to entertain, educate and enthrall, as well as make people howl with laughter or scream in horror. Using video for your business allows you to tell engaging, involving stories that can sway a consumer's choice and change their perceptions, affecting both reason and emotions. At its best, video has a very real impact on the way potential consumers view the world. It creates an impression, influences a mood, and displays things in a way that helps your target audience to gain a fresh understanding about a specific topic, and more importantly your product.

Making the right impression

Any video associated with your company, be it a TV advertisement or a promotional video for potential investors, intrinsically represents your organisation. Any video production can exhibit a level of quality in terms of how professionally it has been shot and edited as well as continuity, sound production and effects – its production values. In addition, the overall package of a video will leave the viewer with some kind of a feeling. This is a less tangible quality as it is somewhat subjective, but most people understand what it's like to see a horror movie and feel tense and jumpy afterward, or feel upbeat and amused or inspired by comedies or epics. This emotion is the key to a successful video production as it will be associated in the viewer's mind with your company. For this reason, finding a professional video production company which understands your business and how to capture a viewer's imagination is vital.

TYPES AND USES OF VIDEO

Promotional video

While the term Promotional Video could really be applied to any of the types of video discussed here, traditionally a Promotional Video is a one that can be used for multimedia sales presentations, conferences, training seminars or in your company's reception area. They can also be incorporated into CD ROMS and DVDs as an introduction to your organisation. Since generic promotional videos can be used in a variety of applications, they are particularly cost-effective.

Customer testimonials

Customer Testimonials are recorded interviews in which customers give their thoughts and opinions about a product or on a company's service. It can be used for a variety of purposes, from forming part of a Promotional Video, as an endorsement on exhibition stands, as part of a general sales presentation, or even to as part of an e-business card. Customer testimonials are often used in television adverts in order to give an apparently honest and unbiased viewpoint, however today's media-savvy consumers may be a bit more cynical regarding such tactics.

Training videos

Video can be an ideal medium for training, particularly as once made, the teacher or trainer need not be present for a training session. Videos are commonly used by businesses for statutory training in areas such as health and safety. Producing a training video about your core business processes can make it a lot cheaper and quicker to instruct new staff.

Television advertising

Television pervades most homes to varying degrees and is recognised as one of the most powerful mediums. As such, TV

advertising can be incredibly effective. Usually a TV advert will be conceived and produced by an advertising agency together with a video production company. The price for showing TV adverts depends largely on the channel, time of day and the programmes before and after the showing, directly related to the size of the viewing audience. The cost of producing a TV advert depends on the complexity of the video project, as well as the ability and reputation of the advertising agency. The most expensive TV adverts can be multi-million pound affairs, especially as part of a wider campaign. This may seem excessive, but TV adverts can be iconic and become renowned and respected in their own right. Combine this with intangible 'feeling' that video can give a viewer about a company and the value becomes clear.

Online advertising

With increase of fast, broadband internet connections and video streaming technologies, the World Wide Web is now very much video-enabled. TV adverts can be shown online at a fraction of the cost, and video can be produced specifically for use within web pages. The capability for targeted advertising means that the internet is a popular medium for advertisers. Using the latest technology, online marketing campaigns can be made interactive and thus more engaging. For example, some web sites prompt a viewer to enter their name, and then include this as text or even part of the video and audio.

Viral videos

Viral marketing is so called because, like an organic or computer virus, it reproduces itself. A message that spreads itself can clearly be a cost-effective and powerful thing. The concept for viral videos is to produce something that is so captivating that people will share it amongst themselves – whether by email, posting to a web page or social networking site, or sending between mobile phones. Viral videos are fascinating because home-made videos with low production values often go viral (read: popular), and this

amateurishness is often emulated by video production companies. Because viral videos (and indeed any piece of viral marketing) must have some quality which makes people want to share them, they can be somewhat hit and miss. As such they are the domain of specialised advertising agencies.

Web-based video

As mentioned about, the World Wide Web is the latest vehicle for video. Video sharing web site YouTube is now a household name and a repository for home-made and commercial video productions alike. Whatever type of video you produce, you should seriously consider adding it, or at least excerpts, to YouTube or a similar site, as it is free, and a further means for your video to reach viewers. While it should be noted that web-based video still lags behind broadcast television in terms of quality, video on the web enables cross-referencing to your website and so can be a further means to effective marketing.

THE VIDEO PRODUCTION PROCESS

As an established industry, the stages of producing a video and the various roles and tasks which must be performed are well defined. The process is divided into pre-production, production and post-production phases.

Pre-production

This is essentially the planning stage, and is where the concept for the video is developed and preparations for the production are made.

Information gathering and the concept

It may be that you have a clear idea of what your video will contain, or you may simply have an aim for the production, for example an advertisement. A video production company can help you develop your concept. For major advertising videos or campaigns, you should employ an advertising agency. You may find that the agency and video production company are one and the same, for example a viral advertising agency. With a concept or aim, the next task is to gather all necessary and relevant information about the business, product or service that is the subject of the video.

Writing

A video production is a major undertaking, and as such needs to be thoroughly planned. This includes scripting of any dialogue in the video, and/or storyboarding the different shots. A storyboard is a bit like a comic strip (of sketches, drawings or photos) that shows what will happen in the video. The writing stage will naturally lead into a more detailed plan and schedule of how the video is to be produced.

Talent

If any people are to be included in the video, they must be selected and booked for the shoot. It may be that this is defined from the

outset (for example, a message from your CEO, or a tutor hosting a training video), or you may wish to employ actors or ‘spokesmodels’. Bear in mind any costs that this entails, but also that the people on screen are the face of your video and hence your organisation.

Location selection

Your video could be shot solely in a studio or at your business premises. Otherwise, selecting the right location is important, as this provides the setting and backdrop for the video and so is as important as choosing the right people.

Production

Shooting

Shooting is the recording of the video. Since this is the source of all original footage, it is vital that it is planned and executed with almost military precision, particularly as organising carrying out a video shoot is expensive. Video production companies will of course be well practised in shooting video, so take care to accommodate them and bear in mind that they have experience and knowledge about such things as when in the day to shoot to get the best light. For example, don’t assume that, because the sun hasn’t set yet, you still have time to shoot. Listen to the professionals, and remember that even a short video can take many hours or days of shooting.

Voiceover

Voiceover is recorded speech which is to be added to video, i.e. the speaker is not on screen. Often, voiceovers are recorded in professional studios, but if your video makes use of a voiceover artist, they may be able to record their work themselves and send it on to the production company.

Graphics creation

Anything on screen in a video that isn't recorded video is graphics. This includes captions and titles as well as logos and still photos. Graphics also includes animation, though if you want a video that is solely or mostly animated, this must be considered earlier in the process. Make sure you supply the video production company with any words or pictures to be included and ensure that your logo is a high-resolution file. A small image used on your website will not suffice. Graphics are also a large part of post-production.

Music and sound effects

Sound and music are a key part of the overall video production and can have a huge effect on how it 'feels'. Imagine Alfred Hitchcock's 'Psycho' without the music and ask yourself how much suspense there would be. Depending on your project, you may have music in mind, or be happy for the production company to source and choose it for you. Music must be licensed for use in a video, and there are libraries of music for use in video available for use at reasonable prices. Well-known recordings, especially current pop songs, will cost a lot to license. Sometimes sound is recorded together with video, but often it is created afterwards, particularly for special effects.

Post-production

While the production phase is concerned with the sourcing and recording of the raw material for a video, post-production is where it is all put together to form the finished production.

Digitising

Sound and video must be transferred to computers in order to be compiled and edited, and this is known as digitising, or sometimes capturing. Digitising is simply transferring recorded media from one form of storage to another, and so is not a very creative or interesting process.

Editing

Editing is the stage where all the elements of the video are combined. The best footage is chosen and combined with transitions between shots, titles and graphics are added and sound is mixed. This determines the ultimate look and feel of the video, so you may wish to be involved in editing. It is also an opportunity to work around any problems in the recorded material. Since editing is a very creative process, disagreements are possible, and it can take a very long time to get right. While your opinion as a paying customer is important, it is also worth remembering that a professional editor will have a lot of experience in what is ultimately a combination of creativity and technical skill.

Output

With editing completed, your finished video can be delivered to you in one or several formats. If your video is for use on television, the production company will be able to liaise and advise on a suitable medium. You may wish to have a DVD version as well. If your video is to be used on the internet, it must be compressed into a suitable format.

COSTS

From the above description of the video production process, it's clear that there are a lot of different tasks involved and a lot of work to be done. Unfortunately many of the costs involved will stand regardless of the scale or length of your video project.

Video is also an industry where it is possible to spend a huge amount of money, especially when employing professional actors and voiceover artists or licensing popular music.

Since animation requires scenes to be drawn and redrawn to produce movement, it can be incredibly time consuming depending on the action. That said, animation makes it possible to include things in your video which would otherwise be costly or unfeasible to set up and film. Often, a combination of live action and animation can be used. It is hard, however, to estimate whether the cost of a video will be increased or reduced by using animation.

Special effects are another potential cost, but again it is hard to estimate general costs which in practice depend upon specific requirements.

Giving even an estimate of the cost of a video production is inherently difficult, but if you have a given budget, video production companies can suggest ways to make the most of the money you have, and when to cut costs.

To give you a very rough idea, however, a one minute video production will start from around £1,000 and a further £1,000 per extra minute. Of course, for longer videos, this should drop as many costs will apply equally to a video of two or twenty minutes.

CHOOSING A VIDEO PRODUCTION COMPANY

Having read this guide, you should have a better understanding of what's involved in video production and can begin the search for a suitable video production company. There may be many companies suited to your requirements, but the following suggestions will help you to narrow down the scope to a shortlist of potential candidates.

Where to look

Generally, the safest option is to select by recommendations, since a satisfied customer is testament to the quality and service a company provides. You may have seen videos that you like which are similar to what you want and be able to find out which company produced it.

Online directories may list video production companies and related businesses and services. This is where the Approved Index, the UK's leading online business to business referral service, proves invaluable, with a list of established, proven video production companies on its books for you to contact. You can complete a simple form on our website and receive up to six free quotes from video production companies. You will still have to choose one company to work with, so here are some things to consider.

Specialists

This guide should help you understand the types of video and the services required for your professional video production. With this knowledge, you can judge how suitable a particular company is based on whether they have skills and experience in the right areas and for the type of video you want.

Experience with your industry

In order to produce the best possible video for your company, a video production company really needs to understand your business

– your core values, what sets you apart from others, and your customer base. Experience in your industry can therefore be an invaluable quality, as it should mean that the company already has a lot of this understanding.

Portfolio and sample work

Thanks to advances in technology, you can probably see a video production company's portfolio on their website. In any case they should be able to provide you with samples, and this can be more useful, since web-based video is usually highly compressed, and if your video is not intended for use on the web you will want to see what the company's work looks like on a TV screen or projector.

When looking at samples of work, you should easily be able to assess the quality of the production in a number of ways like the technical quality of the video and sound. Don't forget to think about how the videos make you feel – it may seem a bit strange but a large part of the effectiveness and ultimate success of video is the emotional response it evokes.

Stability

In this current climate, it is important to make sure that a company is solvent and has the ability to survive. You don't want a company going bust midway through your video project. Our recommendation is to view the latest accounts to ensure they have made no significant losses recently. It is also worth considering using Equifax or Experian for company credit worthiness checks.

Get references

A video production company should be able to provide you with a list of satisfied clients who you can contact. Talk to the referees about the company's services and delivery, and find out what they are like

to work with on a practical, day-to-day basis. Did they help developing the concept for the video, and suggest way to make it more effective? How did they organise and manage the production process, in particular the actual shooting? Having a good working relationship with your designer will make the process much easier and result in the best outcome, so take the opportunity to get honest opinions. This is particularly useful if the referees' companies are similar to yours.

GLOSSARY

Close-up

A shot where the camera is zoomed in close to the subject, causing them to fill the shot. A slightly wider shot is a medium close-up, a shot which is zoomed in very close is called an extreme close-up.

Composition

Composition refers to the combination of elements visible in a shot. The ultimate goal of composition is to form a shot which is aesthetically pleasing.

Depth of field

This is the range in which objects are in focus. It is affected by the distance between camera and subject, focal length of the lens and the aperture setting of the camera.

Establishing shot

This is the first shot of a scene or video production. It is used to 'set the scene' and provide context.

Framing

The process of placing a subject within a shot as part of its composition. The frame is the visible area of the shot.

Long shot

A shot where the subject is seen from a distance, in contrast to close-up.

Medium shot

Any shot where the level of zoom is between a long shot and a close up.

Panning	Moving the camera horizontally, left or right.
Pedestal	Moving the camera vertically up or down, while keeping it level.
Point-of-view shot	A shot where the camera is placed where the subject would be looking, seeing what the subject sees.
Remote	A remote video shoot is one performed on location, outside of a studio.
Rule of thirds	A theory for composing shots. The frame is divided into three sections horizontally and vertically, and the subject(s) are placed on the dividing lines.
Scene	A number of shots which represent a period of time in a particular location.
Shot	The view of a single camera. A combination of shots comprises a scene.
Tilt	Moving the camera vertically, up or down.
Tracking	Moving the camera so as to follow a moving subject, maintaining a fixed distance from it.

Vignette

Visual effect where the shot is framed, appears or disappears through a circle, hole or other shape.

Zooming

Varying the focal length of a camera lens from wide-angle to telephoto (to change from long shot to close up), or vice versa.