

Making a Corporate Film

Story and Message

Making a corporate film involves all the same techniques as making any other film. Its closest broadcast relative is probably the documentary. In a documentary the motivation is 'a point of view' in the journalistic sense. In corporate film, the emphasis is on the company message, sales pitch or educational purpose.

Film Types and Approaches:

- Promotional film
(story/documentary/montage with music and narrator)
- Presentation for teaching purposes
(productization of knowledge)
- Product demonstration
(for information or teaching, for internal use or to stimulate sales)
- Film which focusses on a particular issue
(for example, health and safety)
- Film which documents a company event
(such as a product launch, training day, CEO speech etc.)
- An advertisement for a particular product or for the company
(for TV or for the rapidly expanding market of web TV)

Your Involvement:

One of the main considerations about corporate film is that it involves you or your company. You are the experts in your company and you need to be able to tell the film production company what you want to achieve. The film production company will help you articulate your message and use its expertise to ensure that the film is realised in the best, most professional way. They might, through negotiation, shift the focus of your first ideas because they understand the medium of film and the way it has an impact on its viewers. But it is important first of all to be clear about your message and how you want it delivered.

Remember, in appointing a film production company for a substantial film project you begin a liaison which will continue until the film is ready for distribution, possibly over several months. It is likely, during that time, that key people in your company will need to be involved, taking up their time and possibly challenging them to think in a slightly different way. It is also very likely, in a corporate production, that members of your company will be involved in the production itself, perhaps in the form of an interview or filmed presentation.

Following are some important questions which need to be raised at the outset:

- Which people will appear in the film and what will they do?
- Will they speak (be interviewed or present) or be filmed as part of their normal work?
- Do you need to employ professional coaches to prepare your staff or audition staff who might appear in the film?
- Should you or the film production company give them a camera test?
- Will the film need a voice-over?
- Can someone in the company do this or will this need to be done professionally?
- Do you have adequate accommodation to shoot the film and do your present offices convey the impression you want them to create?
- Should you consider hiring a venue for the production days?
- Does this need to be researched or do you have such a venue in mind?
- On the production days, will you have to give some staff the day off, to give the crew adequate space or make any other special arrangements?

These questions are normally in the domain of the **producer**. We will look at different roles and what they mean in more detail later on. However, many production issues are common sense issues which can usually be answered internally by the company. The more you can do in this respect, and the less the film production company have to do, the cheaper the outcome will be for your company.

Making a corporate film is a big commitment for your company. You will need to spend time with the film production company to help them understand your intentions and to make sure arrangements for shooting are properly organised.

Pre-Production:

Many of the questions asked above fall into the category of pre-production issues. In other words they are issues raised and answered in advance of the production days (or shooting days) to make that time as productive, efficient and successful as possible. Once the proposal has been fully thought through and discussed with the production company a full quotation can be put forward. A production schedule is then prepared by the film production company in which the shooting days are specified, equipment booked and a shooting script drafted. The shooting script outlines the schedule on the shooting days, specifies what will be filmed and where, and if there are any special requirements. After the shooting script has been finalised a detailed shot list will be drawn up for the shooting days.

If a film is to have a voice over it is usual for the text to be drafted before the shooting script is developed. Ideally, this will be first drafted by the company, perhaps the marketing manager, then revised by the film production company based on their experience of the film making process. A smaller company would be advised to consult with an external marketing consultant who will be able to focus on the film as part of a co-ordinated marketing campaign.

Summary of pre-production:

- a clear proposal from the company to the film production company
- discussion leading to a production schedule
- a shooting script details the production days
- a shot list details the kinds of shots the director is looking for to fulfil the production aims.

Production:

The production refers to the shooting days. This is the point where all those best laid plans are fulfilled. If everything is well prepared there is no reason why this shouldn't go smoothly. However, even the best of plans may have to be slightly modified depending on circumstances. In the UK, the weather is always a factor in outdoor shoots and if budget allows, more time allocated to shooting should be made if possible to counter this. Most eventualities can be worked round with an experienced team but it is thoroughly recommended that clients are either on set or easy to contact on the production days.

Post Production:

The post-production phase of any project involves editing the captured footage (film), adding captions and graphics, music and sometimes other sounds before outputting the compilation (or sequence) in a format suitable for screening, DVD and/or web streaming. In a quotation, you might come across these terms:

Logging involves viewing all the captured footage and deciding what will be of use in the edit.

Digitising or Capturing is the process of transferring the logged clips to the computer.

Mastering is the outputting of the final copy of the movie in whatever format is required.

Editing involves manipulating the clips in such a way that the message comes across most effectively. Here, music is added, captions and graphics devised, possibly additional sounds recorded and added and a voice over added if required. This procedure also involves some subtle processes like grading, where the colours of the footage are tweaked to obtain a particular atmosphere or effect.

Archiving is best made in a number of formats. Because video is very space-intensive it is not usually possible to archive the whole project after mastering has taken place. A digital master of the project will be taken without the source footage (which may be re-captured if absolutely necessary) and a tape master is also usually recorded. We will normally archive a project for one year after completion but we can supply the whole project on an external drive if required (supplied at cost price) which will dramatically reduce the time of preparing re-edits.

Distribution:

The distribution of any project is worth considering at the outset. DVD has been the most popular option for some time. Remember, if you want to distribute your project as a DVD you need to take into account duplication costs. There will be additional costs for setting up the DVD with menus, images and music and burning a master DVD. On-disc artwork for the DVD will be needed as well as artwork for the DVD sleeve.

Distribution for the web is generally quicker and simpler because, in the most straight forward scenario, the master copy, encoded from the editor,Äôs sequence, can be simply emailed to your web designer. However, depending on the amount of traffic you have coming to your site your server may not be able to cope. The good news is that, even if your server capacity is insufficient for the volume of traffic you have, there are now other options. Most of us have experienced the popular You Tube web site which hosts a huge variety of work and this is completely free to use (and there are many other free opportunities for free web video publishing). The downside of You Tube and similar is that the quality is not by any means the best available and there are now other companies who specialise in hosting video and who will achieve a much better result. Also, such sites can be integrated into your own site, so it gives the impression that they are hosted on your own web pages. In some cases you can subscribe to a multiple-video option in the form of a web-TV channel and/or a pay per view option.

There are also many specialist companies who will delivery video by email. In the best cases, the videos are embedded into the email and can be seen as soon as the email opens.

If you have spent a considerable amount of money on a substantial film about your company it is worth considering a proper launch. There are many small private cinemas around the country which would provide the basis of a novel networking experience. Or, alternatively, an in-house launch using a good quality projector can be morale boosting as well as entertaining.

Costs:

The cost of corporate film does vary enormously because the type of outcome is potentially so varied. The cost of filming a training day and editing this down to DVD of, say an hour and a half, will probably cost much less than a four minute feature-commercial with professional actors filmed in several locations. So we can't realistically put a price on per minute of film. However, to give some indication, most companies will charge between 400 and 800 pounds per day for a small crew, comprising camera operator, sound and camera assistant and between 250 and 600 per day for editing.

Most companies will offer quotations with options and alternatives which can be finalised after discussion.

Roles and Terms:

Producer in simple terms the person who will oversee all the organisational aspects of the film. As explained above, because of the nature of corporate film, the role of producer is often effectively split between the commissioning company or their representative and the film company.

Director the person in charge of the artistic side of the film. The director will co-ordinate the work of the other crew towards the most pleasing and effective filmic outcome.

Camera Operator sometimes known as **DOP** (director of photography) or cinematographer. In a feature film there would be several cameras, sometimes several crews of cameras. The DOP is in charge of lighting and establishing the look of the film in liaison with the director. In corporate film there will usually be only one or two cameras with one camera operator taking charge of lighting.

Sound and location sound mixer is a specialised position in which sound coming into the camera (or external device) is mixed live using portable equipment. The sound mixer works in conjunction with the boom operator to record the sound. Increasingly, however, partly due to the advances in digital technology and the ability of cameras to record excellent sound quality, sound is often recorded directly from the camera mic or straight into the camera from the boom.

Camera Assistant this is again a role that has redefined itself with changes in technology. The camera assistant is traditionally called a focus puller and this role still exists in the world of the feature film. However, with smaller digital cameras the camera operator takes charge of focussing and the other manual variables at his or her disposal. However, in small crews a camera assistant is invaluable for assisting with lighting, sound and other on-set duties.

Grip, the grips are the strong men of the film industry, sometimes know as riggers. They are responsible for setting up cranes and other devices used by the camera team. Generally, you wouldn't have a specialist grip in a small production, this role being taken by the camera operator or by a runner.

Runner is essential for any medium scale or large production. The runner can be asked to do anything on set to assist the other crew members, providing essential back-up if something unexpected happens. In a corporate production this role could easily be filled by someone within the company. A driver is useful!

Editor is responsible for loading all the footage (film, usually captured on tape or, increasingly, on a hard drive) onto the computer and logging it. Logging means to review all the footage and to make decisions about which is most effective for any particular section or scene. The editor will then assemble the sequence, in other words order the footage in a way which fulfills the shooting script, whether narrative or abstract sequence. The editor will also be responsible for outputting the final sequence in the agreed format and archiving the materials.

In many small scale productions many of these roles will be combined and sometimes all the roles will be taken by the same person. This role, sometimes referred to as videographer, is one which would have been almost impossible before recent improvements in digital technology but for small-scale productions is one which is now perfectly feasible. This has the great advantage of reducing cost while still providing a high quality result.

Summary Questions:

If you can answer the following questions and present this information to the film production company, this will allow them to focus on the commission much more effectively:

- What is my message (not too much information)?
- Who are my audience? Consider slightly different outcomes to target different audience groups. This is something which is relatively cheap to do with digital technology and can be extremely effective.
- What format will be most effective for the product?
- When is the deadline? Do you want to tie in the completion of the film to a particular event or the launch of a new web site etc.?
- How much can I afford to pay? You may have very developed ideas about the type of film you want but that may turn out to be too expensive to realise. However, the good news is that usually effective and cheaper alternatives to developing a production brief. Although you will want to wait for a full quotation before you make final decisions, if you do have strong ideas about what you want, it might be a good idea to give a ball park figure of what you are expecting to pay at the outset to enable the film production company to assess whether or not your ideas are realistic within your budget.

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