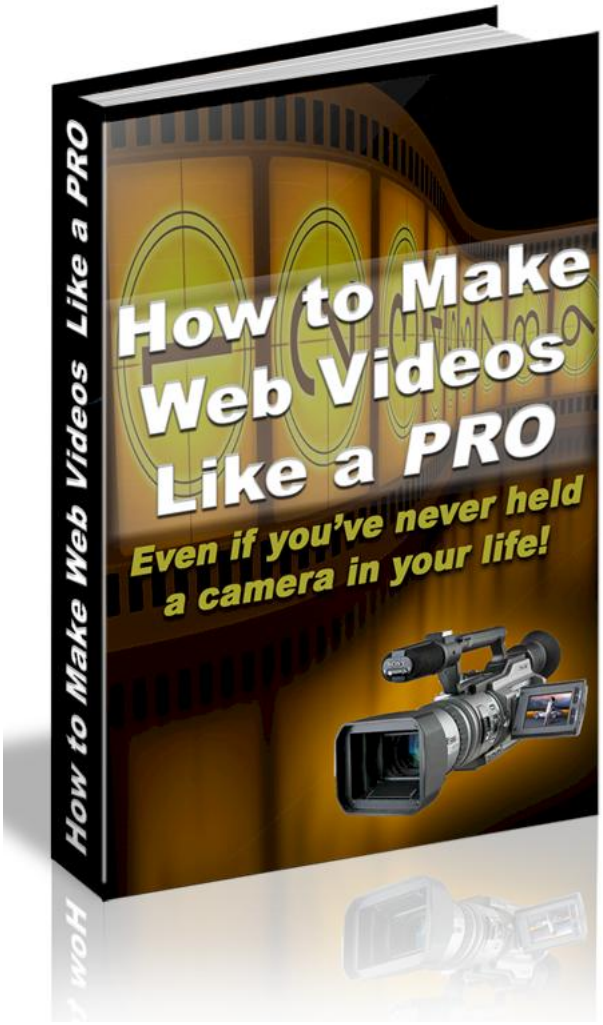

By Lorraine Grula

An award-winning video professional shares the secrets of the pros!

Discover Tips and Tricks for making
Professional Quality Videos without all the effort!

- Build an Internet Business
- Impress Your Friends
- Make Money
- Become an Internet video star

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THE WORLD AWAITS YOUR GENIUS!

So… you wanna be a video director! The Steven Spielberg of YouTube. The next viral video sensation to overtake cyberspace. Video production on the Internet allows you to promote your business, your ideas, your life.

Sounds fun; let's rock.

Is your next step to buy a lot of expensive equipment and break your back lugging it around? Setting it up and tearing it down in a highly complex, technical yet simultaneously artistic manner? Yup, it'll take forever.

Well…you COULD do it that way… that's basically what I did during my many years as a TV production worker bee. But along the way, I managed to figure out ways to NOT break my back or work all night, yet still produce quality video that kept that screaming-meemie boss off my back.

I was just trying to get home on time. ☺

My back-saving, time-saving, money-saving tips are here in this free report. Six Easy Steps to producing ***professional quality video*** without really knowing what you're doing!

Now let's concentrates on the best ways to ***save effort*** and still get ***professional quality*** results.

Six Easy Ways to Save Effort and Improve Your Video:

1. Using Natural light
2. Taming your auto focus
3. Using a zoom lens properly
4. Using auto exposure effectively
5. Handholding the camera steady
6. Narrate as you go

Using these tricks I learned over the years will help you if you plan on doing the actual production by yourself. However, if your budget allows for outsourcing, I'll give you some hints for doing that in the final chapter of this report.

STEP ONE
USING NATURAL LIGHT

No matter where I was sent to shoot, (everywhere from the bottom of a cave to the governor's office) the first thing I did was assess the light available to me. Windows, lamps, wall scones, anything already there.

Being able to shoot without adding artificial lighting saves TONS of time and trouble. Today's cameras do a remarkable job in low light, however, merely relying on a low lux camera in a dark area will give you grainy, unprofessional video. Quality is improved remarkably if you learn how to take full advantage of ***available light***, and usually there's plenty.

The picture below was improved dramatically by simply placing the baby near the window and opening the blinds fully. On the other side of the room with the blinds closed, it was ***way*** too dark to take a good picture.

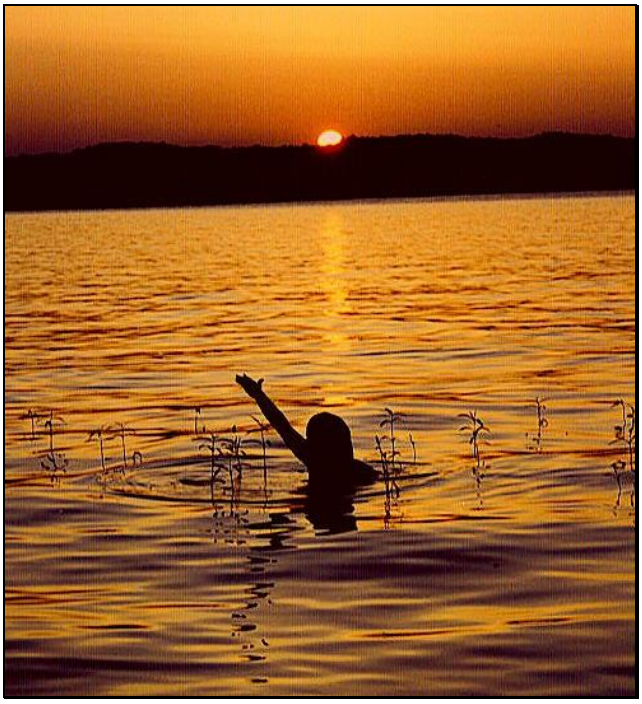
The window is about two feet to the left of the baby, just barely out of the picture.

If you open the heavy curtains and pull up the shades, a dark office can suddenly become plenty bright. Set your subject up *near* the window but *not directly in front* of it, just like the baby above. ***Have the window to the side*** of your subject and the camera. (Actually, what's known as a ¾ profile is best for a head-shot. This means the subject is not looking directly into the camera, but looking off to one side just a bit.)

Side lighting using the window as your light source is simple and effective, but it's also easily screwed up if you don't position the camera and the subject correctly.

AVOID A SILHOUETTE

Putting someone directly in front of a light source (consider the window your light source), then pointing a camera at them produces a silhouette. This can be beautiful, like this shot of my daughter swimming.



Classic silhouette back lighting.

However, generally you want to avoid a silhouette unless you're interviewing someone who doesn't want to be recognized, like some sleazebag child molester. (You don't want to know how many psychopath scum wads I met working in TV news. Well…maybe you do. That info is on my blog too. One guy threatened to have both my house and the TV station blown up cuz my documentary kept his sorry ass in jail. He bragged about killing people for fun and thought that made him cool. Sorry idiot.)

I see poorly shot interviews on the internet all the time. Usually, it's exactly what I describe, someone standing in front of a window. I guess they realize the window is providing light but they never stop to think about the direction of the light. I swear, if they would just rotate the subject and camera a little their video quality would go from a D- to a B+.

Remember, anytime the light source is BEHIND your subject, you get a silhouette. Done well, a silhouette is a good thing. Done poorly, it's a big fat mistake and makes your video look bad.

Available light comes in all forms. Look around. Move your camera to where the light is.

Are there any decorative lamps handy? Try taking off the shade and moving it closer to your subject. Even a 40 watt incandescent light bulb can greatly improve your shot. Place it about 2 feet from your subject and crop it out of the shot.

Turn on every single light source in the room. Observe where the light falls and how best to take advantage of it.

If there simply isn't enough available light and you do add a light source, make sure to ***diffuse*** it. At its simplest, this means you need to bounce it, or point the light toward the wall or ceiling in order to reduce shadows.

LIGHTING 101:
Light comes in two basic categories:

- Diffused
- Direct

Direct light is what you have on a sunny day.

Diffused light is what you get on a cloudy day. The clouds act as a diffusion filter.

You can tell by the shadows that the sun is on the left, outside of the picture. You can also tell by the distinctness of the shadow outlines that the light is fairly direct because it is a cloudless day.

Think back to elementary school science. Light rays do not bend. If you point a flashlight, the light won't bend around the corner of the building, you'd have to move the flashlight to see the side of the building.

Direct light (sunny day) creates deep, harsh shadows that have distinct edges.

Diffused light, (cloudy day) can be very bright but completely shadow less.

Generally speaking, diffused light is best for simple video production.

Below are three examples of direct and diffused lighting.

Amber the kitty looks dramatic in relatively harsh, direct light supplied by a standard 40 watt bulb.

This butterfly shot has virtually no shadows. It was taken on a fully overcast day.

Here is another examples of diffused lighting. Notice that there are NO shadows cast by the people in this picture.

The easiest way to transform a direct light into a diffused one is by bouncing it off the ceiling or wall. Do this by simply placing the light near the wall (or ceiling) and pointing it toward the wall, not your subject. The light bounces off the wall

and is diffused nicely. (Don't get it too close though, I once burned a guy's wallpaper cuz a 500 watt tungsten lamp get purdy hot. Oops.)

Bouncing a light is the quick, cheap, no hassle way to do it. However, if you want to spend money and achieve better effects, professional photographic lighting uses tools like soft boxes, umbrellas, cloths and filters to produce diffused light.

A professional four- light kit with one umbrella, two soft boxes and one barn door. The umbrella provides moderate diffusion and the soft boxes give extreme diffusion. Barn doors are used to point and shape the light beam.

The only drawback to diffusing your light is that as you diffuse, you lose intensity. Diffusion is so desired though most people accept that trade-off. Have you ever wondered why they bother to paint the inside of most light bulbs white? The answer is that the white paint diffuses the light and makes it more pleasing to the eye. On top of that, people usually add a lamp shade for even more diffusion.

STEP TWO:
TAME YOUR AUTO FOCUS

Unless you spend quite a bit of money on a video camera, you will no doubt have one with auto focus. Most people want auto focus because it sounds easy. Sometimes auto focus does indeed make your life as a videographer easier. But the truth is, auto focus can also be a royal pain in the butt. If you don't know how it works, auto focus can ruin your video. Have you ever experienced the joy of an auto focus camera that can't decide, so it wildly switches focus every half second?

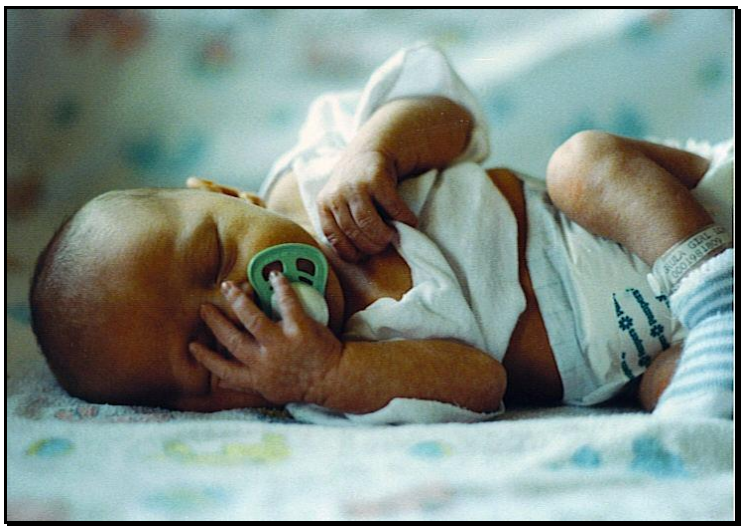
An auto focus camera ***guesses*** at what you want in focus based on parameters such as how far away subjects are from the lens and where subjects are placed inside the frame. Camera engineers study customer habits and they know people ***usually*** want whatever is in the middle of the screen to be what's in focus. So they program the camera to automatically focus on the center image, six to ten feet away.

Of course, sometimes we humans like to be creative and that befuddles camera designers and their magical lenses.

Overriding the automatic focus on a small camera is usually more trouble than it's worth. (Press button 4, turn dial x, engage function P, stand on your tippy-toes, hold your breath and squint…)

Auto focus lenses work best when you have them on the widest possible setting. In other words, zoomed all the way out. The picture will ALWAYS be in focus with the lens zoomed all the way out because a wide-angle lens inherently has an extremely wide depth-of-field and there's nothing for the lens to think about.

(***Depth-of-field*** refers to how much of a picture, measured linearly, is in focus. Say for example, everything from five feet to ten feet in front of the camera is in focus. Anything closer than five feet and further than ten feet is out of focus. That five foot in-focus range is your depth-of-field.)



The depth-of-field in this baby picture is very shallow. Notice how the blanket behind and in front of her are both out of focus. This selective focus makes the baby predominant in the shot.

How much depth-of-field a picture has depends largely on two things:

- How "long" the lens is that you're using
- How much light you have available

A "long" lens refers to a telephoto lens, or one that can see a long distance off and still get a close-up. This is what you have when you are zoomed in.

The term "wide-angle" lens is the exact opposite and refers to a lens that gets a wide shot even when the camera is close to the subject. This would be equivalent to a zoomed-out setting.

A zoom lens, which is what virtually all video cameras have, zooms in and out, changing from a from wide angle to telephoto. As it changes from wide to telephoto, its characteristics change too.

On the telephoto setting (zoomed all the way ***in***) your zoom lens will have a shallow depth of field. It'll be hard to keep ***anything*** in focus. Add the fact that the auto focus gets confused and you have the forever-fun experience of watching your auto zoom go bonkers.

A wide-angle lens, or one zoomed all the way ***out,*** has a deep depth-of-field. In fact, an extremely wide-angle lens has infinite depth-of-field; so it's impossible to take an out-of-focus picture with an extreme wide-angle lens.

What does this mean in practical terms? Well, first, you can ignore salespeople when they brag about how much zoom a camera has. You really won't zoom in as much as you will zoom out.

If you want a close-up of something, walk up to it with the camera, do NOT just zoom in on it while you stand a far distance away. It's a lot easier to get a good close-up if you stand extremely close to something and zoom all the way out. Your focus will be better and the shot will be steadier. (We'll talk more about camera shake in the chapter on handholding steady without a tripod.)

Instead of bragging about zoom capacity, camera salespeople should educate customers about how good the ***macro focus feature*** is.

Most video cameras today, even the very inexpensive, are capable of focusing on a subject with the lens extremely close. This is a feature called ***macro focus.*** Macro focus works best when you place the camera within an inch or two of something and zoom all the way out.

Try this on your fingertip or maybe a postage stamp. Pick a bright spot in the room, zoom all the way out and stick your free hand directly in front of the lens. Experiment within a range of one to three inches. You should be able to get an extreme close-up of your fingerprint that fills the screen. That's truly amazing.

As a lifelong photography enthusiast, the quality macro provided by modern video cameras make me drool with amazement. In fact, ***this is the single biggest criteria I use when evaluating inexpensive camcorders.*** You can easily test macro in the store with the fingertip example.

Macro does not work when the lens is zoomed in. It's a wide-angle feature only. On most inexpensive cameras, it will automatically kick in when the camera is extremely close to something.

Using your wide-angle setting and relying on the macro feature for close-ups will improve the quality of your video tremendously.

LIGHTING AFFECTS FOCUS

Another factor that might make it difficult for you to focus well is if you're in a very low-light situation. Not having much light makes any lens have a more shallow depth-of-field. That's a basic law of physics and photography.

With a shallow depth of field, auto focus lenses tend to perform poorly. To alleviate the situation, the only thing you can really do is add more light. ***Any lens will have a greater depth-of-field if there is abundant light.***

On a bright sunny day like the lake picture above, you will probably never have trouble focusing since the abundant light gives you a large depth-of-field.

STEP THREE
USING ZOOM CORRECTLY

Home video cameras often boast about a long zooming capacity as one of its main selling points. Granted, a telephoto lens has lots of great uses but on a practical level, you will use a wide-angle lens more often, especially in small places, which is virtually every inside location.

As I explained in the previous section, trying to get a good close-up by using the zoom lens is difficult because a long lens inherently has a shallow depth-of-field. This makes it hard to keep anything in focus. Plus, if the camera can not easily distinguish what to focus on, it'll go bonkers and drift in and out, which can totally ruin your video.

Another things that makes zooming in for close-ups a bad idea is that on a zoomed-in telephoto setting, ***camera shake*** appears magnified, giving what we snobby pros sarcastically call earthquake video, spastic-cam and puke-inducing effects. A zoomed in shot can look so shaky you have to judge it on the Richter scale!

So…sorry to be the one to break it to you, but your zoom lens is of minimal use. That's not to say that a good, locked-down-on-the-tripod-zoomed-in shot CAN'T look great, it's just not as easy as it looks.

Get Out The Tripod!

To make your zoomed-in shots look professional, you HAVE to use a tripod, (or something as a substitute). Even on a tripod, camera shake often ruins a fully zoomed-in shot, so lock your tripod down tightly and pray the wind doesn't blow. The longer your zoom, the shakier it'll look and the harder it will be to focus.

An auto-focus lens on full zoom can have an impossible time trying to figure out what to focus on if there are multiple possibilities in your shot. To avoid that problem, make sure nothing in the foreground or background is close enough to the middle of the frame so as to confuse your camera.

A professional-looking zoom will be slow, steady and smooth. Novices tend to move the camera a lot and zoom in on everything just as fast as the lens will go. Doing so will mark you as an amateur quicker than anything else. Slow down and let the auto zoom glide smoothly to a logical resting place. In other words, when your zoom is finished, the shot should be nicely framed up and not just be the middle of whatever it is you're zooming in on.

Constantly zooming in and out is BAD TECHNIQUE. There's really no argument about it, but novices tend to argue anyway. Generally speaking, it's much better to cut from a wide shot to a close-up than to zoom in. Watch TV if you don't believe me. You will NEVER see a ton of zooms in a professional done TV show.

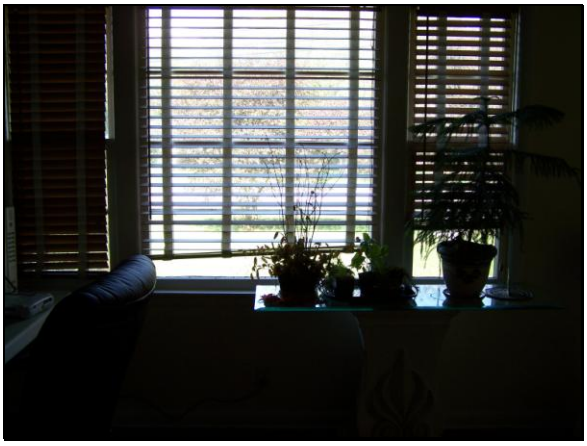
STEP FOUR
USING AUTO EXPOSURE EFFECTIVELY

Auto exposure is another convenient feature that can be both good and bad. If you're not sure how auto exposure works, it can be hard to make your video look good.

Auto exposure averages everything within the frame and sets the exposure based on this average.

If the shot is evenly lit, this is A-OK.

However, if one section of your shot is either extremely dark or extremely light, using an average exposure can throw everything off and both extremes look bad.



These two pictures were taken within seconds of each other in the exact same lighting conditions. The shot on the left is dark, but not quite dark enough to be a quality silhouette. The view seen outside the window is terribly overexposed. Contrast that with the shot on the right. The lighting is much more even so the exposure looks much better. The small portion of the window you can see does not overwhelm the picture. Since the bright window area is limited, the auto exposure knew NOT to expose for it.

Here is a third shot taken seconds later, with the window cropped out completely. Most of the picture area is evenly lit so the exposure is virtually perfect and the room looks extremely bright. The small area of extreme brightness, (the side of

the chest facing the window), is small enough for the auto exposure to ignore it. Who cares if that's overexposed? It's not very large or important.

Auto exposure works well in this instance.

MAKE A CHOICE

If you have manual override, expose your shot for whichever section is the most important. If it's just a corner of your shot that's too bright and you're really trying to get a good picture of the building, let the sky be overexposed. However if the sky is what you're going for, turn the exposure down and let the building appear dark.

If you do not have manual override, then crop out the part that's too bright or too dark. The remaining section of your shot will then be reread and a new average will take effect. This new average will be more accurate for what's remaining in your shot, just like the two examples above.

The bottom line is, for an auto exposure to work well, your shot must be evenly lit. Overly bright areas and overly dark areas should be avoided and the easiest way to do that is crop (cut) them out.

STEP FIVE
HANDHOLDING THE CAMERA STEADY

Nothing marks a video as amateur more quickly than a wildly moving camera.

WHEEEEEEE! Zipitty-do-dah! Gosh-darn-golly-gee willikers, this is a toy that MOVES!

Yes, it moves. That doesn't mean you should move it.

The single biggest mistake virtually EVERYONE makes when they first get their hands on a video camera is to move it every which way as quickly as possible.

I confess to doing it myself oh so many moons ago and being laughed at by my teacher. Like everybody else, I confused the camera with my eyesight and brain.

Trust me; even the most expensive and sophisticated camera is ***nowhere*** equal to the combination of human vision and your brain. Even if you don't have much faith in your brain, (mine sure ain't the best) please believe me when I say God's creation is ten million light years ahead of human video technology.

As you move your head around to look at your surroundings, things appear normal and natural. Your brain actually "erases" a lot of your head movement but no one ever thinks about that. Your brain rather magically "cuts" from static view to static view and all that crazy movement is largely unnoticed.

If you move the camera in the exact same manner you move your head, you will get video that induces sea-sickness.

Seriously. Sea-sickness.

The solution is to **HOLD THE CAMERA STEADY.**

Three of my best students in our Fairview High studio. Left to right, Jonathan, Robert and Josh.

My high school TV production students used to argue with me constantly over this. They thought a wildly moving camera displayed their true creative genius. I told them to go home and watch TV. (Who can argue with a teacher who gives assignments like that?)

If you observe carefully when you're watching TV, you will notice that 90% of all shots are locked down steady on a tripod.

The camera does not move. The action moves within view of the camera.

If the view needs to change significantly, the director will choose to cut to another shot taken from another angle instead of merely moving the camera over to see the new view.

Most professional videos follows this rule, although sometimes a ***semi-***wildly moving camera is used in music videos and crime shows to increase tension in the viewer.

In the rare instance when the camera does move, the movement will be usually slow and steady. ***The movement will start on a static shot and end on a static shot.***

This requires locking the camera down on a quality tripod and taking shots from every conceivable angle to be edited together later.

That's the best way to do it but it can also be a pain in the butt. This report is about ways to SIMPLIFY the video production process.

I left my tripod in the trunk more than once. Shame on me!

Tripods can be a pain, but steady shots are essential.

I never turned in shaky, earthquake video though.

First, realize that wild camera movement is probably NOT the way to go. It worked in the *Blaire Witch Project* but that was the rare, rare exception. Steady-cam technique is partly a philosophical decision. Make it.

Use a tripod if you can. Even a cheapie ($20) is adequate for a small camera. Lock it down and do not pan, zoom, and tilt the camera as though an acrobatic monkey were holding it. (Although I admit to enjoying monkey-like behavior, it's just not professional.)

Steady-cam technique is also just that…a technique.

You don't HAVE to use a tripod if you know how to make the video steady without one.

First, always shoot on your wide-angle lens. By the properties of optics, a wide-angle lens will always get a shot that APPEARS less shaky. Take two cameras

side by side. Zoom one all the way out and the other all the way in. Both will be shaking the EXACT same amount but ***the zoomed out one will seem*** a lot steadier. (Look specifically at the edges of the frame to detect all shakiness.)

If you want a technical explanation, try this: The ratio of ***movement*** to ***shot area*** is much greater with a zoomed in shot, so the movement shows more.

This is why TV news photographers always get in people's face. They're not trying to be rude they're trying to get a steady shot.

Another trick to getting steady video is to find ***substitute tripods*** wherever you are. Is there a table you can set the camera on? A counter top?

Try sitting down on the ground and using the floor as a tripod. This can be an interesting angle just don't blame me if you get in trouble for looking up some gal's dress!

I've used everything from rocks to trees to steady the camera without a tripod. The other day I stacked an empty cardboard box on top of my clothes hamper in order to get a steady shot.

Whatever works.

If there's nothing to actually set the camera on, lean your body up against the wall to steady yourself. Lean up against a tree. Stand up straight, zoom out, and spread your feet apart for a wide stance. You'll get better balance this way.

If you do nothing else, ***shooting steady video improves your grade from a D- to a B+.***

STEP SIX
NARRATE AS YOU GO

There's no doubt about it, the best video scripts are well thought out and re-written multiple times. I had a friend sell a movie script to actual Hollywood producers and they drove him NUTS asking for re-writes.

Well, that's Hollywood.

You can narrate as you go. Ad lib. It's one of the best ways to simplify your production. Even if you end up writing a script and adding supplemental narration, narrating as you shoot is perfectly adequate for many low-budget endeavors. Most TV news stories/documentaries are a combination of both.

With the camera held on your shoulder as you shoot, the onboard microphone will work fairly well. This means you can use a less sophisticated camera with no external microphone inputs and still get reasonable quality audio that's already right there on your video.

(Having said that, it's ALWAYS better to use a microphone other than your onboard mic. The onboard mic is good mostly for what's called ***ambient, or natural sound.*** Sounds of the cars, birds, chain saw or whatever.)

To narrate as you go, simply describe what you see as you shoot it. Try to sound intelligent, but you can always edit later. (Obviously it's cheaper and easier if you don't edit much.)

Also, listen to what ***other people are saying***. You can use their sound to add a narrative. Listen as they speak and keep the camera rolling on a usable shot as long as they're saying something interesting.

Walk up to people and ask them to speak to you while the camera is rolling. That's called an interview and most videos rely heavily on them. You can use the interview as voice-over.

If you follow this tip, you can cut the work of scriptwriting down to a manageable size or even eliminate it altogether.

HEY, THANKS FOR ALL THIS ADVICE, BUT VIDEO PRODUCTION STILL DOESN'T SEEM EASY TO ME. I WANT TO OUTSOURCE.

Don't blame you.

If you have a budget, outsourcing video can be money well spent. Let's talk about how to get it done as cheaply and easily as possible.

First, think about it this way. There are three phases in any video production:

- Pre-production
- Production
- Post-production

Now, how easy is that?

To outsource effectively, you probably don't need to hire help for all three phases.

Here's an explanation of the three phases and you decide which you want to outsource.

Pre production includes all planning. What do you want to shoot? Where do you want to shoot it? How will it be pieced together? Editing is usually planned out (at least somewhat) before shooting ever begins.

Pre production is the easiest and sometimes the most creative, fun part. Even if you don't do it 100% yourself, you can do a lot of it; experience helps but the process is largely logical.

The ***production phase*** includes anytime the camera is out taking video or a microphone is in use. Getting video and audio onto a tape or hard drive is what

production is all about. For the novice, this is probably the most complicated stage.

Post production includes all editing and duplication. Post production is time consuming and therefore expensive. If you're editing a standard, professional-quality video, you can count on it taking about one hour of edit time per finished minute. Seriously. If I did a 7 minute video, I'd allow at least 7 hours to edit.

Simplistic videos that are mostly talking heads will go substantially faster.

Now don't be scared, ***video editing is a lot of fun***. If you can use a word processing program you can learn video editing. It's slightly more complicated, but not much.

I recommend outsourcing only the production and post-production phases. If you're adventuresome, do the post production yourself and hire someone just to shoot it for you. Editing is easier and more forgiving of mistakes than shooting.

Editing is also a sit down activity whereas shooting can be back-breaking manual labor.

WHO DO I HIRE?
Try these folks first:

- Local TV station production personnel
- Local wedding photographers
- Local TV production teachers/students

Many TV stations allow their employees to freelance using station equipment. Call the news department first and ask for the chief photographer. Inquire about the station's freelance policy then ask if he knows anyone who would be interested.

If the news department doesn't have anybody, try the commercial production department and ask for the production manager.

Hiring a TV station employee who can use high quality, expensive equipment for practically nothing will cut your rate from about $2,000 a day to about $500.

Ask the production manager about the station's rates, too. Usually, commercial production departments in TV stations charge a fraction of what professional production companies do. In part, that's because a production company will more likely have highly experienced people and the TV station is getting by with youngsters who work for cheap. But, they'll probably still know what they're doing.

A PBS station usually charges lower rates than a commercial one. Small UHF channels also can be hired cheaply.

Wedding photographers are another great bet for outsourcing video. They, too, will probably not be as good as hiring a full crew from a top production house, but their rates won't kill you either. Many wedding photographers also shoot local school events or kiddie beauty pageants so look in those places too.

Some school districts have TV production departments. I have taught on both the high school and elementary school level. Many of my students freelanced and some of them actually did a good job!

College students are a safer bet than high school students.

In addition to tapping into students and teachers, if your local school district is anything like mine, it will include a system wide government channel. These channels are given free to municipalities by cable companies. They run exciting stuff like city council meetings. See if you have one of these stations in your area and inquire there too. Here, some of the people who staff the government TV station are highly accomplished professionals who have retired from long careers in regular TV.

No matter whom you hire, ***ask for a personal demo tape***. Just like painters have a portfolio, video folks have demo tapes. (AKA ***demo reels*** or just ***reels***.)

Ask what specific tasks the individual did in putting the demo together. I have known people who would put stuff on their reel when all they really did was lug equipment around and watch. You probably don't want to hire them.

Lastly, contact a video production house. They will no doubt be your most expensive option, so be forewarned. Then again, they'll take care of every little thing for you and do a terrific job.

We hope you enjoyed reading this free report. Our goal is to help you get your video projects done.

Good luck and have fun!

In Focus Studios

About the Author:

Lorraine Grula has produced and videotaped at least twenty zillion TV segments. (Well, OK, that's a *slight* exaggeration.) A well-respected professional for over twenty-five years**,** Lorraine's done it all: Producer, Writer, Field Director, Photographer, Tape Editor, Technical Director, Reporter, Sound Operator, Lighting Director, and Teacher.

She's also worked in every conceivable style: Field Production, Studio Work, Documentaries, News Series, Business-to-Business Communication, Medical Education, Health Reporting, Talk Shows, Commercials, Infomercials, Training Demonstrations, Community Access, Independent Films, and Weddings. You name it, she's done it.