



BY PHIL COOKE

5 KEYS TO SHOOTING BETTER VIDEOS AND SHORT FILMS

I was shooting videos and short films back in the days of half-inch black and white, reel to reel recording. Since that time I've written, directed, and produced at least a thousand for a long list of projects and clients. During that time I've learned a few things about producing videos that connect with audiences and inspire them to action.

HERE'S FIVE KEY SECRETS:

- 1 A GREAT SHORT FILM IS ABOUT EMOTION, NOT FACTS.**
If you want to share facts then print a brochure or give the audience a handout. Video is about emotion. It's about telling a compelling story, and you don't do that with facts or figures. Always think about the emotional angle if you want people to respond.
- 2 BECOME A GREAT INTERVIEWER.**
Most of your video presentations will involve interviews, so learn how to put people at ease, make them comfortable, and get honest, authentic answers. Make sure your crew isn't distracting. Particularly if the interview is about a sensitive subject, make the location a safe place in order to win the person's trust.

- 3 WATCH OTHER SHORT FILMS AND VIDEOS.**
There's a few we've done recently at Cooke Pictures for various clients. Watch other good ones on Vimeo and YouTube. Learn what current styles look like. Stay with the times. Stay up on shooting and editing techniques. Nothing is worse than a video or short film that looks like it was shot 10 years ago.
- 4 LEARN TO WRITE.**
Writing is where it all starts, and yet most filmmakers dismiss it as a skill they'll never need. Even if the video is improvised, you need to make good notes, and get your ideas down on paper. The old theater saying, "If it ain't on the page it ain't on the stage" is true. Even if you never plan to be a professional writer, learn to recognize good writing. It will have a huge impact on your ability to tell a story.
- 5 LEARN TO SELL YOURSELF.**
There are enormous numbers of talented filmmakers out there who aren't working because they don't know how to sell themselves. You need to inspire confidence in potential clients or investors, so start practicing how to pitch your ideas well. ➤

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WAYS TO MAKE SHORT VIDEOS DELIVER

Short video presentations have become one of the most important marketing tools in the world, and there's no better place for using video than sharing our faith. Evangelism, missions, discipleship, promotions, fundraising – all can be more effective by using short videos. The problem is – most short videos fail. They don't move the audience, call them to action, or motivate them to accomplish anything.

IF YOU'RE SUFFERING FROM "INEFFECTIVE VIDEO SYNDROME," THEN HERE'S A FEW TIPS TO GET YOURS BACK IN SHAPE:

1 VIDEO IS ABOUT EMOTION, NOT INFORMATION. Stop cramming your video presentation with numbers, data, and results. If it's information you want to share, then print it out in a brochure, or put it on the website. Video connects with people's emotions, so for the best results, make sure you're telling a compelling, dramatic story.

2 NEVER USE TWO THINGS: CHEESY STOCK FOOTAGE, AND CHEAP MUSIC LIBRARIES. Both are deadly. Cheesy stock footage isn't real. It's staged (thumbs up everyone!) and undercuts the reality and importance of your ideas. Bad library music is the same – it stands out, distracts, and turns people away. Take the time to get good shots and find the right music that sets the scene.

3 LIGHTING MATTERS! I see reality all day long, so when I watch a video presentation, I want to see your vision. Create an artistic world that's fascinating and intriguing. And when it comes to lighting, always remember, shadows matter, because what you don't show is just as important as what you show.

4 IT ALL STARTS WITH THE SCRIPT. Whether it's a dramatic or documentary presentation, the writing is more important than anything. As the old Broadway saying goes: *"If it ain't on the page, it ain't on the stage."* Great acting, lighting, or directing can't overcome a bad script. Start with the right words on the page, and the rest will be much easier.

With current technology, there's nothing keeping you back from making the best short videos possible. But remember – it's not the gun, it's the soldier. The best camera in the world in the hands of an amateur can't overcome incompetence. People love short videos, so make yours deliver, and see the difference it makes in the presentation of your ideas, products, or organization. ▶

