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The Poor Man's Guide To Rich Looking Videos

By Brien Lee

Hey, nice camcorder. And I hear you have a computer, too. Guess you're in the video business!

Ah, but it's not that simple. As many would-be photographers can tell you, it's not the gear that defines quality; it's the person using the gear.

Oh, you knew that.

Okay, what if I were to offer you, say, \$5000 to do a history of my life? Would you know what to do? Can you visualize the end result? Or do you just hope that the button marked "Ken Burns Effect" will save your rear-end?

Sound cynical? Guilty as charged. But the proliferation of inexpensive, decent quality video gear has convinced many a consumer they can do their own business videos or wedding videos, and many a prosumer to make the fulltime leap into self-employment.

So here's my offer. Read the next five paragraphs or so for my "video school in 5 minutes or less", and you will be one small step closer to telling a compelling story, no matter what that story is.

FIVE MINUTE VIDEO SCHOOL... starting now!

1) Create an outline of your project. What do you envision it to be? Despite all the hype about interactive and non-linear media, storytelling is linear. The human brain wants a logical flow, and when it doesn't get it, it gets distracted... starts daydreaming..... zzzzzz. So, even before you start shooting or editing, plot out your story. Let's say that you're doing a video for the engagement party of a couple who are getting married, and you want to tell their life stories. Here's a typical outline:

Ancestry Parents wedding Birth of children Children growing up High school or college years Jobs
Some recreational high points in their single lives The magic moment—couple meets Couple together
Couple gets engaged Reprise of earlier shots (let's audience know its ending) Finale text, logo,
"Congratulations" and picture of the happy couple.

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2) Acquire the raw material. We haven't even TOUCHED a camcorder yet. You can't really know how this story will feel and what supplementary shooting you'll need until you know what raw material you'll be working with.

Think inside the box. If you look at a yearbook and just take a picture of the yearbook, you've missed the story. Your "stars" are featured in that world... get close-ups of pictures from the book, pepper that with ads of Pepsi, Coke, Hostess Cupcakes, the cast of "Saved by the Bell"— whatever they were into at that age.

Important: check for existing audio or video recording of your stars, not just still pictures. 8mm film, old Betamax tapes, whatever. This can add a treasure trove humor and expression. Plus, vintage audio of voices long gone can bring the crowd to tears.

3) New Section? New Music. Your outline pretty much tells you how often to change the music. Whenever the era or subject changes, use a different piece. It helps us understand the era, it lets us know we can move on in the story from what came before, and it tells us how to feel. In other words, vary the music according to the emotion, and consider your audience. It doesn't all have to be hip-hop or electronica. Something warm and fuzzy is often more appropriate.

4) Ditch the special effects. Transition effects were developed for scene changes, and the most powerful one is still the dissolve. Page turns, circle wipes, shatters, and other "planet of the cheap special effects" stuff will drive an audience to distraction— away from your story. You're not the star, your subject or client is.

5) Shoot for the editor. There are basic rules of editing, but what they come down to is this: long shot, medium shot, close-up, cutaway. When you're shooting footage of the happy couple in the rose garden, we want to see the garden, them, their faces, their hands (and a close-up of the wedding ring, and some signage telling us they're in the rose garden. Oh, a close-up or scan of their newspaper wedding announcement is nice, too.

Is it time? Put your pencils down. Follow these rules and pass to the next level of video storytelling!

Good luck.

Brien Lee is a thirty year veteran of video and audio-visual production, whose company, Brien Lee Videostory, is considered the "teaching hospital" of video production. His employees have won Emmys, started companies, worked in broadcast and cable TV, and generally seem to have done a bit better than he has.

<http://www.storysecrets.com>

A Growing Phenomenon: Funny Online Videos

By Gabriel Adams

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If you surf the Internet at all these days, you are guaranteed to run across a web site that has a gallery of funny videos. They are everywhere now. The day after the State of the Union address, I found about forty web sites that had spoofs of President Bush's speech on them. They were hilarious. My friends and I rolled for days about some of the things on these videos. Many of the funny videos that appear on the web are spoofs on someone, or something famous, but some of these videos are just everyday situations with a funny twist.

President Bush videos can be found on almost any funny video web site online. Most of these sites have an entire section of President Bush videos for your viewing pleasure. No matter how you feel about Bush, you will definitely find these videos hilarious. For the most part these videos poke fun at President Bush's poor public speaking skills. They always have him making up words like "presidate", and other words similar to that.

If you do not care for funny videos that make fun of celebrities or other famous people, then you might find the videos about everyday situations a little more your speed. I have seen many different funny videos that show an everyday task, like IT helpdesk, but they over exaggerate the stereotypes in the situation. The IT helpdesk video that I have watched was very funny, because the guy answering the phones was putting the customer on hold every five seconds. Then when the customer was on hold he would complain that the customer was the stupidest person in the world. The helpdesk representative would then get back on the phone and he would be overly nice and patient.

These funny videos online are taking on a life of their own. Many ordinary people have gotten famous by publishing their everyday videos online. You can see people falling out of chairs, slipping on the sidewalk for no reason, and a multitude of other funny situations. If you are ever surfing the Internet and need a good laugh then make sure you search for some funny videos and you will be laughing in no time.

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