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I. Considerations Before Starting Your Production.

Before you start shopping for a production company it's best to do as much groundwork as possible to determine your needs. Try to define your goals in the project and select the proper vehicle to convey that message.

- A company profile or product demonstration may best be presented in a message from 5-10 minutes in length.
- Trade Show videos are best kept to 2-3 minutes as crowds moving past a display area are not likely to spend much more time than that while making their way across the floor.
- Informational and instructional pieces may vary greatly in length.
- Commercials are usually 60 seconds, 30 seconds or 10 seconds long.

Price is determined on a few basic criteria.

- Time involved,
- number of locations, and
- specific equipment needed along with talent and media stock.

The more information you can provide to your production company the easier it will be to determine an accurate estimate for production costs.

Quite often we receive calls stating that "We'd like to make a 10 minute video. What will it cost." This question is tantamount to asking, "How much does a car cost?" Without knowing the features that you want included in the package it becomes very difficult to determine a budget or to shop for production.

For example, a 10-minute video could include a fully scripted company tour of several plants in different cities and their unique features or it could consist of the company president sitting behind his desk talking about the year's performance. One could cost several thousands of dollars the other only a hundred. They are both 10-minute videos!

Before you start shopping try to have an outline of the points you want to cover and how you would like to present your information. If you have already got a handle on this one its even better to have the production in scripted form when making your request. The script should define both audio and visual aspects of the production and will provide all the information your production house will need to prepare a quote *(Script attached at end of this document.)*

Include the text the announcer will read and indicate any live on camera segments that will be included in the production. Along with this include a line by line assignment of the accompanying visuals that will go with the text as well as any graphics that will be required.

This benefits both the producer and the production staff in organizing precisely the visual information to be presented and provides a checklist for field production to avoid missing shots. Failure to do so often results in making trips back to the site to shoot a five-second shot that was missed. This is costly in terms of time and money.

When getting a quote be sure you understand how charges are being calculated and what is included:

- **Is the quotation fixed to the parameters of the script?** If there are additional charges, how are they determined. Some production companies will assess a flat hourly charge for production while others use a cafeteria approach for different services including the use of specific hardware and graphics elements.
- **What are the resources of the production house in terms of acquisition and post formats.** Make sure that you are comparing “apples to apples”. One company may quote based on MiniDV with a single chip camera and basic post capabilities while the other is quoting Varicam adjustable frame rate with 3-2/3 inch chips and nonlinear postproduction. The first may sound like a better deal, but in terms of quality and the inability to make changes, may actually cost more in the long run.
- **What is the end-use of the production?** If it is for broadcast your quality needs are probably considerably higher than if it's going to be copied to DVD. In general terms the end product quality is tied to the weakest link in the video chain. The difference between production shot on Varicam HD and copied to a standard DVD is not all that much better than one shot on MiniDV or with a solid state SD camera. Ask to see samples of work acquired on these different formats and make your own determination on which is best for you. There are buzzwords in the industry that convey quality and prestige but usually convey additional expense. You may not need a Mercedes to haul firewood.
- **Take an active role in determining the requirements for location shoots.** If you have a company with four locations. Determine if there is a need of the production company to travel to all four. Can the appropriate shots be obtained at one or two of these and if footage is required from all four is it more cost effective to subcontract with another Company in that city for the additional footage.

Require the Production Company to provide a regular accounting of time and material charges incurred during the production as well as determine a schedule of payment for charges. A contract can benefit both parties in terms of ensuring performance and avoiding misunderstandings regarding to charges for service.

Provide the Production Company with any background information that may help them in better understanding the project and your needs.

II. Once Production Begins

1. In most cases time is money so be prepared to begin when the crew arrives. Have areas intended for use in the video cleared of clutter and people who are to be included in the shots ready and familiar with their roles in the production.
2. Make sure that you have good communication with your production company regarding locations they intend to use and be aware of special considerations for these areas. Is there enough power to accommodate the need for additional lighting? Are there noise considerations that may interfere with on-camera voice elements? Are there any on-site transportation considerations such as golf carts, forklifts or aerial platforms that may be helpful in expediting the production.
3. Ask for time-coded copies of the days field production. These dubs may cost a few dollars but are much cheaper than viewing the actual field tapes at the production house hourly rate. There are times during the editing process where this type of evaluation will be necessary but oftentimes a phone call from the production house in referencing your time-coded tape is all that is needed.
4. Talk through the appropriate graphic elements needed before the production proceeds. Often time's animations and certain graphics can be woven into scenes if the editors are aware of the need for them before footage is shot. Some of these elements may take time to create as well and the more time you can give the graphics people to create and execute them the better your finished product will be.

There are three basic types of graphics for inclusion in you video. Standard character generation. Paint elements that may involve character generation and full motion animations. Character generation and paint elements are built and executed in a relatively short time and at little cost. Animations take longer and may cost several hundreds or thousands of dollars for a few seconds on the screen. Determine which is right for you and if a "real time" CG with a switcher effect may meet your animation needs at a fraction of the cost.

5. In postproduction be aware of the effects and transitions being used between scenes. Do they provide for a smooth flow through the piece? Transitions should not distract from the message but provide a logical progression from one scene to another. Effects if over used result in the viewer becoming "dizzied" by a series of flips, twirls, spins and other assorted aerobatics.

6. At any point in the production, feel free to ask questions and offer suggestions. Successful and effective productions are not based solely on skillful shooting and editing but depend on a steady flow of information from those who know the subject material the best to keep the project on course.
7. Maintain two way communication during the production process to ensure that project goals are being met in a timely manner. A timeline should be set before the production begins and periodic checks should be made to make sure that these have been met and that all components are coming together to fulfill the completion deadline.
8. Once the project is completed and approved for duplication make sure that appropriate back-ups have been made for the master. Once the project has been edited on a non-linear system, ask if a digital backup of the project has been made. This will prove invaluable if modifications are to be made in the future. The digital backup allows for the entire project to be restored on the computer based editing system. Components needing to be changed can then be easily replaced and a new master copied as opposed to re-editing the entire production. Two masters should be made as well. One copy most likely will be kept with the production house, the other should be kept in another location.
9. Determine your production company's policy on ownership and the storage of field tapes relating to your project. Some will store these tapes indefinitely while others will retain them for a specific period of time before disposing of or recycling them. You may wish to store them yourself for future use. Make sure that you are clear on these issues before the project is completed.

Production Checklist

- ❑ Script or Outline prepared prior to contacting production companies
- ❑ Timeline for production established
- ❑ Meet with production company to review script and set project parameters
- ❑ Field production Locations and Dates established and confirmed with all parties involved in the project.
- ❑ Shoot necessary raw video segments required for project.
- ❑ Select on-camera/voiceover talent and record audio segments including music and sound effects
- ❑ Review field tapes and meet with editor regarding post production concerns
- ❑ On-line editing of the project including the incorporation of graphics elements and animations.

- ❑ Review of completed project and duplication ordered
- ❑ Masters, raw footage and backups secured for future use and duplication orders.

Video	Audio