

Producing a video – The first steps

Take this expert advice on how to produce a blockbuster, not a horror movie!

By Simon Crofts, company director of [ST16 Ltd.](http://www.st16.co.uk) www.st16.co.uk

If you've never attempted to use film as part of your communications strategy, the prospect can seem a little daunting. Equally, a bad experience can make you wary of trying again. The good news, however, is that the rewards of getting it right are often tremendous.

Firstly you need to find the right people for the job. Of course, I am little biased and would recommend ST16 but if you choose to go elsewhere then here are some things you need to remember when selecting the production company you want to work with:

'LIMITED' CREATIVITY

It is probably a good idea that you choose a company that has a good track record, start by checking they are a limited company, are they VAT registered? Do they have testimonials and case studies demonstrating their diverse experience? If they have been trading for a long time (probably anything over 5 years in this industry) and worked across industries they will probably have the experience to add value to your project, not just follow a brief to the letter.

UNLIMITED CREATIVITY

Once you have provided a brief (even if it is pretty basic one to start with) the production company should be able to help you to start developing ideas. It is a good idea to let them know how wild you want to be, but their experience working with similar target audiences should help you stay within the boundaries. Creativity doesn't always mean big and brash, it can be very subtle, sometimes this can be the most successful approach, give as much information as you can about your audience so the production company can tailor their thinking just for them.

ASK!

If you are not sure about anything, costs, terms, jargon or timetables make sure you just ask! Production companies are used to working with people who have never produced a film before, a good one will be happy to spend time with you answering any of your questions.

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ST16 Ltd. The BIC
Staffordshire Technology Park
Beaconside, Stafford
Staffordshire
ST18 0AR

Telephone
0800 587 5886
Internet
www.st16.co.uk
e-mail
info@st16.co.uk
Facsimile
01785 211 449

ENSURE YOUR SUPPLIER IS WELL-CONNECTED

A good production company will stick to what they're best at and will bring in specialized experts to help with communications strategy, scripting and distribution when necessary. Although some companies may have in-house talent to help with this, it's hard to find affordable production companies with world class consultants working as permanent staff.

Check that you can easily contact them in an emergency once the project has started. We know of "one man bands" who can't be contacted for days because they're away on a shoot.

£10 OR £10,000,000?!

If you are new to video then you may be a little worried about how much it is going to cost, or you may just be confused because one quote for exactly the same thing is 10 times the other quote you received. As with most industries there are suppliers for all ends of the market and it can be hard to find the right one for you. Don't panic though, make sure you get a like for like quote, make sure you are getting a similar standard of equipment and ask both companies to explain their proposals. Then make a decision based on the work you have seen (to prove they are capable of technically and logistically), the ideas and cost.

FIND A SUPPLIER YOU GET ON WITH

Ensure you employ a supplier with who you get on well. A single project can last for months, so the chemistry has to be right. Choosing a production company with people who're open, friendly and good to work with can be crucial to the success of your project. Like any good relationship it should last for many years...

Once you have chosen your production partner they should guide you through the process of creating your masterpiece. Sometimes however, if you haven't picked the right partner they may not keep their eye on the ball. Here are some hints on making your project a successful one.

GENERATING INTEREST AND ATTENTION

Films that are carefully put together to meet specific objectives can produce great results, providing a cost-effective and trackable way of communicating powerfully to employees or customers worldwide. People love watching film and video and it can outperform most other media for getting attention and delivering key messages with impact.

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DO IT FOR A REASON

Have a clear objective before you start and make sure you communicate it to the production company. A video should look great but first and foremost it must fulfil a business need.

LOOK AT YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE AND ANY CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

How are your target audience used to receiving information?

Make sure you consider all the cultures you will be addressing in the film, be your audience global or domestic. This means both before and during the production process and during delivery. DVD means your film can be distributed all over the world in multiple languages (voice or subtitle) on the same disc, sometimes making it more cost effective than printed media, especially if you include PDFs etc. on the DVD too.

GET BUY-IN FROM THE TOP

If you are producing an internally facing film, the more people involved with the project that actually believe in it, the more credible the end product will be. If the film is going to feature interviews, make sure the interviewee has been briefed before hand. They may have a busy schedule but if the entire workforce is going to hear their message, it is worth spending some time preparing!

TAKE THE TIME TO DEVELOP THE BRIEF

Gain an understanding of video media and technology and involve a video production company to help you develop the brief. Make sure they have experience in developing strategies, so they can understand the issues you face and help you tackle them. Ensure also that they have the creativity to communicate your messages through every aspect of the film – rather than just relying on the CEO talking to camera. Without this level of understanding and involvement the film might look pretty, but will probably not achieve the results that you want.

EVERYONE'S INVITED!

A video can be quite a big investment, and your employees will probably know it. If it is relevant to the subject of the programme, try and include as many parts of the business as possible so no one feels left out. Then, when you deliver the film, make sure everyone has access at the same time, although time zones may still cause a few complications!

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BE REALISTIC WITH DELIVERY TIMES

A film can be put together in a week, but let's face it, if you want the job done properly without mistakes you will regret later, it is best to give it as much time as you can. We usually estimate 4-6 weeks for an average project.

DECIDE HOW TO DELIVER THE VIDEO

New technology means that video that streams on an intranet can now be clear and smooth without taking up all the bandwidth on your network. For productions that need to be sent externally or played on larger screens (like training rooms), DVD is great. A DVD can also hold DVD-ROM content, with document and image files added to the disc for access on a PC. DVD allows multiple language (voice or subtitle) versions on the same disc, as well as scene selection for viewers to decide which parts they would like to watch.

COLLECT COMPETITIVE QUOTES

With some companies there are risks of hidden and escalating costs, and you need to decide how much you should be paying for your film. Since the scope of video is almost limitless, you could spend UK£5,000 or UK£50,000 on the same project, depending on your exact requirements and expectations. Ensure you get two or three competitive quotes – and ask the suppliers to break down their proposals clearly so they're on a level playing field and so you can compare quotes directly. Be careful, though: it's not all about cost. Find a supplier who really understands your requirements, has the skills and resources to deliver and will help you develop the program from scratch.

Although this guide is designed to help you no matter who your supplier, please visit www.st16.co.uk for more information about ST16, its clients and recent projects.

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