

More Changes?

How a staged review process saves you time and money.

An ST16 Ltd. White Paper by Simon Crofts – Creative Director, ST16 Ltd.

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Introduction

Using a clearly defined and tracked review process, we can make sure the project is running to plan and that you are happy all the way through to delivery, with no surprises!

What follows is a guide based on the carefully developed and tested process we have in place at ST16, although many other producers may do it in a similar way, it may not always be the case.

A lot of work will go into your film behind the scenes from the moment we engage on the project. What seem like minor changes may have ripple effects on the rest of the edit or simply take lots of time to fix. It is really important that when signing off on each stage of the project, you are clear on exactly what it is you are approving and any consequences to changes further down the line.

Consequences can include delays to the project, missed deadlines and additional costs. No one wants that!

Remember not all of the stages below may be required in your project. Your project will be clearly set out in our online project management software so you can keep up to date online. This software will allow collaborative working on projects by everyone involved, wherever they are in the world. It will include milestones, scripts, storyboards, edits, comments and more.

The Creative

This stage is usually integrated with the pitching process. Sometimes a client will approach us with a fully developed script and storyboard. Most of the time however, it will be a brief describing the problem and the audience being targeted.

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We will respond with a creative (or series of creative ideas) and the client will choose the one they prefer. This is a really high level starting point. Once the project has commenced a more detailed outline and storyboard will be created to check the creative is in line with client requirements.

Tip.

At this stage a creative is open to interpretation and may still need plenty of development (depending on the project and the timescales involved). Feel free to ask for tweaks, culmination of different concepts or even a totally different approach.

Storyboard and Story outline

This can be the first part of the process where the client gets to see what the producers are hoping the film will actually look like. Based on a more detailed story outline, a storyboard can range from simple pencil drawings of key moments in the film, to more detailed 'animatics' showing short simple animations. A storyboard is a very useful part of the process for the director who can check shots will work and really think about composition but it is also a great opportunity for the client to check the producer's artistic vision.

Client sign off on this part of the project is important because it influences the way in which the project is shot. Anything that is missed out at this stage won't be available in the edit further down the line.

Tip.

Don't make assumptions. If there is something missing from the storyboard, mention it! Don't assume it will be included during filming.

Cuts Only Edit

Depending on the project a cuts only edit may be required. For those that don't need it, we skip straight to the rough edit stage.

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A cuts only edit is simply the rushes (un-modified footage straight from the camera) put in the correct sequence on a time line. A cuts only edit will contain no special effects, the audio and video will be 'as recorded' and there will usually be no music etc. It may include a guide voice over recorded in our edit suites to check content timing etc. A professional voice over will be added at a later stage (if required on the project). This (as with most stages) will be uploaded for viewing online (unless a client chooses to come and watch it on our sofa!)

This part of the process is for checking content. Making sure the correct clips have been used in the right sequence and all the key messages have been communicated effectively.

The challenge for us at this stage is producing something that gives the client the opportunity to check content without scaring them! Sometimes a cuts only edit will be very basic and lack some of the crucial final elements required to make the film great. **Remember** this version is to check the content, make sure the key messages are there etc.

Tip.

Don't be afraid to ask. If you aren't sure if something is going to be included at the next stage or if it has been left out for a reason, ask.

Rough Edit

Now the film is really starting to take shape. This is an almost complete version of the film. The things likely to be missing are full resolution graphics and a final voice over. The film will also be 'rough' around the edges, still needing a grade, tweaks to the edit and an audio mix.

At this stage we are looking for **all** your feedback on content, timings, fonts and music, pretty much everything. Once we have your approval, work will begin on the final edit and any changes may cause delays and additional costs.

Tip.

This is probably your last chance to make changes to the content of the film without affecting the deadline and budget.

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Final Edit

At this point we are sending what should be the final film for approval. Once we have the OK to proceed we will go ahead with 'grading'.

Grading

Grading is the process of balancing colour or adding a specific look or feel to a film. This can be to simply correct shots that are over or under exposed or to add more dramatic effects. Sometimes the result is very subtle but can totally change the feel of a film. This process can also be used to prepare a film for TV or cinema, which have specific technical specifications that need to be met.

Final tweaks will also be made to the audio and on some projects the film will be sent to an audio post-production house. The audio post house will create a new mix, this will be to a higher standard than most production companies can manage in-house. It may include additional effects, be mastered to a specific level and could even contain Dolby data for surround sound on TV and in Cinema.

Now your final edit is approved the film is ready for release. This may be a compression ready to use online or transfer to film for use in cinema. Some of these formats mean a significant financial commitment so make sure you are 100% sure you are happy with the film when signing off on this last stage.

Summary

It's important we stick to the process; these stages of approval are there to make sure you are totally happy with your project and it is delivered on time. We work with our clients to make sure the schedule is practical and realistic, explaining what is required at each stage.

A staged review process will ensure you know when your team's time is required and allow for amendments without missing a deadline or incurring additional costs.

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