Brief Brilliant: Video production

A guide for marketers making videos,
by people who make videos and
used to be marketers

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Introduction

So you're making a video? Great! Marketers who use video see a marked increase in key campaign metrics compared to marketers who don't [1].

Of course, you want it to be brilliant - to hit your marketing goals and delight, educate, persuade and/or entertain those who see it. We've learned that the quality of your video is decided long before the cameras roll. As with any creative, good work stems from good briefs and a positive working relationship. And that means the client and agency both playing key roles in defining the output.

We've put this guide together to help marketers get what they want. We'll talk about how to get off on the right foot, steer away from common pitfalls, make realistic plans and navigate the production process like a pro.
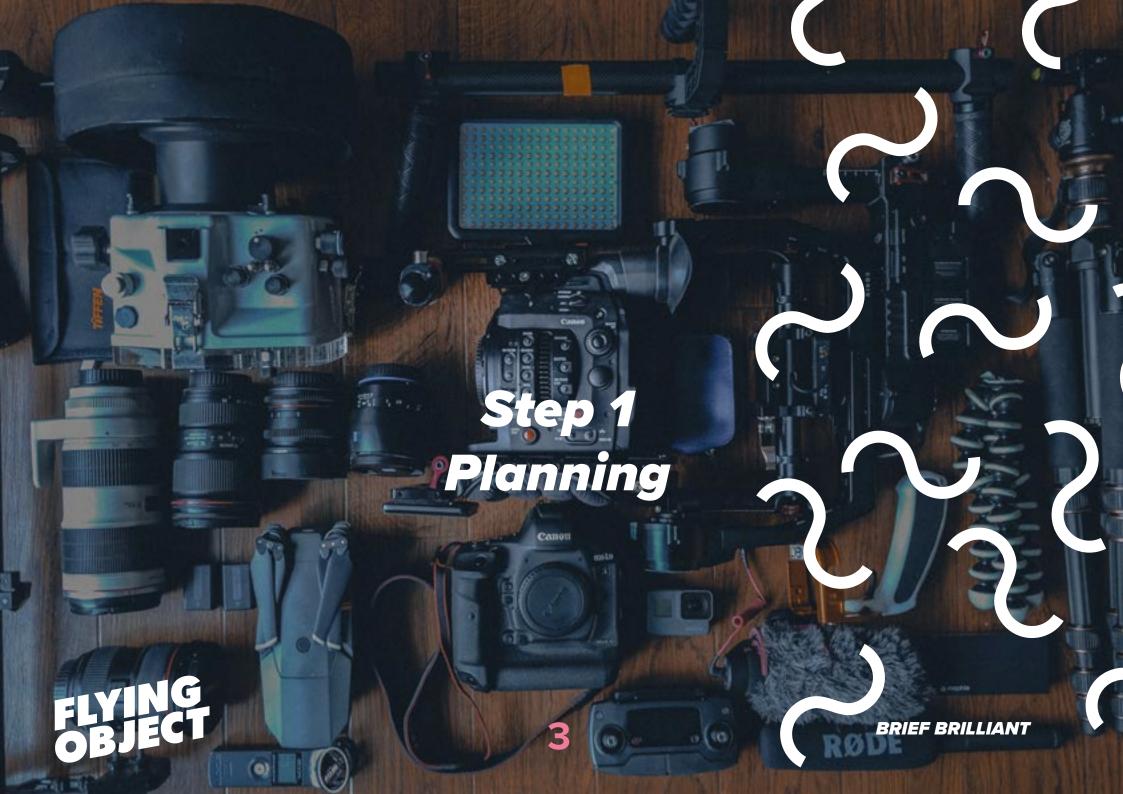
[1]There's a good report on this here: http://awesome.vidyard.com/rs/273-EQL-130/images/Vidyard_Aberdeen_Impact_of_Video_Marketing.pdf

So... who are you?

Flying Object is a London-based creative agency with a mission to connect brands to the ad-blocking generation. We create content (including lots of video), social, campaigns and brand activations. Founders Tim and Tom are ex-clients themselves, former marketing managers at Google and YouTube, so have been on both sides of the agency-brand partnership.

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Step 1
Planning

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Step 1: Planning

Why are we making video?

Whether you're making a short explainer for your website or a major branded content series, the first thing you need is a clear goal in mind. **What is your marketing objective, and how does that support your broader business objectives?**

'The first thing you need is a clear goal in mind'

Agencies will need to know what these goals are in order to help you achieve them. This sounds obvious, but often clients ask for a solution without presenting the problem. What's perhaps more surprising is how often these goals are ill-defined. A clear objective will help set a path throughout the process ahead.

Step 2
The Brief

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How long and how much?

When you need it, and how much budget you have for it, are big practical considerations when commissioning video. We get asked this a lot, so here's a rough guide to timelines and budgets.

A quick note on **budgets**: More money generally means better quality - more time honing the creative; more, better crew available for longer; better kit, talent (if applicable), music, post-production facilities - you get the idea. The budgets below show a range, but exclude special requests; if you want Nicole Kidman and a Coldplay song as well, add a few million pounds to the numbers below.

For **timings**, we've assumed prompt (2-3 days) feedback and responses from the client throughout. Try to avoid the rush timings - you may have to pay more for weekend rates and long days, and find that first choices on, say, crew, locations and so on aren't available if you have a short timeframe.

A side note on licenses and usages
Certain aspects of video and film production work are priced around usage licenses. The costs here assume online and event (ie, conference) usage - what we mostly work on. Should you make a web video and then decide to run it as a TV ad, you will likely find there will be extra fees. In some areas, geographic usage and union memberships will trigger extra payments.

Example costs that will likely be licensed:

• Music
• Talent (actors, voiceovers)
• Third-party imagery, like featured artworks
• Animation in general

Interview/ profile film

30s - 5 mins, live action
For example: business profile for B2B

Timings, initial brief to launch:
Sensible: 8 weeks
Sharp: 6 weeks
Rush: 3 weeks

Budget: £15-50k

Scripted film

30s - 3 mins, live action
For example: branded content funny

Timings, initial brief to launch:
Sensible: 10 weeks
Sharp: 6-8 weeks
Rush: 4 weeks

Budget: £20-60k
(Number and quality of actors is a key budget factor)

Animated explainer

30s - 2 mins, animated (2D, 3D or stop motion)
For example: product launch video

Timings, initial brief to launch:
Unlike short form film, the length of animation determines the timeline. Add roughly a week for every 30 seconds, and another week for stop motion. For a one minute film:
Sensible: 8 weeks
Sharp: 6 weeks
Rush: 4 weeks

Budget: £10-40k

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Step 2: The Brief

The brief is one of the most important elements in any commercial creative process. It consolidates everything that the creative work needs to say and do into a short, easy to understand, clear document.

Well - ideally it does, and sometimes this happens. But a good brief is hard to write. This is a good thing: the process of writing it should make you think hard about your goals, strategy and message. The result should be short (the clue's in the name), definitive, and insightful.

1. Why are we briefing?

It's always good to set out why we're here in the first place. Include:

Business objective
A short overview of the reasons behind why you are commissioning a video. For example:

Electrobikes' newest model, the Series 5, launches in September. Our objective is to drive sales of this model without cannibilising sales of the Series 3 or 4.

Marketing objective
Key information that explains how this video fits with your marketing goals. Can be granular, but leave particular details to the appendix.

To publicize the launch we are partnering with BikeGo, the UK's largest electric bike race. See details of BikeGo and partnership in the appendix. Our video needs to: a) reach and be shared by BikeGo's core audience; b) champion the partnership to set up further opportunities in the future.

2. Who are we talking to?

Short overview of target audience demographics and any information that could be useful - media consumption, awareness of and feelings about your brand, particular interests, heroes, etc. Full research and segmentation docs are great - in the appendix please!

Our target audience is 18-30 year olds, equally male and female, who already have or regularly use an electric bike, and who follow BikeGo and/or attend their events. They are keen to hear about specs, top speeds, and the technology inside the bike. Currently they think of ElectroBike as being for an older audience, expensive, not for them - the Series 5 specs, design and price point are targeted to change those views. They admire top racers like Laura Biker, and watch YouTube and Snapchat.

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Step 2: The Brief

3. What's the message?

What is the ONE thing you need this video to say to that audience? Take your time over this and chat to your agency - some outside help can be useful. One sentence, short as possible.

The Series 5 is the bike you need to win BikeGo.

4. Reason to believe

Quite simply, why a viewer should believe the thought above. Keep it short, but include product or brand features that need highlighting.
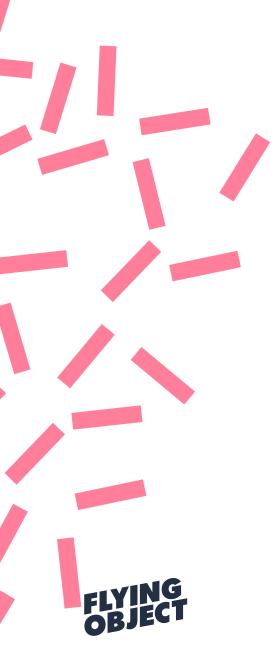
The Series 5 is designed with performance in mind. The 400kw battery means you can ride up to 18mph for 50 miles - around the BikeGo course and back again - while a snappy design will make you look the part on the track. The Series 5 is availalable at a pricepoint we believe the BikeGo community will find attractive.

5. Tone of voice

Adjectives to direct how you want the video to feel - funny, emotional, upbeat, in-your-face, intellectual, reflective, etc. If you have brand guidelines, attach them to the brief.

Fun, upbeat, competitive, bold. See Tone of Voice in attached brand guidelines

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Step 2: The Brief

6. Requirements

It might seem odd to put this at the end, but here's where you say what you actually want. How many videos, how long, broadcast and publishing requirements. (Exact formats can come later - the agency just needs to know before they hire crew and kit).

We need one video creative with cut downs, to be filmed at BikeGo Bristol. Full list as follows:

1x 60" for our own site and social, to be hosted on YouTube and native players; 16:9
1x Same as above, formatted to be played on a jumbotron screen at the racetrack for the following BikeGo race. Specs attached
1x 1:1 square cutdown for Instagram, max 60"
5x 15" highlights / teaser clips for social, also 1:1
5x 5-10" straight-to-camera call-outs with interviewees, for Snapchat & IGTV (9:16)

Clearance requirements: online and events, worldwide in perpetuity

7. Timeline and budget

Be clear if you can be. Include any major milestones.

Total budget is £38k+VAT.

Suggested timeline:
Initial script & treatment ideas: July 14
Sign off script & treatment at internal creative review: July 25
Filming at BikeGo Bristol: Sept 1-3
First cut of main film: Sept 14
Final delivery of all files to publish on social channels: Sept 25

Please allow 2 working days for feedback on any creative. The filming dates can't be moved because of the event timing, but there is some flex in the other milestones; however, we do need to publish all files by end of Q3 (end of September).

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Step 2: The Brief

A note on legals

A film will generate a huge amount of legal paperwork. As well as the SOW, there will need to be talent agreements, appearance and location releases, licensing contracts and clearances for footage owned by someone else (note: this includes people on YouTube.) Some of these can take time, especially finding the owner of a video on YouTube.

Most if not all will be handled by the agency or production company but your company might have specific requirements. A quick chat with the legal team might be a good idea at this point, and make clear to the video producer what your expectations are.

A few things to note before you start writing a brief

- Once the brief goes to the creative team everything in it should be signed off. If, say, the target audience of the work being briefed is changed later in the process, then the work that's been done may need to change significantly or be done again. Of course, changes to the brief will happen in practice, but work that a marketing manager puts in to avoid this will pay off in the end.

- You may want to brief the team at a meeting in which you go through lots of background details, other videos you like, the internal politics you need to navigate to get the work signed off, and so on. Great - do that - but try to keep the main brief document short.

- Consider working with your agency to write the brief. They'll have a good idea of what sparks good creative results for them, and some external thought can help make decisions. They may suggest a strategic process and research, investment in which can help make sure the main budget is well spent.

- Try to avoid business speak or internal acronyms or terms. As well as being easier for the agency to understand, it will help you be clearer in your asks. For example - you may want to amplify your A/W20 brand message, but what do you actually *mean* by that?

Assessing and developing creative

Different companies have different approaches to assessing and feeding back on creative, from dedicated marketing comms review teams to the individual marketing manager working on intuition. There's no right or wrong way.

Our main bit of advice is to consider feedback as mini-briefs - ie, give creative teams problems to solve, rather than pre-packaged solutions. So rather than editing the proposed script, suggest what you think is missing - the team knows why the script is as it is, so is best placed to respond to that note.

Or if the agency has produced multiple options, and you like a bit of one and a bit of another, tell them what those bits are and why they're good - a wholly new idea may come from that, which will be superior to smudging the two routes together (something which is suggested a lot!)

What they teach you in advertising school

Flying Object senior creative Cat Howarth studied Advertising at Falmouth, and went on to work for some of the largest agencies in London, including Mother, before joining our team. She explains how an advertising creative looks at a brief.

"When a client briefs me on a project the first thing I think is; what is the problem they are trying to overcome here? Because by understanding the root cause of their issues, we can devise a strategy that delivers proactive change.

It's only after we've nailed that down that I start thinking about the creative idea and tonality. It's not that they're not important, but that you have to be heading in the right direction before you start. That way you stand a bigger chance of making great work that's effective, ultimately giving clients value for money (and hopefully returning for more projects). Essentially, creative takes a lot of background thinking so that everybody wins.

Once you've nailed the solution you want to deliver, you can dial up and down the creativity. This is often a matter of taste, and getting to know a client's boundaries is key. Challenging a client's expectations is also part and parcel of the job, otherwise they may as well make the work themselves. Listening to everyone's creative opinions and taking fears or anxieties on board as you develop ideas is a key element to ensuring you deliver creative ideas that people buy into.

Without a doubt, you want to make your project memorable and shareable. Not over-complicating an idea as it gets developed in creative and production over a matter of months is certainly a watch-out. Rounds of amends, shifts in budgets and production logistics can all accidentally dilute a great idea. However, a great idea can also withstand change and has flex in it. It's about being aware as you progress forwards.

There's a metaphor we were taught on our post-grad advertising course; if you throw three balls at someone they might not catch any, but if you throw one at them they probably will catch it. Focusing on one product point or service in your messaging is a classic example of how to keep your creative focused. That way it can really shine."

Step 3
The production process
& your role in it

Step 3: The production process & your role in it

Idea approved? Tick.
Budget signed off? Tick.
Timeline for production agreed? Tick.

Then congratulations - it's time to start production!

There are three stages:

1
Pre-production

Getting things ready to shoot - in the case of live film - or make/draw/fabricate/illustrate, in the case of animation. Booking crew, casting talent, finding locations, making detailed plans, assessing risks, and so on

2
Production

The bit where it's all made!

3
Post-production

Editing, sound mixing, colouring, exporting. (In animation, works slightly differently - we'll get on to that).

How involved you are across each of these will vary on the job. The main things for a marketing manager to think about at each stage, we think, are as follows.

Pre-production: Client roles

Contracting & scope of work

Contracts are important: they state who will ultimately own the work, and what the roles and responsibilities of each party are. Statements of Work, usually appended to such contracts, should lay out exactly what is (and, by exclusion, isn't) getting made, for exactly what money. They serve to protect both client and agency. What is agreed should be delivered for the price stated. If new deliverables are added, then detail these in a change of scope agreement.

An example: you commission a video for £25k. Later you discover that a version with German subtitles is required. This version is costed separately and stated in a change of scope.

Invoicing and payment

Once an agency starts producing a video, they start spending money - both in terms of their own time, and external costs like booking kit and locations.

It's a good idea therefore to try to sort an invoicing and payment process sooner rather than later in order to keep things running; delays in payment can hold up shoots. A proportion invoiced on signature of the SOW - say, 50% - is standard.

Signing off

Who will sign off decisions from your side? Make sure that person, or team, is prepared and briefed, as delays in sign off will hold up shoots. Good practice here is:

• Discuss with the agency what you need to sign off yourself and what they can decide. Do you need to sign off a location (maybe) or crew (maybe not)?

• If anyone in the sign off flow, including yourself, is going to be unavailable during the production timeline, communicate to the agency and figure out if there will be a stand-in.

• Once a decision is signed off, put it in writing. Un-signing-off a decision later might incur extra costs so clear communication of what is and isn't agreed helps avoid problems down the way.

Pre-production

Protect the brief

"Hey guys, [someone we've never heard of] from [department unrelated to the work] has suggested [idea that won't work] - can we add that in?" It's happened to us all.

At this point it's easy to start cramming in suggestions, but the result will likely be work that is unfocused, or rushed. As suggestions flow in - even those from your boss - take the time to think: does this really support the brief? How? If it definitely does, bring it up with the agency: as with any creative feedback, they might have an even better way of solving for it.

Pre-production meeting

Shortly before a shoot, a pre-production meeting, or PPM, will bring the key people together to run through details, how the shoot will work, and confirm what is (and isn't!) in the script and being shot.

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Production

The client's role on a shoot

Here it comes: the big day.

The first thing to know about a shoot is there's probably a lot to get done. If it ain't on film then it's not going in the edit, so the production team and crew will be focused on getting all the shots they need, in time. The second thing to know is there's going to be a lot of waiting around. Kit needs to be set up, lighting configured, you may need to wait for cloud cover to clear or arrive - and so on.

So what's your role here?

1. Sign off shots: if a client is on a shoot, they can sign off shots as they go - confirming framing looks good, that lines have been delivered to their satisfaction, and that we're good to move to the next scene

2. Prioritise: sometimes things don't go completely to plan, and the production needs to adapt a bit in the face of circumstance. What is most important, what can be flexible?

3. Remember and defend decisions: you've signed off the shoot as it goes and helped the team crack a conundrum that came up on the day. Please don't renege on those decisions later!

Animation

Animation production works in a different way. Sometimes it's a studio making and filming things, maybe it's an individual carefully working through a long process for weeks. You may not therefore attend the production as such, but the same principles apply - work with the team to craft the product you want to see.

'So what is a gaffer, anyway?'

A non-extensive guide to the job titles you might hear about on set. Most smaller shoots won't need all these roles - a simple interview will likely just be a DOP and a sound technician.

Director of Photography (DOP), sometimes "Cinematographer": Uses lights, cameras, lenses and other kit to achieve the effects and shots required by the Director.

1st Assistant Camera (1st AC) - As well as having ultimate responsibility for maintaining the camera and all the various lenses a/nd accessories required, the 1st AC is also usually responsible for focusing the camera as the action develops - not an easy job!

2nd Assistant Camera (2nd AC) - Helps the 1st AC with their responsbilities, and often seen with the slate (or clapperboard) before each shot.
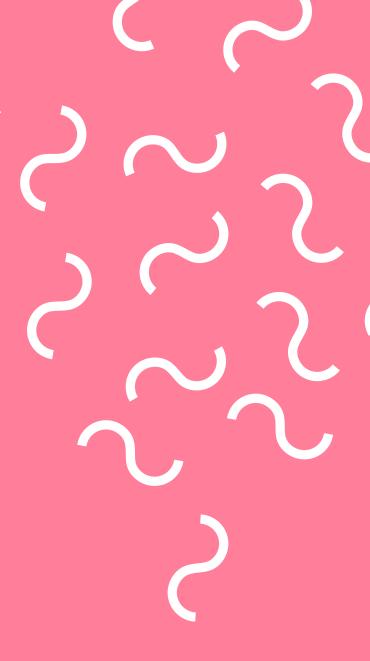
Sound Technician - may work solo or as part of a team. Captures sound on set or location which can either be 'tied in' to the camera and recorded alongside the footage, or is recorded seperately and syncronised later using timecodes or the camera slate.

DIT - Stands for Digital Imaging Technician. Supports the camera team by ensuring digital footage is captured correctly and backed up between takes. May also assist the rest of the team by providing a colour graded monitor to preview the live images.

Grips - in charge of all the various equipment used to suspend or move lights and cameras on set. The chief of grips, should there be a team, is the Key Grip.

Gaffer - Chief electrician on set, responsible for executing (and possibly, depending on the DOP's preference, designing) the lighting plan for a given shoot. Assisted on larger shoots by the Best Boy.

Runner - a junior member of staff, looking after things like taxis, refreshments, moving kit around and the like. Ideally, is not physically running very often.

Post-production: where it all comes together

The film's in the can - or, more likely, the SD cards are in a protective case and thoroughly backed up - and the crew have gone home. It's time to bring it all together and make that video we've been dreaming about for so long.

A quick guide to the edit process

Ingest and prep: the rushes (raw footage) are uploaded to the edit suite and laid out in editing software - usually Avid, Adobe Premiere or Final Cut Pro - ready to cut. Sometimes this is done by an edit assistant.
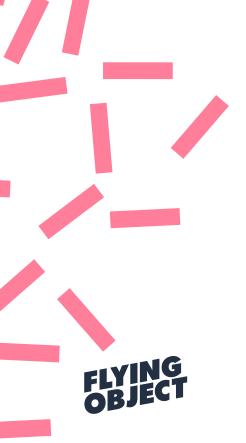
Selects: The editor, often with the director, will work through the rushes and select the best takes. In a scripted film, this can be quite quick, and often the editor will work off notes taken on set (often by a "script supervisor") and the storyboards. If the film is made documentary style, where there's lots of interviews, filmed action, and b-roll (nice shots of locations, details which make the film interesting to watch) then the selects process can take a while, as the editor and director will be building the story of the video through these choices.

Assembly: A bunch of selected clips, in roughly the right order, but not edited in any aesthetic way; probably three times too long and a bit of a mess, but can be a good indicator of where the film is going. If shared with you as the client, treat with caution - it's not an actual edit!

Cuts: Usually, however, the first cut shared with a client will be a pretty good approximation of the final version, especially as the director sees it. That first cut is the main opportunity to make course-corrections: take chunks out, add in stuff that was left out by the director, and so on. The second cut should take in those notes and therefore be ideally the final version. The number of cuts shared with you will probably be defined in that SOW you signed at the beginning.

Final export: once the edit is signed-off ("picture lock", in the lingo), there's a bit of a process of moving various different versions of the files to the colourist and sound mixer, adding in graphics and then bundling it all up and exporting out the final files to the specifications requested in the brief.

Note: You may hear the terms "offline" and "online" editing used. Broadly speaking - and professional editors will be writing in to complain about the specifics, but as far as you're concerned - steps 2-4 are "offline" - when clips can still be moved around - and step 5 is "online". The terms themselves come from an older way of editing.

Post-production: Tips on reviewing edits

• Remember: it's not finished till it's finished! In particular, the sound levels might be all over the place and the colour may look very washed out throughout the feedback process. The editor can make quick fixes to these elements, but a well-shot film won't show its true colours until the grade.

• Ask yourself: does this answer the brief? Does it tell the story we're trying to tell? As earlier, it's good to give feedback as problems for the director and editor to solve.

• Are there any brand or product issues? You're the brand specialist, so if an interviewee calls your product by its old name by mistake, you're best placed to notice.

• This sounds so obvious but: if it wasn't filmed, we can't use it in the edit. New clips will need a re-shoot. You'll be surprised how often this comes up.

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Going live

It's easier than ever to broadcast live to an audience. Producer George Bergel talks through the things to know.

A live broadcast used to mean a hugely complex and technically demanding undertaking - but nowadays it can be far simpler to engage with your audience via live video.

Products such as Periscope and Facebook Live have made viewing live content on your phone almost ubiquitous, whilst Twitch has been one of the breakthrough creative platforms of the last few years. Here's some things to think about when working out how live content can fit in to your marketing plans:

What sort of live show is right for me?
Broadcasting from a phone is a great, low budget way to bring your audience into an intimate or exlusive environment, whereas a traditional, multicamera set up is best for those larger scale moments such as performances or panels. For the right project, 360 VR is an option, too.

Where should I broadcast?
This will depend very much on your existing audience - where do they normally interact with your brand? Drawing an audience to a new platform to watch your content live can be harder than the broadcast itself - so bring the content to them.

It's possible nowadays to broadcast to multiple platforms.

Why is this live?
We always try and ask ourselves this question when planning a project. Exclusive access, one-off moments, a sense of jeopardy or danger and fan engagement are good reasons to go live. If it could work just as well as a pre-recorded video, then it's probably not the right idea for your live project.

Plan plan plan.
Then plan some more. Even if you're just going backstage with a phone for a sneak peak, planning your content to the finest detal will really help you make something compelling, engaging and re-watchable after the broadcast is over.

Post-production: Audio, Graphics & Colour Grade

The production of the audio on your video is crucial. Some audio will be recorded live as you shoot - such as actors, or interviewees, talking - by the sound recordist. Other parts will be done separately.

The main components are:

Music

One of the most challenging parts of a production to get right. Music will come from one of three sources:

Production music libraries

Stock tracks chosen by keyword searches; those tracks are usually developed to be flexible to the production, with different versions at different lengths or hiding instruments or voice. Cheap (from a few hundred pounds) and flexible, but often the quality is poor, and any editor will know the pain of hours spent trawling huge libraries for the right thing.

Composition

The advantages of bringing in a composer are clear - creating music bespoke for the picture. The disadvantage is it can take time (and often money) to change course later on. Note, composers can often do the sound design (see below) too - this can be handy in animation in particular - and the mix. Costs for composition is roughly £1-5k, more for an established name.

A licensed, named track

How much budget do you have? Licensing music for commercial video is amazingly expensive. On the plus side, a well-known track brings a memorable punch that little else can, and even a little-known track by a real band you've never heard of can have an emotional drive that production or composed music lacks. But you're looking at £10k up to - well, think of a number and double it.

Post-producton: Audio, Graphics & Colour Grade

Voiceover
Normally done in a voiceover (VO) studio by a VO artist, normally takes no longer than an hour. VO artists' fees will, again, usually depend on the usage of the final piece.

Sound design
Sound effects and other little details, added to the edit, that bring a video to life. Particularly important in animation, but quite a lot of sound effects on live film will be added later too, rather than recorded at the time. Often these effects will come from libraries, but new ones are made through a magical process of recording random things called foley (see any BBC nature documentary: most of those sound effects are the work of a foley artist).

Sound mix
Once everything is complete, the last step is for an audio technician to mix all the music, voice, voiceover and effects together in a way that's nice and clear to hear, and sounds great. Along with the grade (below), this should be the last thing done, so the audio should be completely signed off. If a change is then made, the audio will need to be mixed again.

Graphics
Includes names and titles of people talking (often called lower thirds or astons), and intro/call to action copy (often "supers"). Simple graphics ("gfx") can be done by an editor; more ambitious visuals will take a motion graphics artist or animator. Ideally graphics are worked on in parallel to your edit so you can see it all together before picture lock. Share any brand style guides you want followed before this starts.

Grade
Up until now, the colours in your film may have looked quite flat or unbalanced. The colour grade is where this is corrected, adding a final, crucial "look" to the film. If your video has been shot on quality kit in the right formats, there's actually a lot of flexibility in the range of colours and tones that the colourist can pull out, turning something bright and shiny, or moody, or cinematic, and so on. While some colouring can be done in the regular edit workflow by an editor, investing in a professional colourist at a post-production house can really lift the final product.

As with the audio mix, the picture needs to be locked at this point, or else work needs to be re-done.

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What should you attend?

Being physically present during the post-production process is less key than being on the shoot, usually because there's more time to take in feedback. Editing, colouring and the like are detailed, time-consuming jobs, so if you do attend, expect a lot of sitting around in a small dark room.

The edit
It's useful to attend if time is tight. Otherwise, you could drop in to review selects with the director

Music and mix
Attending a composition isn't often done and may not be possible. Attending a mix can be useful, but only if you have strong opinions on how the audio in the final piece should balance.

Grade
This can be useful to attend as the time with the colourist is limited, and seeing it on a colour-controlled screen is important. Otherwise the team can send over stills to review. Note, when reviewing, colours look different on different screens - Macs, and iPhones (not on nighttime mode) tend to have a good balance.

And finally... launch launch launch!
Once the audio is mixed and the grade complete, there will be a short process of "online" editing to put all the files back together and export to your requirements. Then, it's ready to go live for whatever occasion demands.

Want to make a video? Get in touch!

At Flying Object we produce innovative, quality video for a range of cilents to be used on all sorts of media. Don't hesitate to get in touch for your next project:

hello@weareflyingobject.com

Check out our work at:

weareflyingobject.com

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