

VITAL VIDEO

TIME – THE ADDED DIMENSION

Video for Multimedia

When to shoot video?

Video adds more weight and complication to your life in the field but well shot video will add more power and depth to your multimedia pieces.

What kind of story best lends itself to video?

Any story with action or activity is a good start. Another situation to shoot video is when you need visuals and audio of the same event and don't have time to both shoot stills and record audio (at least until you grow that extra set of arms.)

Interviews are also good to capture on video. People's body language can be a powerful cue to what they're saying and can add emotion to their words. If you record your formal interviews on video, you'll have the option to use either the audio alone or the audio plus video.

Typically we use the audio part of the interview to build the spine of the narrative in a multimedia story and cut to the video section to see a subject's emotional reaction.

So, why not always shoot video?

Because stills images have a real power to captivate. The combination of stills and video can have a multiplier effect.

Time: The Added Dimension

A great still image is a combination of great light and great moment.

In video, you still need great light and great moments but you've added the third element of time.

So one way to think about those still "moments" is as "extended moments" in video.

Because you're operating across time, every video shot needs a beginning, a middle (the peak or "moment") and an end.

Timecode

Timecode is the unique numerical address of every single video frame you shoot. Like house numbers on a roadmap, the computer refers to these addresses, or timecode, for every operation. But add two houses with the exact same number and you're in trouble.

Breaking timecode means the camera stops assigning addresses then starts again from zero. So if you break timecode on a tape, you'll have two of the same addresses on a single tape.

If you have a tape with broken timecode and ask the computer to go to frame 00;02;01;07, it will see 2 frame 00;02;01;07 and it will freak out. Often you can't recover the second half of the tape with broken timecode.

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You can break timecode by looking at your tape in the field and not rewinding it properly. If you look at the tape, be sure there is still a timecode number on the screen before you start recording again. If you see something like this on your screen "--:--:--:--" the camera will assume this is a new tape and start recording new timecode from zero.

Broken timecode is a big problem when you sit down to edit so be very careful with rewinding or viewing in the field.

Formats

There are 2 ways video cameras capture images: progressive and interlaced.

Interlaced video is drawn in two fields: every other line (or half the screen) is drawn in one instant and then other half of the screen is added the next instant. Interlaced video is more common.

The advantage of interlaced is that it makes the file size smaller but means if you're trying to capture a single frame on your screen, you only get half the information, or every other line. That gives frame grabs a "combed" effect.

Progressive draws the entire image in a single pass. Each frame is complete but it takes up twice as much data and hard drive space. Progressive video cameras are just starting to become affordable. Frame grabs from a progressive video camera are complete without any comb like images.

SD means standard definition video is always interlaced and the images measures 720x480 pixels.

HD means High Definition Video (HDV). It comes in several sizes. A very popular size is 1080i (i=interlaced), which is 1440 x 1080 pixels high. HD can be interlaced (i) or progressive (p).

4x3 vs 16:9 is the aspect ratio. The proportion of SD is 4x3, which is a slight rectangle. 16:9 is a longer rectangle, more panorama in shape. 16:9 is the new standard for TV.

Technical things

A few technical tips for still photographers using a video camera:

- 1) Avoid auto focus: it hunts, jumps and is never sure it's in focus. I use autofocus push, just like on my still camera.
- 2) To focus zoom all the way to telephoto, focus carefully then zoom out to properly compose your shot before you hit record.
- 3) ISO is called gain. Pushing the gain up to high allows you to shoot in lower light. It also adds a ton of digital noise to the picture, just like very high ISO does with stills. Try to use the lowest gain possible.
- 4) The standard shutter speed for video is 1/60th of a second. Using a faster or slower speed makes the image act weird. Set the shutter speed on 1/60 and leave it. When you step outside, use the fstop and ND filter to control proper exposure.
- 5) Video cameras are sensitive to light. In bright light, use the ND (neutral density) filter. Think of it as your camera's sunglasses.
- 6) Exposure: Don't trust the viewfinder or flip out screen on your video camera when setting exposure. It is always wrong. Instead turn on the zebras and set the threshold for 95. When the zebras appear, the exposure that shows the zebras is above 95 (101 is clipping) Set your aperture and ND (but not your shutter speed, leave that at 1/60th) until the zebras appear, then dial down until they're almost gone from your screen. If a subject is in front of a bright window, adjust the zebras on the person's face.

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7) One of the most crucial video camera settings is white balance. It's important to use the same white balance in a location so the scenes will seamlessly cut together ("Wait, wasn't she wearing an orange sweater in the last shot?) Custom white balance off a piece of white paper or a grey card every time you change lighting situations.

Audio

Audio is the backbone of video and audio is also the backbone of great multimedia.

The a rule of thumb in documentary films is

- people will watch a film with good sound and bad visuals.
- people will not watch a film with bad sound and great visuals.

So pay special attention to your audio.

For good audio:

- 1) Always wear headphones when you're shooting
- 2) set your audio levels manually to -12 dB to -6 dB and check them before you start rolling.
- 3) avoid strong wind and strong background noises, especially for interviews (turn off the radio or tv in the background)
- 4) don't talk when you're shooting video, the microphones are sensitive and will pick up your voice on the audio track.
- 5) Set your inputs to mic, which means "microphone". Line is for recording with the line from a sound board.
- 6) If you're using 2 microphones, an on-camera mic and a lavalier or wireless mic, put each mic into its own separate channel and do not mix them in the camera.
- 7) Remember to record a lot of ambient sounds, and get a nice piece of video of the source of those sweet ambient sounds.

Tripod

Use it. Yes, it's a huge pain but it makes a big difference. You want people to look at what you're shooting and forget about the frame.

If you're not rock steady, that first thing the viewer will notice is that the frame is moving and they'll stop paying attention to the subject in that frame. Unsteady video can break the magic spell that great video or multimedia can weave. Video camera shake is like an amateur's out of focus pictures.

When you set down your tripod, first thing is to make sure the legs are perfectly level before you put the head or camera on.

Use a fluid tripod head made for video., It makes any move look smooth as silk.

Once the camera is on, be sure it's locked down.

Moving the Camera

Don't ever zoom or pan while recording .

The zoom was created to give you a number of different focal lengths in a single lens. It's not made for zooming during recording. Don't zoom.

Use the zoom to reframe shots before hitting the record button. If you want to be closer to a subject or farther away use your feet and move the camera closer or farther away.)

Basically, don't zoom the camera.

Panning is moving the camera left or right. Tilting is moving the camera up or down. Try not to pan or tilt as it doesn't work very well online. It's better to decide what you want to show, frame it carefully, then hit record.

Don't scan and pan and move the camera as if you're trying to show everything in one shot. Find the subject, frame it and hold on it.

But if you pan or tilt, be very slow and do it twice: once in each direction. Start the shot with the camera not moving and then slowly move it, stopping smoothly and gently when you get to the end of your pan or tilt. Stay on that shot for a while before you stop recording. Begin and end the shot steady then move the camera in the opposite direction for the next shot..

Motivated moves

Make sure every camera move has some motivation, some reason for why you're moving the camera. If you're panning from left to right, wait until someone enters the empty frame going from left to right and use that as your motivation for going from left to right.

Anticipate

Don't chase the action. Anticipate the action, Try to get ahead and let the action come to you and move through your frame.

Sequences

The wonder of video is its ability to compress time. An action that can take several minutes can be compressed into a few shots. You'll need a variety of short, precise shots that are then edited together to suggest a longer action. Get a lot of shot shots of different focal lengths from different angles to be able to seamlessly compress time.

Start thinking right away: beginning, middle and end.

Shot list: start with some idea of what you want to show before you start shooting.

Answer the who, what, when where and why questions and try to get images to support them

The Empty Frame

The ideal video shot starts with a empty frame, that is, a frame that does not contain the subject.

- 1) Start recording the empty frame for a few seconds before the subject enters.
- 2) Then the subject enters the frame,
- 3) an action occurs (a moment)
- 4) the subject leaves the frame
- 5) hold a few seconds on the empty frame before you stop recording.

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This should all happen within 12 seconds. If you were shooting a commercial, this sequence would happen within 2-4 seconds.

All these empty shots help you with editing; they create natural and logical transitions.

For example: You anticipate a shot of someone getting out of the car, going up the walkway to a house then knocking on the door.

You can record the entire process in a single uninterrupted take that is several minutes long, or you can accomplish the same information in a more dramatic way with three or four short shots?

Can you suggest three or four short shots to show that complete action?

Framing (or where to put the camera.)

One of the wonders of video is that you can create three dimensional images in people's mind by putting together images from different locations and of different focal lengths.

Frame video as carefully as you would frame a still photograph. all the same composition rules apply (rule of thirds) . Make your video images as beautiful as your stills. And don't forget about the beauty of light, too.

Keep moving

To show a room, you can turn the camera on and wander around the room. Or you can shoot from the four corners of the room, then shoot 8 details and then 8 more medium shots. Each time you change the camera position, you add depth and another dimension to the sequence. The beauty of editing is that 3 quick shots can show you the room in 3 dimensions, especially if they're each well framed in beautiful light and of a different focal length from a different locations.

Since video is often dealing with movement or activity, think about where you will put the camera to get that entrance, " the moment " and exit.

Again anticipate: where will shot start and where it will end ? Be ahead of the action, not behind. Remember to start with an empty frame.

Circle of Action

Being close or even inside an action makes the viewer feel like they're inside the action too. Shooting wide and being close helps accomplish the feeling of being inside the action..

Long lenses are more remote, better for graphics and to make the viewer feel more neutral, more like an observer than a participant.

Some rules for framing:

You can dance.

get a WS (wide shot) MS (medium shot), a CU (close shot) and a ECU (extreme close up) of every situation you shoot. Change you position and do it again. Always remember good framing and interesting light.

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30 degree rule

Change your position at least 30 degrees between each shot, either horizontally or vertically. Remember to get WS, MS, CU, ECU from each position. Always remember good framing and interesting light.

Close

Video loves close-ups. The web adores close-ups even more.

Wide shots don't usually work online because online video players are still small and information is easily lost.

Get 3 times as many closeups as wide shots or medium shots. Always remember good framing and interesting light.

The RULE of 4 - 8 - 12

Four different angles. (MS + CU + WS + ECU)

Shoot from eight unique locations.

Hold each shot for twelve seconds. (min)

Make it your mantra

Put the camera on the ground and hold it over your head at least once a shoot (maybe more than once.) Always remember good framing and interesting light.

POV (Point-of-View)

See things from both sides. If you're shooting someone reading a book, imagine what the person sees (the subjects' POV) and then imagine what the book sees (the book's POV). Always shoot both views and remember good framing and interesting light.

Crossing the line/ Screen direction / the 180 degree rule

Draw an imaginary 180 degree line through your subject. When you're shooting, stay on one side of that imaginary line.

For instance: if you're covering a parade, make the parade route your "line" and shoot only from one side of the street. If you start off on one side of the parade and the marchers are going left to right, they need to always be going left to right. If you cross the street (the "line") the marcher will suddenly be going in the opposite direction on screen. This will confuse viewers.

Practical Things

Check to be sure you have all mic cables, your tripod and your headphones

Tapes: take off cellophane and put labels on all tapes before you go out. It can be a pain to quickly change tapes and have to struggle with the packaging. Be ready. Bring twice as many tapes as you think you will be shooting.

Tape: always use same tape manufacturer in your camera. don't save money on cheap tape.

Develop a consistent system of labeling your tapes. We use 2 digits 3 letters= 01MSW, 02MSW. The most important number you'll have in video is a unique tape number

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Video Cheatsheet

before....

- 1) Batteries charged
- 2) Cables ready
- 3) Tapes labeled
- 4) Tripod
- 5) Headphones
- 6) Clean lens

ready??

- 1) Bars on each tape
- 2) Gain set at low
- 3) White balance
- 4) Headphones
- 5) Set audio levels

shoot....

Audio is king

The Rule of 4 - 8 - 12 =

Four different angles. (MS + CU + WS + ECU)

Shoot from eight unique locations.

Hold each shot for twelve seconds. (min)

Always remember good framing and interesting light.

You can never shoot enough details.