

Sell It With **VIDEO**

By Greg Varhaug

Tips for Producing It Yourself



Advertising money is moving away from traditional media outlets – print, television, radio – and moving to the Net. Until recently, the model for advertising on the Net was the traditional print ad. Now, with the advent of streaming video content online, advertising on the Net is looking less like print and more like television. Increasingly, the model for advertising on the Net is the television commercial.

Having video on your site gives you a very direct way to convey your company's message to your customer. It can also help to attract traffic to your website – search engines give better placement to websites and individual Web pages that include video.

Websites like YouTube let you reach a surprising number of people in a short time, for free, provided you can post something people will want to watch.

It's relatively easy to create video for the Web, compared to producing video for broadcast. Your Web video doesn't have to be broadcast quality – because Web videos are displayed in a space much smaller than your television screen, you can get away with much lower resolution.

Even with less expensive standard-definition video cameras, it's possible to employ some of the basic techniques and effects that videographers use to create professional-looking video.

The key to making a good video is planning, plus controlling your filming environment. It's a good idea to write a script, or even better, a simple storyboard for your video. You have a choice as to how elaborate you want your video

to be. More elaborate doesn't necessarily mean better, or more effective.

Equipment

As much as possible, familiarize yourself with all the functions your camera offers. Your video editing software can help you to correct for some of the factors you can't entirely control while shooting. Adjustments for brightness, contrast, and color saturation can help to sweeten your final video. Also, many editors include an audio clean-up function. I use this feature to soften ambient room noise.

You're likely to get your best video shots using a tripod. You can get a tripod that extends up to five feet for about \$35 or less. Even though "shaky-cam" shots are all the rage these days, you're usually better off with steady, well-composed shots.

Lighting and Background

If you're speaking directly into the camera, lighting may be one of your most vexing problems. You should avoid all direct lighting, as it causes distinct shadows. (There are possible exceptions to this, which we can discuss later.)

Overhead fluorescent lights are usually not a good choice, either.

I use a combination of natural sunlight and diffuse incandescent light for shooting videos in my office. Sunlight comes from a window to my left, covered with a white sheet to further diffuse the light. I add two

six-foot torchere-style floor lamps, which come with white, upturned plastic shades to diffuse the light. The floor lamps shine directly onto a white ceiling. Aluminum foil inside the upturned shades diffuses the light further, shielding me from direct light. I use 60 watt incandescent bulbs, placed on either side, about four feet in front of me.

This combination of diffuse sunlight (which tends to be blue), combined with the incandescents (which tend to be yellow), gives me a good overall light level and natural-looking color.

My favorite background is a navy blue bed sheet stretched over one wall, in part because it helps to obscure any shadows from the lamps in front of me. I've tried a black background, but found it a little harsh. Using a dark background gives the impression that I'm filming at night, which lends a more relaxing visual ambiance.

Because the window and the incandescent lights are positioned higher than my chair, there is light shining on the top of my head, which is very important to achieving a professional look. Don't let the top of your head blend into a shadow behind you. You can shine a direct low-voltage light down toward the top of your head, as long as it doesn't create any other unwanted shadows. This is a standard professional lighting technique.

Finally, if you're getting shadows on your background, especially at head-level, you can shine a bright

direct light onto your background. But don't let that direct light fall on you.

Performance and Sound

If you're speaking on-camera, you should probably use what videographers call the "rule of thirds." The idea is that your subject should occupy one-third of your shot, usually to the left side of the screen. You see this done on television whenever anyone is interviewed on camera, live news aside.

Don't rush the beginning or the end of your camera takes. While shooting, allow a couple of seconds after the camera starts before you start speaking. Be aware of your facial expression during these pauses. Also allow a couple of seconds after speaking before you stop the camera. This makes your editing easier, with smoother transitions between shots.

Sound reflects much the same way as light does. The more reflected sound you have, the harder it is to clearly understand the speaker on-camera. The less reflected sound you have, the better.

There are a few simple steps you can take to reduce echoes in the room where you're shooting. A carpeted floor eliminates one potential source. You can also use blankets or thick cloth on the wall directly opposite you, and in the upper corners of the room.

Assuming you're using the microphone on the camera to record sound, you should be as close to the camera as your shot will allow. Move the camera closer, instead of panning in with the

Rock On, Good People!



People buy everything online nowadays, but with so many sites out there, return business can be elusive — converting browsers to regular subscribers is the great challenge. How to hook those invisible millions who hunt bargains while clicking through social networks and novelty postings? Above all, how to keep them coming back? One answer is to offer something for nothing, in an entertaining way.

Often a David-and-Goliath scenario seems to prevail in cyberspace. While, for instance, major newspaper publishers grapple with the problems of adapting a subscription-based business model to the Internet, two music teachers from San Diego have created a thriving subscription-based Internet business.

Tim Gilberg and David Taub run Next Level Guitar (www.nextlevelguitar.com), which has posted over 400 guitar instruction videos on YouTube. These are essentially free guitar lessons designed to direct viewers to their website. Now boasting over 100,000 YouTube subscribers, Next Level Guitar's videos have received millions of combined views. Reflecting the popularity of their YouTube channel, the NLG website has maintained

a U.S. Internet ranking in the top 200,000 for the past year.

Gilberg and Taub began posting videos on YouTube about three years ago. Today, of course, there are many music instructors on YouTube, but NLG was one of the first music instruction sites to create a strong YouTube presence.



Through his YouTube exposure, David Taub has become a minor cyber-celebrity — millions of viewers now recognize his backwards ball cap and signature sign-off, “Rock on, good people!”

In his video about YouTube marketing, Tim Gilberg says he tried pay-per-click as part of his overall NLG promotional strategy, but had only limited success with it. Gilberg instead attributes Next Level Guitar's success to their ability to convert their YouTube traffic into actual website sales.

Gilberg addresses the question of whether there really are buyers on YouTube — NLG's cash flow proves that there are. Videos can generate sales leads, he says, by directing viewers to a specific URL. Gilberg stresses the importance of list-building — from the NLG home page, visitors are offered an e-book if they provide a valid e-mail address.

In one of his marketing videos, Gilberg states that NLG's demographic leans toward the 35 -50 age group. This contradicts the idea that YouTube is patronized only by teenagers with no money. He believes that YouTube has evolved into an online information resource, with people now using YouTube to research products and plan purchases.

NLG's knack for converting their YouTube audience into paying customers also contradicts the idea among many marketers that YouTube's following is comprised entirely of people looking for freebies.

Most of us have seen YouTube videos (cute pet tricks, dance routines on treadmills, Susan Boyle singing “I Dreamed a Dream”) that have scored millions of views. Tapping into this, with a series of quality videos attuned to their niche viewership, NLG has drawn a steady flow of highly-targeted traffic to its website.

NLG's particular niche is music; more specifically, the guitar. But the same principles can be adapted to target a wide range of market niches.

Tim Gilberg offers a free five-day marketing course through his website at www.timgilberg.com.

lens. The closer you are to the microphone, the less likely you are to have problems with reflected sound.

Editing and File Management

Keeping a production log can prevent headaches during the editing process. This might be simply a list of “takes” by number with a check mark next to the takes you want to keep or review for later, or an “X” next to each bad take. Be sure to announce the “take” number at the beginning of each video segment you record, as in “Indoor shot, take seven.”

A common problem is simply managing all the files that will be edited together to form your completed video. You’ll likely have a mix of file types – graphics, video, audio. Create a logical system of naming your files. I rename all my video files before importing them into an editor. It’s much easier to find “Video 1” than to find “PG001693.”

I recommend that you archive all your developmental files. Data storage is cheap, so there’s no reason to

permanently erase anything you’re working with. Don’t assume you won’t ever need it again. Copy your original files to a separate folder to edit your project.

Camera and Computer Quality

Your standard-definition Web video may or may not be suitable for distribution on DVD. Older, less expensive cameras work well enough for Web videos, but may not produce a high enough picture quality for DVD. My three-year-old JVC Everio does fine for Web videos; but played on DVD, the picture looks pixilated.

The price of high-definition cameras has dropped considerably in the past year. This is the least expensive way to produce very high-quality video. Before high definition, the price of a low-end professional video camera was around \$3,000.

If you’re thinking of getting a high-definition camera, you’ll need a computer that can handle the resource demands needed for editing video. High-definition video files are

especially large. You’ll need very fast processing, plus plenty of RAM and disk storage.

Producing a quality video for the Web can help your company or your product to stand out. Producing your own video requires planning, effort, imagination, and time. But it can also be an inexpensive means of communicating your message to an audience that is increasingly turning to the Web as its primary source of information. **N**

Greg Varhaug has worked professionally for over 20 years as a musician, arranger, teacher, and writer. He has scored and performed on radio and TV commercials, promotional videos, and short films, including a number of commercials for Congressman Charles Wilson (Charlie Wilson’s War). More recently, Greg has contributed music to several short documentary films by independent filmmaker Erik Kolflat. These films include The Circuit featuring Billy Dee Williams, and a series of documentaries on the Houston Art Car Club and the Burning Man Festival. Greg operates houstonguitar.com, a guitar-lesson website. He can be contacted at greg@houstonguitar.com.