



BACKGROUND PAPER COMMUNICATIONS WORKSHOP

Lead Beneficiary Seminar II, 4-5 February, Lübeck, Germany

BACKGROUND

This paper will provide a general background and check lists to issues that are relevant to consider when opting for new media solutions as a communications and marketing tool in communications.

The paper is by no means extensive and does not cover all and every aspect of the complex field of new media and video commissioning and production, but should be seen as an introduction with the intention of giving the reader an overview for further investigation.

The intended message of the paper and subsequent workshop is that new media and (web) videos and related communications measures are potentially very effective and should be persuaded if possible. There are challenges, generic for all communications as well as specific ones in new media. Many of the challenges can be preempted if the background and research part is well thought through.

The paper focusses on the concepts of 'determining competence' which is to do with understanding key competences to look for when looking for a production company and issues which might make or break a video project, and about 'commissioning and managing' a video production, which is to do with the working procedure, effective management and practicalities of a video production.

CHECK LIST – Determining Competence

Before considering a video producer or production company for a commission, it's best to do some checking.

The first 5 items on the below check list are essential and it's not advisable to proceed unless the below boxes are ticked and can be supported by documentary evidence. Items 6 and 7 are not essential, but are desirable.

CHECK LIST

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| 1 Professional | <p>Is the company a professional production company which employs qualified professionals in the relevant fields of work?</p> <p>Do they make the bulk of their income from video production?</p> |
| 2 Track record | <p>Have they made videos similar in style and content to the one you are commissioning?</p> <p>Can they give you a show reel or point to web site where you can see their work?</p> <p>Can they supply referees who you can call, preferably businesses or institutions that are well known?</p> <p>For commissioning of international productions, experience and track record from working in different countries and cultures are essential.</p> |
| 3 Trading status | <p>If it's a company, are they registered in the public records?</p> <p>If an individual, can they prove their self-employed status?</p> |
| 4 Insurance | <p>The individual or company should be able to produce proof they and any sub-contractors they intend using are insured for public liability, third party and employer's liability.</p> |
| 5 Health & safety policy | <p>All individuals and companies in the EU must by law have an active health & safety policy; that is, one which is current and is in operation.</p> <p>Legitimate contractors should be able to produce their policy document and proof it is active, such as recent risk assessments based on codes of practice relevant to the country in which their business is registered.</p> <p>They are also obliged to document any lost-time accidents, serious injuries and deaths, if any.</p> <p>National regulations and laws apply.</p> |
| 6 Trade or professional body | <p>Membership of such bodies is usually only open to <i>bona fide</i> professionals.</p> |
| 7 Environment and sustainability policy | <p>This is a bonus at present but will become increasingly important and eventually will be compulsory for publicly-funded commissions.</p> <p>It might be relevant to ask for policies and work procedures, how do they travel?</p> <p>Does the company do off-set travels, do they have travel policies, do they in turn ask for policies when they sub-contract?</p> |

Note: Many organisations maintain a list of pre-approved contractors. Using a video producer that has already been checked out and found satisfactory is the easiest way to determine competence.

COMMISSIONING AND MANAGING A VIDEO PRODUCTION

So you've found a suitable contractor and determined competence, what next?

Before the producer can give you a realistic estimate of cost, you have to brief them on what you want to achieve, the time constraints and the delivery date.

You must also decide what formats/media you want the project delivered in: broadcast videotape, DVD, web streaming file, mobile phone formats, etc. This will effect the cost.

If you're not sure, or you want maximum flexibility that will enable you to convert your master material to any format at a later stage, or re-edit it, you should originate it in high definition broadcast quality, on tape. It is always possible to downgrade the quality, but you can never upgrade. If you opt for something to be used for television in the future, it has to be shot in broadcast quality.

Ownership of master tapes

Remember that you, or the organisation you work for, will own the material. The master tapes, containing everything shot, whether used or not in the final programme, will be delivered to you at the conclusion of the project, by the contractor.

This is important and you need to keep track of this. It then becomes a valuable archive resource that can be re-used and stand as a visual record of the project, alongside documents and still photos.

Communication with producer

It's strongly recommended that you keep a regular and robust communication line open with your video producer at all stages of the production. The more input you give and feedback you get, the more likely it is that you will end up with something approximating what you wanted.

There is no reason why you shouldn't accompany the video crew on location, from time to time, subject to their agreement. If you have little or no experience of video production, it may also give you a valuable insight into the process.

CHECK LIST – Commissioning and managing a video production

The below check list is structured as a number of meetings, it represents a likely working procedure for a standard video production. Understanding the process beforehand will give you better possibilities to influence the work and secure that the end result meets the criteria you have set.

CHECK LIST

| First Meeting | |
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| 1 | <p>Target group(s) / Audience</p> <p>The wider the audience, the less focussed is the message.</p> <p>Try to identify the most relevant target groups and be restrictive. You will not reach everyone and by going to wide you risk not reaching any of the target groups.</p> <p>Unfocussed target groups or too wide target groups usually means that the topics also become to unfocussed – and then you end up with a video which lacks focus and topic orientation.</p> |
| 2 | <p>Key points/goals</p> <p>It's unlikely, in a video of this type, that you will be able to make more than a few major points.</p> <p>Resist the temptation to try and cram everything in. Less is more. Let the pictures, natural sounds and interview clips speak for themselves and give them room.</p> |
| 3 | <p>Format(s)/length</p> <p>Project videos work better shorter rather than longer.</p> <p>Whoever the audience, to get 5 minutes of attention is good. This is the length you should be aiming at.</p> <p>It is not realistic to expect anybody to sit and watch more than 10 minutes of a video of this kind. 8 or even 6 minutes is better, if it can be achieved, although interview-based content can dictate this to some extent.</p> <p>The aim is to stimulate interest in the project and give an impression of its achievements to date, goals and key personnel/stakeholders.</p> <p>The recommended format for this type of communication is news feature, with a balanced editorial line, rather than PR gloss, which tends to have low credibility.</p> <p>It's advisable to master the material in as high quality as possible, such as broadcast HD & sound, as it can be exported in any number of different formats while retaining maximum technical quality, whereas material mastered at a lower quality cannot be upgraded.</p> |
| 4 | <p>Location(s)</p> <p>The greater the number of locations, the higher the production cost. On the other hand, varying locations will enhance the visual variety of your production. Transnational projects usually require locations in more than one country.</p> <p>Land-based locations are usually straightforward unless they involve working in low light, confined spaces, weather extremes, uncontrolled crowds, or private property.</p> <p>Any kind of shooting that requires flying, aerial shots,</p> |

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| | <p>helicopters, can be problematical because of insurance.</p> <p>Any locations on or close to deep water or in and around moving vehicles (including fork lift trucks) are safety hazards and will need special planning as well as more expensive insurance cover.</p> |
| 5 People | <p>Interview-based content requires careful thought about who is going to represent your project on screen.</p> <p>The boss stakeholder is not always the wisest choice. It's better to choose people who can express themselves most fluently and enthusiastically.</p> |
| 6 Language(s) | <p>Translation comes with a high price tag. If at all possible, it's best to master the video in one language.</p> <p>This can be a mine field, sub-titles are often the cheapest escape. Voice-over will take time and add substantial costs to the project.</p> |
| 7 Key dates | <p>If there are key date-specific events which need to be in the video, then it's more cost-effective to build the production around those dates.</p> <p>The ideal production schedule is back-to-back. Gaps cost money and may affect quality as the production crew may change.</p> |
| 8 Research/background | <p>Background material will help your producer focus on the key images/sounds required to communicate your project, but too much information may swamp and confuse them.</p> |
| Second Meeting | |
| 9 Draft budget | <p>This can be adjusted by the producer, but usually involves trading one goal for another. For example, less languages – more content.</p> |
| 10 Draft schedule/delivery date | <p>The draft schedule will always be subject to variation, even during the production, but the delivery date should remain fixed unless you, as the commissioner, change it.</p> <p>However, once the production is under way, it's unlikely an earlier delivery date can be accommodated.</p> |
| Third Meeting | |
| 11 Final budget/advance | <p>Once the budget is agreed, there should be no variation upwards, unless there are changed circumstances agreed to by both parties. In particular, the agreed delivery date and delivery format(s) can't usually be changed without incurring extra cost.</p> <p>Video producers will usually work to a price. It's unlikely they will demand extra money unless you change the brief after commencement, neither are they likely to refund any of the budget, if they underspend! Their cost breakdowns are usually not open to inspection.</p> <p>Open ended contracts should be avoided, especially</p> |

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| | <p>so for international productions. Travel and accomodation can quickly break a budget if not included at a fixed price.</p> <p>Most small independent producers will ask for an advance 'in good faith' usually 20 or 25 per cent, in order to finance the production. The remainder is usually paid after the video has been delivered and signed off as satisfactory.</p> |
| 12 Final schedule | This should be specific about start/finish dates and broad locations, but will be subject to change as circumstances change 'on the day'. You should be kept abreast of changes, by the producer. |
| 13 Contract | There is no standard contract, although if you are dealing with an experienced producer, they will offer one of their own that has stood the test of time and usually requires only minor adjustment. |
| Fourth Meeting | |
| 14 Pre-production | Everything that happens from signing the contract to the first day's shooting. |
| 15 Production | The shoot from beginning to end. |
| 16 Post-production | The logging, scripting and editing process. |
| 17 Draft script | Should be flexible enough for you to have a major input, before editing starts. This is your final chance to make big changes to the structure of the video. |
| 18 Final script | Also called the 'editing script'. If you have any doubts, this is the last opportunity you have to voice them. Any major and even minor changes after this point will incur a cost. |
| 19 Rough cut | Not always possible to supply, but does allow you to make some changes, as long as they're not too drastic. The alternative is for you to sit in on some of the editing and suggest changes 'on the fly'. |
| 20 Final cut screening | This is essentially the delivery screening and unless there are major gaffes, such as dates quoted, names wrong and so on, that are the fault of the producer, there is very little that can be changed without incurring extra costs. |
| Fifth Meeting (can be combined with fourth meeting) | |
| 21 Delivery & sign-off | The product is accepted and payment of the remaining fees is agreed. |
| 22 Final payment | Producer will hand over the masters, including all material shot. |
| 23 Feedback | Everyone benefits from a frank exchange of views. |