

## **Adventures in Scriptwriting**

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When making good videos, it's all about the pre-production. Every minute spent in the planning stages saves double that when that record button finally flashes. For programs with a specific message, that means having a thorough and effective script.

First get the basics: Who is the primary audience, what is the objective, what information is required to reach the objective, and what is the audience's attitude toward the objective. Find out in what physical environment the production will be shown, and in what context.

The goal with this information is to get a crystal-clear idea of what the client needs. I need to understand what they are trying to achieve, and determine if a video best serves that purpose. Clients tend to assume that because a video is more visually attractive than a booklet that it's more effective. Truth is, I've made several programs that became glorified Powerpoint shows or diluted voice-over videos, that could have worked better in a different medium. I've also made shows that look fine on TV, but lose detail (or have ineffective graphics) when shown on a projector or to a large audience.

Let's say the video is a go - what next? The video should be 5-7 minutes, the shorter and more concise, the better. The structure hasn't changed since the dawn of tape: tell 'em what you're going to show, show it, re-cap it. I prefer the axiom, "Hey - You - So What?" Get their attention, why this info/idea affects them, tell them what they can do / what you have done.

At MVCC our clients write the scripts, which we help rewrite when needed. Some other script tips: keep a friendly, conversational tone for better comprehension. Use the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person "You" over we/us to keep their attention. Match visuals to the words you write; if they can't see it, it's hard to understand it. Avoid excessive graphics, the point is not to read a video.

Then there are the 1001 additional factors to figure out before you're ready to get shooting. Who is the "talent" and what can they do? Who has final approval on the video? Do you need release forms, are minors involved? What kind of copies will you need- VHS, CD-Rom, DVD, and how many? Should you buy a master copy on Betacam?

As a client, realize that your video can be Good, Cheap, and Fast, but you only get two. At MVCC your cost isn't monetary, it's opportunity - the ability to take on other projects for your city around that timeframe.

Discuss and answer these questions, and a quality program becomes simpler and easier to achieve. And of course, for any thoughts, help, or brainstorming ideas, please give us a call. Video is what we do.

### **Script notes:**

Use present tense

Beware time-dating the material (can you make it timeless?)

Use familiar words and phrases. You want the audience to understand quickly. They have to watch and listen at the same time, so make easy on them.

Make notes of what they should be seeing during the script writing.

Write the visuals, then the sounds, then the words.