

Adventures with video – practical tips and tricks on sharing your story

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Abstract

Technical and financial barriers to video are now gone. Never before have we been so well equipped to share our story on camera with our communities.

While video gear, shooting techniques, production and sharing can be done to the nth degree, the world is very obliging if you keep it simple and have a story to tell.

Over the last four years Central West Local Land Services and its legacy agencies have begun using video and YouTube to share news and stories.

While many mistakes were made, this biggest lesson from this body of work is to hit record and fine tune with experience. Providing relevant and useful information through video doesn't need to be hard or expensive.

Even with a modest start up budget (or none), you can begin. Many DSLR cameras now record in broadcast quality. Smart phones are driving high level video content to captivated viewers.

With a cheap tripod, mobile phone and lapel mike, you can begin producing quality video and reaching people who will never sit in the same room as you.

YouTube and similar platforms make it easy to regularly upload and share material through your existing communications channels. A two minute video can be easily emailed, newslettered, Facebooked and twittered.

With regional TV news under resourced, there is also golden opportunity to provide your content for broadcast. Become your own TV crew and take advantage of this issue affecting regional Australia.

How should you be judging your content? While 'viral' still remains hit and miss, you can observe how your audience is engaging with you and improve.

Begin today and get better. What are the rules? Relevant, interesting and timely is your starting point. Then keep it under two minutes with good lighting and audio. Share and do the next one better.

Why video?

Video can be an effective tool in your communications shed.

You can share your story in a way the written word cannot. It lets you open your world to the viewer and see things from your perspective.

You can share your story across the world with anyone with a screen and internet access. Fast connection speed is important, but not necessary. YouTube for example will adjust the quality of your video to suit the users' internet speed.

Top tips for video beginners

Over the past four years, Central West Local Land Services has been using video to communicate with our communities. Over the course of this time many mistakes have been made, but more importantly learnings made.

Following are my 20 top hints and tips to help you engage with video as a communications tool.

1. *Better done than perfect*

Start filming, share and learn from your mistakes. If your content is OK and you hit some basic production guidelines, I'm sure it will be fine.

Think about fit for purpose – filming on a smart device can be very appropriate if your video is interesting and relevant.

2. *Prepare, prepare, prepare*

You only get one go at filming when you are out in the field. Organising staff, landholders and other experts is difficult and embarrassing to do it twice.

Make sure there are no unknowns. Ask the question if you are wondering about something. Check and check twice.

Have backups for batteries, tapes, cards, etc. Check all your gear 24 hours before and check in with key people.

3. *Communicate with everyone*

Type a schedule with all details (who, what, when, where, how) and contact numbers of people involved. Send this out a week before and a reminder a day before. Print this and take with you on the day.

Ask if people have any time limits when you meet up.

4. *Get there early*

Turn up at least 30 minutes before everyone else to scope things out. Set up, test.

5. *You're in charge*

You are the boss. You set this up – people expect you to be organised, know what you are doing and lead them around. Please make a point of being organised and clear about what you need to get done.

6. *Gear*

Wear headphones

Invest in a cheap headphone set to monitor your audio. You can be confident you are recording and avoid any wind noises or similar.

Tripods

Tripods are necessary for professional looking videos. They aren't expensive, but will mean your interviews will be rock solid and panning shots sublime.

Camera

You don't need very expensive or specialised cameras to get started. Chances are you have something adequate sitting in your pocket.

Many DSLR camera will record video now, although the audio may need to be supported.

Microphone

Viewers may forgive grainy footage but bad audio is a mortal sin. A lapel mic will give you clear audio and not break the budget.

You may also be able to record audio on a separate device and join together in production.

7. Framing your shot

Use rule of thirds – divide screen into equal thirds and sit items of interest on lines. Place the horizon on a line.

Avoid chopping off at joints like elbows and knees (looks weird). For interviews, it's pretty safe to shoot from stomach to above their head.

8. Pick a great background – no walls

This is a simple thing you can do to set your work apart. Often beginners will sit their talent in front of plain walls. Better to have a scenic backdrop to add interest.

9. Pre and post checks

Reduce technical issues by doing a pre and post check. Before you start filming, do a test record. Playback to make sure you have recorded both video and audio to the quality you need.

Once you finish recording and **before you leave the site** check the video and audio.

10. Check it is recording

Every video producer has a story about not hitting the record button. Get some really solid habits around checking the record light is on.

Some digital cameras stop recording once file size is 4mb so it's good habit to check throughout the interview.

11. Shoot with the light

Have the sun behind you to light up your star.

Get people to take off hats and sunglasses. If people are squinting too much, angle them away from sun.

12. More is more

If you are going to use 'cut aways' in your production shoot way more footage than you need – different angles, close ups, pans.

13. Have a game plan

If you are interviewing someone, have a series of questions typed up (you may forget key info in all the excitement).

At the end of the interview ask them whether there is anything else you want people to know. Often this is where the gold is. They'll start talking about their favourite part of the project, their eyes will light up and your success is ensured.

14. Support your talent

You'll need to develop rapport with your speaker quickly. If they connect with you, they will connect with your audience. Read Dale Carnegie's *How to win friends and influence people*.

Smile. Support them. Nod a lot. You want them to feel safe and valued.

15. Add value to events

Consider having a short four minute interview with key speakers rather than their 30 minute keynote presentation. It will be far more watchable and therefore valuable.

16. Keep it short for the internet

Short videos are better. Keep it two to four minutes and sharp. If you have a specialist audience base, you may get away with longer but as a rule, shorter is better.

17. Use the analytics

Most if not all video hosting platforms will be able to tell you how your audience is interacting with your video.

A telling statistic is audience retention. You'll be able to tell when people click off and look for reasons. Are your videos too long? Long silent bits? Too many slides? If these and others are having an impact, you may be able to pin point and improve.

18. Work with your media

Supply your high definition interviews to your local TV station. They will also need 'cutaways' (shots of cows, tractors, landscapes, etc) to add colour to the piece. Ask for feedback.

Often media can't make it to an event but will run your material if the quality is there.

19. Load captions

These will help your searchability, as well as helping viewers hard of hearing.

However the auto caption services provided by YouTube are not recognised by search engines – only ones you upload directly.

20. Share your video

Make sure you send out your video like you would any other material. Embed in your website with 300 or so words about the project. Send via social media, newsletters and whatever else you have going.

Send me a link too. I'd love to see your work.