

Do-It-Yourself Video Shooting Guide

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Easy Way to Create Great Video Clips for the Internet

An easy way to create great video clips for the Internet is via the angled interview method. This is done using a camcorder or cell phone where the recording device is placed directly in front of the subject on a tripod or stand. The subject looks 10-15 degrees to the left or right of the camera and makes solid eye contact with the interviewer. The output will show the subject looking slightly to the left or right, with the interviewer off-camera.

There are two reasons this works well:

1. Many people get stage fright when they have to look directly at a camera but are much more at ease when looking at and talking to another person.
2. Most people have difficulty memorizing a script or reading cue cards but have no trouble answering simple questions about their business as they would when responding to a customer.

Depending on the available time and shooting environment, it's possible to shift views from left to right or vice-versa to help retain the viewers' attention by creating a sense of motion.

Although cell phone video can work, I recommend using an inexpensive dedicated digital pocket or hand-held camcorder. **Critical: Make sure the digital camcorder has the ability to plug in an external microphone to get better audio quality.**

In the world of Internet video, audio quality is actually more important than picture quality. A good pocket or hand-held camcorder will have both a stereo microphone port and headphone jack. You can get an inexpensive lavalier microphone at Radio Shack that will work well with any camcorder with a compatible input jack. I recommend that you get a 6-foot microphone extender cord as well to allow for maximum shooting flexibility. The headphone jack (with headphones) lets you review your footage in the camcorder to make sure it's okay without having to transfer it to a computer.

In certain cases, you might want to get a second lavalier microphone and mono-to-stereo Y-adaptor to record the voices of two people separately. Doing this should record one person's voice on the left track and the other person's voice on the right track. This will allow for easier equalizing of voice levels in post-production.

The key in using any camcorder is to have adequate lighting and a relatively quiet shooting environment, especially for interviews and testimonials.

Ideally, finished videos for the Internet should be 30 seconds to five minutes. However, YouTube accepts clips up to 15 minutes, and longer if you follow the steps listed here: www.ez7.me/yt. The key is to make your videos just long enough to tell your story in an interesting, informative way and not a second longer... or shorter. For maximum results, ideally, each video should provide the answer to a problem that your customers have or demonstrate something unique about you that potential customers will find interesting, informative, entertaining or all three.

Consider why customers buy from you. For example, you:

- Provide free expert advice that your competition doesn't provide.
- Have credentials, qualifications or certifications your competition doesn't have.
- Offer products that are more reliable than your competition.
- Deliver higher value than your competition.
- Offer a warranty over and above what the manufacturer gives.
- Provide service that is different from – and better – than the competition.
- Offer a strong guarantee that your competition doesn't offer.
- Have a greater selection of products or services than your competition.
- Offer a product or service that your competition doesn't offer.
- Have more favorable buying terms than your competition.

Each of the bullet points above could be the subject of a video. Video clips could be:

- Staff members addressing these or other issues that are important to your customers and prospects.
- Your product(s) in action.
- Your staff consulting with customers.
- Customer testimonials
- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) or “Should Ask” Questions (SAQs).
 - You probably have FAQs and their answers already on your website or in a brochure.
 - SAQs are the questions you wish your customers would ask that you want to address.

There really are no rules other than to make the content relevant and meaningful to prospective customers, hopefully in a way that has a little creativity to it.

Unless there is absolutely no background noise (unlikely unless you are shooting in a studio or on a soundstage) you should get about two seconds of that noise on each take with no talking or other sounds so the noise can be filtered out. If there is steady controllable noise – such as an air conditioner – you should either leave it on or off during the entire shooting session.

If your subject makes a flub, make sure you pause for at least two seconds before shooting that section again. A way to make sure this happens is to ask your subject to mentally count “one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two” before starting over. Keep in mind that if necessary or appropriate, transitions between scenes or graphics over the voice can be inserted.

Scenes should be 7-20 seconds with two seconds of pause before and after talking. If the subject flubs anywhere in a short scene, you should start over from the beginning of that scene or section.

Watch your background. Try to shoot against plain, clean walls without photos or loud wallpaper, or at least stage the scene so that the background does not distract from the subject. (We once got a video clip from a client standing in front of a small tree where it looked like a branch was growing out of the client's head.)

If you shoot action scenes where it's impractical or unnecessary to include on-camera speaking the sound is less critical. It might be possible to insert a voiceover recorded separately.

The camera should be relatively steady so you might want to pick up an inexpensive tripod (or phone holder/stand if you use an iPhone) as well.

Experience has shown that most people cannot remember a script word-for-word; cue cards with the exact wording are hard to use; and a teleprompter is usually not practical. So if you don't use the angled interview method, for best results I recommend creating cue cards with bullet points – say, three to a card. Hold the cue cards above the camcorder and try to get the subject to look directly into the camera after viewing a bullet point. The subject should avoid looking away from the camera, as this makes the subject look awkward.

Except in the case of testimonials where you want the dialog to appear spontaneous, make sure you have your content written out in advance so your subjects can prepare for the shoot. You should make an outline of or notes about what they plan to say well in advance of the shoot.

At the beginning and end of a scene, make sure your subject stays still for at least two seconds (“one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two”) – ideally, smiling.

“Slate” your scenes verbally prior to shooting with a descriptive title and, if desired, the name(s) of the on-camera subject(s). For example: “Acme Widgets, super widget demo, with John and Jane Acme on camera.”

Whatever kind of camcorder you use, the footage should be saved in mp4, .avi, .wmv. or .mov in that order of preference. As of this writing .mp4 has become the de facto standard.

Video Shooting Tips Quick Start Checklist

1. Shooting environment should be adequately lighted and as quiet as possible. Turn off noise sources such as cell phone ringers and if possible, air conditioners, etc.
2. Shooting frame should take into consideration the visual background and be as clutter- and distraction-free as possible.
3. If using an internal camcorder or cell phone microphone, try to limit the distance from the device to the person speaking to no more than six feet. Three to four feet is ideal.
4. Create talking points on thin, white cardboard sheets (cue cards) rather than write out a script word-for-word. Hold the cue cards above the camcorder if possible.
5. "Slate" your scenes verbally prior to shooting with a descriptive title and, if desired, the name(s) of the on-camera subject(s).
6. Shoot for approximately two seconds with quiet on the set before starting the action to record background noise for filtering out in post-production.
7. Remind on-camera subjects to hold a smile for two seconds at the start and end of every segment.
8. If there is a dialog flub or other reason to reshoot a segment, with camera rolling, have subject mentally count "one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two" before resuming.
9. Whenever possible, reshoot scenes when unexpected background noise occurs, such as a phone ringing, loud vehicle driving by, aircraft overhead, etc.
10. Relax and have fun! You can get great results with just a little preparation and practice.

Before you shoot your video footage we invite you to call us for a complimentary assessment of your project and what you want to accomplish with video marketing. This can save you time, effort and expense and can help you create video clips that will convert prospects into buyers. Call 214-458-2290 during normal business hours central time to set up your complimentary assessment.