
Chapter - 7

Pre-Production Tips to Create Successful Video Content

Video production is not particularly easy, or affordable for that matter. Many teams set out to add video to their marketing strategy without having a clear idea of how much it's going to cost them or a clear idea of the process — especially pre-production.

The truth is that the most important part of the video production workflow happens *before* the camera starts rolling.

Pre-production, or the planning and logistics phase of a video project, is where most of the magic happens — long before you hit the “record” button.

As with most things, you can't create a knockout video without first making a plan of how you'll create it. Even if a video production team has on-staff creative, they may not understand your vision or premise, and pre-production is where you put that image together. Taking the time to plan your video ahead will not only save you time, but money, too.

Fortunately, plenty of marketers and production managers have already gone through the steps and learned from their mistakes. Here's our handy list of 20 video pre-production tips that will save you a lot hassle.

Once you have an idea for a great video project, here's what you need to do.

1) Figure out Your Audience

Whether you want better insights from Google Ads or a more targeted video, figuring out and defining your audience is the first step in any content-creation process. But don't fall into the trap of assuming that all your customers want to see the same content.

Defining an audience is a complex process that includes building buyer personas, which are simply detailed descriptions of your ideal customers, written as though they were real people.

After all, your audience is made up of more than just one customer with one interest. The group of people you're targeting is likely to have overlapping interests that you can exploit when planning your video content.

Every business, regardless of *who* they're targeting, should have a buyer persona document that looks a little like this:

Narrowing down your video viewer to a specific buyer persona — rather than a generic audience — will help you create a much more targeted and effective video.

The reason for this is simple: Writing with one specific person in mind allows you to tell an authentic and relatable story.

Too often, marketing campaigns are built to include everyone but result in interesting no one.

Or, as poet John Lydgate put it:

“You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time.”

Instead, craft your video message to your buyer persona: what they find entertaining or interesting, and how your product or service can help them.

To better understand this concept in practice, take a look at these two entirely different (yet effective) video content productions that cater to their *unique* buyer personas. On paper, the concept for the video is the same — accepting your physical self, whatever it looks like — but when you target two separate groups (women and men), you get two different videos.

2) Make Your Message Crystal Clear

Although the importance of knowing your audience and narrowing down a target market is critical, clearly defining your message is just as important. In other words, don't try to cram everything into a single animated explainer video.

Your business likely offers different services or products, not just one, so you'll need different videos for each of these. For example, you might need:

- An explainer video to give basic customers a product demonstration

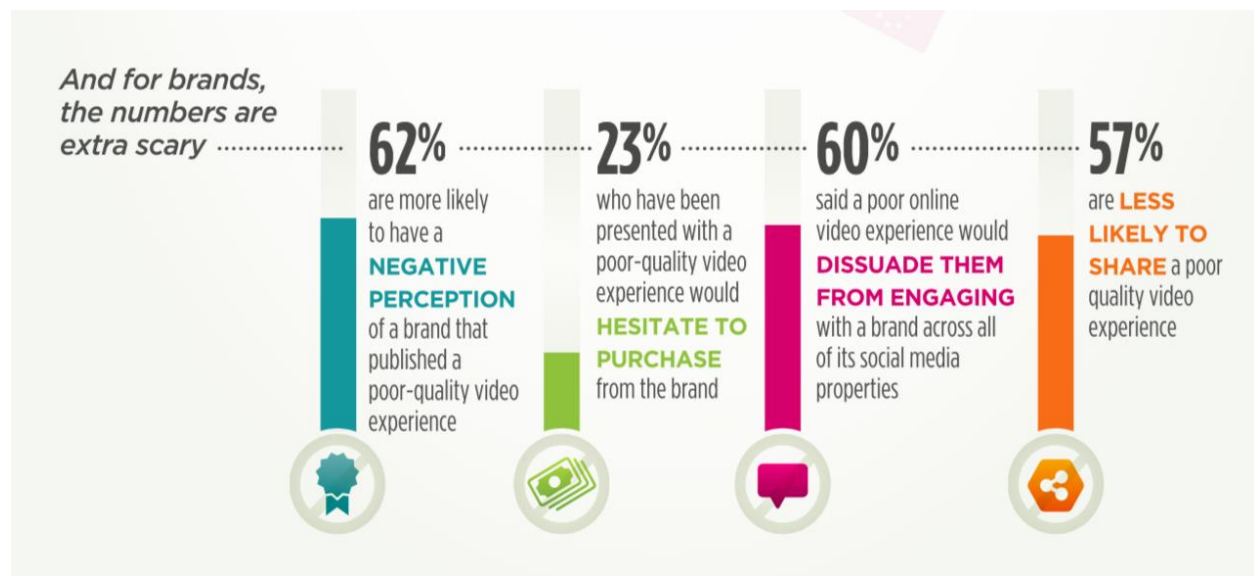
- A more complex product demo for your upper management or B2B customers
- A powerful TED Talk-type of message from your CEO
Don't try to explain what your company does sell your products, and bring up a case study all in the same video. A tailored video with a specific message and a specific goal will be much more effective in the long run.

3) Set a Realistic Budget

Once you've defined your audience and your message, you need to set your budget. Failing to work out the financial costs during pre-production is a good way to inadvertently go over budget. Plus, vagueness means that it's impossible to manage expectations.

Some elements of video creation are more costly than others, which could lead to you over-promising but under-delivering — especially if you're planning to go above and beyond with your video content by including voice-overs or third-party interviews.

If you're thinking of cutting costs by whipping up a quick video on your smartphone with your employees as cast and crew, keep in mind that when it comes to brand perception, a poor-quality video is *worse* than no video at all:



The benefit of working with a good production company is that they value their work. Every video they make is placed in their portfolio and used as an online marketing ad. Giving them a budget before you hire them allows them to produce the highest-quality content within the financial constraints you've outlined.

4) Write Your Script and Revise It. Then Revise It Again.

The written video script is a key part of pre-production that's most commonly understated.

Contrary to popular belief, not just anyone can write a script. Often, someone on the team will dash off a script and think it's ready to execute without several rounds of critiquing and revising. It's important to get input from other members on your marketing team who speak to customers individually.

Don't worry if the script for your video goes through several drafts by the time you're ready to shoot. Even Martin Scorsese revises his screenplays many times. Having a solid foundation to work from will form a large part of your production and post-production schedules.

5) Put Your Best 8 Seconds First

Thanks to disappearing messages and smartphone-induced ADHD, the average attention span is just eight seconds these days. That means most viewers will click away from your video in as long as it takes to have a sip of coffee if their attention wavers.

Fortunately for video producers and scriptwriters everywhere, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. The first eight seconds of a video is a perfect reasonable amount of time to include capture the viewer's attention and let them know what they can expect from the rest of the video.

Don't underestimate your viewers and think that you need to pre-explain the video in a rambling introduction. Many writers refer to the term "mid-res," an abbreviation for "in medias res," which means "into the middle of things." Starting a story in the middle of things kicks the viewer into a whirlwind of excitement that will keep them engaged long enough to hear your *why* in the video.

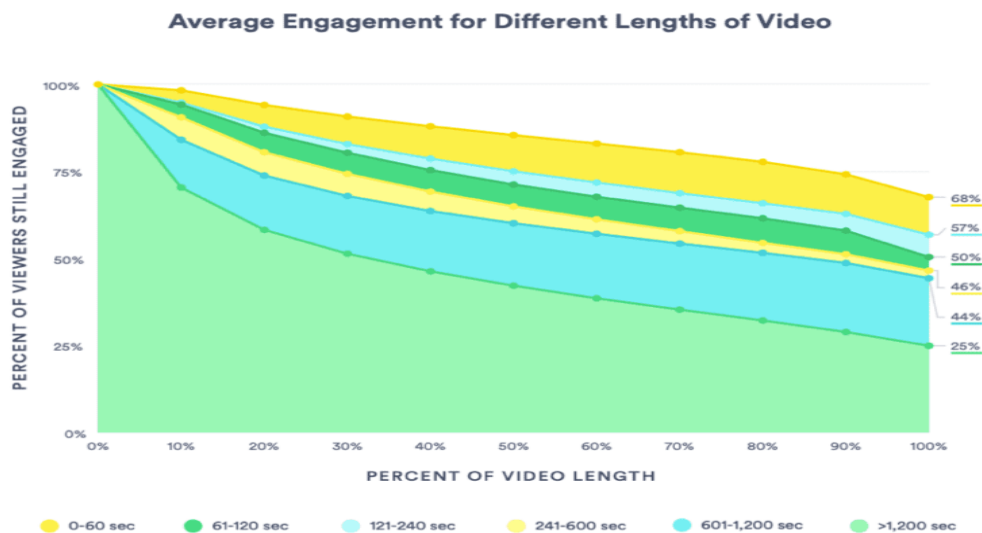
The "why" of your video is the reason your audience will benefit from your product or service (aka, the most important part). In other words, it's the problem that your company can solve for them (by the end of the video).

Just take an accounting software company, for example. Their target audience of SMB owners might not realize that they're spending too much time collecting, scanning and filing receipts until they're shown the brand's video — and convinced to switch.

6) Choose the Right Run-Time

Although conversion and completion metrics shouldn't be the end-all when it comes to determining the length of your video (hint: your message should make that determination), the final run-time will affect your overall completion rate.

As you might expect, there's a direct correlation between video length and viewer drop-off:



Shorter videos tend to have better engagement:

- If a video is less than 60 seconds, over two-thirds (68%) of viewers will keep watching until the end.
- If a video is over 20 minutes long, only 25% of viewers will finish it. Generally, videos that are 2-4 minutes long perform best and will have more people watch to the end. But if your video is supremely engaging, time is not as critical a factor.

Keep in mind that the length of a video generally varies depending on which stage of the marketing funnel you're creating content for. The lower down in the funnel you go, the longer (though still focused) your video content can be.



7) Visualize Your Shoot with a Storyboard

A **storyboard** is a sequence of drawings that shows all the various shots of your video and gives everyone working on the project a solid plan to work from.

Vidyard has a good explainer post that covers the basics of creating storyboards from a non-artist's point of view and shares exactly why video marketers should always make them before shooting a video.

Just as a video script is an indispensable pre-production tool, a storyboard is invaluable as an efficient way to visualize the shoot before it happens. Why? Because the storyboard verifies the possibility of taking the images in your head and putting them on paper.

It can also help answer questions like:

- Where does the light come from?
- What does the location need to have for the production to work?
- Is there a location in mind?
- What tools will each shot require in order for them to look and feel the way the script intended?

There are a variety of functions, lenses, tripods and sliders that may or may not be available for the shoot, so it's wise to know what equipment you'll need beforehand. The tools will also affect your budget, so knowing if you need that crane shot and the cost for the rental is crucial to pre-production.

Don't worry if you're not a great artist. You can always use a service like StoryboardThat to create the storyboard for your marketing video:



Create your own at Storyboard That

8) Don't Forget to Make a Shot List

Just as a storyboard is the scene-by-scene breakdown of a video, a shot list is the shot-by-shot breakdown of each scene.

Shot lists include specific details — like camera placement and lighting direction — making this document the ultimate pre-production planner.

Make sure this is on your pre-production to-do list (after crafting your storyboard). Covering these two areas with help from your producer and videographer will save you tons of time during production.

Shot lists usually include:

- Scene number
- Shot number
- Location
- Shot description

- Framing
- Action/dialogue
- Actors involved
- Props needed
- Extra notes

Script /SB Ref.	Shot #	Interior Exterior	Shot	Camera Angle	Camera Move	Audio	Subject	Description of Shot
1	1	Exterior	WS	Eye Level	Static	VO	Paul and son	Paul and his young son are at the lake, fishing
6	2	Exterior	WS	Eye Level	Static	VO	Paul	Paul at the lake, fishing alone. He pulls out a photo of him and his son; he smiles.
9	3	Exterior	WS	Eye Level	Static	VO	Paul, son, grandson	Paul, his son, and grandson at the lake, fishing
2	4	Exterior	VWS	High Angle	Static	VO	Paul and son	Paul and son playing baseball in a backyard
3	5	Interior	MCU	Eye Level	Static	VO	Paul and son	Paul teaching his son how to drive
4	6	Interior	WS	Eye Level	Pan	VO	Paul, wife, and son	Paul and his wife at their son's high school graduation
5	7	Exterior	WS	Eye Level, Birds-Eye view	Static	VO	Paul, his wife, and son	Paul's son packs up a car, clearly leaving for college. He hugs Paul and his wife, and they both watch him as he drives away.
7	8	Interior	MS	Eye Level	Pan	VO	Paul at his son's wedding	Paul hugs his son before he walks out to the altar; they smile
8	9	Interior	MS	OTS	Static	VO	Paul's son and his wife	Paul's son is at the hospital with his wife; she's in labor, gives birth to a boy

9) Create a Production Schedule

Now that you've got the basics covered, it's time to think about when and where you'll be recording the video. This is your production (or shooting) schedule.

You'll need this document to make any kind of judgment call on whether your video project is going according to plan and to manage the time expectations of stakeholders.

Your video production schedule should include key information, such as:

- Location
- Scene/shot
- Equipment

- People needed
- Contact info
- Date and time

A production schedule is a one-stop-shop for all your production questions and concerns and should be updated regularly and shared with the entire team:

Scene #	Location	Scene	Date	Time	Cast	Equipment/Props Needed
1	Zoey's House: The Ridgeway (Oakwood)	Couple in bed	9 th February 2013	11am-3pm	Comfort	Camera
		Relaxing at home (Playing Wii, Cuddling, Laughing)	9 th February 2013		Michael	Tripod
		Break-up Scene	9 th February 2013			Nintendo Wii Steadicam Mobile Phones
2	The Cookie (Oakwood)	Walking to the Café	2 nd February 2013	12pm- 12.30pm	Comfort	Camera
		Discussing in the Café	2 nd February 2013		Michael	Tripod
		Comfort alone in the Café	26 th January 2013			Steadicam
3	Trent Park (Oakwood)	Cuddling in the park	2 nd February 2013	10am-1pm	Comfort	Camera
		Walking across field	26 th January 2013		Michael	Tripod
		Playing around the trees	2 nd February 2013			Steadicam
		Couple at the bus stop	2 nd February 2013			Extra lens (70- 300mm)
		Photoshoot for CD DigiPak	9th February 2013		12pm-1pm	
4	London Bus (Across Enfield)	Couple laughing and talking	2 nd February 2013	1.30pm-2pm	Comfort	Camera
		Comfort alone on the bus	9 th February 2013	3.30pm- 3.45pm	Michael	Steadicam

10) Choose the Right Location

There are few decisions you can make with a more resounding impact on the production schedule than whether you want to do your shoot at a studio or on location (like a beach, for example).

While it may not seem like a huge deal at a glance, it certainly is for your budget. Studios will already have everything in place for you to work with and all you'll need to do is show up and bring your actors.

Shooting on location, on the other hand, involves travel and equipment transportation costs and the whim of the elements (like weather). You'll need to be aware of these costs and include the location details in your production schedule.

11) Visit Your Chosen Location before the Shoot

You should definitely visit your filming location prior to the day of the shoot. But even if you do decide to shoot in a studio, you should still visit it beforehand to get a full understanding of the space you're working with.

Why? Because one of the best ways to build an accurate production schedule is by determining which locations will be problematic and scheduling them into your day based on availability.

Outdoor shots, for example, need to be scheduled based on the type of lighting you require and should be flexible in case of inclement weather. Or if you're shooting in a real office, shots will need to be conducted after hours.

Visiting locations ahead of time also gives you the chance to preview each "scene" and update both your shot list and storyboard with actual, accurate pictures.

12) Determine Your Equipment Needs

Knowing exactly what equipment you'll need for every shot in your shot list should be something that you have set in stone long before the camera starts rolling.

Understanding the basics of a script, storyboard, shot list and even production schedule might be easy, but knowing why a Canon 5D wide-angle lens steady camera is the best choice for a specific 3-second shot is not so intuitive.

Ideally, equipment needs will be managed directly by a production manager, who will coordinate equipment hire from your shot list. However, for smaller projects, the videographer should be the one making the call.

It depends on what type of video you're creating, the scope of the content, your budget, etc., but here is a basic list of video equipment you're likely to need:



13) Do an Inventory of Equipment You Already Have

Once you've worked with your producer to list the equipment you'll need for all your shots, take a moment to double-check what you already have in-house (because your producer certainly won't know).

Larger companies with multiple departments could literally have viable equipment tucked away in some storage room. Maybe there's a certain type of microphone that HR uses to make their recruiting videos, or a high-tech camera lying somewhere in the product department.

Checking before ordering new equipment could save you hundreds or even thousands of dollars in rentals!

14) Secure the Best Talent You Can Afford

Often, the narrator in large-scale business videos will be someone from the C-suite. But you might want someone who can get the job done better, quicker, and build stronger relationships with your audience, too. That's when hiring professional actors can come in handy.

If you want to shave a bit more off your budget and identify a long-term talking head for your videos (especially if you want to start a company vlog), keep in mind that there could already be someone in your HR, sales or marketing department who's just waiting to shine.

To find these people, send a company-wide letter inviting interested people to take part in a quick interview or even audition with the script you've put together. Every company has its fair share of interesting characters, and one of them might just fit the camera perfectly.

Where an actor or paid hire might study the script and play well, nothing compares to someone who lives and breathes your brand message every single day.

15) Create a Call Sheet

Regardless of whether you decide to go with professional actors or in-house representatives, one of the last spreadsheets you'll need to prepare is the call sheet. This all-important companion sheet to the production schedule includes the contact information of every member of the film production crew and the actors.

A good call sheet will answer all the basic "who, what, where, when, and why" questions at a glance, and is practically invaluable when it comes to keeping organized, calming nerves and managing expectations.

The call sheet will be used more often than you think: from a daily checklist, to roll call, to the emergency contact list when you're missing a key player in the shoot.

If you're confused about how to piece a call list together, you can download free templates from **How To Film School** or **Set Hero** to make it easier.

Simple Call Sheet Template

Ideal for client video shoots, short films, and photographers

TO DREAM Monday, October 23, 2018
CLIENT NAME Day 1 of 3

DIRECTOR: John Doe
AGENCY: 78 West Legacy
CLIENT: ABC Productions
LOCATION: Colorado Springs, CO

General Call Time:
8:00 AM

Breakfast: 7:30a
Shooting Call: 9:15a
Lunch: 1:00 - 1:45p
Est. Wrap: 7:00p

LOCATION INFO

Location	Address	Notes
Crew Parking & Shooting Location #1	3651 Berry Street Colorado Springs, CO 80915	Park along the right edge of the front driveway.
Shooting Location #2		

CREW INFO

Position	Name	Call	Contact
Director / Producer	John Doe	General	john.doe@smith@gmail.com 269-955-1239
Interviewee #1		9:30 AM	
Interviewee #2		9:30 AM	
Interviewee #3		General	
Camera A		General	
Camera B		General	
Sound		General	
Lighting		General	
Cater		General	

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Questions? Contact 1st AD Sarah Lee (269-555-1234) or 2nd AD Karen Dillon (222-555-1234)

TO DREAM Monday, October 23, 2018
CLIENT NAME Day 1 of 3

SCHEDULE

Time	Event	Notes
8:00 AM	General Call Time	
9:30 AM	First Interview Block	
12:30 PM	Move to the second shooting location	
1:00 PM	Lunch break (meal served by Ashton Kelly Catering)	
2:30 PM	Second Interview Block	
7:00 PM	Estimated Wrap	

LODGING INFO

Location	Address	Notes
Hyatt Regency Denver	3651 Berry Street Colorado Springs, CO 80915	All out of town cast/crew will be lodged here. Front desk phone number: 555-123-1234

TRANSP0 INFO

Passenger	Driver	Time	Pickup Loc.	Dropoff Loc.
Jameson Wilson	John Smith	Pickup @ 7:00 PM on 10/23/2018	DEN Airport	Hyatt Regency Denver

NOTES

<< Any other notes you need to share with everyone can go here >>

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Questions? Contact 1st AD Sarah Lee (269-555-1234) or 2nd AD Karen Dillon (222-555-1234)

16) Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse

Once you have your script, storyboard, shot list, production schedule and call sheet lined up, you're almost ready.

Now, it's time to put your talent on set!

As any actor will tell you, the importance of line-readings and rehearsals cannot be understated. It's a good idea to get your talent familiar with locations, dress, directions, etc., *before* they show up for the actual shoot so they – and you – know what to expect.

If you've found that one of the actors you've commissioned doesn't fit with your vibe, now is the perfect time to recast if necessary.