

YES

You CAN Make Powerful, Affordable Videos

*Here are innovative ways your organization
can use videos—and tips on keeping costs low.*

BY DEBRA GOLDENTYER



More and more nonprofits have found that video is a good way to get their messages across. They are using video for development, staff training, public education, recruiting, and much more.

Can nonprofit organizations really afford to make video programs? Yes, they can, if they plan carefully and creatively. This article discusses some innovative ways for your organization to use video and gives tips on what to do—and what not to do—to keep production costs down.

Debra Goldentyer and her partner, Mark Schaeffer, produce video and multimedia programs for training, education, development, and public relations. With over 10 years' working with nonprofit organizations—large and small, local, national, and international—they're adept at producing powerful low-cost programs. Debra can be reached at Schaeffer & Goldentyer, 933 Rose Avenue, Oakland, CA 94611; 510-652-1091; or 71044.2743@compuserve.com.

Nonprofit World • Volume 14, Number 2
March/April 1996 Published by the
Society for Nonprofit Organizations
6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, WI
53719 • (800) 424-7367

How Can You Use Video?

1

Fundraising and Development

Most nonprofits rely on two fundraising tools: print materials (such as brochures, fliers, and letters) and personal contacts (such as speaking before community groups). There's a problem with both these fundraising devices.

The trouble with print materials is that people today don't like to read. They scan, they peruse, but they rarely stop and review a document from beginning to end. Before you began reading this article, did you look over the headers, glance through the pages, and check to see how long it was? Did you perhaps read some of the material below this before coming back and reading this section? Do you think you might even choose to skip a section or two? It takes a powerful piece to catch—and hold—someone's attention.

What is the trouble with personal appearances? Mainly it's the time such appearances take. Few nonprofits can afford to send people out to community events very often. And when you do go out to speak to the public, what do you have to show your audience? In most cases, your audience has nothing to look at except you—and maybe some print materials. With a video program, you can take your audience to your service area so they can see exactly what it is you're talking to them about.

2

Staff and Volunteer Training

The membership recruitment director for a large national nonprofit approached us last year with a problem: She had done everything right for membership recruitment. She had developed training plans and attractive materials: brochures, incentive programs, posters, and giveaways to interest people in the organization. She soon learned to her chagrin, however, that no one was using these materials. Although the membership recruitment chairs had received the training materials she had so conscientiously mailed them, they had never read them.

So we developed a video. The program shows each membership recruitment item and demonstrates how to use it. The video caught membership chairs' attention, and recruitment is going up as a result. People will watch a video, even if there's the chance that it might teach them something.

For an organization that has many new volunteers, a video can be a great tool. A video can get each person quickly "up to speed" on what the organization does and how it does it.

3

Public Education & Public Relations

Video is a great medium for education and public relations. Educational and public-service video programs give you the opportunity to introduce your organization by providing valuable information.

For example, a women's health organization might offer video programs on breast self-examinations. An animal shelter might offer a program on caring for animals.

Sponsoring and distributing educational videotapes is a way to develop a positive image for your organization. Some nonprofits distribute educational videos by mail, either free or at a nominal cost. Others lend educational tapes for showings at community gatherings, with or without a development representative to lead discussion after the showing.

Many schools, service organizations, and TV stations—even some corporations—welcome educational or public-service tapes and play them frequently. You could use such tapes instead of (or in conjunction with) an educator or representative from your organization. Or you could send such tapes ahead to prepare people for your presentation. For example, an animal shelter, which is frequently asked to send educators to schools, sends a video

about a week before the educator is due. Teachers can thus prime the students for the visit.

Informative video programs work to increase a nonprofit's visibility. At the same time, viewers appreciate the information the programs provide. That increased credibility and appreciation may pay back in development dollars.

4

Grant Applications

A few years ago, an arts funder in California decided it could no longer afford to go out and see art installations. Wanting to eliminate costly site visits, it required all applicants to submit a five to 10 minute video of their work. While requiring a video is still uncommon for foundations, many organizations are submitting videos along with their print applications. These videos are clearly worthwhile for arts organizations,

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especially those dealing with the performing arts, and service organizations as well.

If you’ve written grant applications, you know how many hours—days, even—you can spend looking for words to explain what your organization does. Words can’t describe activities as well as pictures can.

Even politically-based groups can use video to illustrate their purposes: A before-and-after of environmental clean-up, for example, can be extremely powerful.

5 Even More Uses

Organizations are using video for recruitment, as thank-yous at donor appreciation events, and as public service announcements (PSAs). Some are making video brochures, sending them out to prospective donors or clients who may never otherwise have the chance to see what goes on within the nonprofit organization.

Many nonprofits are using video to augment or even replace their annual reports. Although this may sound like an extravagance, organizations that rely on outreach make great use of video annual reports. These videos needn’t cost much to make, especially if you’re working on another video already. By planning for the next five years, you could shoot the proper footage at one time and then, each year, have the executive director speak for 10 minutes. All that’s required is to add this year’s speech to the earlier footage. Some nonprofits find that, if they are shooting a program anyway, it doesn’t cost much more to go ahead with this as well.

How Can You Afford to Produce a Video?

How much does it cost to produce a video program? One often hears ballpark figures such as two or three thousand dollars a minute. If you seek out a few quotes, you’re likely to find that the highest one is twice or three times the lowest. Which one is right? The truth is, all the figures are right. A video can

cost several thousand dollars a minute. Or it can cost much more. But it can also cost a lot less. By working cooperatively with an experienced producer, you can make a powerful video program without bankrupting your organization.

What to Do to Keep Costs Down

TIP #1

Use the talent you have.

Professional actors command high fees. Unless they’re willing to volunteer their services, professionals are out of the question for a low-budget program. Depending on the content of your program, you may be able to use non-actors. A good director should be able to get moving and realistic footage using members of your staff and volunteers.

TIP #2

Keep locations to a minimum.

Shooting is the most expensive element in a video production. Many scriptwriters, nevertheless, make the mistake of writing programs that call for dozens of locations. A script calling for “a fast-paced sequence of the Golden Gate Bridge, Coit Tower, Fisherman’s Wharf, and Chinatown,” would require at least a half day to shoot and would blow the entire budget. To keep costs down, limit the number of times you need to move the camera.

TIP #3

Use only the frills you need.

A lot of production companies will tell you that no one will watch a straightforward video program anymore. They will tell you that you absolutely must have fast cuts and fancy effects. Remember, however, that your program is designed, in the end, to get a message across. An excess of frills will detract from that message. Also, most frills are expensive. You don’t want it to look as if you spent the organization’s entire annual budget on a video. That will offend the viewers and turn them off to your message.

Fortunately, there are a number of “cheap frills” that can make even a low-budget program look pretty snazzy. Computer animation and good quality music, for example, can add a lot to a low-budget production at little extra cost.

TIP #4

Do several programs at once.

To save money in producing a video, consider doing two or three programs at a time. If you plan ahead, you can produce a fundraiser, a public service announcement, and an educational program all at the same time. It’s much easier to plan and shoot several programs at once than to shoot one program and then re-edit it to fit a second purpose.

TIP #5 **Put time into the script.**

Yes, it's possible to start with existing footage and develop a video from that. Most people, though, are disappointed with the results. While the most expensive element of a video production is shooting, the least expensive element is scripting. Script first, script carefully, and script thoroughly, and shooting costs will be greatly reduced.

Keep in mind, when developing a script, that shorter programs are more effective than longer ones. No one wants to sit through a program that's longer than 20 minutes. For a public relations or fundraising video program, seven to 10 minutes is ideal.

TIP #6 **Work cooperatively.**

If you can't afford to produce a program on your own, consider working with others who might benefit from the same program. For example, an animal shelter wanting a video on spaying and neutering might pool resources with other shelters to produce one video program that meets all their needs.

While looking for groups with which you can pool resources, remember that you don't have to make only one program. If you're an agency providing health care services for people with AIDS, for example, you could work with an agency serving meals for people with AIDS or one offering health services for the elderly. With careful planning, you could make two video programs for the price of one and a half.

What Not to Do to Keep Costs Down

While you don't want it to look as if you've spent all your money on a video program, there are limits to cheapness. It's worse to have a poor quality video than no video at all. Some cost-cutting efforts can sabotage an otherwise terrific effort. Here are a few to avoid:

NO-NO #1 **Cramming it all into one program.**

Video is a very different medium from print. You can't cram in as much information as you can in a printed document. That's not what video excels at. If you have a lot to say, consider making several videos or just focusing on the main points. If you try to squeeze everything in, you'll only succeed in confusing your viewers.

NO-NO #2 **Shooting just a talking head.**

While it's cheap to shoot, watching someone talk on videotape is dull. And it defeats the purpose of the videotape. The aim of a video is to take viewers someplace it would be difficult for them to go. Use the medium to its full potential. Use words and pictures to show action.

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NO-NO #3 **Shooting with a camcorder.**

A professional videographer and professional camera are essential to a good video program. Using your home camcorder, shooting without proper lighting, or shooting without proper audio will make your video—and your organization—look amateurish.

Something to Think About

Even though video programs don't have to cost thousands of dollars a minute, they do cost something. While you probably don't have a pile of money squirreled away for video production, you do have money set aside for development, for training, and for public education. As you plan how to accomplish these tasks, consider the power of a video program. Remember that video has the power to use a variety of media simultaneously—pictures, spoken word, written word, and music—to motivate and to inspire. Can your organization make wise and cost-effective use of that motivation and inspiration? It's something to think about. ■

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