

Camera-free Video Production: Actors not required

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I remember as a young boy sitting with my friend and his dad, a set designer, scarfing down donuts from the actors' food truck while watching a crew shoot a TV show. Bright lights turned the summer evening into a midday scene while actors repeated lines until the producer was satisfied. Video production has come a long way since then—both in the way we create this rich content and the way we consume it. The explosion of video-sharing services and networks such as Vine, Instagram and other social platforms is evidence of our craving for rich media. And with YouTube reporting six billion hours of video watched every month and 100 hours of video uploaded every minute, there's no doubt that video is the new black. Although the cost of professional video cameras has plummeted, other costs have not: renting space, hiring camera operators, lighting technicians and actors, coaching your spokespeople. To satisfy our visual craving, how do communicators produce professional quality video content without breaking the bank?



Scene 1: Preventing people problems

We will always shoot powerful videos with people such as customer testimonials. However, animated videos can be an appealing alternative. Instead of shooting a subject with a video camera and transferring that footage into video editing software, animated scenes are created with various software packages, making a camera redundant. Animated videos produced through the eye of an experienced director rather than through the lens of a camera have distinct benefits. Animated videos can reduce your budget and virtually eliminate the most unpredictable aspect of the shoot: the people. Your own spokespeople need to be coached before and during the shoot, and even with the most eloquent speakers, “talking head” videos rarely inspire. Other talent-related challenges include the executive's busy schedule and the need for expensive or time-consuming travel. Animated videos also offer unlimited options for imagery, branding, colors, voice-overs and music to ensure your video is aligned to your brand and specific to your target audience. With animated video, finding the perfect backdrop to shoot against will never be a headache.

Scene 2: When is going camera-less appropriate?

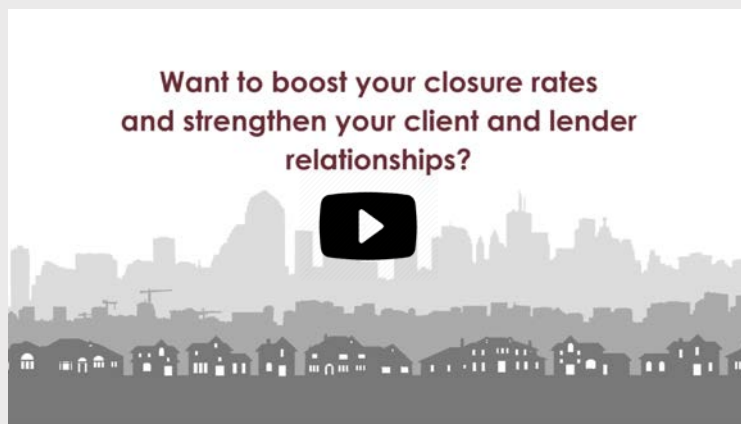
Once you decide that video is the right medium for your message and your audience, consider the following questions to determine if an animated video is the right choice. If you answer yes to any of the questions, animation may provide the best value. Are you pressed for time? An animated video eliminates the time required for planning and executing a live action shoot. However, you still need to account for planning and storyboarding. Is the material complex? Are you able to simplify the message with graphics, distilling the essence of the content into understandable, digestible visuals or sound bites? Are your subject matter experts geographically dispersed? Sometimes travel costs and coordinating experts' schedules make herding the talent prohibitive.

Advantis faced some of these challenges when we were asked to produce an animated video in just 10 days to celebrate accredited business communicators and the value they bring to their employers.



Scene 3: Top tips for a perfect production

Understanding the business objective, your audiences' needs and preferences and the desired outcome is critical to producing an animated video that engages your audience and maximizes your investment. **Audience analysis.** Since the outcome is limited only by your imagination, start with a well researched audience persona to set the stage. This includes everything from the color palette and type of imagery and fonts to the personality of the voice-over. **Time tracking.** There is no ideal length, but typically shorter videos are viewed and shared more often. Determine the length by considering the audience, the content and the business intent, but don't forget to question your assumptions. For example, you might think students vying for a degree would watch an instructional video for at least 10 minutes. However, recent research shows that student engagement starts dropping after just six minutes. The rule of thumb? Let brevity be your guide. **Communicate clearly.** Engaging any audience is most effectively done when you can address the "pain" they are experiencing. Once they realize the content provides value, they'll listen longer. The video below may be boring to the casual observer, but for the intended audience, mortgage brokers, it addresses their "pain points" from the start.



The script was also written so the video could be cut into five distinct demos, each showing how a mortgage broker can attain key data such as determining comparable sales within a neighborhood. **Brain basics.** Much has been written about the effects of visuals on the brain, so use the science. Decoding text requires audience effort. Images, on the other

hand, are processed quickly and directly into long-term memory. Taking brain science one step further, Paul Zak, director of the Centre for Neuroeconomics Studies at Claremont Graduate University, researches how stories themselves change the brain. The upshot is that humans are hard-wired to be attracted to narratives that follow a universal story structure, called the dramatic arc. The moral of the story? Create a storyboard that resembles a Hollywood movie, with conflict, rising action, a climax and falling action to a conclusion.

Scene 4: The call to action

Remember to think like a communication professional and don't lose sight of the business outcome you want to achieve. After your audience watches your video, what meaningful action do you want them to take?

One last reminder: Simply uploading a video doesn't mean people will watch it. After you invest in the production, the online and offline marketing of that video begins.

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