

STERLING RESOURCES

7 Tips for Creating Great Videos That Will Keep Your Audience Engaged



■ Did you know that the average YouTube user exits out of a video after seven seconds? Seven seems to be the lucky number when it comes to audience attention span. They say marketing taglines should never be longer than seven words either. It must have something to do with that old psychology fact: the short-term memory can only retain seven pieces of information at a time.

You've probably heard about the exciting new marketing channel companies have found in video-sharing services like YouTube or Vimeo. Web users love dynamic forms of content, and video is a great way to create it. All it takes is a simple flip cam video, and voilà, you're ready to produce your own series of amazing videos.

Or are you? While buying a \$300 Kodak Zi8 or Flip is easy, it takes more than just a camera and a talking head to create a well-done video. Here are seven tips that will help you turn your next video series into the kind of dynamic content that gets attention on the Web.

■ 1. Divide your process into three parts: pre-production, production and post-production

By approaching your film shoot the same way they do in Hollywood, you can better prepare yourself for the intricacies of producing a good video. Pre-production consists of the preparations you make before the shoot, including script-writing and location-scouting. This is where you'll consider your narrative, the principals involved (whether that is a customer or CXO), the questions you'll ask, and the shots you need. Production is the shoot itself. Post-production is your editing process, where you'll take your footage and fine-tune it into a well-crafted video.

Breaking down the process in this way will help you plan—making it easier to think through all the necessary details and preparation you need to consider for each stage of the process.



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■ 2. Listen for Audio

No room is really silent. Before filming, you can get a feel for the audio obstacles your location may present by closing your eyes and really listening to the room. Is there an air vent humming? Noise from traffic outside your window? Other people conversing? You can check your camera's internal mike, which has a green to red background noise indicator, to make sure background noise will not be a problem. Additionally, consider purchasing a lavalier microphone, which plugs into the Kodak Zi8, to give your interview a higher professional quality. The next generation of the Flip is expected to allow for lavalier microphones as well.



■ 3. Use the Lighting Available to You

You don't need expensive lighting to film your subject. Use what you have. It could be a tall lamp with the ceiling lights dimmed down, or you can sit between your subject and a window so natural light gives your subject a nice glow. Be sure to adjust the white-balance on your camera to the proper setting—outdoors, indoor with some outdoor lighting, or completely indoors. Consult your camera's User Guide for instructions on altering its white balance. It can be done with the simple click of a few buttons. This will keep your video from turning out too dark or washed out with too much light.

■ 4. Frame Your Subject Like a Picture

Ever heard of the rule of thirds in photography? The same rule applies to shooting video. See how Tom Hanks is lined up in the left 1/3 of the screen, as opposed to the center? Also, you'll notice the depth of the shot behind him. To achieve this effect, you can place your subject about 4 feet from a wall or more. It gives the viewer some sense of the location you're in. Finally, this frame uses a MCU (medium close-up), filling the frame from mid-chest to the top of Hanks' head. This will keep you from having wasted space above your subject's head and it mimics the way people generally focus on someone talking in real life.



■ 5. You Need B-roll

B-roll is the supplemental or alternate footage that gets intercut with the main footage in documentary and interviews. Watch any newscast, and you'll see it's filled with B-roll. In other words, when the interviewee is no longer on the screen but their voice continues on as narration, the extra footage you see is the B-roll.

In order to avoid the strictly "talking head video," you can use B-roll to "fill" parts of your interview while the respondent's voice acts as narration. When taking B-roll shots, consider every visual element you can shoot that will provide some context to your story. This can be shots of a tradeshow booth, close-ups of someone using your product or service, or camera pans of an audience your CXO may be speaking to. Make sure to take each B-roll shot for at least ten seconds. They make invaluable filler during the post-production process.



■ 6. Be a Human Tripod

We all hate a shaky camera. As such, you might consider purchasing a Flip Video tripod to help keep the camera still for interviews. For more active shots or when a tripod isn't an option, make yourself a human tripod. That means lean back, brace one arm with the other, and when panning, place two hands on the camera with arms locked and extended outward while moving only your hips. Use the resources around you, which can include a wall, table, or any other object you can brace against to help keep the camera still.



■ 7. Post-Production Is Where the Magic Happens

Once you've finished filming, take all the footage you think you're going to use and put it into a single cut, called a string-cut. Like a sculptor, you'll start carving away at your footage to get closer to a finished product. You might edit sound bites down, or use B-roll to fill in the less interesting parts of your video and help with transitions. Now you have a rough-cut.

From there, try and get feedback if you can. A new viewpoint on a story can help you make the edits you'll need to more effectively convey your narrative. This is known as your fine cut. After you've made suggested changes, it's time to share your video with the world.

Congratulations! You have your final cut, and it's time to upload the video to your chosen video-sharing platform.

