

## "The Power of Craft in Video Production"

By Matthew Billings, Owner & Creative Director, Spin Creative, LLC

The video and film production business is in a state of relentless flux. There are always new technologies, improved equipment and ever-evolving notions of what's "hip" and what's not. At Seattle's Spin Creative there is one constant in every project we produce and that is CRAFT. Trends come and go, gear is frequently replaced - but CRAFT is eternal.

What do we mean by Craft and why is it so important to us? Why should it be important to you? Here at Spin Creative, craft is the sum of all the small decisions that ensure the highest quality in every aspect of the production. This goes far beyond the actual excellence of the visuals themselves. In this aspect the quality range has never been as broad. On the high end (at least this week) the Red Digital Cinema Camera offers the look and feel of a Hollywood film at a far more reasonable cost. On the low end, the ubiquitous cell phone camera shoots video of varying quality and even offers editing software, making every consumer a potential video producer. Which approach best represents your company?

As discussed in the Spin article "[Choosing the Right Video Production Company](#)" it's important that companies find the right video production company. It's equally important that video and film production companies find the right clients. A compatible match definitely avoids potential misunderstandings, most of which revolve around the notion of craft. Next week we'll begin to explore the elements that we believe define craft.

Craft makes a statement about your company. It tells your audience that you care about your image and by extension your products, your customers and your employees. Craft sets you apart. Craft makes a difference. Here are some thoughts about the planning phase of a video project.

- **High care. High thought.** Great video is not created without great effort. The key word here is "created." This is not a tangible product that can be mass-produced. Each program is custom made to the specifications of a discerning client. It is storytelling brought to life with words and music. This may sound overblown but we firmly believe that the more passionate the team, the more effective the result.
- **Creative Brief.** Ideally, a strong creative brief is both creative and brief. It presents the rationale for the project and clearly states the goals and objectives. This is critical because at various points along the way, you will need to determine if a given decision will achieve the stated goal. A good producer will raise a warning if a production decision strays from the stated

goal and will get things back on track. Craft works from a clearly defined vision.

- **Creative Treatment.** Before a word of the script is written, an overall direction and framework for the program must be agreed to. In the creative treatment the elements are defined and decisions made which will determine the plan of action. Most important, the client and the production team must agree. Otherwise you will be going through multiple versions of the budget and the script.
- **Script.** This is the blueprint for the final product you are all building. The writer should indicate what action is occurring on the screen as well as what going on while we see it. What is the narrator saying? Is there music? Are there special effects or graphics? A good script will drive consensus and guide the way to a successful shoot.
- **Production execution.** The creation of a video is a logistical dance. Craft makes that choreography seamless. Planning is extremely important is a shoot is to be successful. Your production team should work closely with you to stay on schedule and on budget. Craft is economically responsible.
- **Location.** Where will your program be shot? In a studio? Your corporate offices? At a customer location? Wherever it happens, it must look like some thought has gone into the visual design. Interviewing a customer in front of a cinder block wall is not likely to create viewer interest, unless perhaps the customer sells cinder block.
- **Run and Gun.** Spin does not send out crews to "see what happens." We don't document meetings, weddings, baseball games or news stories. We don't show up without a plan. We don't bring cameras, lights and crews so a product manager can "wing it." Run and gun wastes time and money. Craft does not.
- **Audio quality.** The visuals may be stunning but if the audio is garbled it not only creates a bad impression, but also threatens the success of the video. If a production company tells you that the camera microphone is adequate, find another production company. If they tell you an audio engineer is unnecessary, find another production company. (Better yet, contact Spin Creative at [contact@spincreativegroup.com](mailto:contact@spincreativegroup.com))
- **Lighting.** Effective lighting gives your production texture and depth. It is neither too light nor too dark. A competent videographer knows that shadows are as important as light. It sometimes surprises clients how many artificial light sources it takes to make a shot look natural. In a visual medium, good lighting is key.

- **Plan what to shoot & shoot what you plan.** The script is an agreement between the production company and the client that specifies what elements will be included in the finished product. The script is also a tool to stay on budget. If it isn't in the script, it's probably not in the budget.
- **Quality interviews.** Great interviews don't just happen (unless of course the subject gives interviews for a living). But if it's a customer or an employee, great planning will make a good interview better. The key to a great interview is an in-depth pre interview. The director and producer should have a pretty good idea of what points will be covered in an interview before the camera is turned on. A pre interview is a great way to find out what the subject will say and how well they say it.
- **The director.** It may seem obvious but – an effective director should be good at working with people. Even if you're shooting food or cars, the director must communicate well with the stylist, the producer, the camera operator, the grip – and of course the client. Which reminds us of the shoot where the director was composing a shot, looked up from the viewfinder and said, “Lose the bald guy.” The bald guy was the VP of marketing.
- **Talent.** Sometimes a client will tell us that Sid on the loading dock has a great voice and should narrate their program. Or Melissa in accounting is taking acting lessons. Most of the time, Sid and Melissa should keep their day jobs. Unless they are being interviewed about what they do, craft requires the use of professional talent.
- **Camera movement.** Video and film captures movement. That's why you're not just handing out brochures. Sometimes the movement also includes the camera. A fluid, traveling shot with the camera on a dolly or a steadicam can gracefully draw the viewer into the scene for greater impact.
- **Graphics.** The artful use of type and can enhance almost any program. But don't let the graphics overwhelm or distract from the message. Tasteful yet creative is important. Type styles can become dated quickly so try not to choose an overly trendy font or treatment if the video will have a long shelf life. However, if it's a short run commercial, the trendier the better.
- **Fix it in Post.** The cost of video production rises as the production moves towards completion. Postproduction – the step where the footage is organized, narration recorded, music composed and edited – is not the place to solve problems which occurred during the shoot. It makes no sense to make major changes during the most expensive phase of the process.
- **You Tube.** The emergence of YouTube has changed the way viewers watch video and with it, their expectation of quality. In some cases, clients actually

want shaky, blurry images because they think it adds authenticity. However, we believe that quality will improve across the board as small hand-held devices improve in quality and that craft will continue to set a high standard.

### About the Author

**Matthew Billings** is the Owner and Creative Director at [Spin Creative, LLC](#). Spin Creative is a full-service high-care high-touch creative video production company based in Seattle. We propel brands using cinematic storytelling. If you would like to work with one the best video production companies on the west coast, shoot us an email at [contact@spincreativegroup.com](mailto:contact@spincreativegroup.com) or call 206.686.1090. Our production offices are in Seattle but we travel all over the world for our clients.