

VIDEO ARTISAN

How to earn a living from Professional Videography

by Kevin Cook FInst.V.



A complete guide to setting up a successful professional videography business in Wedding, Corporate and Special Interest Video production

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First Edition

By Kevin Cook

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Edition 1

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
About the Author	1
Introduction	7
Business or Pleasure	11
Business Formation	19
SOHO (Small Office Home Office)	25
Buying & Hiring Kit	35
Wedding & Event Videography	41
Corporate Videography	49
SIV (Special Interest Video)	73
Peripheral Videography Services	85
Online Content	89
Videography Marketing & Promotion	95
Developing a Website	109
Copyright, Trade Marks & Protecting your Brand	117
Your Exit Strategy	123
Conclusion	129
Acknowledgements	133

This book is dedicated to my father—Donald Cook. A great dad, a fair cop, a wonderful storyteller and although he didn't realise it, probably the most influential person in getting this book in print.

About the Author

Like many of you reading this book, I found my way into videography by way of a hobby which then grew into a commercial venture. I can't honestly say that I've been a film maker since childhood but I've always had an enquiring interest in film, television and, later on, videography. It's always been a little more than just watching films and TV for entertainment as I've pretty much always deconstructed as I've watched – especially when the creators have failed to get me to willingly suspend my disbelief.

Without knowing it my late father probably sowed the seed with his 8mm cine film attempts during my childhood. Not that I've inherited miles of cine film, but he did the obligatory recording of the holidays, parties and general family tom foolery. I value those few old cine films now and I guess I always will. Later on you'll read how to tap into the rich vein of sentimentality which can earn you a substantial part of your videography income.

My father's film production experience actually goes back further. Having finished his national service in the air force just after the WW2 as an electrical engineer, he found himself working at Selfridges as an apprentice electrician. At that time Selfridges were making commercials and promotional films in-house, and as part of his general duties he was roped in as set electrician after the store was closed to the public. His role wasn't really part of the creative process, but I suppose those stories I heard as a child have in their own way helped to steer me into the industry in which I found myself.

I had another significant brush with videography in 1982 when I was asked to be best man for a childhood friend. These were the very early days of portable VHS recorders and separate cameras – and on arrival at the church the bride was approached by a videographer (they wasn't actually called that then) who asked whether she would like the wedding filmed. No obligation to buy – only if they liked what they saw after the wedding day. They were actually given two options – either just the service or the service and the wedding breakfast and speeches. It was really a no-brainer as it was offered as a no obligation service. However, they of course just had to buy the two videos (around £150 each I believe) and then go out and borrow the money to buy a VHS player to play them back on (another £1,500!). Once again – I'll be covering the motivation behind this and the opportunities for the videographer later in the book.

However, my real entry into videography came by way of someone else's vision of this becoming a truly profitable business enterprise – namely my father-in-law, Rex Levi. Rex was running the family surveyors, property management and estate agency business in the East End of London. This was in 1984, and having treated himself to one of the early VCRs and cameras (a Sony F1 Betamax recorder coupled with a JVC GNX7 camera) he identified what he thought was the killer application for this new, relatively affordable, video technology. Video of houses for sale was going to be huge! The plan was to set up his daughter, Tiffany, and I in business, and using his estate agency practice as the springboard, to launch the service to other estate agents. There were also other opportunities in video production, but the main thrust was going to be creating video catalogues of houses and rolling window displays. Both Tiffany and I bought into this concept big time – so in late 1985 “TK Videograph” was born with considerable help and encouragement from Rex.

At that time there was still a huge novelty factor about video as your average man in the street did not have a video camera. Despite both having a keen interest in the craft prior to this point neither of us had much experience other than stealing Rex's camera whenever we could. We signed on to a TV production course at our local college in Loughton – plus Tiffany completed her studies in photography.

Rex's generosity and encouragement was unbounded. Realising that the Sony F1 and JVC cameras were merely consumer toys, he invested further. The double garage to the rear of his house was converted into office, edit suite and studio. The F1 portable was dropped in favour of a VO8800 Lo-Band U-Matic portable recorder and the GXN7 was replaced with a BY110 3-tube industrial camera. The post production facilities were to expand from crash editing to VHS – to a 3-machine Lo-Band U-Matic suite with a twin channel CEL Maurice Effects unit, JVC vision mixer – plus many other bits and pieces. I've no doubt that he got a kick from helping us to get the business off the ground and it wasn't uncommon for Rex to come down to have a play with the new toys at the end of his garden – but I know his overriding motivation was to help his daughter and his future son-in-law get a good start in business. If it hadn't been for Rex's generosity, I'd not be writing this book today.

We now had the enthusiasm, some pretty serious kit and the skills – or so we thought! All we had to do was start to make it pay. We had already done a few friends' wedding videos and recommendations from these started to come in. I also knew that there was a potential (and substantial reward) in

producing promotional and training videos for other businesses – however, the main stay of TK Videograph was going to be estate agency videos. This is where our efforts were to be spent.

This was the mid to late 80s, when the UK's economy was on its unsustainable upward spiral. House prices, earnings and expectations were high. We had our successes in selling the estate agency video service to a few local chains. These consisted of producing window displays of properties – with simple overlaid graphics of the property particulars. We also had an agreement with one of the top national agencies on their exclusive homes division. The idea here was to produce detailed videos which would be sent to buyers who were either too far away or too busy to visit the property.

About that time we heard of a new trade association that was starting up – the IOV (Institute of Videography). We joined, attained our Fellowship on the showreel we produced for the exclusive homes property videos – and within a short time were acting as one of its Area Representatives. This was a voluntary role and included organising meetings with other videographers in our area. We were networking!

Even though both Tiffany and I were still having to supplement our income with part time work, a side business of erecting estate agent's for sale boards – and relying on the support of our parents – TK Videograph was getting established. We were regularly producing wedding films, and had three substantial corporate video clients who were feeding us work on a regular basis. We were also hiring our edit facilities and small talking-head studio out to other videographers. The business was growing – with the exception of the estate agency work!

The final nail in the coffin for the estate agency videos was a culmination of smash and grab attacks of the TVs and VCRs we had placed in estate agents windows. However, the route cause of this venture's failure was not that – and I guess I only really realised this some years later. Here follows one of the first rules of what works and what doesn't work on video. Houses do not move! They are therefore just as well represented using printed property particulars and photographs. I'm always willing to be proved wrong, but in the past 20-years I've seen many people try the estate agent video idea – and to the best of my knowledge it has never really worked commercially. I can see perhaps some merit in producing documentaries about the surrounding areas – including information on local schools, shops and facilities – but specific videos about houses on the is not the killer application that we all hoped it would be. Besides, when houses are selling estate agents do not need any gimmicks – and when they are not selling the agents will not spend on

gimmicks - especially those that do not provide them with any advantages.

In the following years both Tiffany and I became much more involved in the IOV – with both of us working on various roles at Executive level. After serving as one of its Executive Committee members for seven years, I eventually stood down from its committee and, along with my now business partner Martin Baker, formed a separate facilities company (IOV Focus Ltd) providing its administrative backbone, organising its annual convention and trade exhibition, publishing its magazine and maintaining its website. Essentially, IOV Focus Ltd provides the public face of the IOV. We provide all the first-line support for members, deal with public enquiries and implement the directives of the IOV's membership-appointed Executive Committee. Quite rightly, the IOV remains in the ownership of its members – but subcontracts its day-to-day administration to IOV Focus Ltd.

Today, with over 1,000 members my role within the IOV is very much full time – though I do still produce one or two corporate video programmes each year. These are for those clients that I've maintained since the TK Videograph days, plus I also work as a freelance writer/director for other videographers. I do not produce wedding videos any more, though my work keeps me very much in touch with current trends and what constitutes a sound business approach.

I'm still very passionate about videography – in all its guises. My involvement with the IOV has given me a unique insight into the industry in that I see what works and what doesn't. When members have a problem, or simply want to discuss an idea or concept, they will often ring the IOV and that call will normally come through to my desk. This close association with the industry has revealed to me why some videography businesses fail – and why others succeed.

Introduction

What is a videographer? This might seem a simple question to those already familiar with the term but it's still a relatively new concept to most. It has only recently found its way in to popular dictionaries. The simplest way to describe it to the uninitiated is to say, "Think of a photographer, and then replace the stills camera with a video camera". It is a little more complicated than that, but the general public's acceptance of what videography entails is gradually changing. If someone says they are a photographer, you would accept that they could be involved in any avenue of photography – such as commercial, portrait, wedding, sports or journalistic. Videography is just as varied. It's not limited to wedding videography as some may think – but just as a photographer takes photos, a videographer will create video.

The word was actually first phrased in an article by Bob Kiger published in *The American Cinematographer* in October 1972. The thrust of this article was cautionary to the film and broadcast industry as the then imaginary videographers were going to be a new breed who would threaten their existence. He wasn't far from the truth.

Though sometimes you'll be involved in collaborative productions, a videographer will be involved in or actually perform every stage of the production process. They will be the camera operator, sound recordist, lighting cameraman, director, script writer, editor, colourist, key grip.... Generally speaking, you will be a single-handed TV production company.

Establishing videography as a common term was one of the challenges faced by the IOV. If it was to sell membership then it needed to single out those who would want to associate themselves with the organisation. It's true to say that when the IOV was first formed, the main area of work that its founder members were involved in was wedding videography, and that is also true of the make-up of its membership today. However, those that make a success of this business will be offering a whole range of services. Some successfully specialise in certain areas, but creating a general practice business will enable you to capitalise more fully.

Looking at the polls and research carried out by the IOV on its members, nearly three quarters will be providing both wedding and corporate video services. Furthermore, virtually all will be providing ancillary services such as duplication, format transfers and other freelance services. When you finally come to tally up your first year in business you will be surprised at the amount of turnover which these services generate. They are also very important as they will lead on to commissions in the other main service areas.

Putting the ancillary services to one side for a moment, there are three main areas of production that this book will concentrate on – Corporate, Event and SIV (Special Interest Video). “Corporate Video” is essentially any video created for businesses or organisations. It could be a training video, promotional video or indeed providing video coverage of a business event. “Event Video” will cover weddings and other private functions – but also extends to filming live shows and school performances. “SIV” is essentially non-broadcast documentary production. These are the type of DVDs which you see for sale in your high street bookstore – and the subjects are as varied as people’s interests can be – Local History, Hobbies, Nostalgia, Sports, Crafts... Whilst the traditional means of delivery is DVD sales for SIV, there are growing opportunities for online delivery of this content so it’s an expanding side to videography and one which can generate considerable return. The other attractive side to producing SIVs is that they can become a sellable asset to your business.

This book is aimed at those who are considering taking their interest in videography to a professional level; those that are already earning some income from videography; and those whose videography businesses are partway established. I’m also sure that those who have already established a successful videography business will pick out some information that will make their businesses more profitable. Whilst I will cover some of the technical and creative aspects of videography, the main theme is to reveal the opportunities and means of earning a living from what is an enjoyable, creative and rewarding vocation.

We work most of our lives, and whilst earning money will always be essential, I happen to think that you should always try to earn your living in a job that you enjoy. A career or enterprise in videography can provide this in abundance. It’s creative, challenging, stimulating and most importantly has the potential to create a sustainable income and a sellable business. Even though most videographers are male (which is changing), it is by no means a vocation which should be so. In fact it seems that there are advantages for female videographers in the Wedding Video part of the market as the video is normally commissioned by the bride or the bride’s mother – and therefore seem to be a little more “in tune” with their client’s expectations and desires. Whilst there are some avenues and area of work which are physically demanding, it is something that you can do at any age.

Like others reading this book I’ve done my fair share of jobs where you see little result from your efforts other than a wage packet at the end of the month. Sure, a big fat pay cheque is an attractive thing, but do not

underestimate the value of having something to show for your efforts. The videos that you will be creating will quite often be appreciated for years to come. Your creations will be cherished and often increase in sentimental and monetary value over time – well beyond your own lifetime. Even those humble family cine films – how easy would it be for someone down the family line to throw them away?

This book will concentrate on developing a sustainable full-time business, but there are many who run successful businesses alongside full-time employment outside of the industry or use it to supplement other forms of income. I know there will be some full-time videographers who believe that part-timers devalue the craft, but as long as they are charging proper rates they do not have such a negative impact as some believe. In fact, there are many full-timers who have a far more negative impact.

Above all, the aim of the book is to give you a reality check. Make no mistake, the only time that ‘Success’ comes before ‘Work’ is in the dictionary. Whatever figure you had in mind for investment to make your enterprise work – you’ll need to double it. If you think that it’s something you’ll be able to dip into every now and then – forget it. Like any business if you are going to make a success of it you’ll need to put in the time and effort. If you think you know pretty much all you need to know about videography – read on, and then continue to read and learn throughout your career.

Like any other business, looking from the outside in it all looks pretty simple. You only see the positive side. And like the craft itself, you’ll only see the end result and not the effort and skills that went into making the programme.

Thinking back to my unbounded enthusiasm for the estate agency videos, a little grounding and insight into the real world would have helped me to realise or temper my expectations. It would have enabled me to concentrate more on those things which really had earning potential. I’m not saying that you should never try speculative ideas for yourself - but keep it real! No matter how strongly you believe in something it will be the market who will decide if it’s a winner or not. Accepting this will enable you to experiment without being disillusioned when ideas do not pan out.

Business or Pleasure

This book is essentially a culmination of the “Video Artisan” articles that I have written in the IOV’s Focus magazine - with some additional information and edited into one fluid document that should act as the guide for those entering videography professionally. Having said this, I must pay homage to those whose involvement is purely for pleasure. That’s not only because my own roots lay here, but also because there are many hobbyists who care more about the craft than those who earn a living from it.

One of the dictionary descriptions of an “Artisan” is, ‘a skilled worker who practices some trade or handicraft’. Whereas the word “Practice” implies that someone is engaged in the act (even professionally when used in conjunction with “trade”), it doesn’t automatically mean they are making a living from it – which is enforced by the use of “handicraft”. Say handicraft to most people and they think of things like cross stitch or carpentry – and whilst these relate to skilled use of the hands, they are again not automatically associated with a money making venture.

This is why I think “Artisan” is a most suitable description of what those involved in videography are. Even those who operate considerable full-time businesses – at some point in their videography they will be practicing their craft, not only for the benefit of the business, but also because it’s a creative and enjoyable pastime. This is also one of the best ways to get your head around the technology – by playing with it.

This chapter will deal with that extremely grey area of whether your interest is either Business or Pleasure? If you’ve got it absolutely right it will be a combination of both.

I’m sure there are many established videographers reading this who have experienced this scenario... When asked what they do for a living their inquisitor has responded with envy, or at least a comment about it, ‘not being a proper job’. Of course they are not aware of all the normal drudgery that goes with any business – but when compared with someone having an extremely physical, boring, unpleasant or dangerous job – earning a living from making movies appears on the surface to be a pretty desirable occupation.

To many videographers, the business or income is purely a means to an end. By this I mean that it funds what is essentially a hobby. They do weddings or other productions purely to buy the toys they like to play with in order to make the films they really want to make. I don’t see this as a negative – as long as they are not undermining those who are trying to actually earn a

living by undercharging for what is often a professional standard of work.

There are of course those opportunists who turn out dross and still charge for it (some of whom call themselves professionals) – and like most of the industry I see these as the real villains. These are the ones responsible for maintaining the legend that all videographers are cowboys – when this is clearly not the case.

Then there are those who have no desire to earn money or subsidise their hobby. To them videography is a creative vent – and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that in my mind. To give a comparison there are probably many thousands of people who enjoy watercolour painting compared to those who earn an income from it. Videography is the same – and can be a very rewarding way to express your creativity. Some may well have dreams of someone else enjoying their work so much that they are prepared to pay for it – but to most the enjoyment comes from the challenge of realising their creative ideas – be that on canvas or the screen.

You also can't get away from the fact that the tools for creating consumable video programmes are pretty much available to anyone these days. Cameras are cheap and nearly every computer now comes with the ability to create professional looking content and then output that to DVD or share it with the world via the Internet. There probably was a time when pigments, paint brushes and canvases were only available to the privileged few - and it was probably only the privileged few who had enough spare time to enjoy such pursuits. But those times past many, many years ago. Videography has now almost past into this phase.

I think it's also interesting to note that some of the best video programmes that I have seen have been those of an amateur nature – or at least those produced without a commercial incentive as the main objective. I think this probably comes about as we all perform better when we are enjoying what we do. This can be seen quite clearly if you look at the rise of the Independent Film market. Whereas a good proportion of them are producing films as a stepping stone to greater things (the road to Hollywood), there is an equal amount that are producing short and long films purely for the fun of it – or at the most to win a prize at a film festival or two.

I think this is probably one of the most interesting sectors of the videography community – and is in some part driven by the success of films like 'Blair Witch Project' or 'Open Water'. These, and others, have been held up as examples of how a really low-budget (sometimes called no-budget) film can reach a mass audience and in some cases generate substantial income for those who produced it. Of course, there is very little in the way of headlines

about the marketing machines behind these films, or the control the film studios had over the final content. All that is noted is the cost of production against the box office receipts – which in the above examples was quite astronomical. Apparently (and here I go extending the phenomenon), The Blair Witch Project estimated production cost was about \$25,000. The movie grossed over \$248 million worldwide – which makes it one of the most profitable motion pictures of all times in terms of the ratio of production costs to box office receipts (the exception being ‘Deep Throat’, which cost about the same to make and grossed about \$600 million – but that’s another story).

Movies are being made for fun all the time as witnessed by the plethora of amateur cine/video clubs dotted across the land. Enthusiastic and often crafted individuals (who sometimes also spend their working life in the industry) create content purely for the pleasure and challenge. Looking down at them says more about you than it does about them.

Another common cause of someone getting into creating videos is the interest in the subject rather than the actual act of making films. SIV (Special Interest Video) producers are quite often those who want to document their understanding of a specific subject, not necessarily filmmakers. It’s not always about making money either – with many getting their reward from others seeing them as a leading light in their given field.

It wasn’t until recent years that making films about your interests has become a possibility – again made viable through the availability of cheaper creation tools. Until now the only avenue open to most people was to write a book about the subject. Whilst this is easier to generate the content (if you are knowledgeable about the subject and can easily put this into words) it is probably much harder to create the finished product (i.e. a book) to a professional standard. As most good films start with the written word it’s a relatively simple step to turn this into a video. The hard part is knowing the subject. And more importantly, the attractive thing about publishing a video as opposed to a book is that they can be produced on extremely small runs and still look as though they were professionally produced. This isn’t always the case though!

At the beginning of this chapter I said that if you’ve got it absolutely right you’ll be both enjoying your videography and earning money from it at the same time. This is pretty much the nirvana that we are all aiming for – regardless of what it is we are doing. There is also the joy which comes from when others appreciate our work. Then again, there is no better sign of appreciation than when someone is prepared to put their hand in their pocket for the privilege of owning your work.

Videography does represent a viable business proposition and I happen to think the opportunities are expanding year on year. Every day will see someone making the leap from pure hobbyist, to part-time pro or from there on to a full-time business pursuit. Their paths are not always the same, and the triggers which make these steps happen are infinitely variable – but the common bond is nearly always a desire to spend more time practicing their skills, trade or handicraft. If the by-product is a sustainable income then you are pretty much living the dream.

So, despite all the words of warning from your friends and family, your accountant's dire projections of cash flow and life-style changes – and your own niggling thoughts and self-doubt – you've decided to take the plunge and start up a videography business. Well done – but its going to take more than just enthusiasm and a keen interest in making movies to get the thing to work.

Unless you are literally burdened with cash that you simply don't know what to do with, your first few years in business are going to be a struggle. It's not the case with everyone who embarks on this adventure but the norm is that most will fall by the wayside within 3-years. In fact, most businesses will fail within the first year – normally through lack of funding. In the second year you'll still be ploughing money into the business whilst it builds. In the third year you might break even.

But once you break the 3-year barrier you'll be able to join that exclusive club of entrepreneurs who knowingly laugh when people say – 'I wish I had my own business!' It's not the "easy route" – and its not going to be the bed of roses that those in ordinary employment tend to think it is.

No businesses plan to fail – but many fail to plan. Part of that planning process includes taking a course of 'reality pills' that will enable you to see exactly how hard it is to establish a business. You will need to know facts and figures of how much you will need the business to generate in net profit in order to live the lifestyle you desire - or in the meantime, enough that you can survive on. This will vary quite considerably depending on whether you are creating a full-time business that's got to generate all of your income – or a small sideline business that will supplement other sources of income.

A videography business can exist quite happily alongside other sources of income or even a full-time job. The only exclusion to this is the corporate video market where clients will simply not understand a videographer who says, 'Oh, I can only do things at weekends!' Weddings are predominantly weekends, and producing and selling SIVs can normally be fitted in as and when you need. With the Internet now an accepted means of supplying and ordering things, an SIV title (or preferably, a series) can easily be set up to sell

itself off a website. Come home from work, download the orders, process the payments and package the goods. You could be sweeping the streets all day for all the customer knows!

I can remember when I first started out in this business and had the obligatory meeting with our bank manager who told us to go away and prepare a cash flow forecast. What? How can we possibly prepare a forecast for a business that doesn't have a trading track record and there's nothing out there to compare against?

This is the point where you need to forget all the hairy fairy ideas about what a videography business might or might not turnover. What you have to do here is work out what you need the business to return. In turn this will then show you what business you need to generate in order to succeed. It should also lead you on to think about what additional and associated services you need to offer in order to reach the financial goals dictated by what you need the business to return.

You will end up doing some work that you originally had intended to avoid. There are many videographers in the IOV who would rather not do weddings or duplication jobs – but if doing these makes the difference between your business dreams becoming a reality or not, then you'd be a fool to turn your back on them. Needs must when the devil drives!

Don't look at these as compromises to your plan, but more of a means to an end. When you are simply stacked out with the type of work that you are aiming for, that's the time when you can pleasantly say, 'No, sorry, that's not the kind of work we are prepared to do'.

It's not always that easy to plan the stages between being a serious hobbyist, to being a part-time videographer, to going the whole hog and setting up an exclusive business. However, a retrospective look at anyone who has gone down this route and they will nearly always tell you that had they been better informed, and more prepared, then they would have done things a different way.

This phenomenon is not exclusive to videography – but nonetheless learning from other people's mistakes is the cheapest and most realistic training you can obtain.

Whatever avenue of production you are entering into, your ultimate goal is to get your potential market to think of you first when they are thinking of buying, commissioning or using video. Envisage yourself in the position where you can almost pick and choose your clients. This is the frame of mind you need to adopt from day one. And there is no more important part of your business planning than the way you price your services.

Too many videographers start off by trying to attract business by being the cheapest. Make no mistakes, this policy will work. You will get business because you are the cheapest – but not because you are the best, or the most innovative and creative, or the most technically competent - or even because you provide the best value for money. These are the reasons that you will eventually want to base your success on. A cheap price will always attract business but unless this is tied in with producing the greatest volume you are not likely to generate sufficient profits to achieve the financial goals that you should have by now set yourself. I can honestly say that I know of no example where someone is both the cheapest and the best. The two simply do not mix.

I'm not saying that being the cheapest is an unviable business proposition. There are many videographers out there who go for volume of work as opposed to quality of work and I'm sure that it's worked extremely well for them. However, to get the volume of work as a newly formed business it is going to take a considerable amount of start up capital to fund the marketing and promotional resources that this requires.

There is obviously that slightly sticky point in a videography business where you are trying to establish yourself and form your portfolio of satisfied clients. Having a cheap price tag will obviously attract a wider audience as there will be more people able to afford you. However, one of the hardest challenges will be to increase your prices as essentially you'll have to re-establish your businesses in a different market each time you try to raise your prices into a different price bracket. The best work you can get is that which comes from recommendation, but that recommendation is normally qualified by how much the originating customer paid. If all of a sudden you start telling these recommended leads that your prices have doubled your good reputation will be tarnished.

Sure, do work at a discounted rate just to get your foot on the ladder – but make sure your customers know that the rate they have paid has been heavily discounted. This way anyone they recommend to you will also, hopefully, know the real cost of employing you. Call it what you like – 'Special Introductory Offer' or 'Early Booking Offer' or any other creative tag you can give it – but make sure that you know what you will need to be charging in order to return the profits your business will need to survive.

You'll also get a whole lot more respect from your fellow craftsmen if you are not undermining their efforts in attracting a fair reward for a professional service. And make no mistake, getting on with your fellow videographers is going to be an important part of your business. Not only will

you be looking to provide freelance services to them, but you should also get to the stage where you'll be casually employing them.

Business Formation

Whilst most videographers will start off as a sole-trader, many of you will at some time in your development consider forming a limited company or teaming up with others - either on a casual basis or as a more formal cooperative or partnership.

I'm not going to advise on which format your business should be run in as this advice should come from those qualified to give it based on your personal circumstances (such as your accountant). I am however going to highlight some of the potential pitfalls and advantages of teaming up with others in the same business.

A sole trader is simply you taking full responsibility for all your losses and gains. There is no need to create a separate legal entity – but you will have to inform the Inland Revenue of your trading status. This all becomes a little more complicated if you regularly employ others within your business where you might cross the barriers between having employees and sub-contractors – which might be one of the triggers for you switching to 'Limited' status. Your accountant will advise you on this.

Setting up a limited company can help to avoid unlimited liability, but there are many situations where the directors will remain personally liable for financial decisions and obligations the business has entered into. Again – speak to your accountant about your personal circumstances. However, one of the underlying benefits of running your business as a Limited Company is that it will help you to generate an 'established' feel amongst your clients (albeit that an inquisitive client could gather your financial records from Companies House!).

A far more common way of presenting yourself as a larger business is to tie up with other videographers or those offering complimentary businesses. A good example is corporate work, where you can sub-contract in the services of a script writer and to get them involved in the initial briefing stage of a commission. You might then introduce a graphic artist if the commission requires graphics beyond your capabilities. On a reasonably sized commission, you might also employ sound or camera operators to actually do the button pressing whilst you concentrate on directing the action and ensuring the video is still on message. These will also help you to present a substantial business image to your client.

These can of course be arranged as and when the need arises, but as time goes by there will be benefits in forming a more formal arrangement between those who you employ. For a start, ideally these should be reciprocal

relationships – so your script writer should be using you when he needs someone with production experience and equipment. You should agree rates and terms of business between you so that you can both easily quote for each others services. Whilst sharing diaries may not be practical and worthwhile – having some understanding of how and when each of you is able to work will also help when it comes to quoting for work. There is little point in you saying that your sound engineer can work during the week when they are only available at weekends.

Going down the route of forming a formal partnership needs a lot more thought and consideration. Whilst your enthusiasm and trust for one another might be high when you start off, the relationship has to be able to cope with the many disappointments that the business will face. A truly even 50-50 relationship often fails because either one of the party will consider themselves to be the senior partner – and expect a commensurate reward for their input.

This is natural, and if you can work happily that way then that's all well and good. However, the saying 'too many chiefs and not enough Indians' highlights the difficulties that partnerships may experience. You may well have invested more time, equipment and expertise in the business – but unless both of you appreciate this then there is going to be conflict when recompense is being considered.

Informal partnerships probably work better between non-competitive but complimentary businesses. For instance, a photographer teaming up with a videographer is often a winning combination. Whatever the relationship is, it should always be a two-way street – with each promoting the services of the other whenever possible. Gathering of several non-competitive businesses could prove to be an even better arrangement – and more akin to a traditional cooperative arrangement.

I've heard many videographers say that they are thinking of forming a cooperative-type of business with other videographers. Whilst there may be lots of commercial enterprises or industries where this may be a practical way to develop a business – I do not believe it's the right formation for videographers to form cooperatives with other videographers. I'm willing to be proved wrong, but in 20-years I've not seen any evidence to change this opinion.

Cooperatives work best when the joint parties are not competing against each other outside of the agreement. A wedding videographer forming a cooperative with a photographer, florist, car hire, cake maker and dress maker might well prove successful cooperative partners. They can share

marketing and promotional costs, pass external referrals back into the cooperative loop – and even share business premises in some circumstances – but they shouldn't be tempted or able to steal business from within their cooperative partners.

Although you are not thinking about this at the early stage of your business as you grow and become established you will at some point have to think about how you are going to get out or sell up. As a sole-trader you are going to find this a challenge. Your business, though hopefully blessed with an amount of goodwill, will be based around you. Even if you trade under a company name, much of the work will be based on your personal reputation – which is another good reason for opting to trade as a limited company. Shares can be more easily transferred to others – and you can more easily develop a trading identity with a proven profitable trading history.

And make no mistake, you will at some point want to either retire or capitalise on your trading success. This might come about by gradually stepping back from the front line of your business whilst employing others – and then ultimately selling on your shares. This can be done as a sole-trader, but the mechanics are far easier and less messy if you are operating as a limited company. Thinking of your exit strategy as early as possible will make the final stages of your business that much easier.

Most full-time videographers provide a whole raft of services in order to generate a sustainable income; and a good majority started their business doing wedding videography at weekends whilst holding down a weekday job. The move from a weekend-only business to taking the full-time plunge can be triggered by a number of things but the plan to go full-time nearly always includes expanding into all areas of videography.

The trigger points for a wedding videographer to drop the weekday job are numerous – but there are a few common reasons for this to happen. The first and most desirable reason for going full-time is when your weekend income exceeds that of your weekday income. At this point you will find yourself turning weekday work away, and this is when you should start to question where your time is better spent. It can take many years for a business to get to this stage, but with more and more weddings taking place on weekdays there is more opportunity to take the full-time step.

Another common reason for going full-time is redundancy or retirement from the weekday job. If you have already got a profitable weekend business then it is only logical to examine the viability of expanding it. If the redundancy or retirement comes with a financial package the chances of making it a success increases. Likewise, an inheritance can give you the

financial support that will be needed while you are building up the other sides to your business.

An alternative is to combine completely unrelated businesses with videography – examples within the IOV membership include landlords, surveyors, farmers, dentists, printers and many other trades which happily share the business week of what are effectively part-time videographers. If all of this is sounding like you'll never make a decent living from doing just one type of videography, fear not. It is possible, but not from day one.

There are no legislative requirements to start offering video services – other than compliance with employment and safety at work issues that effect us all. One of the things you must look at is your insurance cover to ensure that there are no exclusions, and keep in mind that some work, such as filming in high-risk environments, may require you to increase your public liability cover.

Your accountant will also be able to advise on the VAT status – but I've always subscribed to the point of view that being VAT registered (whilst being a pain in the butt to administer) can add to your credibility as a business. It will certainly avoid you having to explain why there is no VAT on your services, which in turn will reveal that your business is turning over less than the VAT threshold.

SOHO (Small Office Home Office)

You've made the decision to start your own business and you've gone through the initial stages of identifying the market and putting a plan together. However, one of the decisions that you may have already taken could impact on your success in a greater way than you think – and that's where you are going to run the business from.

Let's face it, a basic set of working tools for a professional videographer doesn't require a multi-story factory unit to house them. Nearly all your post-production kit can fit on one desk – along with your telephone. Stock, shooting kit and accessories will also take up little more than a corner of a spare room. But it's not all about the space required to operate the business – its about the quality of that space and whether it will help your business to reach its goals.

There are of course exceptions to this – such as the videographer who produces SIV (Special Interest Videos) and has very little outside contact with customers. It might be that the whole sales process is carried out by a distributor leaving you with the sole task of putting the programme together. However, at some point in the growth of your business you will have visits from clients or colleagues – and the impression you make at this stage is going to be lasting.

The overriding benefit of working from home is that it's cheaper than renting or buying business premises. Though there can still be costs associated with this, generally speaking it can provide a very cost effective way of getting the business off the ground. But many of the things which are seen to be positive about working at home also have their negative side.

PLUS – No travelling to and from work.

MINUS – You don't get out much.

PLUS – You can work the hours you want.

MINUS – The rest of the world will also want you to work normal hours.

PLUS – You will be your own boss.

MINUS – You'll be your worst nightmare for a boss!

There is a certain level of freedom when working from home and most of the time you'll not have someone clocking you on and off. However you do need to be disciplined about getting the work done. This is another one of

those positive/negative things. You'll need to develop a regime that enables you to spend quality time on projects in hand as well as the day-to-day tasks of any business person. This is not always that easy – especially if you are working on your own and do not have the stimulation of others working around you.

Some things can be done outside normal office hours – such as filing, preparing and lodging invoices – but even these will need some work done on them within the normal working hours of your customers or those the tasks involve.

You also need to consider when you are at your most productive. There is no point in getting up at 5am and finishing work at 2pm if you work most productively between 5pm and midnight. If you have very little business that centres around other business' working hours it might be that your creative juices will flow more easily in that latter part of the day.

Likewise you'll need to forget about the week/weekend structure. Those in the wedding video business will already understand this – but Saturday is just another working day. Sundays are also normal working days for some videographers – which means you'll need to fit in your socialising elsewhere. You will need to realise that you can go out and play any day or night of the week, and you can work a bit on Sundays, if that makes best use of your time. This doesn't mean you should work every hour that God sends – but it's more about giving work the right place in your life in order that you don't run out of enthusiasm.

Even though you'll not be travelling to and from work you'll need to put some barriers between home and work life. This might be as simple as having a door you can close and shut your work away – or even a corner of a room which is out-of-bounds for other people in the house. Not only will this help you to establish a healthy work/play regime – but it will also help in those moments where you are distracted from work and have to leave projects in a state of limbo and know that it will be in the same state when you return.

Getting your family to understand these boundaries is important. There's nothing more frustrating than having to find blame for that lost, but crucial piece of paperwork or camera master tape. If you are like me quite often your desk will look like the hamster has been making a nest on it – when in fact I know where everything is. If your work area is in a corner of the main living room the temptation for others to tidy up will be the cause of conflict. That in itself is not conducive to a healthy working environment.

Also, your office should sound like an office when you are on the telephone as this is sometimes the only way that clients will form an

impression of you. I'm often surprised when contacting IOV members via their business telephone line and the phone is answered by a young child – or we are trying to have a conversation whilst music is being played full blast by some other household occupant. Whilst quaint – it's not going to help you to form an impression of professionalism.

Whichever way you achieve this, it is far better to have a room (be that a spare bedroom, garage space, loft...) which you can call your own space and exclude everyone else from it whilst you are working.

The cost of a dedicated business line should form part of your business plan – and you'll need to establish rules within your family about the use of that line for anything else. When it rings – its business, and you should have a set script to follow when its answered – “hello, AK Videos, John speaking... how can I help you?”. This sounds awkward when you first start to use it but after a while will become second nature.

The freedom and flexibility of working from home is certainly one of the plus points, but at the same time without the structure of a working environment it's easy to let things slip past you. If you completely lose structure you'll find it hard to achieve anything – and will end up only reacting to situations as opposed to dealing with things before they become time critical.

Start in a simple way. Decide what the first thing is that you do every day, and build from there. It might be that you start every day with a cup of tea – then check the answer machine – then open the post – then check your email... Also, try and only have the work you are doing at that precise time on your desk. Though I'm not advocating what is often referred to as a 'clear desk policy', having only current projects on your desk at any one time will stop you from being distracted by things which are not critical at that point in time.

A very simple aid is what I call a bring-up folder – which is filing system which has 31 pockets; one for each day. If you have a letter or memo that needs to be dealt with on a certain day, file it under the day that it needs to be done. Each day go to the bring-up folder and open the pocket of today's date and complete the tasks that it contains. In order to establish a good working discipline it might be an idea to initially put things in this such as “empty the bin”, “stock up the tea bags”, check tape stock”. These things will obviously become automatic to you after a while, but putting them into a bring-up folder will stop you having to think about them in the meantime.

You'll also find that when your business does start to flourish it's not going to be at an easy to manage and steady pace. It will be all or nothing –

and when times are busy and you can't afford distractions and you'll regret not having emptied that bin – or more importantly, topped up the tea bags! These sound trivial points but there are probably thousands of things that you take for granted if you work in a large company. When you work for yourself no one else is going to do these.

Let's assume that you have the right space at home and all the family is pulling in the right direction and getting behind your venture. This is all fine, but you must still leave some time to play. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy!' And let's face it, in this creative game you can't afford to be dull.

Again, this might sound extreme but formally scheduling in play-time into your diary will help you ensure that you actually get around to doing it. Decide how much time you are going to give yourself, your friends, or your family, and book it in your diary as you would any other appointment.

Getting out of the office and socialising will also help you to polish your communication skills. It's easy to underestimate the effect on your social skills of working from home and only speaking to people on the phone – or worse still, only communicating by email or on forums. You might not believe it, but you'll soon forget how to talk socially – which is one of the key skills of selling your services to others. Make some appointments that take you away from your work space - go to conferences and exhibitions. Choose to go to meet your clients rather than them coming to you – and book the occasional lunch appointment with a colleague.

You might want to consider combining the two activities of business and pleasure by joining a trade association such as the IOV and taking part in their regular meetings – or join one of those breakfast business clubs. In fact anything that gets you out of the office and into a social network should pay dividends in your business.

If you are going to be working from home its best to keep your neighbours informed – even if it will not impact on them. Of course you might not exactly see eye to eye with your neighbour, but keeping them informed about what you are doing will avoid any misunderstandings if they start to notice that the car is still on the drive during the day. And as one of your aims will be to let as many people know about your business as possible – spreading the word amongst those around you will be a very cheap way of marketing your business. You never know who they know!

Depending on the nature and size of your home office, you might find that you will need to inform the local authorities of your intentions. Whilst the use of a corner of a spare room is not going to concern them, the adaptation of an out building and its change of use from domestic to industrial most

probably will. If you are going down this route then having your neighbours on your side will be invaluable.

Before you've got your neighbours on your side it's essential that you look into other legal implications. If you live in rented accommodation you might find that your tenancy excludes you from running any sort of business from it. You'll need to check this out with your landlord. Even home owners should re-consult the title deeds to ensure that there are no restrictive covenants.

With so many companies encouraging their workforce to work from home, local authorities are becoming a little more friendly towards this activity – but they have a completely different view to someone running a business from the same address. Once you step over this mark you will start to qualify for business rates.

Whilst you may have the contents of your household insured, it is unlikely that the same policy will work equally well for your business use. Check this out with your insurance adviser before assuming all is well.

Running your business from home will probably be the most logical solution whilst establishing your business, but one of the great advantages of running your business away from home is that you'll create a separation between work and home life. This might seem like an obvious statement, but there are distinct advantages of establishing this barrier.

On a psychological level it will help you to develop a good working practice simply by association. You'll be able to relax more when you are at home - and work more efficiently when you are in your place of work. On a practical level it is far easier to divide business expenses from personal expenses – such as utility and telephone bills. However, as important as the above reasons are, the advantages of running your business from separate or purpose built premises go beyond this.

One of the greatest advantages will be the image created by your business if it's run from a business-like location. There are of course a variety of business-type premises that a video production company can be run from – including retail units, industrial units and office units.

Whilst some wedding videographers will never have their clients visit their premises, there are many who find this the most effective way to win commissions. It can be quite impressive for customers to visit a well laid out studio, with all its flashing lights and technology – and it will help you establish in their minds that you are a professional and trustworthy enterprise.

If you are working for corporate clients you will quite often find that they will want or need to sit in on the editing. Having to explain that you

work from a spare bedroom or attic might put them off. Worse still, if the editing is interrupted by things going on at home only the most understanding clients will accept this.

And let's face it – putting the costs to one side – there is no doubt that your dream business will be located in purpose-built business premises. The nearer you can get to this the better. So let's examine the pros and cons of the two main types of business premises.

Retail Space

I don't know of many videographers that operate from retail space and I think there is good reason for this. The clue is in the title – “retail”. Whilst there is no doubt that some video services are sold on a retail basis – such as conversions and duplication - generally speaking you do not need a shop-front to sell them. Most retail operations rely in some way or another on impulse purchases from passing trade. We've all done it, we go out shopping for one thing and our eye is caught by a window display – or we are intrigued by what things might be found in store. You might well be inspired to go back to a store which specialised in cine-to-video conversions, or wedding video production – but you'll rarely be in a position to make a purchase there and then.

Unless off the beaten track, retail premises will also be the most expensive type of premises to buy or rent (I will cover the buy/rent scenario more a little later). Retail premises are generally valued on a zone basis (A, B, C...) – with the first 20 feet from the entrance (Zone A) valued at twice the price of the next 20 feet (Zone B) – and so on. Therefore a retail unit with a wide frontage will be more valuable than one with a narrow frontage as it will have a great area of Zone A space.

This might seem like an unnecessary piece of information, but those who are tempted to go down the route of taking on a retail unit might find a bargain by looking for a narrow shop front in an area with less footfall. If on a busy road (albeit with little footfall), an attractive shop front will give your business greater exposure. If you look at it as having a billboard advert – then a retail unit might well be your best option – and might end up being less expensive than office or industrial space.

Finally, as many retail units also have residential accommodation above this might also be an attraction for you. Even if you do not want to live above the shop yourself, there may be an opportunity to sublet the living accommodation on a short-hold tenancy and recover a good part of your rent (if your lease allows – more on this later). Even if you own the shop you

might find planning restrictions will limit this activity – so it must be checked out if this is part of your plan.

Offices and Light Industrial Units

Whilst I dare say the planning group for a video studio would be classified as Light Industrial, there are few instances where your operation would extend beyond that which would be allowed in a commercial office environment. Proof of this is that many video production companies operate in this way. You've only got to stroll around the hub of the UK's production industry in London's Soho to see that most are simply a single office within a block. They will provide the means of a meeting point for your client and will help to establish you as a "proper business".

Office units will generally be within a complex of offices or within an industrial estate. The benefit of this is that you will have a ready list of potential clients around you. Of course this is of most benefit to those involved in corporate video production, but you also have to consider that wedding business can come from anywhere – and the more people that know what you can offer the greater chance you have of gaining commissions.

One of the other attractions of office or light industrial space is that many are offered on easy-in easy-out terms. You can start by taking on a single room within a complex and expand when necessary. These are often referred to as 'seedbed centres' and are aimed towards start-up businesses who want to cap their potential outgoings. Though not always the case, your rent will include business rates, utility charges and maintenance. Seedbed centres will often include shared reception facilities – whereby incoming calls will go through a central switch board which can be very handy if you are often out on location. Many will also have additional meeting rooms which can be rented on a daily basis to existing tenants. This can be very useful to the corporate videographer when they have screening sessions or the odd requirement for a filming studio set-up.

Seedbed centres or industrial complexes are often a mixture of office space mixed with what is referred to as 'Light Industrial Units'. Where a 'Light Industrial Unit' becomes an 'Industrial Unit' is defined by the type of business or manufacturing process which the building is used for. There are other planning groups, such as warehousing and open field sites – but generally speaking a video business would come under light industrial as there is some manufacturing taking place – especially if you are intending to incorporate editing and studio facilities within the building.

Whether you buy or rent your premises is rarely a decision that a start-up business will have to make, but should your business grow sufficiently you will have to consider the benefits of one against the other at some point. Buying a property will be expensive in the short-term but cheaper in the long-term - plus you will have the benefit of any increase in capital value. If the ownership of the property is within the business – this will obviously have an affect on the businesses value. Your individual circumstances will dictate the best route for you at any given time – so you should always take professional advice when faced with this situation.

However, there are things that are not always apparent to those who go down the renting route. Having been an industrial/commercial estate agent in a previous life, the most common misconception about renting is that you don't have all the responsibilities of maintenance. Whilst easy-in easy-out type tenancy agreements might limit your liabilities in this way – they don't offer the security of knowing that you will be in occupation for a long term. This can be important when considering the long-term development of the business.

Longer term agreements (5 to 15 years normally) are commonly referred to as 'Full Repairing and Insuring Leases' (called FRI leases). As the name suggests, the upkeep of the building and surrounding parts will be your responsibility – whether this is a leaky gutter, a lick of paint or a completely new roof! This can become even more complex when there are shared facilities such as access roads and common hallways. You might understand your obligations under the lease – but your fellow tenants might not understand theirs'. You will find that a diligent landlord will fix periods of property inspection, where a schedule of dilapidation will be drawn up and you'll be given a certain period to put the premises into good order.

It's also worth mentioning that another commonly misunderstood feature of many FRI leases is that if you take on a completely new lease – say 15-years – and at some point down the line you assign the lease to another business, your name will remain as the head-lessee. Though it doesn't always happen, should at some point in the 15-year period the current tenant falls foul of the terms of the lease (even if the lease has passed through several hands) the landlord could come back to you for recompense. You will then have to pursue the business who you assigned to, who will then have to pursue the next business, and so on.

As mentioned in the retail unit section, sub-letting might not be allowed within your lease or agreement. At the very least it will require the permission of the landlord to ensure that your sub-letting does not conflict

with your own lease or agreement. The rule of thumb is to take professional advice before signing any form of property lease. Every lease or tenancy agreement is going to be different (and worded in such a way that its not meant to be easily understood) – and whilst it can be a considerable outlay for the advice there is no doubt that you should take it. Do not be tempted by landlords who simply plonk an agreement in front of you and as you could be signing for something which you didn't plan for.

Assuming that you've already opted to run your business from home, there may be the odd occasion where you need additional space for a project – or you want to set up a meeting with a client in a place that looks the part. Don't panic, there will be purpose built office and meeting facilities not too far from you where you can hire a room for by the hour, ½ day or day. A quick search on Google for 'Meeting Room Hire' will throw up many choices.

These short-term let offices are also quite handy when you are trying to recreate a meeting room environment in a corporate video. They are normally well maintained and come with all the props that you would expect to see within a board meeting environment. Just make sure that the office owners know what you are doing and get them to sign a location release form (samples are freely available from www.video-artisan.co.uk) so that you don't have any come backs down the line.

If you are after a purpose-built studio for filming then a quick Internet search will throw up some solutions. Whilst these are obviously not so widespread as general meeting rooms you will be quite surprised at how close your nearest studio facility will be. The advantage of purpose-built studios is that they will be geared up for most circumstances – and will normally offer either manned or unmanned facilities (usually referred to as wet or dry hire respectively). They will also be able to offer technology and recording formats to fit your requirements.

Even if you don't currently have a requirement it is good practice to seek out the nearest facility to you and make an appointment to go and see them. Not only will you get an appreciation of costs and facilities, you'll also be widening your network of contacts. Make sure they know exactly what services you offer and you never know, they may well point some business back your way should they get enquiries for work they do not provide. You will also be better informed when you get an enquiry which requires facilities beyond that which you can provide in-house.

Buying & Hiring Kit

In most cases, the choice between hiring and buying kit is simple - you either need it or you don't! However, there's a little devil that sits on everyone's shoulder that continually eggs you on to spend that well-earned cash in your pocket. Understand this and you'll get your head round why most people buy things and it's got nothing to do with need - but rather that compulsion which drives us all - namely 'Want'!

I think this probably goes back to childhood where we all suffered from an excessive 'want' for everything we didn't have. If, like me, you had brothers or sisters then you pretty much always wanted what they had. If you didn't have siblings there would have been someone else you would have used as your measure. You might have occasionally used the word 'need' as leverage but rarely did you actually need it - whatever it was. I'd bet my last penny that if you set out all of the video gear owned by your average videographer on the floor in front of them and divided them between those that they really needed to create a video and those that they had purchased due to 'want' and it will be a pretty even split.

This will now probably highlight another human trait in us all, as there will be things that we bought ages ago which we may have 'needed' at the time, but now we only keep them because you 'want' to! There's no getting away from it - we are hoarders as well as a frivolous spenders!

Now that you've had a mirror held up you can stop feeling bad about yourself - because you are probably like the other 99% of people in this game. There are three main character traits in this industry - the Luvvies (those that love the artistic side), the Techies (those that love to press buttons) and the Moneymen (those that see the commercial opportunities in videography). Well, they all can be equally guilty of making unnecessary purchases - but for slightly different reasons.

The Luvvies actually don't give a hoot about the bottom line anyway - so tempting these with the belief that the latest gizmo will provide the path to creative excellence is all they need. The Techies just have to have it - as long as its cutting edge. The Moneymen will respond to claims that the gizmo will, within months of purchase, return a handsome profit. If you are a blend of all these characters then you are going to justify the purchase no matter what.

I am being rather unfair here - as I'm sure there are many things that you've bought over the years which have delivered on every front. However, it's not always either desirable or logical to buy the kit and there are alternatives.

Excluding consumables there will be a set of core tools that you will need to call yourself a videographer - Camera, Tripod, Mics, Lights, Power/Batteries and Editing Kit. Having said this even these can be hired or borrowed as opposed to being purchased. If you are out every day with your kit then its unlikely to be economical to do this (or possible to continually borrow it) - but if you are predominantly a camera operator and spend most of your time shooting for other people, then an edit suite might just be a luxury that you like to have at hand.

However, as a videographer I'm happy to accept that these basic tools are what you "need" to operate your business. You might also quite rightly justify doubling up on these so that you always have a spare. It becomes a little less obvious when you compare the purchase of camera 'A' against camera 'B' costing twice as much. Do you really 'need' it, or do you 'want' it? Will it actually generate you more work - or even make your programmes more sellable or more pleasurable to watch?

Unless you are working for a client such as a broadcaster or another production company who are specifying the format and minimum spec of your camera, the vast majority of your clients will employ you for what you have produced in the past and your creative flair. They may well be able to appreciate that a few more lines resolution will result in a better picture but if they are happy with what they've seen then its not going to make a whole heap of difference.

If you find that you have one job or customer that specifies something beyond your standard working tools don't be tempted to go out and splash the cash in the hope that more will follow. Hire it in - and if more similar work comes as a result then you might want to ask yourself whether it makes economic sense to make a purchase.

And it's important to remember, upgrading your camera or edit suite will undoubtedly result in upgrading something else. A bigger camera will need a suitable tripod, probably different batteries and maybe even a different microphone system to match. Likewise, your new editing software will need a higher specification computer to sit in. Oh, and whilst you are at it, it's probably time to get yourself a better monitoring system (both screens and speakers) so you can fully appreciate all that extra quality your new purchase can produce.

So far I've posed a lot of questions in this chapter - and for good reason. That's because you should attempt to quieten that little devil on your shoulder when faced with the decision to buy or rent. They will always err on the side of the former. Taking a little time-out to consider whether you are

doing the right thing is time well spent.

Hiring kit can be a painless process - and a pleasant side effect will be that you can put the kit through its paces in a proper-job scenario before you make a major investment. Generally speaking, most hire companies will also be familiar with all the additional extras which will make the kit work to its full potential - many of which will be included in the standard package.

This is especially useful when it comes to things such as matching a camera to a tripod - or a wide-angle adaptor to a camera lens. Having experience of how the different elements compliment each other is really useful. Of course, this might just tempt you into buying more things that you think you need if you do get around to purchasing!

The other benefit of hiring kit is that it's instantly deductible against production costs as opposed to purchasing kit which will be written off over time. There are, of course, additional advantages to purchasing such as residual values which can be materialised once completely written off over time. However, if you really don't need to invest that money in outright purchase you could put that spare cash into promoting your business so that you can afford to buy it outright eventually.

Whilst it is possible to hire entire edit suites, the most common thing to hire will be shooting kits or those nice little extras you might need every now and then. These include items such as camera cranes, jibs, tracking systems and specialist supports - but also items that will help you get the most out of your camera, such as additional lenses (if your camera will take them), wide-angle attachments and ancillary audio kit.

Whilst most hire companies will supply component parts, shooting kits will generally come as complete solutions. This is really handy when you have a multi-camera shoot and need to match your main camera. This brings me neatly on to 'Wet' versus 'Dry' hire (wet being with operator and dry being without).

Of course, you can hire a shooting kit on its own but you'll also need someone to drive it. This is where economies of scale and your business connections come in handy. It's also where organisations such as the IOV come into play - as you might find someone quite close to you has the kit you are after and for little more than the dry-hire rate you could get someone to operate it as well.

There are things to check out when hiring. Firstly, does your insurance cover you? If not you'll need to arrange this through your hire company - which can be expensive. If you are going to be doing this on a regular basis it is probably worth getting this extension to your own insurance policy. You

will be responsible for the security and care of the kit, so don't be tempted to skimp on this!

Secondly, make sure you know how to use the kit you are hiring safely - and that you have all the bits that will enable you to use it. I can speak from bitter experience of hiring a jib, only to find on location that my tripod head did not fit it. Doh! Your hirer should be able to advise you on this.

Finally, make sure you know exactly what hire period you are taking out. If the hire company is dealing with delivery and collection - make sure its available for them when they collect. Usually, a days hire will be 24-hours - but it's important to check that you know exactly.

Wedding & Event Videography

I have on more than one occasion been one of the judges for the Best Wedding Video category in the IOV Awards which has not always increased my ranking in the popularity stakes! But, despite the hate mail and social abandonment, I have to say I really enjoy the experience. The overall standards and creativity in wedding and event production these days is extremely high, and those that make it through to the top five in the IOV Awards each year are all good examples of what can be achieved in wedding and event videography.

Having not produced a wedding video in anger for over 10 years, some may think that I'm in no position to judge them. Whilst this argument may carry some weight, I believe that in my unique role in the IOV I get a well-rounded picture of the wedding videography market. Having produced 100 or so weddings in a previous life I also think I have a good idea of the working environment and demands that are unique to wedding videography. I also get to see the odd one or two kindly offered by members for my entertainment, when I'm at a loose end (as if!).

To say I have an interest in wedding videography may sound a bit perverse, but I do have one - and it's partly a commercial one at that. The very existence of the IOV partly relies on the success of those working in this market. If they don't make money they will not have it to spend on things like IOV membership. But my interest is not purely mercenary. I happen to believe that these are important social documents, and provide the videographer with an opportunity to express their creative talents in original and inventive ways.

The standard format wedding video (commonly referred to as the 'fly-on-the-wall' technique), where the videographer simply records the wedding day as it happens, is the common perception of what a wedding video is. Indeed, the vast majority of wedding videos are produced in this way with varying levels of post production to refine and enhance the raw material. Whilst to be a wedding video it does actually have to have the wedding as the underlying theme there is a growing community of videographers taking a more open-minded approach to the task of telling the story of someone's wedding day or event. For instance, there are a growing number of formal documentary-style wedding videos being produced.

Documentary style is still basically a standard format wedding, but after and during the wedding day the videographer records interviews with the couple and main characters recalling their emotions on the day. These are

then edited into the build-up scenes at the bride's house and the guests arriving at the church. A standard format wedding is great for recording the general atmosphere but this approach really captures the emotions of the day and the way the couple felt about each other at the time.

This documentary approach is sure to flourish, and I can see other ways in which this can expand – not only to make better wedding videos, but also to add to the profitability of the craft. The wedding itself is only the final part of the process of getting married, and much of the pain, pleasure and perspiration comes in the planning and preparation. To document this will not only make interesting viewing for the couple and their families, it will also provide tangible extras for the videographer to charge for.

My belief is that this is only one of many ways that videographers will be approaching the task of producing a wedding video in years to come. Other styles, such as the highly orchestrated romantic montages and musical scores, have already featured in previous IOV awards. The set musical mime is now becoming more common – which has recently been labelled the Marry-oke! Props, pre-shot sequences, big crowd scenes shot at the wedding itself – the ideas are only limited to the creativity of the videographer and the client's willingness to get involved. At the end they'll have something that pretty much everyone will enjoy sitting through.

Other areas of advancement of the craft have come about through technological advances in media - such as DVD and video on the web. Whilst the main wedding video format might stay the same, the facility to index scenes, tag on things like interviews, web site links to the dressmaker / florist / caterers and include additional reference information, can take wedding videography on to a completely new level. The only danger here is that the basic craft of being able to tell a story using video may be put aside in favour of the technical ability to construct dynamic media.

I have my critics when it comes to what I think a wedding video should cost. I'm not sure why this is, because in essence my view is that a wedding video can cost as much as the couple want to spend – and some have more to spend than others. There is a well-told story of an Essex wedding, at which a production company provided 3-camera Betacam coverage (live mixed in an OB truck) and charged £25,000. Even if this one is not a true story, achieving this sort of level should not seem surprising or obscene to us. There is only a tiny percentage of the population that could afford this kind of money but they do exist – and some that can afford a lot more.

Where I fall foul of most of my critics is that I think there is a bottom line under which I don't believe a couple will get a video that is any better than

something produced by Uncle Fred. To simply hit the record button and point the camera in the general direction of the action, slap on some music and in-camera titles – still results in a wedding video. This is why tales of £25,000 for a wedding video seem complete fantasy. Why pay that sort of money when you can hire a camcorder for £15 and buy a DV tape for £2.50? However, if you subscribe to this point of view, then you must also question why anyone would employ a professional videographer.

The only way to work out your fees for producing a wedding video is to do the sums. Excluding your own time, add up any additional labour, mileage and stock it will cost you to produce the video. Then add up the cost of all the kit you use, and work out 1% of the capital value – and times that by how many days the kit is used. This will give you a figure that should cover replacement, insurance and maintenance. You then need to look at the fixed costs in your business (accountancy fees, bank charges, advertising, rent, vehicle costs, electricity, etc.) and work out what proportion should be attributed to your wedding work and divide that by the number of weddings you anticipate doing. Add on things like licence fees or the proportional cost of copyright-free music albums – and you will eventually get to what each wedding costs you to produce.

If you carry out this cold analysis of costs you'll be surprised at the bottom line – and many of the bargain basement community will realise how much they are losing on each job. Whilst kit costs have gone down in real terms, my estimation is that your average wedding video will have a net cost (single camera) of something in the order of £300 (based on a basic production outfit of £10,000). The next, and most difficult part, is to add you own value.

One important lesson I learnt in a previous life as an industrial commercial estate agent is that a “Value” is only what one person is willing to pay, and another willing to sell for. There isn't a scientific formula for reaching a value – only evidence as to what has been paid for something similar in recent times. The more unique the service or product, the harder it is to fix a value.

One way is to work out a figure per hour that you need to earn but it might not be anywhere near your value. Another way to look at it is to compare your level of skill and experience to another trade or profession. Again, this is where values will differ from videographer to videographer as some will consider their worth to be similar to parking attendant, whilst others will see themselves more akin to a top interior designer.

Looking from the customer's point of view, their perception of value is going to be influenced by what the bulk of videographers are charging for

what appears on the surface as a similar product. If they live in an area where the majority of videographers are charging £400 then anything that varies greatly from this is considered either too cheap or too expensive. In an area where all the videographers are trying to be the cheapest (though its never part of their marketing message!), it eventually gets to the point where businesses start collapsing.

Don't think for one moment that I'm suggesting that a price cartel should exist amongst wedding and event videographers, but what I do believe is that all videographers should charge a realistic amount for a well-crafted product. Personally, I also believe that, like any other commodity, there is a market (albeit of varying sizes) for both bargain-basement and luxury wedding videos.

Once you have established your worth you need to be realistic about the amount of time you spend on each wedding – and include time consulting with the client before and after the event.

Many videographers end up with a menu of wedding services, ranging from basic coverage of the wedding service itself – with coverage of scenes such as the bride's house and reception sold as add-on extras. Other videographers will quote a package from the bride's house up until the first dance and an hourly rate thereafter. Others have a more simplified, 'all-inclusive with 5 copies' approach.

Whichever method you use, the effect is that you will be "bracketing" your service. In other words, you will align your service to a spending bracket. The add-on extras guys will, on the surface, be pricing themselves into a much wider bracket as the difference between a wedding service-only order, and one which includes the entire day, could be double the cost. The 'extra-hour' brigade will be doing a similar thing but to a much narrower spending bracket. The difficulty comes in finding out where the break points are between spending brackets.

To talk about pricing strategy without considering volume is meaningless. You might produce 100 wedding videos at £350 each year – but accepting that your base costs are going to be somewhere around £300 you would be left with a gross profit of only £5,000. Compare this to producing 10 videos at £1,000 which would result in a gross profit of £7,000. Remember – each wedding video will take the same kit and expertise to produce. OK, maybe you would spend less time producing a budget video, but the difference would not be quite as much as you expect. Essentially, 1/10th of the work returns almost 50% more profit!

I know from my involvement in the IOV that it's not uncommon for a videographer, by employing subcontracted crew, to be producing in excess of 150 weddings every year. If contemplating this kind of approach your biggest challenge will be in maintaining standards whilst paying your crew at a level you can profit from (that is before the penny drops and they realise they could be doing the same thing as you!). You will also have to reinvest more money in promotional activity and insurance premiums, and the additional stresses and strains of managing a workforce. And don't underestimate the increase in general administration that automatically comes with larger volume business.

There are ways that the videographer can decrease the workload per wedding and this is most commonly achieved by disciplined shooting with a view to achieving a camera master tape that needs no (or very little) editing. This is referred to as in-camera editing primarily because unlike those who shoot to edit, when a poor shot is recorded, the in-camera videographer will rewind and retake. Some in-camera videographers will go as far as pre-titling the tape leaving only end titles and music dub to finish the video. This can obviously result in much lower production costs and greater profits.

I have been chastised in the past for saying that the in-camera editing technique results in a less refined video. Despite my critics I still believe this. I have seen respectable wedding videos shot this way but every exceptional video I have seen has obviously had loving care applied on the edit suite. I accept that it is a way of delivering a wedding video at a price (or for maximising profit) – but not that it has equal creative value to something that has benefited from greater consideration to pace and continuity, let alone the advances offered by sophisticated editing kit.

There are only 52 (ish) Saturdays in a year, and only a percentage of these are prime wedding days – mainly concentrated in the summer months. On top of this you have Sunday weddings, Friday weddings, and the occasional one in between. In an ideal year, this would probably equate to around 60 weddings. However, there are not many one-man-band wedding videographers achieving these sorts of figures.

In reality, an established business may only achieve half of this amount – which needs to be taken into consideration when calculating and dividing your fixed costs and developing an overall business plan. I will get back to reality later, but even if you produce 30 weddings (earning £500 from each wedding) this only equates to £15,000 income. Whereas 30 weddings might not seem a lot to someone starting out in this business, in reality it is. If you can't increase on volume then your other option is to increase on profit per job – but in doing so what you have to accept here is that your potential market

place is going to be a lot smaller.

From IOV surveys it would appear that £25,000 wedding videos are not common at all – if indeed they do exist. The bulk of professional, well established videographers are charging around £1,000. However, there is a notable number which achieve budgets of around £5,000. All this actually proves is that there is a diversity of spending for wedding videos.

If you are aiming at the higher end of the market you're advertising and promotional activity needs to be spent in the right place. There is no point in pushing a £5,000 wedding in a market that has a tendency and funds to spend £700. According to recent research (Guardian Special Report – referring to www.datamonitor.com), there are around 75,000 millionaires in the UK. And, according to Forbes.com, there are just under 500 Billionaires worldwide – with only 13 coming from the UK. These are the people you have to find, and more importantly, instil with the desire to purchase your service. Again, in reality, that is not going to be easy.

One of the hardest things to do in this business is increase your prices – which is even truer for wedding videography. When you are cutting your teeth in this industry the temptation is to start low and build up your experience and list of happy customers. The problem is part of your customers' satisfaction will be based on what it has cost them. This often results in a lot of effort being spent on building a reputation in a spending bracket you do not intend to work in the future. Much of your future work will be by recommendation, and to have to keep telling friends and relatives of previous clients, 'I'm sorry but the price has gone up another £100' is not going to sit easy with you or them. There are ways to disguise this by having, "Special Introductory Offers", but you must be careful not to make hasty decisions in the early years that you live to regret.

It would be very hard to justify starting a full time business just producing weddings. With the exception of a handful of IOV members that seem to have cracked it (either by bulk business or success in niche markets) I would say that it isn't possible to survive on weddings alone. You must diversify

The longer-term view of the wedding video market is that it will become tougher – mainly because every year fewer weddings are taking place. The most recent figures at www.statistics.gov.uk clearly show a steady decline of marriages in the UK. Whilst civil ceremonies were starting to level off during this period, the majority of the decline was seen in religious ceremonies. By the end of this period nearly 25% of civil ceremonies were carried out in 'Approved Premises' - having only been introduced in 1995.

Whilst this may paint a sad picture, the wise amongst you will start to think about ways to capitalise on these trends. If the social trend is moving towards civil ceremonies in castles etc., you need to start aligning your business accordingly. Hints like this cannot be ignored – even if wedding videography is only part of your planned business income.

Corporate Videography

As mentioned in my profile at the beginning of this book, my first attempt at earning an income from videography was producing videos for estate agents. It was only after a long period of trying very hard to market and sell this service, and not getting any appreciable income, that I turned my limited technology and talent to other videography businesses. This of course meant doing the odd wedding or two, but my real interest has, and always will be, business-based video – or what I will collectively referred to as Corporate Videography.

First I need to define what I mean by “Corporate Videography”. I’m not talking specifically about producing corporate videos, but at the much wider array of services a videographer can offer business customers. This would include things such as providing a video recording of a conference, filming role-play sessions, authoring interactive video programmes or offering facility hire. If it’s a business-to-business video service – it’s Corporate Videography. As technology continues to provide new means of distributing and consuming video, more and more things will come under the corporate videography umbrella.

The importance of grouping these services together under one global description is that a client who commissions you to produce a promo is also quite likely to turn to you when they want a conference recorded, or even a DVD transferred. The importance becomes even more apparent when you accept that the company that asks you to copy a DVD might then commission you to produce their next multi-thousand pound promo. Corporate Videography is all about who you know, or more precisely, who knows you!

This “Wheels within Wheels” theme continues when you look at the industry itself. You never have all the expertise and kit needed to cope with any corporate videography enquiry. The client will always want one more camera than you can provide for their conference, or require greater creative input than you are able to muster, or need an unusual format tape converted to another unusual format. Everyone in this part of the industry has to network, which is one of the main benefits of joining a trade association such as the IOV.

There is a growing tendency among videographers to separate domestic services, such as weddings, away from the corporate side of their business. Rightly or wrongly, a large percentage of business people do not make the connection between the person filming their daughter’s wedding and the company they would commission to produce their corporate video. Some do

make the connection, but it does not happen that often, so a common solution is for videographers to trade under different names when they want to cater for both markets.

Even though we are getting there, the description of “videographer” is still not accepted as a generic term for someone involved in all fields of video production, mainly because the industry itself has not accepted the term. It will happen, and the IOV has a role to play in establishing the image of the craft as a profession with areas of specialisation. Once this is achieved then a company name such as “Bristol Videography”, might give you a catch-all trading name you need. The short-term solution is to develop different trading identities, or adopt a company name that does not suggest specialisation.

The fundamental difference between dealing with members of the public and businesses is one of product satisfaction. A wedding video client will expect a well-crafted video that tells the story of their wedding day in a style they like. Whilst the video may enrich their lives it is not something that will mature in value (other than in sentimental terms) or be vital to their matrimonial bliss. A wedding video is a true luxury item.

With corporate videography your service will have a clear objective, in that it will have to either make or save your client money. What you are creating is a business tool, regardless of whether it’s a promotional video, a multi-camera shoot at a conference or converting a PowerPoint presentation into a video. Whilst sentiment (or kudos in the case of a promo video) can come into the equation, your client’s decision to use video will be because they believe it is the best way to achieve a goal.

I found the best way to understand where video works best as a business tool is to examine applications where it does not. A classic example was my failed business producing videos of properties for estate agents. The simple fact was that a video did not help the estate agent sell the property any more than printed particulars with photos. Unless you’re in an earthquake zone, houses don’t move. If you want to show someone what a house looks like a photograph will do an equally good job – and it’s cheaper to produce.

We produced both bespoke videos of properties, and produced rolling video window displays of all the properties on the estate agent’s books. Even though it also failed to survive, the latter service did kind or work - in that it attracted attention of passers by. I even produced a special Christmas window for one estate agent, which included animating a Pleistocene bear (called Larry), who walked on and introduced each property - using hand gestures because there was no sound. The local kids loved it, and unfortunately so did the occasional brick-tossing TV thief – so eventually video gave way to

printed particulars in the window.

There is no doubt that video works best with moving subjects – a point illustrated by Larry (who survives today in his little cardboard box – though a little unanimated). There are other factors that make video an ideal medium such as when you want to demonstrate machinery which cannot be easily transported, or when you want to take the human eye (and ear) into places it can't usually go, or for recording an unrepeatable event. It is also a very effective means of communicating human emotion - and therefore very good at influencing opinion.

One of the common applications for video in business is training. Dealing specifically with training videos first, for many applications the medium has some definite advantages over printed training manuals. The audience has much of the work done for them, therefore leaving less room for misinterpretation – a phenomenon all too common with printed instructions. Would flat-pack furniture have such a bad wrap if every cupboard came with a video that actually showed you how to construct it? The reason you don't see these is that a video will cost a lot more than a slip of flimsy paper. But a video would definitely do a better job because the process is animated.

Video also has some advantages over personal tuition. A training video will deliver the same message again and again. Its delivery is not subject to the varying performance of the trainer, and can provide a far cheaper alternative to things like basic induction training within a large unskilled workforce.

Moving off from training videos, another common service is providing a conference recording or broadcasting service. In larger companies video provides an excellent way for key personnel to communicate with their workforce – even on a global scale. In a large company it would be very difficult and costly for the chairman to deliver his address on a one-to-one basis. But not only is video a cheap way to do this, it also creates another record for the company's archives – if only to pander to someone's ego!

Of all the reasons why a company uses video for a business application, the hardest thing to explain is the kudos factor. There is still an assumption that video is always the most expensive way to achieve a solution and therefore anyone using it must have some level of credibility. Today this is far from the truth. Technology is getting better and cheaper, and in real terms the cost of utilising video in a business is a fraction of the cost it was 20-years ago.

When I first became involved in video I did the usual research into what other video production companies charge. This was the first time I

realised that it's not the easiest commodity to sell or package. No one was able to say how much a 10-minute promotional video would cost. The nearest thing I got to a price was anywhere between £1,500 to £2,500 per minute of completed programme. They were of course absolutely right, you cannot give a general quotation for producing a corporate video – but the per-minute approach to enquirers meant that video developed a reputation for being expensive.

Whilst these kind of budgets are still around, with a tight script, an undemanding shooting/editing schedule and no client misconceptions about using a star to present it and a Elton John doing the music score, today a usable corporate video could be produced for £100 per minute. This is where the Kudos factor comes in.

If part of your client's ambition for the video is to generate credibility for their business or product there are various ways this can be achieved. Just producing a corporate video is not always good enough. Depending on the audience it is trying to appeal to this might mean using a celebrity presenter, filmed at various locations, using the highest possible quality filming and editing kit operated by the most crafted people within the industry. The final video might include a well-known music track or two – and archive footage bought in from third party libraries. The fact is that for a corporate video to achieve its aims it might need all of these elements – and you are not going to be able to deliver that at £100 per minute of completed video.

I don't know of many videographers who started their business solely offering corporate videography services. Whilst many end up working purely as corporate videographers, in the early days of any business you have to look at all means of income. One of the main reasons why corporate videography is not the best initial stepping stone is because a part-time (or more precisely weekend-only) corporate videography business is not going to work. If a client wants any of the previously mentioned services they are unlikely to buy them from a videographer who can only offer them at weekends.

The set of skills for corporate videography, more precisely producing corporate videos, is different from that of wedding videography. There is much debate as to whether one requires more skill than the other. My opinion is, whilst there are skills common to both areas, I would not recommend a complete novice in either field to take on the other's work. Being an experienced producer of corporate videos does not mean you can produce a good wedding video – and vice versa.

The areas of difference are mainly in creativity. Though a wedding videographer will add their own artistic interpretation to the brief they are

governed by what it is they are recording. It is a wedding, which will have a predetermined story line. Get handed a cassette labelled 'Our Wedding' and you'll have a pretty good idea of what it contains before playing it. The same cannot be said for a corporate video.

Even with a detailed brief from a client, present this to ten experienced corporate video producers and you'll get back ten different ways to reach the client's objectives. Sure, a client may know what they want the video to achieve, and have an idea on the format in which the information should be communicated – but the videographers task is to present their interpretation (sometimes referred to as a 'Treatment') of how best to present the information using video – within a given budget.

The ability to put your ideas into words is very important. You may employ a writer to produce scripts for you, but you must have an understanding of how scripts are structured and the influence they have on the final video. Your specialist talents will be in adapting the written word into video images and sound – and, in turn, be able to show your prospective client how you intend to achieve this – all in a written document.

Whilst there are lots of ways to improve your writing talents, the most effective way is to practice. The more you write, the easier it will become. Once you have a few corporate video scripts and proposals on file you will be surprised at how similar they are – even when the subject matter is very different.

The other key skill difference is your ability to manage a project. Even if you are not hiring in external crew and facilities, and you are handling the entire creative process on your own, the one thing you'll need to manage is your client and any facilities they are providing. This might be as simple as ensuring that you have the co-operation of any employees that might appear in the video, or making sure that at any locations, vehicles and staff being featured on screen are clean and tidy.

This is all part of managing a corporate video project, and will include the mundane (but equally important) things like preparing terms of engagement, accounting and any other administrative roles.

The kit requirements for corporate video are very different from wedding videography – though this does not mean that you couldn't use the same kit for both applications. The reason I say this is because with corporate videography you simply can't afford to invest in every conceivable bit of kit that you might use within a production. The only things that should harness your creativity are a/ ensuring that the objectives are met and, b/ that the client's budget is not exceeded. The creative ideas that you put into a video

proposal should not be limited by the equipment you own.

The temptation, certainly amongst those with the benefit of a cash injection (redundancy, inheritance etc), is to go out and buy a whole new bag of toys. Whilst there is some good argument for owning the best possible kit to do the job and upgrading obsolete technology, this will not necessarily result in more business. It makes far better sense to invest this capital in promoting the business which in turn should provide the funds to invest in kit. The other way to look at it, whilst a camera is sitting on a shelf not working for you it is in fact costing you money – in depreciation, in insurance and in maintenance.

Everything can be hired in, and there are still quite a few central London production houses that solely consist of an office, desk, chair and a telephone line. No equipment is owned, other than perhaps the facility to view rushes.

These rules can be applied for specialist skills that might be required to fulfil your vision. In the past I've worked with puppeteers, 3D model animators, lighting directors and sound engineers. After a while you will build up a database of suppliers which will form an important part of your tool kit – so that at any time you can obtain up to date and accurate costs of the ideas you propose.

I refer to a corporate video as a “commission” as it highlights the artistic nature of the task. But you also have to understand that a corporate video will always have a purpose – so your skills are not only measured by how well-crafted the video is, but also how well the video serves its purpose. You'll also have to expend some of your artistic energy on working to a budget – which will always be the governor of your creativity.

More often than not a corporate video enquiry will start like any other in that the client will contact you and ask, ‘How much?’ Even with a lifetime's experience as a corporate videographer, at this stage you do not have enough information at this stage to answer this question. Attempting to do so will lessen your chances of getting the commission.

This is a common scenario... A meeting takes place in a company in which someone suggests that video might be a solution to a problem (be it training, promotion etc). This is when the question of costs first arises, and someone is then delegated to find the answer. That's when you get the call, and the only thought that has been applied is that someone has said, “what about making a video”. They may as well phone a building company and ask, ‘how much would it be to build me an office?’ – and give no clues as to how big and how plush.

This scenario reminds me of a Smith & Jones sketch, where they were doing the final appraisal of the three tenders received for building the channel tunnel. Two of the tenders were from major construction companies – and consisted of huge glossy documents detailing every stage of design and construction. The third was from a local builder, which consisted of an A5 sheet of paper – stating, ‘to build one channel tunnel - £20billion’. Video is not quite that complex to quote on, but it will take a bit more effort than a stab at a price.

Whilst there is some sense in establishing a rough £-per-completed minute rate, it is not the best way to ensure you get the opportunity to widen your client base and portfolio. Sure, it gets the time-wasters off the phone but it will not do anything to increase your chances of getting a commission. It will also bracket you price-wise, so if the client is shopping around you might find you are seen as being too expensive – or worse still, too cheap!

Getting to the point of actually being commissioned to produce a corporate video is a lengthy process, and your first aim should always be to get a face-to-face meeting with the client – preferably at their premises. Explain to them that this will enable you to provide them with a proposal in line with their objectives and budget. It should take no longer than an hour of their time.

If they decline, and push you to give a price, my advice would be to say anything from £X (work out what you’ll get out of bed for on a one-day admin, one-day shoot, 2-days edit and absolutely no frills video). I’d then balance this by saying, ‘but I also work on videos with budgets in excess of £Xk, so I’m sure we could provide you with a convincing proposal when you are ready to explore this further.’ Then get their contact details, and follow up the conversation with an email or letter so that they have your details on file.

Let’s assume that you have convinced the client to hold a meeting you. Again, you’ll need their contact details – and once you get off the phone, drop them an email/fax thanking them for their enquiry and confirming the time of the appointment. Along with adopting a professional telephone manner, this is a great way of giving your client the impression that you are a professional.

Unless timing is crucial, I would make the appointment at least 3-days ahead. This will give you the chance to do some background research. The simplest form would be to drive to their office and have a look from outside. This will give you some idea of the size of company you’ll be dealing with. It will also leave you with less chance of getting lost when you go to the appointment proper. You might even discover that you’d rather not bother, and it will give you the opportunity to bow out politely before the

appointment.

You could of course ask the client to send you some background information. You can gain a whole load of information from a company brochure or website – all of which will help you to gain as much as possible out of the meeting. Better still, if they've got a copy of a previously produced video it will not only give you the background on the company, but also an idea on what they have previously spent on commissioning videos.

When you are gathering data on these enquirers try to obtain as much information as you can. If the person is calling on behalf of someone else (their boss), get both their names – and check the spellings. Over time this will data will become your most valuable tool for expanding your business so make sure that you archive things accurately and in a form that you can use with ease.

There are basic rules to follow when you finally get to meet the client. These might sound a bit basic, but ensure that you keep to the appointment time. Avoid turning up too early and never arrive late. This may seem like common sense, but punctuality is a necessity if you want to give the impression that you are capable of delivering the service. Two-hour lunch breaks and knocking off at 2pm on a Friday are things of the Eighties. Successful business people manage their time effectively. If you are punctual, then it is a quality that the client can easily appreciate. First impressions really count, so having to start the meeting with, 'sorry for being a little late', will definitely put you at a disadvantage.

Planning your attire for the meeting will certainly be something to consider. Some believe that you should always go 'suited' to an initial meeting. However, in some circumstances this could be to your disadvantage. Say your enquirer is a sound recording studio. This industry is not known for its 'best bib & tucker' image. More appropriate dress could be 'smart casual'. This is an extreme example but it does prove that you should dress to suit - not automatically dress in one.

So, now you know when you should be there and what you are wearing. Next you will need to plan what you are going to say by setting yourself a target for the meeting - 'What do I want to achieve by this meeting?' The simple answer is - to gather enough information that will enable you to prepare a convincing video proposal.

"Video Proposal" is a name that I've adopted over the years, but it is also referred to as a "Treatment", "Pitch" or "Quote". Regardless of what you call it, this document essentially consists of three elements. Firstly, it should confirm your understanding with a section outlining the "Aims and

Objectives” of the video. Secondly, it should describe how you propose to achieve this using video – which I refer to as the “Production Outline”. And thirdly, it should detail the costs and your terms and conditions – what I refer to as the “Quotation”. A set of sample documents is freely available from www.video-artisan.co.uk.

Taking each part separately, it is important for you to state what the purpose of the video is. This is not only for your client’s benefit but also so that when you start on the creative process you have something to gauge the suitability of your ideas against. I refer to these as the “Aims” and “Objectives”, though quite often these are seen as the same thing. My understanding is that an ‘Aim’ is an ideal, and an ‘Objective’ is a defined target. For instance, a video could have an aim to establish MJ Smith & Co as the UK’s leading supplier of widgets, and an objective of increasing widget sales by X%. A training video might have an aim of establishing that MJ Smith & Co as a company who invests in their employees training, and an objective of enabling the staff (after watching the video) to demonstrate an understanding of a specific procedure in their work.

In my mind they are slightly different and enable you and your client to gain a better understanding of what they want. You will rarely find that a video has only one Aim and one Objective – so I present these separately within the Video Proposal document. Obviously, the more aims and objectives you end up with the less chance the video has got of meeting any of them – which is something you need to make the client aware of. More than once I’ve had clients that want a video that sells their product, trains their staff and attracts visitors to their exhibition stand – when in fact what they want is three separate videos!

Another aim of the Aims and Objectives is to prepare your client for the oncoming Production Outline and to inform them of how you arrived at the ideas within in it. This is especially true if you are using unconventional ideas and themes – which sometimes is what makes the difference between winning the commission or not. Some videos cry out for unusual ideas and ways of getting a message across. But, make sure you prepare your client within the brief so that they can see your way of thinking.

The Production Outline is the part that describes how you propose the video should look and be produced. As mentioned previously, this will be a test of your ability to make others visualise your ideas with words. It should describe the general style of the video, and how you are going to meet the Aims and Objectives. It should also cover any specialist requirements, such as how the video is going to be consumed by the audience (Is it supplied on DVD

or placed on a website etc.?)

The final part, the Quotation, should include the elements of cost in producing the video, the timescale, the payment and engagement terms, ownership of copyright, and any exclusions and possible additions to the quote. For instance, it is not unreasonable to stipulate that you will charge mileage and overnight expenses. You might also want to include some optional extras to the package – such as additional copies or encoding to a web friendly format. Essentially, this part of the document states what the bottom line is – and also provides somewhere for the client to confirm their acceptance.

You'll note that I've kind of avoided talking about costs so far and this is for good reason as it's the frame of mind you'll need to adopt if you want to increase your chances of getting the job. Until you've extracted the information that you'll need to prepare the Aims and Objectives of the proposal, you are still not in a position to give a useful answer as to the costs. Once you have a good idea of what the video is for, and what they hope it will achieve, you should then ask them what their budget is. Quite often this will throw them as they've not knowingly assigned a budget for the video – or have they?

Let's assume that this is their first video, and they want it to deliver basic induction training for their staff. This will already have a cost associated to it even if it's only on-the-job training provided by senior staff. The same can be said for most promotional corporate video commissions, in that the video will improve, replace or compliment other means of achieving a given goal. The client should know what these are costing. Get this information out of them and you've established their budget – or what they will see as an acceptable investment.

All of this information can come from an initial meeting. However, you have to keep in mind that the natural progression of evolution has left us with two ears but only one mouth. This suggests that we should listen twice as much as we talk which is what you should try to keep uppermost in your mind at the meeting. Whilst it all may be very interesting, don't babble on about who you've done what for. It's not useful, and rarely relevant. Don't be worried about taking notes. It's good practice and they will help you as the meeting progresses and serve as an invaluable part of your research should the project progress.

It may become apparent from the meeting that in order for you to prepare the proposal you will need input from others within their company. This is quite often the case with more technical videos. If you need to make

another appointment go away and prepare for it. Write to the client, thank them for their time and confirm your next action – ‘I look forward to meeting Mr. Jones on Thursday 12th...’ This acts as another reminder and will help to build an impression of professionalism in your client’s mind.

If you have got all the information you need to prepare the proposal, make another appointment with them there and then. Set a period in which you feel confident of being able to prepare a realistic and convincing proposal – perhaps 2-weeks time. Directly after the meeting write to them, thanking them for their time, and confirm your course of action – ‘I will see you on the 12th to go through the proposal...’.

It only remains for you to combine your artistic skills and your research into a viable video proposal. From the meeting you may find that there are real reasons why video will not be suitable for your client. And, to be honest, video is hard to sell if there are no benefits. Your client will appreciate the fact that you do not want to waste either yours or their time. You should still write to them, thanking them for their time, and perhaps offer peripheral services such as copying, standards conversion etc. Remember, you are always trying to increase your client base, and peripheral services can equate to a substantial part of a video company’s total income.

Sometimes it is worth putting a little more effort into the proposal by including a draft script and what I refer to as, a “Visualisation”. These will require more work as you’ll be presenting the client with a more complete outline of the video. In many cases this is exactly what clients are looking for – something that’s easy for them to agree to, and which they can still add their input to make it their own.

Depending on the confidence you have in your own writing skills this might mean speculating on the services of a scriptwriter. The process of writing a script is seen as a daunting task to many videographers. However, if you have asked all the right questions, and have taken notes at the meeting, you will have a good idea of what your client will want to see. And, like other creative tasks, if you understand some of the basic rules of form and process in writing scripts it helps spread light on what can appear to be one of the dark arts.

Obtain a copy of any corporate video script and see if you can divide it into “The Hook” (the part that grabs attention), “The Bridge” (the part that links the Hook to the main subject) “The Main Subject” (the part which encapsulates the purpose of the video) and “The End” (the part that rounds off of the video). This format is followed to one extent or another in the vast majority of corporate video scripts.

When writing, always keep in mind what you feel your client can afford. Avoid detailed graphics, animated sequences, aerial filming, celebrity presenters and numerous locations if you feel it would exceed the client's budget. The final quotation will be a direct reflection of the ideas that you build into the script, so cut the script according to your client's cloth.

The Visualisation gives the client an easy to understand presentation of your ideas. It includes the script, audio, visual and graphic content of your proposed video – in as much detail as possible. There are a number of ways in which to do this but the simplest form is to divide your pages into two vertical halves, the audio, visual and graphic information to the left and the narration to the right.

There will be various motives for going this far – such as it's for a very big client, or where you are competing against other corporate videographers. Whatever the reason is, in my experience the more work you put into a video proposal the greater chance it has of being well received. Sure, there's the old fear of the client picking up your ideas, but another videographer's budget, but this is a fear that you learn to live with. As far as I know it's never happened to me.

The Quotation part to the document should be reasonably simple and should consist of no more than a single A4 sheet. It should include how many days filming, how many days editing and detail individual costs of items such as voice-over, music, graphics, special filming equipment and so on. By breaking down the costs your client will get a greater understanding of what adds to a video's budget. It will also give you room for negotiation should they have a cost objection.

You should also date the Quotation (with a 'valid for' period) and outline the terms of payment, stating when monies are due. A good formula to work to is one third of the total on acceptance of the script, the second third on acceptance of the storyboard and shooting script, and the final payment on acceptance of the finished video.

You should also give a timescale as to how long you feel the video will take to produce and on which video format your Quotation is based. This still may not make any sense to your client but when you present the pitch you can explain the benefits of one over another, and more importantly give them advice. Realistically, unless you are shooting and editing on one of the higher broadcast formats, or film, the chosen format will be less influential on the final budget than many believe.

There are obviously situations where you would want to take proper legal advice and have a contract drawn up between you and your client (such

as the one available to IOV members). Whilst this would result in a more defined agreement between the parties you have to consider the additional costs involved, plus the additional time spent negotiating with your client's legal representative. In my own experience, as long as your Video Proposal is well laid out and easy to understand you shouldn't experience any resistance in clients agreeing to your terms and paying the first instalment. This act itself will signify their acceptance.

Finally we get to the point where we present the proposal to the client. When putting the document together spend a few pence more on presentation - which could be as simple as a bound A4 folder. This kind of detail will give you a better chance of winning the commission so there is no point in skimping on the stationery that you use. Better still get a printer to design a bespoke presentation folder for you.

If you have gone the whole hog and produced a script and visualisation, it would make sense to send a couple of copies to the client a few days prior to your meeting - so that they have a chance to study the content before the proposal meeting. If it is the slimmer version this may not be necessary.

When you get to the meeting this is your chance to talk - in fact perform. Your client will probably have lots of questions at this stage, but start the meeting by reading through the Aims and Objectives and Production Outline, expanding on any theme so that your client has a clear vision of how the video will look. Once you've completed invite your client to ask questions, and hopefully, they'll start to give suggestions for changes. Make notes, and of course, compliment them on their ideas. If you get this far you've just about got it.

If you've done your homework right, the budget should not be an issue - though you need to be prepared to talk about changes to the proposal which might help reduce the cost. If the client does not wince a little when they see the bottom line, have some suggestions ready as to how they might improve on the video (AKA, spending more money). You might find they are already doing this - such as asking about multi-lingual versions, or encoding for the web, or having a celebrity doing the VO...

If you've already produced the draft script it may only take a few changes here and there before you are ready to issue your first invoice. If this is yet to be done, for heavens sake don't suggest that the client writes their own script. This will only delay matters and, more importantly, the progress of the project will be out of your control. Sometimes this can be difficult with a technical subject but you'll find that the actual message is going to be simple - "do this", "don't do that" or "what a fabulous product".

The next stage will be completing the pre-production planning in which I would include preparing basic storyboards and shooting scripts. These two documents form part of the project management, along with the hiring and the buying in of specialist creative talent, kit and media assets.

I often find that once I've been successful in convincing a client that they should commission me to produce their corporate video the panic sets in. First, it leaves me with a worrying feeling of responsibility and I start to wonder if I can deliver what I've set out in my proposal document. The only way to suppress this state of panic and enable the creative juices to flow again is to put a plan together.

I'm going to assume that you are at the stage where the script is agreed. Whether this was part of your initial proposal – or subsequently put together with your client – the script is the framework of the video. I quite often hear of videographers who shoot promos without a script – filming general shots of the company, its products and their premises, and then find the words to put to the shots in post production. Whilst this may result in a watchable, well-crafted video, for my mind it does not result in a video that best meets the brief. Your compromises will be in favour of the shots, as opposed to in favour of the messages within the script.

Your script is the blueprint of your production plan. The imagery, soundtrack and any graphic requirements are listed within the script – so your first stage of planning is to muster a more defined visualisation of how the video will look (shot for shot), which in turn will enable you to produce a shot list.

For many years I thought of storyboards as something for feature film makers only. I mean, it's a bit extreme drawing out every shot of a video before acquiring any footage. Well, after you've worked to a storyboard once, I'll guarantee you'll wonder how you coped before. Not only does it make for a better video but you'll also discover the true creative pleasure of using video to communicate the message. The process makes you think in more detail about each shot, but more importantly how shots sit together in each scene and how these scenes link together to form the whole programme.

From a purely mercenary point of view, along with the shooting script that will arise from a storyboard, in my three-thirds payment scheme (as detailed previously) this also gives you another opportunity to present your client with an invoice.

Storyboards do not need to be expertly crafted pieces of art. I use Microsoft Word to produce my storyboards (See samples on www.video-artisan.co.uk), using the basic drawing tools to illustrate my ideas. Whilst

they would not win any illustration awards, they do serve their purpose and that is to give both my client and me a more precise idea of how the video will finally look.

The first stage of this might entail doing a recce of any locations or processes so that you can illustrate them better on paper. Not only will this will help with the storyboard process but it will also highlight any potential problems you'll meet at the filming stage. It will also enable you to highlight responsibilities of your client such as ensuring that external scenes of their premises are free from unsightly rubbish, tatty signage or imagery that will give a negative message.

I always come back to the opening sequence once I've completed the storyboard as it is at this point where you will either fail or succeed in hooking your audience. I work through the script in a linear fashion, taking each sentence at a time. I study the text and re-conjure the images that originally inspired the words.

Much of the time the images will be pretty much defined. Character dialogue or interviews are quite easy (mid shot, two shot etc), but you still have to think about the locations in which they are filmed. The viewer's eyes will drift around a shot after a very short while, so you have to give consideration to both fore and background. This might be as simple as arranging for a poster or calendar to be put on an office wall, or placing a branded mug on desk etc. These little subtleties are what your viewer's eyes will be drift to, so you may as well use the whole of the screen to your client's advantage.

Drawing these out will reveal practical concerns and allow you to give some thought prior to filming as to how to make the shot look and sound as good as possible. The questions you should seek answers to are: - a/ Is this shot achievable? And, b/ What kit and expertise do I need to achieve it? You should have got your head round this when writing the script but this process will identify finer detail that will enable you to work more efficiently at the filming stage.

The more challenging parts of a storyboard are where you are setting a scene – or in sequences where the narration is non-specific. The part that needs most attention in this respect is the opening sequence or Hook. Quite often you see videos where the hook seems to be completely unrelated to the subject, in hope that it will catch the attention of the viewer. In one video I worked on the aim was to explain the range of services offered by a freight forwarding company. The video was produced for the benefit of new and existing customers, and also for the staff within the organisation who were not

aware of the complete range of services the company provided. It was a large company, with offices in the UK and overseas – and whilst the staff knew roughly what the company did the various departments did not have a complete grasp on what their role was within the organisation. The aim here was that the video would also enable every member of staff to identify opportunities for expanding the services offered to clients in their specific section of the business.

The entire business was best described as logistics. They could provide collection, packaging, pricing, bar-coding and despatch of products – even accounting direct to end customers. This ranged from fashion goods, to engine parts, to cosmetics – in fact anything and everything. When developing the script, the first thing that I thought I needed to get clear in my head was the word logistics – which though I understood roughly what it meant, a simple glance in the dictionary gave me the inspiration for the opening sequence. The origin of logistics is, “the art of moving, lodging, and supplying troops and equipment”. And whilst the services of this company were not as critical as military operations, by opening the video with archive footage of tanks in transport, ships heading for war, troops manoeuvring etc, I was able to make the link and give the impression that this company approached the task by applying the same level of urgency and precision that is required in a military situation. It also gave me some very strong images to work with. Most importantly, I had accounted for buying in the library footage in my initial proposal.

You’ll note in the online sample storyboard that I also include shot notes and numbers in the top of each storyboard. These are transposed to my shooting script later on – and should include any information relevant to the shot or graphic. Don’t take these as hard and fast though, as you might find when it comes to shooting that you are inspired to shoot a sequence differently. The same comes for the entire structure of the shot, but the thing to keep in mind is how your newly devised sequence or shot will fit with those either side of it.

As a general rule of thumb, words are spoken at around three words per second – which enables you to be reasonably precise about how long shots should be held for. This also tells you where to break sequences down in to separate shots. Though I don’t put shot duration in at this stage as I prefer to read through the script at the shooting stage, I can see this would be useful. Anything that avoids those awkward moments in post production where you are looking for non-existent material is a good idea.

The shooting script is essentially the storyboard broken down into a

logical shooting sequence (See samples on www.video-artisan.co.uk). The shots are divided into locations, and graphics and stock material in separate groups – complete with their storyboard reference number. I would also add specific filming dates.

There's not much more to say about this document, other than make doubly sure you don't forget to transpose a shot from the storyboard to the shooting script. The way I achieve this is to colour code each location, then divide the colours in to groups. I would also give myself a reminder about any props needed at each location.

The Shooting Script will become your tick list – and play a major part in ensuring an efficient edit. Once you know you have a good shot in the can, mark down the timecode in and out points. Once in post, you simply have to log these in to your batch capture file and hit the record button. You do have batch capture on your NLE system, don't you? Well, this is one good reason for having it.

You'll find that you are forced to drift from the shooting script from time to time. This may be because of unforeseen circumstances, or perhaps you've thought of a better way to treat the sequence. Whatever the reason is, make sure you log the information on your shooting script so you know how the new shots fit in and where they are on your camera master tape.

If you are relying on additional skills and equipment (cameraman, sound recordist, camera jib etc), this is when you need to make your first contact with them. It is important when dealing with any supplier that you do not mess them around, so at this stage you should make it clear that this is a tentative enquiry – and subject to your client's approval. Once you build up a rapport with these suppliers it should be quite acceptable for them to accept this as a preliminary booking, on the grounds that if they are approached by another contractor for the same date, they give you first refusal.

What you are trying to avoid is a situation where your client gives the go ahead on the dates provided, and then you have to go back to them when you find out you can't deliver.

Once you have completed the storyboards and shooting scripts you need to run these documents past your client. I would suggest you send them a copy of both documents, giving them a few days to consume prior to an appointment date. You might want to draw their attention to sequences and filming dates that require them to take some action – or at least raise internal questions. This might be as simple as ensuring that you can gain access to the given locations on the specified dates.

Once with the client, make sure you outline to them exactly what will

be required in order to achieve each sequence. If the video includes an interview with a company director or employee make sure they appreciate that this will not take only a few minutes of their time. You must be realistic otherwise you'll find yourself battling against people who did not appreciate how long things would take and you won't get their best performance.

Again, you should be prepared to be flexible at this stage. In fact you'll quite often find that clients will suggest alternative or better solutions. Once the meeting has concluded you should confirm your actions – 'I'll send you an amended storyboard and shooting script in the next couple of days, along with my second stage invoice.'

Any amendments should be done as soon as possible and get a bound copy back to the client along with your invoice. I say a bound copy because it gives you another chance to reaffirm your professionalism and plug your services. The more polished this document is the greater chance you'll have of them treating it as a permanent memento of the time they commissioned a film.

Once you have confirmation from your client (and I would suggest this is in writing if not acknowledged by them paying your bill) you must confirm the details to your suppliers. It might be that there are no other suppliers to consider, but at the very least you should ensure that you have no other commitments stopping you from completing the shoot.

Finally, there are some things you need to consider about the practical aspects of the shooting stage through to delivery of the final edit. By now you should be in a position where you know all the dates and times of shoot – and your client should be fully briefed as to their obligations. You should also be at the stage where all external kit and crew are arranged and briefed.

Whilst I firmly believe that its possible for the single-handed videographer to produce professional corporate videos at all levels, collaborative productions should generally end in a better programme and make for a more satisfying creative experience. No one is blessed with having all the good ideas. Whilst creativity is not a democratic process, you'll find that sharing your vision for how the programme will look with other creative professionals might highlight better ideas, or unforeseen reasons for a shot not working.

The number of crew is obviously dependent on budget, but my own view is that a crew should be no less than two people - the camera operator/director and an assistant. I believe this to be the same with any videography work, especially weddings. Even if they are only used as a pack mule it will at least allow you to concentrate on the creative aspects of filming

the event. Better still, they should be an extra set of experienced eyes and ears and prompt you of things happening that you may not be aware of. The level of expertise of the assistant will again depend on budget, but my own preference will be to have someone with me who has a good working knowledge of acquisition of pictures and sound. I much prefer to have someone suggesting alternatives and commenting on my ideas than someone who's just doing what they are told and no more. Sure, the final decision will be with me, but I'd like to think it's been made after giving consideration and input from others I respect.

I become more comfortable when the crew size increases to three people, with one person dealing with camera and the other sound. Stepping back from the tools enables you to concentrate on the shot and how it will fit with other shots in the scene. If you are using presenters or actors you can pay more attention to their performance leaving the camera and sound operators to ensure technical perfection. With a crew this size I would also take responsibility of continuity but having someone dealing specifically with this is a real bonus.

You can see how crews expand and once you start to introduce ideas requiring specialist skills (lighting rigs, camera cranes, pyrotechnics etc) you start to increase the need for someone help with the logistics. Enter the production manager!

Given unlimited budget, the ultimate buzz for me would be to surround myself with the most talented at their craft and draw from them the best materialisation of my ideas. I'd have people to deal with all the details (they just bog me down), a leatherneck or two to hump all the kit, the sharpest legal and financial team to ensure the bottom line was right and a client willing to pay for experimentation of ideas. Maybe one day!

But of all the qualities you should look for in crew, the most important is that they know how to conduct themselves in front of clients. Their craft skills are obviously important but if they can't demonstrate a professional attitude your client will see this as a reflection on you.

Once you build a rapport with other local videographers you'll quite often find that you will work for each other in different capacities. One week you may be working for them as an assistant, and the following week they are working for you (the producer/director) on the sound – and visa versa. It is also quite common to find that daily-rates will vary according to what capacity you are working in. Whatever the arrangement, it is important that you agree terms before engaging each other.

The other, often sticky subject, is that of copyright. If you are

employed by another videographer as a camera operator it will be normal practice for you have no residual claim to copyright in the material you acquire on the job. This is of course subject to payment of your invoice. When there is potential for on-going sales of copies, it can be tempting to offer crew a percentage of sales in exchange for reduced fees – or no fees at all. This is dangerous territory, and unless everyone is totally trusting in the process of distributing royalties this type of arrangement often ends in tears. As an alternative, you might find that crew are willing to delay invoicing (for a small premium) until such times that you're in a position to pay. There would have to be time limits to this, and an agreed solution should the whole thing flop, and even then it will rely on trust.

Another important issue is Health and Safety. On a shoot it is everyone's responsibility to ensure their own safety and the safety of others. Because of the nature of corporate video you will often find yourself working in risky environments. Putting aside the usual risks associated with using electric appliances and bits of kit that are sometimes heavy, you are often so preoccupied by the filming process that you are not aware of your surroundings. When filming in factories and busy places of work, it may be required for you to consult with in-house health and safety officials. Explain to them exactly what you want to do to achieve the shots. This should include details about where you want to run power cables, position lights, block access ways or present any risks to other employees. Failure to comply with regulation may put both you and your client at risk.

Think carefully about each location and where any hazards might exist. If you are filming on a walkway or road someone must keep an eye on your back whilst you are engrossed in taking the shot. Likewise, if you are monitoring sound with enclosed earphones someone needs to be listening out for you.

Despite preparation and good safety awareness, accidents can and do happen. I will not mention any names, but I was filming a sequence for a company who has trucks filled with pressured gas. Ironically this was a safety video, and what we were trying to illustrate was why a safety lanyard must be used on the hoses connecting the vehicle to the filling station. The hoses were about 5" in diameter, with a brass threaded collar that screwed to the filler station (which weighed about 15lb on its own). The idea was that in the extremely unlikely incident of the thread stripping on the collar, the lanyard (which had a noose at each end) would restrain the hose and stop it thrashing around under the extreme pressure.

With two safety officers present, plus a large crowd of workers from

the factory, I took up a filming position close enough to get a shot of the action, but out of reach of the hose when tethered by the lanyard (which was brand new). A collar had been prepared by taking out enough thread so that it would not give until the hose was under full pressure.

On my signal, the valve was opened the hose tightened and the collar broke away from the filler engulfing me in a huge CO2 vapour cloud (which was expected). The next thing I heard was an enormous bang and then lots of shouting. When the vapour cloud dispersed it revealed an open-mouthed audience somewhat surprised I was still in one piece. Though I never saw much, the hose and collar slipped through the lanyard then whipped over my head and hit the side of the truck leaving a dent about three foot across. I was lucky.

Assuming that you've got back to the edit suite alive, the first thing to do is double-check the footage and make a digital back up of the camera masters. Though you should always check the material as you shoot this final glance at what's in the can is the first stage of editing the material. It will also allow you to log any un-scripted shots should you need to find them later.

Personally, I prefer not to involve the client in the editing process. Much of editing is a slow process and in my experience they get easily bored whilst you experiment with effects, minute changes to shot duration etc. It is far better to present them with a first edit which in some cases might only require the odd tweak here and there to be considered finished. I would suggest that any draft copy you supply to a client has the time code burnt in to the picture. This not only makes it easier for them to identify required changes, but also stops them from using the copies and never agreeing to a final edit. Some videographers go one stage further and watermark the entire video – but I think this says too obviously, 'I don't trust you'.

When you get to the point where the client says they are happy with the edit this is when you need to invoice for your final balance. Make sure you reiterate the copyright situation – that, until this is paid, you will retain ownership of the video. Also, make sure they are aware of any other rights existing in the video – such as library footage which will normally have a licence period. While you are at it make sure you make a note of when the licences expire and nearing that date contact the client to see if they want their whole video updated.

Assuming you've been paid and the client is happy, ask them if they are happy for you to refer to them as a client and for you to use the video (or extracts) as part of your showreel. Do this in writing and you will often find that it will also spur them on to compliment your services – which is always

handy to have.

If you've never produced a corporate video before here's a final challenge. Make one for your own video business. Start with what the aims and objectives are and the rest should follow quite easy!

SIV (Special Interest Video)

It's worth noting that I'm not particularly fond of the term "Special Interest Video" as it's still not generally understood by the uninitiated. It's also a bit of a mouth full! However it's the best catchall phrase I heard so far and like the word "Videography" it has become more readily accepted as time has gone by. As with "IOV", the abbreviation to SIV is both easier to spurt out and snazzier to use in your business literature.

To clarify I'd like to start by defining what I understand SIVs to be in both programme content and commercial terms. Essentially, an SIV video is any video that is produced on a specialist subject and not considered to be of general interest. In commercial terms the difference between an SIV and a general interest video is purely down to market size or whether it would be broadcast by the likes of the BBC. Where the boundaries lie is hard to define, but for the sake of this article we are looking specifically at videos of special interest – produced for video release only. The vast majority of these fall into three sub-categories – namely Nostalgia, Recreation and Education.

The exciting thing about SIVs is that the subject matter is endless – in fact continually expanding. If you lived for a million years you would still not be able to list every conceivable topic for SIVs. Within the IOV's membership alone we have a vast array of specialist videos being produced; from Dog Grooming to Software Instruction, and from Local History to Extreme Sports – and most things in between. We also have those that produce videos on more obscure subjects – including a whole range of SIVs on car scrap yards. Essentially, the videographer walks around scrap yards in the UK and USA and talks about the rusting wrecks that he finds. Believe it or not – people buy them. This example demonstrates the point that, regardless of how obscure the subject there is bound to be someone else that shares the interest and hence creates a market for an SIV.

With no limit to the number of subjects to make a title on, producing SIVs fulfils the creative ambitions of videographers very well indeed. But there are many other motivations for videographers to get into this part of the industry.

Many SIV titles started their lives purely as a personal record of an event or interest and through encouragement by family and friends the producers have made it available for sale. A common story is when a videographer films the local church fete or event, puts together a well crafted and interesting video (to the local community that is). Word gets around, the local newspaper picks up on the story – and they end up selling a hundred or

so copies. What started off as a pleasurable exercise ends up banking £500; the cash bells ring, and the videographer then starts to think of his next epic – or at least, "Church Fete 2"!

It is also very common to hear stories where the producer's interest in the subject came well before their interest in videography. Within the IOV we have wood-turners that have become wood-turning video producers, and pot-holers that have turned into pot-hole video producers. There are probably many more instances where the motivation behind the video has been to share views on interests with other like-minded people and it has later grown into a mature business.

The third type of player in the SIV market are those who have already gained their video production skills in other parts of the market (corporate or event videography) and then look for an SIV subject to make a title on. The main motivation here is to make profit, so the key is finding an SIV subject with sufficient market size to support all video production and promotional costs. Those thinking bigger will look for subjects that can support not one title, but a whole series of titles.

Whilst volume is a big contributing factor when looking for a subject you also need to consider the spending power (or price points) of your market and the value of the information held within the SIV title. The latter point really starts to come into play when producing an educational title. If the buyer learns how to do something, or the video shows them how to profit from something, the perceived value will be higher.

It is quite often that once a general-practice videography business is established they will start to get approached for joint ventures from people who have the desire (and the subject knowledge) to produce a programme, but neither the kit nor expertise to put it together. A deal is normally struck whereby the videographer retains partial copyright and benefits from royalties on sales. These arrangements are fine as long as all parties are clear on ownership and that everyone fulfils their part of the production and promotional process. The main reason for this type of arrangement falling into dispute is because nothing was agreed in writing before the project was undertaken. Though I would always advocate employing legal experts to draw up such agreements, even when the SIV title has a small sales potential, you should at least exchange a written understanding of how royalties are to be divided and paid.

IOV surveys of members involved in SIV production reveal interesting results. One such survey asked how many SIV titles they produce per year, and what is the greatest number of copies they have sold of any one particular

title in a single year. The majority of SIV titles rarely make a mint (quite a few selling less than 100 copies) but there are some that obviously generate substantial income. For instance, one member claimed to be producing five new nostalgia-type titles per year, with the highest number of copies sold in one year being in excess of 15,000. When you get into these numbers you are more than likely selling through distributors and/or retail outlets – which obviously means dividing profits between two or more parties.

Though I plan to go into detail with regard to retailers and distributors later on in this chapter, you should expect to return around 60% of the retail price if selling direct to a retailer. If you have a middleman/distributor involved, you can expect to pay them around 20% of the wholesale price. On a title selling off the shelf at £14.99 (£12.75 excluding VAT), this would give you a wholesale price of around £8.00. A distributor's cut would take you down to around £6.00 – from which you will have to produce, duplicate, promote, package and make profit from.

Even at only £1.00 net per copy, in the 15,000 copy example mentioned above you can see the income potential. Build a series of titles and it becomes even more apparent how, for some videographers, SIV has become their main source of income.

Having whetted your appetite you're now probably eager to start on your first SIV title. However, if you are like me the ideas will be free-flowing, but you'll be so busy trying to keep your desk clear that spending time on speculative ideas takes a back seat. And there's the rub. If you want your SIV titles to return substantial income you'll need to invest substantial time. This includes measuring market size (which will indicate viability), establishing the best routes to market (how you are going to get your title in front of its intended audience) and carrying out research on the subject (get it wrong and you'll never sell anything else). This is all before you start to think of developing a script and making the video.

Whilst I will go into timing later there are obvious strategic times of the year for any title – Christmas being a prime example. If you do not have your title ready for the shelves at least 3-months before such times you'll miss the boat. This is where SIV differs from other areas of video production in that you do not have the luxury of a client telling you when the video is needed by. The progress and success of any SIV will depend on your ability to plan long-term projects and your ability to stick to the plan. Get your attitude right and you are halfway there.

OK, so you've found a big hole in your work calendar and you want to fill it with producing an SIV title. First thing to consider is whether or not you

really have the time? Would your time be more profitably spent building your existing revenue streams? Also, if your regular work picks up are you going to put your SIV title to one side until work slackens again?

Your answer to all these questions will depend on the size and type of project you intend to embark on. However, most existing SIV producers confess to underestimating the amount of time needed, not only to research and produce the title but also in general administration. Like any other project you'll undertake as a videographer, each will add to your general administration. Dealing with accounts, preparing literature, maintaining records, all of these tasks will be added to if you choose to go this route.

My comments here are based on producing a single title though, as I've already said, to be truly viable it's preferable to have a series of titles in mind. The two main reasons for this are that much of the work covered here will have to be done anyway if you are going to make 1 or 100 titles on the subject. The second reason is that once you have sold one title you have a ready audience for the next. There is also a third reason, and that is an SIV rarely contains everything that is worth knowing about the subject and nearly always leaves room for a sequel or two.

One of the first things you'll need to get a clear vision of is the title's purpose. Because the variety of subject matter is endless you'll have to establish what category your title falls under from the three main SIV groups – namely Nostalgia, Recreation and Education. If you are going to produce a title it will be one of these – if not it will be a crossbreed combination. For example, a title on 'Dwarf Tossing' (now banned) could be considered nostalgic and at the same time recreational and educational. An SIV title on how to answer business calls could simply be educational. A video about a location, set in a particular period – may be both nostalgic and educational.

The clearer the definition of what you're trying to achieve the easier it will be to plan a logical path to completion. The other reason for establishing this is that it will help you to identify the market size and routes to market. Taking my obscure Dwarf Tossing example, if your original idea was to produce something of purely nostalgic value – introducing an educational element (how to toss a dwarf) might increase sales. This can be said for almost every SIV title.

Once you have established the purpose of your SIV title you will then need the answer to a very important question – "Has it been done before?" If it has it doesn't mean it's not worth pursuing. In fact, launching a new title into a market that is already used to buying SIV titles can be much easier than entering a completely green market. If it hasn't been done before you'll need

to know why. One of the main reasons might be that the market is not of sufficient size to support a title.

So, now you know what your title is and who it is aimed at, you should now be able to research the market size. Where you go for this information will depend on the subject but it is safe to say that there will always be evidence to be found on market sizes - even if only anecdotal. A brilliant place to start looking is the Internet, because if a market exists there will be a website dedicated to it. Look for associations, clubs, institutes and societies relating to the subject and if they do not publish information on the size of membership approach them by telephone or in writing. If there is more than one organisation, approach them all because each will have a slightly different view about the market size and in general will be happy to assist. In each case, ask them to supply you with membership information, as well as details on any newsletters or magazines they publish.

Another good source of information is independent magazines and publications relating to the subject. Like websites, if there is a substantial market there will almost definitely be a magazine title (or many) dedicated to it. Go to your local library or simply ask your local news agent who will have access to lists of titles available to order.

Once you've trawled the web, and anywhere else you think you'll find publications on the subject, request a media pack from them including details on the volume of readership, advertising rates and policy on printing relevant news.

Whilst this will be part of your general research for your title, you can also find information about market size in books dedicated to the subject. Again, the Internet is excellent for this

Exhibitions, trade events and society functions are also good sources of information. You'll find these either advertised or listed in the magazines and websites found earlier. Contact the organisers and ask them for an exhibitor's pack (you may need this later) which should include details about attendance at previous events – as well as costs for taking exhibition space.

Not all of these will be relevant to all SIV titles but going through this process is all part of establishing the potential sales of your title. If you find that there is no website, magazine or exhibition on the subject it may well indicate that you've identified something that very few people are going to buy an SIV title on.

Finding routes to market is essentially identifying the means and costs of getting your title in front of those likely to buy it. If you've established your market size you will already be aware of the obvious routes – such as

advertising in the magazines and taking exhibition space at events. However, there are other means you can use to get your product in front of the right people. Generating press coverage is one way. Whilst it is always better accepted if supplied with an advertising order, press who have their readers' interests at heart will be favourable to news items on their given subject. You could go one stage further and offer the editor a copy of the video for review. If this is the leading title in the market you may also want to offer them an exclusive dealership for the first month or so. This will not only provide excellent exposure for the title but might also mean a reduction on your administration as you'll be dealing with one customer – albeit at a smaller profit margin.

Local press may also be interested in running a news item on your title especially if it is of local interest. The knack here, as with any press releases that you produce, is to make the piece concise and relevant to the reader. Get your message across in the first paragraph and think of an eye-catching strap line. If you supply pictures with your press releases you will increase your chances of getting published.

The same rules apply for websites, which are more commonly in the form of on-line news channels. Like traditional print media, editors of these sites are constantly looking for news. The added benefit of websites is that they are interactive and live – in that they will normally have additional features such as forms, web rings, bulletin boards, etc. Getting your SIV mentioned on these is a cheap way of spreading the word. If you can add postings to a forum a better way would be to ask if anyone would be willing to review the video once it is made. You might get a lot of offers - who will also be hot sales leads once the title is launched!

Direct marketing is also a very effective way to promote an SIV title – be it by traditional mail or electronic. However, it will not suit every SIV title because the market size may be too large. For instance, if you were making a title about the history of a city your market may be in the 100s of thousands bracket. A direct mailing campaign in this instance is unlikely to return sufficient sales to recoup the cost – added to which you will have to buy the data along with the permission to use it.

The routes to market so far have been specifically aimed at those who are looking to sell direct - but there are other routes, such as employing a distributor and selling direct to retailers. The benefits here are a reduction in administration, instant exposure to an established market and expertise offered by those already selling SIV titles (be it retail or wholesale). You might also find that there are retailers and distributors that specialise in a particular

subject.

Some distributors offer a more comprehensive service for independent producers. They will review the title, advise on packaging and price. They can also review your planned marketing and forecast sales and revenue value. Their service can also extend to handling inlay design and printing, bar coding, duplication and DVD authoring and replication.

Generally speaking, a distributor should give your title access to all traditional High Street retailers, mail order organisations and wholesalers within your given market. Their fees will be negotiable and are largely dependent on the sales potential. Their commission will normally range from 15% to 25% of invoice value – plus any other additional services they may have provided (duplication, inlay printing, etc.).

You should now be armed with all the information you need to estimate the financial viability of your title. I say 'estimate', as you will have to make a guess at the number of video sales that will be generated by a given amount of promotional spend. Unfortunately there are no hard and fast formulas to arrive at this – such as '£X Promotional Expenditure = £X Sales' – but your research so far will have given you an indication of potential and the costs associated in promoting it.

Let's assume that your title will sell 5,000 copies over 2-years. Let's also assume that your research and knowledge of the market has suggested a retail price of £12.75 (approximately £14.99 including VAT). This would give a gross turnover of £63,750. To spend 20% to 40% of this on advertising and promotion would not be unreasonable to assume – say £20,000 (easily spent if you intend to buy a reasonable spread of advertising over the two years - plus a stand at a exhibition or two each year). From the £43,000-odd remaining you'll then need to work out and deduct the cost per unit to duplicate, package and deliver a tape – say £4.00 each (£20,000). This would leave around £23,750 to research and produce the title, pay respective royalties and administer the business side of the project. Then, and only then, will you discover its financial viability.

Regardless of whether your title has good viability or not, it is always worth considering the possibility of sponsorship. This can come in from various sources. From purely commercial backers that have an interest or connection to the subject, through to contributions from foundations with a cultural interest in the subject.

The most common scenario would be an SIV that features tools, materials or accessories being used in the programme – and therefore endorsed. For instance, if you were producing a video about mountain

climbing an obvious sponsor might be a company that makes climbing equipment and clothing. Less obvious, though equally important, you might also raise sponsorship from the local tourist board and the leading mountaineering association. There might also be a possibility of attracting sponsorship from a Central or European Government fund.

It is always worth checking these things out because it might make the difference between profit and loss. Unless you are offered substantial sponsorship, don't offer exclusivity for the video. It would be quite acceptable to have more than one sponsor as long as there are no conflicts of interest. In fact, once you have attracted one sponsor others will be easier to convince. Using the example above, a leading mountaineering clothing company may be very pleased to have their name associated with a local tourist board or government sports incentive.

In each case you will need to produce an outline of the production in order to attract the sponsor. You'll also have to produce a plan which outlines the sales potential and the means and methods by which you have calculated this. It might not need to be very detailed but these are questions they will need answers to if they are going to get involved in the project. If interested, you might also find they'll require input on the content – a) to ensure maximum exposure for them and, b) to ensure that the video contains nothing detrimental to their business or organisation.

With all the research and profit evaluation out of the way you can now start thinking about making movies. Like any other programme (excluding event coverage where there is predetermined story line) this should always start with a script. You should know what your production budget is which must be kept in mind when you think of the means of adapting the script for the screen. What I mean by this is that if you've £2,000 to spend on making the SIV, building in ideas which require multiple locations, specialist camera kit, celebrity presenter, aerial filming etc. might not be possible.

Other cost-adding things to take into consideration include buying-in material from outside sources. This can include things such as photos, music, illustrations and video footage currently protected by copyright. As licensing fees for video/film footage can be up to £20 per second (for only a 2-year licence agreement), this can add colossal amounts to SIV budgets. Any SIV with a nostalgic theme will greatly depend on archived material so you will need to know a/ if the material exists, and b/ how much it will cost for you to use it?

Though you will be able to express opinion in an SIV you must first get your facts right. Get the facts wrong and your specialist audience will not buy

anything else from you. The same can be said for aiming for high production values – in that you will achieve greater sales if the programme is well shot and edited. Whilst not everyone can distinguish between good and bad production values there will undoubtedly be a proportion that will. Aim high and you'll get them all.

The amount of work in getting to the production stage will greatly depend on the subject matter – but you'll need to either complete or contemplate them with every SIV project. If, as in many cases, you just decide to jump to this stage and just make an SIV and hope it sells then do not be disappointed if the sales do not reach your blind ambitions. If you want a make an SIV and you don't care whether it makes money or not – fine, go ahead.

If you are on the money kick there are still lots of things you'll need to do, such as design sleeve artwork. If you don't have a clue go to your local book or video retail store and look at the selection of titles there and note how they are designed (use of pictures, graphics and text). If your title is going to sell off a shelf its sales will greatly depend on how well the cover works. Unlike books, customers will not be able to leaf through the video to make sure its what they want. Your only chance will be what you say and show on the sleeve. You might also consider producing a point of sale multi-DVD dispenser which again will need to be designed well in order to attract attention and generate sales. This will also help convince retailers that your title is worth stocking.

Nearly every SIV title (and certainly any series of titles) would benefit from being found and ultimately purchased, on the Internet. This might mean building your own website but can also mean having your title listed on a specialist distributor's site. Going back to measuring market size, unless the subject is purely of local interest your findings should include the international potential for your title. The Internet can be both a cheap and quick means of getting your title in front of your potential customers. Once you've gained their electronic contact details, placing additional titles in front of them will become even quicker and cheaper. There is an entire section dedicated to the importance of websites later in the book which is of special importance to the SIV producer.

This brings me on to the last piece of general information about an SIV-based business – and that is the importance of retaining, maintaining and using the customer data you acquire along the way. The first rule is whenever someone enquires about the title obtain their contact details – even if they don't buy one. Adopt the frame of mind that you'll never throw away the

opportunity to sell a single copy. If you are selling through a distributor or retailer you might not get the chance to record this information so it is important to include your contact details on the cover so that customers can come direct.

Like any commercial activity, the financial future of the SIV market will depend on how much spare cash people have in their pockets. Other than training videos, the buying decision will be purely based on, 'I want' and opposed to, 'I need' so in this sense it is a luxury item. Having said this, putting aside complete world monetary meltdown, past history would suggest that over time we will all be continuing to spend more and more on leisure and pleasure.

Though the immediate delivery medium for SIVs is DVD there will be a future in online delivery – more of which is covered in the Online Content chapter. Whilst there are still security, compatibility and cash-handling issues to overcome, the attractions of a workable pay-per-view system are numerous. As long as all the above features can be provided at a reasonable charge, the cost of delivering your title to customers will reduce dramatically as well as the time spent in processing orders and taking payment.

I also think that online delivery of SIV content will open up the market even further. For instance, it might then become commercially viable to produce Special Interest News programmes – such as reporting on very local issues (City/Town/Village/Estate), supported partly by subscription, partly by advertising and partly by local authorities. These are all things that are becoming a reality.

Out of all the business activities videographers are currently involved in I think producing SIVs has the greatest potential for growth. The other attractive sides to it are that it is self-driven. It feeds the desires of those wanting a larger audience for their creations and, most importantly, can provide a videographer with transferable assets that have a measurable value. The value of a business purely based on an established client list, such as those involved solely in corporate videography (or even worse, wedding videography) will be speculative at best.

The more obscure the subject, the less the potential will be for sales - but, if you discover a subject that has a growing market your future earning potential could be worth the investment of having a few dry years. Whatever your involvement is in SIVs, do the sums, be conservative about sales potential, and enjoy!

Peripheral Videography Services

Despite the brevity of this chapter I see peripheral videography services as being of great importance to establishing a profitable videography business. Not only do they lead on to other things but they will also make up a considerable part of the annual turnover of a professional videographer. These will include doing simple copies, format transfers, digital prints from video – right through to providing editing services of existing video footage. There are also opportunities in hiring video equipment out if you are not so precious about your camera.

Of all the services you will be offering, peripheral services are the easiest to explain to potential clients. The sales process is not complicated when the client makes an enquiry – ‘Can you convert an NTSC DVD tape to a PAL DVD?’ – ‘Certainly, would you like our collection service or would you like to drop the DVD in to us?’ Job done - unlike a corporate or wedding enquiry that will probably take a round of meetings to get to the point of closing the sale.

Peripheral videography services are very easy to “commoditise” if for no other reason than they are very easy to price. It is also very easy to buy in expertise and sub-contract work out to others when you do not have the kit or expertise to do it yourself. When someone asks you, ‘Can you convert this?’ your answer should always be, ‘Yes’. It might take a little footwork and a smaller profit margin but the real value is instilling an image in another potential client that you are someone that can get things done. I consider that an important part of the marketing strategy of successful videography businesses.

On the back of these services you can promote other parts of the business. Businesses that are likely to commission me to produce a corporate video are also likely clients for my business-type services, such as: DVD & Video Duplication, TV Standards Conversions, Web Video Encoding & Hosting, Roll-play video camera hire, Digital File Format Conversion and PowerPoint to Video Conversion. Producing a small pamphlet with a menu of these services (with additional information about your corporate video production services) and regularly distributing them to businesses within your area might bring in more than just a few format transfers each month.

The wedding video side to the business might also benefit from the promotion of services such as cine-to-video (or more likely these days, cine-to-DVD). There are still miles and miles of family cine films out there. Whilst these may have already been converted to VHS tape previously we are

already in a time where some households no longer have the facility to play them back. The cine-to-video market, and now VHS-to-DVD market, will continue to represent a huge potential. As new formats come into use the transfer requirements will expand.

Remember, your overall business plan will be to build the business beyond next week so the promotional activities you put in place now should reap rewards much further down the line. Take 5-years from the age of your average wedding couple and you are probably looking at someone in their late teens. Therefore adding lists of peripheral services to the DVD covers of school plays, performances, etc. that you produce might well be great opportunities for making an early connection with a wedding video customer.

The other attraction of peripheral videography services is that whilst all work is time sensitive to some extent it is rarely going to be a while-you-wait service. You can fit the work in the small hours that every self employed person finds themselves working. With the help of technology (such as when you are encoding from one format to another) some of this work can even be done whilst you are asleep.

It's important to keep abreast of new technology and trends. You only need to look at the speed at which DVD took off and the business potential that created. You don't have to invest in every conceivable piece of technology to claim to be able to convert virtually any format to any format – but you'll certainly need to make sure that you know where to sub-contract these services to. Remember, by farming the work out and adding a small profit could well lead to a highly profitable corporate video commission.

As a final comment, as with all avenues in your business to fully capitalise now and in the future you must keep records of your clients. With video formats changing on a regular basis, the client who has their cine film converted to DVD today will be the client who has their DVD converted to Blu-Ray disc tomorrow.

Online Content

Video technology is changing so rapidly that it's difficult to put a peg in the ground at any one time – especially when it comes to the subject of video content being delivered over the Internet. However, it's a very important subject and one which the entire industry has its hopes pinned to. The promise is that one day we'll all be able to make some serious money from distributing our work this way. Further down the line there's a chance that all your content will be delivered this way – including wedding videos. You'll no longer be providing the couple with a physical copy – but instead it will be a website address which they can share with their friends and family.

For general interest content the promise is that instead of a handful of broadcasters chucking out a programme schedule to millions of people there will be millions of content producers making their content available to all. We've now part reached that point but there are still a few important elements to come that will make the thing really start to work for us. For a start there are too many variations in getting your content online (codecs, websites and playback mechanisms) and more importantly there's not one great solution for viewers to find and filter the content. Sure, rudimentary searches using the likes of Google will throw some light on the range of content on any given subject but it's far from perfect. Dare I say it such a search facility might never be available so we are at a point of making the most of what's available now.

If you simply want to include your showreel for download from your website that's a relatively simple task to achieve. Simply encode your material to one of the three main delivery codecs (Windows Media, QuickTime or Flash) and stick it up on your website. In an ideal world there would be just one format for all – but we are not in that world quite yet. You have to accept that for the sake of simplicity you have to stick to fewer formats and, ignore those with dial-up connections (sorry). Whilst there are some pockets of users where broadband connection is still not available, video over a dial-up connection is pretty much not worth bothering with anyway. It's certainly not the way that you will want your showreel viewed – at low frame rates with highly compressed pictures and sound.

This chapter is not going to be a technical “how to” article but rather an examination of the world of online video and the means of making money from your online content. Getting a showreel up on your website is, indirectly, a means of doing this as the hope is that customers will see what you can do and book you on the strength of your showreel. There are, of

course, issues surrounding copyright but these are not too difficult to avoid. You should also ensure that your customers have given the OK for their content to be included on your website. Whilst you might still retain the copyright in the end product, your customer will have some moral rights as far as how you exploit that material. A simple clause added to your contract might well cover you for this, but it's still advisable to make it clear to your client that you want to use their video on your website – for all to see!

Pure business promotion might not be your motivation for getting your content online. In many cases it's simply a means of gaining a wider audience for your creations – or using video to have your say on certain subjects – or joining in with a wider community who are using video. In either of these cases there are various websites that have been set up to exploit these desires but which can also be used to promote your video creation services if only by widening the possibility of your content being seen.

Probably the best known of public access online video platforms is YouTube (www.youtube.com). This was sold in recent years by its founders to Google in a much publicised \$1 billion deal. If you have never had a scout around YouTube it's not a bad way to waste a few hours and you'll get an idea of the type of content which attracts attention. Most of it is pure drivel – but amongst it all there are a few gems. More importantly, YouTube and others will share a small proportion of any advertising revenue they attract alongside your content. Whilst for the vast majority this will not generate income, it does give a big hint as to where income from online content might eventually be found.

Whilst the likes of YouTube are good at offering pretty low-brow content, there are other sites out there that have a more serious agenda – albeit that they are also harvesting content from producers and not offering any financial reward. FourDocs (www.channel4.com/fourdocs/) is an excellent example. Limited to 4-minutes in length, this site showcases documentaries from around the world on all manner of subjects - from simple blogs to political statements, comical views and insights into many walks of life. Quite often when I've failed to find anything on proper TV I've turned to this website and always found something of interest. What's even more impressive about this site is the guide section which provides very useful information on how to plan, shoot, edit and compress your documentary ready for uploading.

Unlike YouTube, FourDocs does not accept any old dross and each submission will go through a vetting process to ensure that it's relevant to the site content and that you've obtained the necessary permissions. Quite where

FourDocs will end up I'm not sure, but whilst we are in a world where people do not expect to pay to watch this kind of content then the only obvious financial model is that they will be selling advertising on the back of your content. If this develops along the lines of YouTube (who will be sharing advertising revenue with contributors) only time will tell.

So why are all these sites free – not only to watch, but to upload your content? That's a fair question to ask as they must cost literally millions to set up and host. There are two answers to this. First reason is that, like YouTube, there's a lot at stake for those who are first to develop content websites which end up with huge audiences and the obvious potential to sell these on. The two guys who started YouTube are a \$1bn example of this. The second answer is that these types of websites are tipped to be the future of TV – or what is referred to as IPTV (Internet Protocol Television).

The TV sitting in the corner of your front room, used in combination with items such as Sony's PlayStation 3, is already able to access all this content in much the same way as you access it now using a computer. You'll note that the likes of YouTube include the means to personalise your own channels or indeed set up your own channels with your own content. So, in the future you'll be able to switch on your own personal choice of TV of virtually unlimited content, share your holiday videos with family and friends (or the whole world if you so choose), create content for others and syndicate these across the globe – and ultimately upload content on a pay-per-view basis.

With so much free content on the internet, how realistic is it to expect to generate income from your content? That's another good question – to which there are a couple of good answers. Firstly, channel and individual content advertising or sponsorship is seen as means of generating the income needed to continue to create original content. With so many choices this is going to be a difficult call as the more content there is the thinner any advertising budget will be spread. With literally millions of hours of content up there it's going to be difficult to attract sufficient audiences to appeal to advertisers unless you are aiming at a very targeted and specialised audience. If you can set up a channel on one of these open-to-all IPTV networks (I particularly like the format on www.veoh.com) then you have a far better chance.

The second way to generate income is to serve your content on a pay-per-view basis. Again, www.veoh.com has a pretty good model for doing this. This entails updating your account to VeohPro – which is currently free. In addition you will need a PayPal account to accept payments from viewers. As

well as being able to provide content on a pay-per-view basis, VeohPro offers you additional features such as higher-resolution encoding of your content, the ability to syndicate your content across other sites (such as YouTube, Google Video and MySpace Video) and automatic transcoding to other formats so they can be viewed on devices such as iPods.

Regardless of whether you are going to follow the advertising model or the pay-per-view model (or both), the old adage will be true - 'Content is King'! If you turn out any old rubbish you are unlikely to attract a great audience and sponsors are unlikely to want to associate themselves with you. Some advertising world pundits are saying this about YouTube and doubting that serious advertisers will want to associate themselves with some of the dross that can be found there. Only time will tell – but it's a sure thing that if you can create compelling, well produced content you stand a better chance of making money whichever of these models you follow.

You could of course bypass external websites and set up your own site. The requirements for this will depend on what you are trying to achieve and the possible audience volume. Hosting the content on a basic HTML type server might be fine for low-volume, low-quality content (say, a site which just includes your showreels). However, if you are expecting high concurrent volume (hundreds of users wanting to view the same content at the same time) then you might well need to host the content on a special media server.

If you are going down the latter route then your choice of server will be governed by the type of files your media is encoded to. For instance, if you are going to encode to Flash Video then it should really be hosted on a Flash Server – which can also offer additional advantages of deterring viewers from copying your content (DRM – Digital Rights Management) as opposed to watching a one-off stream. Having said this, the moment one person devises a way of stopping online content from being copied there's another bright spark waiting to crack the copy protection. Even in some quarters of our own industry, copyright theft is seen as a 'soft' crime so what chance do we have of protecting our media assets in the big bad world! Accepting this will enable you to adopt a more realistic prediction of any income you may make.

OK, so you've got some cracking content – and preferably an endless supply of it - so you can build a channel. You've got sponsors falling over themselves wanting to associate themselves with your channel brand and viewers who are so into what you make programmes about that they are willing to pay for the privilege of watching it. How can you make even more money from your content? This really is thinking outside of the box, but once you have an audience who have bought into your brand why not sell them

other things too? For instance, if you are making documentaries about deep sea diving, what about selling diving holidays too, or diving apparatus – or just simple merchandising such as tee shirts and mugs? This might sound a little odd, but it's exactly what BIG brands do. When you go and buy a Harley Davidson motorcycle you can also buy a special pair of Harley Davidson sunglasses (I think they are about £130!!). Harley Davidson is certainly not the first manufacturer that you would think of when considering buying sunglasses, but if you are 'into' the brand it all starts to make sense.

Obviously some content subjects will not lend themselves to this concept but there are many, many more that will. It needn't mean setting up a huge retail facility either as you could tie up a deal with an existing retailer who simply pays you commissions on sales derived through your channel. It's like sponsorship or advertising – but you've an ongoing interest in driving sales through your site. It might even influence further content geared towards making more sales. However, never lose sight of that old adage – Content is King!

Hopefully this brief introduction will have opened up a few eyes as to where income from your online content can be derived. It's not straight forward by any means and in reality we are not quite there yet - but its coming. The technology is changing so fast that by the time you read this book we'll probably be much further down the online content path.

Videography Marketing & Promoting

I'm sure many of you, like me, will be confused with the concept of Marketing. Probably the best description which has helped me get my head round it is "creating the desire to purchase". However – even that's a bit fluffy! But then again – marketing is a "fluffy" thing, and if there was a universally accepted description and explanation of marketing – or should I say, 'great marketing' – then we'd all be brilliant at it and there would be no need for me to write this chapter.

The bottom line is that there is not one marketing method or activity which will suit all businesses all of the time. It's an activity or state of mind which should be at the very heart of your business. Sure – craft skills, the ability to make profit, a legal mind, technical know-how are all important – but unless you know how to package these and present them to a market then you are pretty much wasting your time.

A common maxim is that there are four P's of marketing – namely Product, Place, Price and Promotion. First of all you'll need to create the right 'Product'. Then you'll need to know where to 'Place' that product to make it available to your market. You'll also need to know what 'Price' your product will need to be to attract your market – and finally 'Promoting' it in a way which your market can relate to. However – great marketing is about thinking how every activity you do within your business can augment the four core P's. This includes, and is not limited to, the way you answer the phone, produce invoices, your dress code whilst at work or when meeting clients, your efficiency and professionalism in dealing with customer complaints – essentially every aspect of your business can provide you with the opportunity to create a desire in your customers to purchase from you and to recommend others to do the same.

What is probably more useful, and where this chapter will concentrate, is specific marketing and promotional activities. These are the things that you can and should do to actively market your videography business. But before you embark on any of these you will need to get the first of the four P's right in your mind. There is little point in promoting something to a market if it's not what they want, at the price they are willing and able to spend. Your definitive marketing goal is to match your services to the customers who need and want them.

A common thing I hear from videographers with established businesses is that they experience fall off of business after a few years. This can be due to a number of factors – such as increased competition, or cheaper

alternatives, or dare I say it, their product or service is getting worse. But the most common cause will be that they have failed to keep up with their marketing and promotion.

This is understandable as you can fall into a false sense of security when your order book is full and you are struggling to keep up with the work you have. The last thing on your mind at that stage is trying to generate more business. But videography work is like that. It will generally be a case of feast or famine so you must always make a conscious effort to build this into your daily working pattern. The only reason that you are rushed off your feet now is that previous efforts in marketing your business have paid off. Failing to keep up with this will almost certainly result in idle times.

Whilst marketing is an important activity for any business, it's also a key element in making your business more profitable. Get your marketing right and you can more easily attract work of higher financial reward – or generate volume business to return the profits you desire.

Whilst there will always be some activities that will work better than others, or those that are easier to recognise as being successful, the best approach is to develop a mixture of activities. There are three easy steps to follow in creating a winning marketing mix.

Step 1 – Do not rely on just one or two marketing activities. There are literally hundreds of activities you can use (my top 12 are featured later in this chapter) and you should be prepared to try them all.

Step 2 – Do not believe you can create the perfect mix straight away. The secret is to approach your marketing in an experimental way. Try lots of different activities – but most importantly measure their success. Once you have established four activities that actually work you are well on your way to achieving a successful mix. These are what I refer to as ‘Marketing Pillars’. Like most structures, having at least four pillars ensures stability.

Step 3 – Even if you find four activities that really work keep on trying new ideas out. Times change, and so do successful methods of marketing. A really successful marketing mix will have many pillars – maybe the 12 mentioned later in this chapter. The more you have the less likely you will find yourself in times of business drought.

Before we start on some of the marketing ideas that will help you to grow your business you need to set in place the means to measure the

response. This is simple really, but does require some discipline. Essentially, you need to know where every part of your income comes from.

Probably the simplest form of recording and measuring is to create a spreadsheet or database for each job. In that record where the client found you and monitor the results from this on a monthly basis as part of your marketing appraisal. I appreciate that this can be difficult in a one-man business but you still need to go through the motions to help you understand what measures are working.

You will often find that the enquiry is a result of more than one activity. For instance, if you get a job as a result of a referral from a previous client you need to be able to track back and see how the original client found you – and then look at any additional marketing activities you introduced with them (see ‘Marketing Pillar 8 – Customer Referrals’) to see if these were responsible for the new enquiry.

Sometimes it’s worth seeing if clients will spend a little more time with you in analysing how they found you. It would not be unusual for a client to respond to the question, “How did you find us?” with the first thing that comes into their head. Further investigation might discover that not only did they see your advert in the phone directory but they also walked past your stand at an exhibition, saw your listing in a Google search but never visited your site – and also that their next door neighbour’s second cousin had their cine films transferred by you. Quite often one marketing activity will only work because of another.

Measuring the success of activities not only helps you to save money on ineffective activities but it will also inspire you to try others and indeed invent some of your own.

Marketing Pillar 1 - Customer Care & General Professionalism

One of the first things to get right in your head is that the customer is King. Treat them like this and customer care will be one of your strongest marketing activities. Even when you feel put out by your customer’s demands always treat them with the dignity and professionalism that you appreciate receiving from others.

A business that gets no customer complaints is less able to leave their customers with a good impression. This might sound daft, but think of the last time you had a complaint about a service or product and the company handled your complaint in a professional way and delivered an acceptable outcome. Even in that difficult situation they managed to impress you and you are probably more likely to remember them for all the right reasons.

I'm not suggesting that you should try and generate complaints, but be prepared for them and make sure you come out smelling of roses. I personally find that simple things like companies promptly returning my calls or emails goes a long way to building my confidence – especially when it's in relation to a complaint.

Also make sure that all of your business communication is neat and tidy – and concentrate on the very basic stuff like spelling customers' names correctly. These are things which customers will expect so any shortfalls will have a negative impact on marketing your business.

This brings me neatly on to one of my biggest grumbles and something which there is no excuse for getting wrong these days – and that's adopting a professional telephone practice and manner. I appreciate that sometimes answer machines have to be used, especially in smaller businesses. What I cannot understand is why some businesses in our sector feel that it's OK to let their kids answer their business telephone or have their phone in a place where you can hear their kids yelling their heads off in the background. Equally irritating is when the phone is left unanswered, or there's a telephone message which is obviously not geared to the business.

Finally, do things when you say you are going to do them. Make it easy on yourself by not setting deadlines you can't achieve. Telling your customer that you will have their project completed when they want it when you know full well that you can't possibly achieve this is short-term appeasement. Having to go back to them with news of delays is never a great marketing tool.

Always think and act professionally, and the next time a business impresses you with their professionalism try to analyse exactly what it was that impressed you and adopt that within your business.

Marketing Pillar 2 - Website

Quite simply – if you do not have a website, or have one which is stale and unattractive to your target market – then you are failing to achieve your potential. I really can't put this point over strongly enough – and you'll find more detailed information in the chapter dedicated to them later in this book. Websites are the leading means of communicating with your market. They present so many opportunities for videographers operating in the three main markets of wedding, corporate and SIV videography.

Wedding clients, generally being young and totally familiar with the technology, will expect you to have a website and will understand how to find you through search engines. Corporate clients, who once used to find you

through the telephone directory, will use the Internet in the same way – as a directory of services. The SIV producers are not only provided with a shop window for their wares but also the means for clients to sample, order titles online or watch the content there and then on a Pay-per-View basis.

There really is no excuse. If you do not have a website or you have a poor one and your business is suffering - this will be the main reason. But, it doesn't stop at having a great website. You need to use every trick in the book to ensure that your target market can not only find it but more precisely find it hard to avoid! You must ensure that your website address is prominent on everything you produce - letterheads, printed adverts, posters or leaflets, business cards and programme title sequences. You really must shout about it at every opportunity.

Marketing Pillar 3 – Traditional Print Advertising

50% of your advertising will work. The only trouble is you will rarely know which 50% it is. That's often because one advert will be seen but not responded to and then another will appear and act as the trigger for the customer to call. I guess what I'm saying here is that advertising, if designed and placed right, is a valuable part of your marketing mix. But it's still important to measure them because some titles you advertising in are going to be a waste of time.

As advertising tends to be an expensive marketing activity your expectations are going to be high and this is probably why advertising gets such a bad wrap. To overcome this never spend more on an advertising campaign than you can afford to lose. Always opt for a regular smaller advert as opposed to spending your entire budget on one big splash.

As for design, this should be mainly influenced by the target market you are trying to appeal to. Whilst text-only adverts can work you should try to include some eye-candy or graphic design to help enforce your message. As someone is flicking through the magazine you will need something to attract their attention – whether this is a headline or a relevant picture. Look at successful adverts by leading brands and you can then deconstruct the elements to see what it is that catches your eye.

Your advert should also always include what is referred to as a “Call to Action”. This is simply an instruction to the reader as to what you think they need to do next – ‘Call us now on XXX’, ‘Visit our website at XXX’ or ‘Come and see us on stand XXX at the exhibition’. It sounds obvious – but sometimes people need these subtle hints in order for them to respond in the way you want them to.

Marketing Pillar 4 – Direct Mailing

Within this I'm going to include brochures, printed flyers and leaflets, emails and letters of introduction. All of these are useful marketing activities that will reap rewards if designed and executed correctly.

One of the first things you will need is a database of customers to send your material to. These can either be built or bought. By 'built' I mean those customer contact details that you will gather over time or by specific activities. By 'bought' I mean off the shelf from companies who supply the data such as telephone directories or other industry-specific mailing house companies.

Like advertising, think of direct mailing as something that you should do on a regular basis. A one-off direct mailing campaign sent to 10,000 customers will not be as effective as ten mail shots to the same 1,000 customers. A good example of this is business stationery companies – who must send out literally millions of their catalogues each month. However, you'll note that they send these out month after month. It's a numbers game, but not so much as to volume of recipients but how many times they will have to hit you before you respond. It must work as they keep on doing it.

The secret is to start small or in volumes that you can manage with your available resources. This could be something that you rope the family in to help you with – maybe to justify the pocket money. Don't waste money on first class stamps but don't skimp on the actual production of the material you are sending out. Remember, this might be the only impression these people will get of your business so home printing on toilet paper might just be a false economy.

As for design and layout, the first thing you need to do is try to get into the mind of the customers you are aiming at. Your design and copy content should be aimed at meeting their wants, needs, desires, hopes and dreams. Don't over complicate things and try to use conversational style language. Most of all think "benefits", not "features". Don't be tempted to say, 'Our camera produces over 1,080 lines of resolution'. As impressive as that might be your customers would rather hear how you are going to provide them with, 'stunning picture quality'. And never forget to use the word 'You'. This will help you to remember that you are trying to have a personal conversation with that person.

Like advertising design there is a classic format to follow – referred to as AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire and Action). Your headline should grab their attention, which should be followed by something of interest to your target market. You then need to home in on their desires for your service or product and finally, make it clear what action they need to take (call, visit,

post etc).

The only area of work where direct mailing is going to be hard to achieve new business is wedding videography where ready-made databases of potential clients are hard to come by. However, there are some sources you can check out such as buying or renting the list of attendees to wedding exhibitions. These will be available!

Marketing Pillar 5 – Articles & Press Releases

The same AIDA rules apply to creating releases or articles for relevant press or websites. You will find it a struggle to get them to publish everything you supply but all I can say is that persistence and bribery works. This might mean that you have to occasionally advertise with the magazine or website in question but at least you'll be getting at least twice the exposure. Some magazines and websites also accept advertorial which can be a very effective way of getting your message across.

To increase the chances of your copy being published always include pictures. Magazine editors are always hungry for artwork so one or two less to find makes it an easier decision for them to make.

And again, think little and often and never lose sight of the target audience you are aiming at. If you fail to get a story printed one month, change it a little and re-send it. This might seem a little crude but there will be times when even the most well respected newspaper or magazine is hunting for a story or page filler. Sometimes I'm astounded at what I read and hear as being news!

Don't limit yourself to print and website media. You might find that your local radio station would be keen to give a little help to a local business especially if you can come up with a story with a human or creative angle to it.

If you struggle to come up with regular press releases you might want to approach your local newspaper to see if they would like a regular column on tips on how to get the most out of your camcorder – on the understanding that you always manage to get your name and website address on each article.

Marketing Pillar 6 – Alliances

Customers will feel at ease in dealing with you and your terms and conditions of employment if you have been recommended by someone they know or have dealt with. Time spent in building alliances with other service providers in your market is time well spent. Even if you have to offer some form of cash incentive it will probably result in being one of the most cost effective means of promotion you use.

But don't just concentrate on building alliances with non-competitive service providers. You should be in contact and working well with other videographers in your home market or region. There will be a time when you get enquiries on dates that you are already booked or for projects which you cannot cope with on your own. Having someone else to either pull in or pass the work to will hopefully payback in the longer term. This is one area where membership of an association like the IOV will work really well – with members cooperating not only locally but across the entire organisation. If it isn't already, networking should play a major role in your marketing activities.

Marketing Pillar 7 – Exhibitions

Exhibitions, whilst relatively expensive, are great for a number of reasons. Firstly, they provide you with the opportunity to sell yourself face-to-face. People buy from people so exhibitions provide you with the right environment to achieve actual sales. Remember, in general those who attend exhibitions are pre-qualified customers. As long as you have picked the right event then everyone who comes through that door is a potential customer.

Think about how you are going to present yourself and your stand layout. Don't create a cave which will bar people from entering. Always look approachable and friendly but don't be forceful. No one enjoys a hard sales person – but then again people like to think you are approachable so a fine balance has to be maintained. And don't forget to talk to your fellow exhibitors as they may well end up being businesses that you form an alliance with.

Exhibitions also provide you with the opportunity to distribute other marketing materials and gather data on potential customers. Go prepared to talk to people, have something to hand out to them and the means to take down their contact details. And don't just file that data away when you are finished at the exhibition – use it!

The other great thing about exhibitions is that they are pretty easy to measure as far as success is concerned. Unless you are selling a very complicated service which requires lots of consultation before a sale is made you should be able to gauge whether it was a success or not the moment the doors close.

Marketing Pillar 8 – Customer Referrals

Without doubt the best kind of business to get is that from recommendation from a previous client. This is intrinsically linked to Marketing Pillar 1. Regardless of how good a product you provide, or how cheap you can provide

it, if you do not get the customer care part of your business right you are unlikely to get further work from referrals.

It goes well beyond providing a great service and a well priced product. There are activities you can do to squeeze every last opportunity out of your existing and previous clients. For instance, you might have sold customer 'A' your wedding video services but they are also quite likely to be a customer for your cine-to-video service. If not them, then they will almost certainly have someone within their family or circle of friends who is. However, the chances are they have no idea that you do provide these services and any other consumer-based services.

The opportunities expand even further with corporate or business-based clients. The company who commissions you to produce their promotional video might not appreciate that you can also provide duplication services, standards transfers or even camcorder hire for when they carry out internal training sessions. Previous clients, or should I say satisfied clients, do not have the major obstacle that you'll face with a new client – and that's trust. You've already proved your trustworthiness and there will be a level of loyalty that you can tap into.

There would be nothing wrong in offering incentives to previous clients who recommend you. Something along the lines of, 'Introduce a wedding video client to us before 1st Jan 2008 and receive a £50 Marks & Spencer voucher'. A £50 fee for getting a £1,000 job is not out of the question. You'll obviously need to qualify the terms to limit your liability but this kind of activity has great potential as a cost effective marketing tool.

Marketing Pillar 9 – Competitions

Videography is a pretty specialised so offering your service as part of a competition is going to attract only those who can make use of your services. This is the basis of all marketing competitions, in that whilst you will have to give away your services to one lucky winner you should gain a database of potential customers from the remaining entrants.

This kind of activity can be used in conjunction with Pillar 5 – where you can give a local newspaper an exclusive competition offer for their readers in exchange for publishing your press release or simply news of the competition. Likewise, it can be a great way to gather data whilst you are at an exhibition – 'drop your business card in our box and win a 5-minute corporate video'. Only those who are interested in commissioning a corporate video will enter (mostly!).

You can offer further incentives to the unlucky entrants when you tell

them the bad news, ‘Sorry, but on this occasion you did not win the free corporate video, but we are happy to offer you 100 free copies on any corporate video you commission in the next 12-months’. It’s also a good idea to tell them who won, and use that story to promote your services further, ‘ABC Products were the lucky winners, who have commissioned a video that will double their turnover in the next 12-months’.

Marketing Pillar 10 – Market Surveys

Whilst customer surveys have the additional value of providing you with data about your market, they also present you with the opportunity of promoting your business and developing your services. Even though they can be a pain in the rear to enter, if coupled with an incentive like those in Pillar 9 you will find that potential clients are willing to make the effort.

Make sure that you keep the questions simple – and aimed at the information you are trying to obtain. This might be something as simple as gauging feedback on your pricing structure, or finding out what publications potential clients read so you can place adverts more effectively or even what additional services clients want.

There are many good guides and examples of surveys online – and probably the cheapest and easiest way to run them is via your website. Check out SurveyMonkey.com where you can set up your own 100-response survey free.

Marketing Pillar 11 – Promotional Video / Podcast / Download

This one is really a no-brainer! If you are a video production company then you really should be using video to promote yourself. This is especially true for those involved in corporate video as one day you’ll be put on the spot by a client who you are trying to sell a promotional video commission to and they’ll ask, ‘If video is so good at promoting business, why haven’t you got one?’

I’m not talking about a showreel of previous work here – I’m talking about a specific video explaining the benefits of using your company. I think in the past 20-years I’ve seen no more than a handful of video production company promotional videos. I think I’ve seen only one promotional video produced for a wedding videographer. Now that’s either saying that this idea would not work or that videographers are generally the worst example of the ‘Cobbler and his shoes’ scenario. I happen to believe it’s the latter.

Either way, a good promotional video will help you in a number of the other Marketing Pillar activities. It’s now very easy to include video on your

website and let's face it a videographer without video on their website simply must be missing a trick. They can also be a great aid in making your exhibition stand look interesting and should help to pre-qualify those that approach your stand. With DVD replication so cheap now there's no reason why a DVD could not be included or indeed form the major part of your direct mailing campaigns.

Marketing Pillar 12 – You!

Finally, and most importantly, we come to you. In most instances videography is a one-man business. People buy from people so you need to invest in your interpersonal skills and make sure that you use these at every opportunity. You must be enthusiastic about the craft, your clients and your business – and don't be shy of telling everyone what you do and what you can do for them.

As great marketing is all about measurement, you need to first look at activities you are doing right now and start to measure their success. Look at your competition, see what they are doing and copy the things you like (there's no original ideas left you know!). However, always consider differentiation and how you can add an edge. What is your USP (Unique Selling Point)?

Sometimes differentiation is simply about price and whilst everyone wants value for money that does not always equate to paying the lowest price. Back in the Nineteenth century, passengers embarking on a slow boat to China were offered more expensive cabins on the cooler side of the ship (supposedly so because of the sun). These tickets were sold as Port Out Starboard Home – and hence the word POSH! It wasn't so much that they got cooler cabins but the knowledge that others would know they paid more for their tickets. This is a phenomenon which continues today in the form of which deck your cabin is on a cruise liner.

Once you have made the key decisions about Product, Place, Price and Promotion you have effectively developed a marketing strategy. Your Marketing Plan will simply consist of writing down the activities (Marketing Pillars) and stating when you are going to do them. Don't set yourself unachievable targets. You can't expect establish all twelve marketing pillars in the first week so pace yourself. Think about how you can build these activities into your daily schedule and stick to it.

Marketing Plans normally range from 6-months to 5 years and I would suggest that a realistic plan for a videographer could be achieved in 12-months (one Pillar each month). At this point you will be able to gain an accurate

measurement of the overall plan. However, you must review your activities on a regular basis and tweak them if they are not working.

As a final comment about marketing and promotion, you can have all the enthusiasm and great ideas in the world, but unless you get on with the nitty gritty of starting and completing the tasks then this will all go to waste. Breaking down the task into a step-by-step plan will make the journey that much easier.

Developing a Website

The importance of developing an effective and easy to find website for your videography business cannot be overstated. Yet videographers in general have been slow to realise the potential of websites in promoting and selling their services. Many of them do have a website, but rarely update it or invest in professional help in getting one designed. So what does this suggest? Probably a number of things... First is that there is still a fair proportion of videographers out there who are not yet convinced of the importance of having a website to promote their business. Secondly, that some of those that do have a website think that that is good enough – despite the fact that a drab and dreary website might do them more harm than good. And thirdly, and in relation to the second point, videographers are generally poor marketers.

Those that have seen the light, and who invest both time and money on their website presence are, in general, the more successful videographers. This doesn't always correlate but there seems to be a direct relation between having a smart, functional and visible website and running a successful video business. The question is what comes first – a decent website or a business of sufficient volume that can sustain one? And that's simple to answer. Today, you simply must have a website (or at least some form of website presence) if you want to take every opportunity to build your business. Failure to buy into this concept will seriously hinder your chances of success.

The story of the World Wide Web throws up some amazing facts and figures. Even though it's a relatively new phenomenon (having been first conceived in 1990 by Sir Timothy Berners-Lee), if you come across someone who claimed they knew nothing about it you'd rightly assume they were either slightly mad or had been in a deep coma for the past 17-years. In this very short time the web has become entrenched in our private, public and commercial lives. It continues to twist and evolve - and according to a recent survey by Netcraft.com there are now over 100 million unique websites in the world (that's entire sites – not web pages, of which there are many millions more!).

There are now well over a billion website users worldwide – many of which are now used to buying and finding services and products on the Internet. This figure is rising by around 10% each year. Probably more significant is the type of people who are naturally using the web to search. Whilst this is a generalisation, the younger the age group of your potential market the greater importance having a website to market to them will be. The wedding video market is an excellent example where most customers will

be in their late teens early twenties. These people have grown up with the web so you need to communicate with them on a level and a medium they understand.

In a recent poll on the IOV's website more than half of the respondents reported that more than 20% of new business comes through their website. These should be convincing figures to you. If these people are gaining new business through their sites why aren't the rest of them? Again, there are going to be a variety of answers to this question, including the obvious one - that they don't have a website! Slightly more complicated answers include:

- 1) You do have a website but it doesn't attract any visitors;
- 2) You do have visitors but it still doesn't generate any enquiries, and;
- 3) It does generate enquiries but these do not convert into business.

Let us look into these a little closer.

So, you've spent the kid's inheritance on getting a website designed and hosted but the only traffic you get is you and the occasional friend or relative. I'd like to make these people feel a little better about this – they are not the only one! Of the 100 million websites out there yours might be one of many which attract little attention. Simply plonking a website on the Internet will not result in hoards of people just itching to read all about you. You have to direct people to it at every opportunity.

Your website address should be included on every piece of business literature, programme title sequence, video sleeve and DVD face, vehicle and building livery (if you have either), adverts and directory listing. You should take every opportunity to tell your clients and potential market your website address. The more memorable your website name is, the easier it will be for them to remember. That sounds simple enough, but with more than 100 million website already up and running you'll find this quite a challenge. It doesn't mean finding a short and punchy name (as these will probably already be taken) – but something memorable or logical.

There are loads of facilities for checking the availability of website names but the one I use quite regularly is www.uk2.net.

Another way to drive traffic to your site is to pay for advertising on the search engines. Commonly referred to as Pay-per-Click, this essentially provides a quick means of getting your site visible to those who use search engines to look for products or services. The most widely used search engines are Yahoo, Google and MSN (which are ranked as the top three most visited

sites by Alexa.com) – and these all offer a means of paying for your site to appear within the ‘Sponsored’ search results which appear at the top (and sometimes down the side) of the results of a standard search.

These advertising solutions are ideal for small businesses. Not only can you tailor your own set of ‘search strings’ (words that potential customers will type into the search engine when they search), but you can also limit your spend in various ways. You can, for instance, set a monthly overall budget as well as a maximum rate per click for individual search strings. You can also assign a specific page within your site to specific search strings – so if your website has a page detailing your DVD duplication services you can direct customers straight to it from your sponsored link.

Rising up the standard search results is a more complicated subject, but the first step (which is completely free) is to register your website with all of the major search engines. You can, of course, dig around the websites of all three search engines looking for the page which allows you to do this (and they can be hidden very well) or you can use a website that has done some of this donkey work for you (such as www.webmasters-hq.com/add-url.php). Don’t be tempted to buy a software package or service that does this for you – it’s a free service!

The other step in rising up the search engines is called SEO (Search Engine Optimisation). This is a set of disciplines which will enable your site to be more easily found by those who you want to find it. It combines both technical measures (ensuring your website is search engine friendly) and practical measures (including gathering links from and to other websites).

In the early days of search engines they pretty much relied on referencing what’s called ‘Meta Elements’ which are found in the head section of the pages of your website. This data is not visible as part of the external design, but should include ‘keywords’ associated with the type of searches you want to be found under. You can see what other website use as keywords by viewing the ‘source’ of the website page (right-click and select ‘View Source’). However, this system was and is open to abuse, so search engines have adopted additional, more sophisticated algorithms for returning useful results to those searching the web. They do not disclose these methods, but the general rule is that you need to pay particular attention to the following four elements:

- (i) Keywords in the title tag
- (ii) Keywords in links pointing to the page

(iii) Keywords appearing in visible text

(iv) Link popularity of the page

Google in particular uses the number of sites that link back to your website as a means of ranking. This is why it's important to set up reciprocal links with other website owners. This form of back-scratching will benefit both websites, which is why you see specific 'links' pages on websites and it works particularly well when the two sites are operating in a similar (though not competitive) market. An example would be that a wedding videographer's website includes links with a florist's website – and vice versa.

The IOV's website is highly ranked in all three major search engines – especially under the search string of 'Videography'. It's normally number 1 or 2 in Google and MSN – and within the top 5 or 6 in Yahoo. Whilst our website design company (Novacaster) have done a lot to ensure the technical aspects of the site are right, over the years we have also built up a lot of links coming back to the IOV site (anything up to 400 sites at any one time).

The wonderful thing about the web is that it contains many websites and points of reference which provide tips and tricks on how to rise up in the search engines. Some are very technical and some are written in a language we can all understand. Just type in 'Search Engine Optimisation' in any one of the major search engines and you'll find these – but be cautious of any site that asks for money or who promises the world. In each instance, it will require some work on your behalf, but once completed you should see a marked improvement in your site rankings.

Let's assume you are highly visible in the search engines but you are still not actually gaining any enquiries from your website. This will undoubtedly be due to the message on your site. If you are a general practice videographer, providing all three main production types, it is very difficult to come up with a website design that will give an equally comforting experience to all three types of customer. A wedding video client is not going to be convinced by a website which is designed to appeal to a corporate video client – and vice versa.

Probably the most effective solution is to set up separate websites for each area of your businesses – designed specifically to appeal to that market sector. Remember my earlier generalisation; a wedding video client is going to be young, probably female and more in-tune to modern website design and features than your average wedding videographer! Once you have that pen-picture in your head, think of the average corporate video client. Will they

share the same social profile as your average bride? Probably not – so you should develop your sites to meet their expectations.

These separate websites can include links to each other (remember the Google method of ranking!) whilst maintaining separate identities. This isn't a particularly expensive option other than the fact that you'll need to invest time in developing and maintaining each site.

Other means of making the most of the traffic hitting your site is to include the means of capturing the details of visitors. You could, for instance, have a main page where visitors need to register in order to access the site. The negative side of this will be that it may put off a fair proportion of visitors. An alternative is to have your showreels within a section which requires registration.

A softer approach would be to offer a level of registered access which comes with an incentive – such as entry into a regular prize draw. This sounds like an expensive way to gather details but the cost of a bottle of Champagne each month to give away to any 'lucky bride' that is willing to offer their contact details (including date of wedding) may well prove to be a very cost effective marketing method. You might even find that issuing a press release to your local paper about this offer might be newsworthy for them and ultimately raise the profile of your website and business. All data gathered by this activity is highly valuable (as described in the Marketing & Promotion chapter) and can be used in your other marketing activities such as distributing printed brochures or showreels.

Let's take the scenario one step further where you are gaining traffic and enquiries from your website but failing to convert these into actual business. Of all the scenarios this will be the easiest to understand but the most difficult to accept. Essentially, your sales process or presentation is wrong or not in line with your customer's expectations.

One of the grumbles I hear most often from videographers is that they receive enquiries from customers, send out showreels and information and that's the last they ever hear from them. They normally describe these people as 'time-wasters'. It's never an easy thing to say, but the truth is there is only one person wasting their time and that's the videographer! If you find that your current sales technique is not working, why keep on doing the same thing? The first sign of madness is doing the same thing again and again, expecting things to change!

A simple golden rule – don't send out showreels on a 'fire-and-forget' basis. Whilst a showreel can demonstrate how skilled and creative you are it will never actually sell your services. People buy from people, especially in a

creative industry such as videography. It's far better to make an appointment with the customer (either at your place or theirs) and present your showreel. This will give you the opportunity to ask questions, engage the customer and sell yourself.

If there are great distances involved there will obviously be times where you will need to send them a showreel or point them towards an online version on your website. But, you must always follow these up with a phone call. Even if the customer declines your services you can at least take the opportunity to find out why. Another good reason to make personal appointments is that it will filter out competitors just being nosy.

There are lots more things to be discovered about the importance of having an effective, visible and up to date website. If it's not already, it should become the single most important means of promoting your services. The perfect website will work for you whilst you are asleep.

Your website is not something you can just put in place and then forget. You need to monitor its success continually – not only in terms of how much traffic it attracts but also in terms of what real business results from those who find you this way. Styles and website facilities change day to day so you need to keep an eye on whether your site remains in tune with your potential market. Spend some time checking out your competitors' websites and make an honest appraisal – on this first impression, would you rather use them than you? If the answer is 'them' – do something about it!

Finally, keep an eye on the future as in the web-world things change extremely rapidly. No doubt at some point in the future your programmes will be distributed through your website. You'll probably not be making copies of DVDs but providing access to your creations online. And when we are in this world your website will become an even greater part to your business and probably the main means by which you'll earn your living. You might like to read the Online Content chapter again!

Copyright, Trade Marks and Protecting your Brand

OK, so you've established a fantastic business for yourself, including a well-defined brand image, website and range of products and services. What measures can you take to protect these?

This chapter will deal with three distinct areas - Copyright (or Intellectual Property), Trade Marks and Business Identities. Copyright, whilst a relatively complex subject is relatively easy to establish. Trade Marks are the opposite, in that it's a relatively simple subject but a little more complex and expensive to establish. Business Identity or uniqueness is the worst of both. As a general bit of guidance though - if you are in any doubt don't take my word for it - take proper legal advice.

I'm going to try to give you an understanding of each of the above so that when you are faced with a situation where you think your rights or property is being abused you'll know what to shout!

Before we move on to the means and measures of protecting these assets, let's have a quick look at why someone would want to steal them or imitate you. Whilst it can be frustrating when you believe that someone is abusing your creations, designs or property the first thing to do is calm down! Analyse whether it's a malicious attempt to steal something from you, someone trying to emulate your success or just a pure coincidence.

We all want to be recognised as being successful and there's no better quarter for this to come from than your competitors. They are really saying, 'you're doing better than us.' I appreciate the fact that you've created a winning formula through toil and trouble and it makes it all that more frustrating when someone is clearly imitating you - but take a little comfort from this experience too. They want to be you!

This could, of course, all be a coincidence. The IOV quite often get calls from videographers asking whether someone else is using the same company name they want to use. To come up with something truly original, which your market is going to be able to relate to, is not that easy.

How you deal with these situations from here on will depend on how you have protected yourself - if indeed you could have. If someone is using your logo and company name, are these registered Trade Marks or are there grounds to take out a private prosecution on the grounds of "Passing Off"? Is it a case that they have completely lifted your website design or video material? The nature of the abuse (and indeed if one exists) and your course of action will depend on what you have done to protect yourself.

Copyright in an artistic work (including video programmes, websites, graphics, music, etc.) belongs to the Author – and in the case of videography this will normally be the person who actually took the shot. However, there might be circumstances where this might not be the case. It might be the person who chose the angle, the type of shot used, the exposure and settings of the camera... but not actually the person who pressed the record button. As artistic works are quite often collaborative efforts, if you want to ensure that you are the sole owner of the copyright, you must agree these terms with everyone involved in the production chain.

There is no formal register or registration process for copyright in Europe (they do have a voluntary scheme in the US), but when published the works must be clearly marked with the copyright symbol ©, the date of creation and the owner of the works. It can become more complicated than this - especially when someone has reworked something to the extent that it's no longer in the ownership of the original artist - but that's one of those situations where it will be argued in court (a very expensive solution).

Assuming you've found someone using your work (be it video or website or... whatever), there's an assumption that, as this is technically a theft, you could pop along to your local police station and report it. Wouldn't that be nice! No, you've got one of three choices. Either turn a blind eye, or get your pockets emptied by a solicitor - or take some simple steps yourself. The first choice is not professional, the second expensive and the third sounds like a lot of work. But is it really?

Unless you've discovered that someone is blatantly selling your latest SIV DVD and destroying your business (in which case you'll be best advised to dip into your pocket and set the legal dogs on them) you're main objective will be to stop them from doing so. In which case you'll first need to contact them and threaten them to the point that they stop. Instead of me going into the process of how to do this here - there's a fantastic guide on Lorelle's blog on the World Press website (<http://lorelle.wordpress.com/>). You'll find it under 'Most Popular' and its called 'What Do You Do When Someone Steals Your Content?' Its USA based but contains excellent guidance on the process.

Assuming you've established this killer business, with a killer brand identity - your logical course of action would be to formally register your 'TM'. Make no mistake, a trade mark is not a TM unless it's registered. The design of your logo might well be your copyright but it's not your TM until such times as you formally register it. According to the UK's IPO (Intellectual Property Office) - "A trade mark protects any sign or symbol that allows your customers to tell you apart from your competitors." TMs are not

just limited to logos - you can in fact register the company or product name, slogans, domain names, shapes, colours and sounds.

There are a few qualifying features that you will need to meet. Part of the process includes registering the mark under product or service categories so the first rule is that your mark must be distinctive for goods and services you are applying for. It should also not be similar or identical to earlier marks for the same or similar goods and services. The mark should also not be deceptive, or contrary to law or morality.

Assuming your trade mark does meet these requirements then you may apply. You can, of course, do this through a patent agent, but the process is quite painless. I know this as I've recently completed the application process and the people at the IPO were extremely helpful. At the time of writing this book, the cost of registering a UK TM was £200 (very reasonable) and includes one class of goods or services. Additional classes cost £50 each - so again not a King's ransom. This is renewable every 10-years.

The benefit of registering your TM is that it gives you exclusive rights to use it within the UK. You can of course register in other territories and there's some excellent information on this on the IPO site (www.ip.gov.uk). Once registered you can use the ® symbol alongside your TM to warn others against using it. Using this symbol for a trade mark that is not registered is an offence.

Essentially, misuse of your TM will allow you to more easily take legal action against those that use it without your permission. In the UK it also allows Trading Standards Officers and/or the Police to bring criminal charges against counterfeiters if they use your TM.

Another benefit of registering your TM is that it will be your registered property - which you can sell or licence others to use. This would really come into play if you were setting up a video production franchise, or developing a stream of SIV titles - or simply building a business to the point of selling it as a going concern. Having the TM would simply make the whole thing a lot more secure.

Like most people in this game you will have probably started small - most likely trading as a sole trader. It's only when things start to take off that you'll think, 'What if someone started to pass themselves off as me?' If you do not register your TM then you'll be relying on the common law action of 'Passing Off' (or "Palming Off" in the USA). You will need legal help in processing this so it's going to be an expensive process to establish that you own the trading identity and that you've suffered loss as a result of the passing off.

Passing off actions are notoriously expensive. You and your legal team will have to gather large amounts of evidence to persuade the court that customers associate the trade mark with you, and that the offending party's goods or services have been mistaken for yours. In the case of videography this is going to be a difficult thing to establish as you may well find that your argument gets down to the style by which you film and edit. The IPO website also suggests that unregistered trade marks might be limited to protection within a given region within the UK. This is particularly relevant to videographers who in most instances would find it difficult to prove a trading reputation throughout the UK or other countries.

There are measures you can take to protect yourself or at least build up evidence of ownership of your business assets. The simplest thing to do is keep records. When you advertise, keep a copy - likewise any press cuttings or public statements which include you and your business. When setting up a website and deciding on your URL address, think about registering the complete set of suffixes (.com / .co.uk / .ie / .net and another others that might fit). At this stage you'll also find out if there are other active businesses operating from the same or similar website addresses.

If you are trading as a Sole Trader, the next logical step will be to go Limited (subject to advice from your accountant). In the UK no two limited companies can have the same name - so that will be another piece of registered evidence of what you are and what you do. In fact, even if you have no intention of going limited its good practice to search the Companies House website to see if there is already someone trading as a limited company with your sole trader identity (www.companieshouse.gov.uk). Even a simple Google search will throw up potential conflicts.

Finally, it's worth pointing out that this chapter should be read from both perspectives - those that are trying to protect their trading identity and those that are trying to avoid infringement of other's. Reading it this way might save you thousands of pounds in developing something which others have already laid claim to. Applying thought to this now might just save you a lot of grief and expense down the line.

Your Exit Strategy

Like all good stories, the story of your videography business will need a beginning, middle and an end. Most of you will be at the beginning or in the middle of that story now, but the end is something that is rarely considered by those setting up a business – despite its inevitability. Most live in hope that one day they will be able to sell up and retire on the proceeds, but in reality that's not going to happen unless you plan for it. In this short chapter I'm going to examine the common conclusions to videography businesses.

Many of you will simply keep working right up until your last breath or until you are unable to continue. This might sound dramatic and the worst possible outcome, but to some of you it might be the most desirable conclusion. In the early part of this book I said that videography is an enjoyable way to earn a living and that to many outsiders it does not represent what they would call work. Sure, running any business it has its stresses and strains, and there are some activities that require some physical wellbeing, but generally speaking it's something that you can do at any stage of life. I also happen to believe that anything that keeps your brain active, as well as providing you with some physical demands, is a good thing. If you can earn money at it too that's got to be a positive thing.

There are many videographers who enter this business once they have reached retirement age and have the benefit of a company pension scheme or have taken early retirement. This is another indication that videography is something that you can do and enjoy right through your life. However, so that you don't leave a mess for those that you leave behind you will have to apply some thought as to what happens to existing clients, unfinished projects and any residual business that you leave behind.

Another common scenario is that videography businesses are left to simply fade away or gradually run down. This will obviously depend on you having an alternative income such as pensions and savings. It might well be that videography has only provided for a little extra cash and losing it would not have a great impact on your lifestyle. Of all the scenarios, this is the most common. If you have not made previous provisions to allow this you will need to build pension savings into your pricing structure. After all, its got to come from somewhere.

If your dream ending is that you will build the business to the point of selling it as a going concern and retire on the proceeds then you will have to build the business in a way that it becomes sellable. This might vary from outright sale, to selling parts of the business or assets off, through to selling

shares and retaining a silent interest in the business. These are all challenging by the very nature of the business.

A wedding videographer will have very little in the way of future bookings. You might well get to the point of having bookings two or three years in advance, but it is unlikely that this will have any great book value. This is also true of corporate video. There might well be some regular clients with contracts extending over a year or so, but these will rarely be something with great value or certainty.

Having said this, there are ways in which you can increase your chances of selling the business and reaching your goal. Probably the most important thing is to depersonalise the business. Do not be tempted to build a brand around yourself as a potential purchaser is unlikely to find this an attractive and safe investment. If the business is based around your personality and name the goodwill will end on your retirement from the business.

This is why choosing a trading name and identity is such an important stage of developing your business. Don't be tempted to use your name within the trading identity, as tempting as it may seem. Maybe an abbreviation would work, but its not going to help you in either building the business or if you finally decide to sell up. It is far better to develop a generic brand name, or maybe something with a location identity (e.g. Bristol Videography) as this could be easily transferred from proprietor to proprietor.

Naming your business in this way should also help you to establish distance between you the person and the business and services you provide. When you talk to clients use "We" as opposed to "I" – 'We provide a complete script to screen service'.

As mentioned in the Business Formation chapter, selling the business will be easier if you are trading as a limited company. Not only will it have a more established feel to it, but you will also have some more options open to you. Any existing contracts will be between your client and the business – and not you. This will give buyers additional confidence that you are not going to sell them the business and then continue to trade with your old clients.

With a limited company you also have the option to sell all or part of the shares. You could of course do this by way of a partnership agreement but a limited company shares offer is a lot clearer. You could for instance sell off part of the shares and retain a proportion to provide you with some residual value or even an income if the business can sustain it. Giving the new major shareholder first option on the sale of your own shares might also be an

attractive proposition. In fact there are quite a few variables which make forming a limited company, even in its late stage of development, a much more attractive proposition when it comes to selling the business on.

There will probably be a period where the business is transferred to its new owner and you will be retained for a certain period to ensure the smooth transition. You need to think about this as it might be as long as 12-months before you are fully detached. You will probably also have to agree to not set up business in competition with the new buyer for a given period after the sale – which is quite understandable.

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, your exit strategy is probably not uppermost in your mind at present. However, by starting your business with this in mind might well pay dividends later. Try to put yourself in the mind of a buyer, and think of the things that you would like to see in an off the shelf business. You would want a ready-made and established brand, a list of clients and contracts, proven and easy to adopt systems and procedures – and pretty much every piece of technology that will enable you to continue trading from day one. If you run your business with a weak or personalised brand image, do not maintain accurate and up to date client records, only have verbal agreements with your clients, run the business without formal structure or systems – and don't keep up to date with technology or at least keep it well maintained – let's face it, would you want to buy into it?

You'll note that I've not mentioned a healthy balance sheet as one would expect that this really goes without saying. However there is a great temptation, especially in relation to domestic work such as weddings, to do things on a cash-in-hand basis. Not only is this illegal (unless you declare it all), but it would take a foolish buyer to invest in a business which has apparently survived on undisclosed or unaccounted income.

Besides the equipment, and possibly business premises, there are other tangible assets you can build up in your business. The most valuable of which could be the images you have acquired on video. This is especially true of those who develop SIV titles. Not only will there often be a value in the copyright of the raw material, but you should also have a proven track record of sales and a database of customers who buy them. This is one of the strongest reasons why I believe that SIV production should be part of the makeup of a videography business. Not only does it present an opportunity for profits whilst you are in business but it will also represent a value should you ever decide to sell.

Whatever format or structure of your business, if you get to the point of wanting to sell it on there is great merit in placing this in the hands of

someone else. Whether you chose to do this through your accountant, your solicitor or a business transfer agency, the real value comes in placing a barrier between you and the buyer. There will no doubt be some negotiation, and whilst you might feel confident with this process it will get personal. You might well feel insulted by early offers, whereas your agency or representative should be able to shield you from this experience. It might cost you in the way of commission but you might also find their experience in negotiating a better deal pays for this. Of even greater importance, by handing this over to a third party you should be able to conceal the fact that your business is for sale up until the moment that your identity needs to be revealed. If you simply spread the word around this might have a negative impact on the business as it stands.

Whether you are selling yourself or through a third party, one of the first things you will have to consider is who the likely purchasers are. These will often be your competitors or even those who you employ. This is why it is important to maintain a good relationship with others in your industry. Not only would these people have an understanding of the nature of the business, but if you have done your job right and developed a strong business they will also see the value.

Your exit from the business will become more and more important as time goes by. Whichever door you choose, planning for that journey will make it so much easier.

Conclusion

I hope this book has served two purposes. Firstly I hope it has given you an insight into the business and provided some coaching on how to develop a videography business to a level that both supports your lifestyle and provides some residual value. I also hope that it's given you a reality check. We all need this from time to time – especially when our enthusiasm for something can overtake our logic. If there is one thing that will make your business a success it will be your enthusiasm to succeed. However this often needs to be tempered by the benefit of experience – wherever this comes from.

The route you are about to take, or are in the middle of, has the potential to provide you with fantastic rewards. I don't think I've ever met a successful professional videographer who has been unsatisfied with their lot. It's a great industry, mainly full of interesting and helpful people. Your fellow professionals, like you, will be creative people and I've always found them to be enjoyable company to keep.

Most of the work itself is incredibly rewarding and you'll be creating legacies by which you'll be remembered as the creator for many, many years to come. Whatever avenue of videography you pursue your work will motivate, impress, impart knowledge to, highlight emotions and generally entertain its audience. It's probably one of the few industries where you can make your customers cry and it's exactly what you were trying to achieve. I'm talking about wedding videos here, but it could equally be part of the aims and objectives of a corporate video.

You will never stop learning or being challenged. Apart from the fact that the technology continually changes and improves, the art or craft itself is such that styles change and you'll want to experiment with these and different techniques with an aim to generally improve the viewer's experience. You should always aim to make your last programme the best you've ever made. Keep to this ethos and the business and profit should naturally follow.

This book has highlighted the avenues of work that I know can support a successful business. But you must also understand that other opportunities will arise. When I first entered into the world of videography online content, or indeed the Internet itself, was not heard of. Today online delivery of content is probably the most important thing for any of the main business sectors in videography. Some day soon every company will want some form of video on their website. Some day soon you'll not even think of producing physical copies of your SIV titles – they will simply be purchasable from your website. And some day soon, in fact already, you will film a wedding and it

will be streamed direct from your camera to family members all round the world. These concepts are not pie in the sky and yet the Internet was only conceived in 1990 – so be very open minded about where the opportunities will arise in years to come.

I've purposely avoided too much talk about cameras and kit for good reason. The actual industry and craft has changed very little – we are still making moving images. That will never change and the advances in technology should simply make this process quicker, easier and cheaper. That's certainly what I've witnessed in my 20-odd years in the business. The progression from analogue to digital, from tape-to-tape editing to computer-based nonlinear editing, and more recently the move from standard definition to high definition are merely the progression of the tools for the same craft. And whilst you shouldn't ignore these advancements, your investment in them should be based on whether they actually help you to create better programmes and greater profit. Never forget that the greatest influence on the quality and value of your programmes will be the skill and creativity of those who make them.

OK, you've invested time and money in this book but you must continue to invest in yourself as your career continues. Read more books, go to seminars and conventions, invest in training, take qualifications, join a trade association (hopefully the IOV!) and most importantly never stop listening to others – even if it only cements in your mind that you are doing things the right way. The man who knows all the answers about videography has simply not been asked all the questions. It is an art form, and is therefore an open-ended learning process.

Above all, I hope you enjoy your journey in this industry and that it returns the rewards that you desire.

Acknowledgments

There are quite a few people that need to be thanked for their part in getting this book completed. First and uppermost is my loving and devoted wife Tiffany. To say that she is long suffering is an understatement. To give you some idea the final stages of the book were completed whilst we were on holiday where for much of the time she was abandoned in favour of my laptop. If it hadn't been for her, and the generosity and encouragement of her family, I would have never got into this industry which I love with a passion.

Coming a close second is my business partner, Martin Baker. Not only has Martin proof read and corrected most of the content of this book he has also acted as an anchor for some of my wilder ways of describing the craft. Not being a videographer himself (but a damn good business partner in our IOV related work) his input has been to make some of my ramblings make a little more sense to the uninitiated (I hope!).

I must also thank my late parents who supported me in the early part of my career. You will also need this type of support so make sure you take every opportunity to thank those around you as without their support you are likely to fail.

Within the industry itself there are too many people to mention individually as I've learned so much from so many of them. My involvement in the IOV has meant that I've had contact with literally thousands of videographers in all walks of the business. From the successful to the unsuccessful, from the knowledgeable to the inept - they have all added to this book in one form or another. A special thanks must go to all those that I have worked alongside in my role in the IOV - its Executive Committee, its late founder Geoff Belmont-Rixon and the IOV members themselves.