1.1 What is video production?

The differences between “video production” and “television production” have become increasingly blurred. Most video production is concerned with non-broadcast program making. Video productions are generally distributed via DVDs or online. Although video productions are generally made with a lower budget, it does not mean that few people see them. A simple tour of YouTube will show that millions of people are looking at video productions every day (Figure 1.1).

Television productions, on the other hand, are usually shown to a large public audience by broadcast or cable transmission, either “live” (during the performance) or “recorded” (carefully edited video recordings). Television transmissions are required to conform to closely controlled technical standards. However, television productions may be considered to be a type of video production once they are distributed in a nonbroadcast method (DVD, Internet, etc.).

With the high quality of today’s consumer and prosumer equipment, video productions can be made with equipment ranging from that meeting the most sophisticated professional broadcast standards to low-cost consumer items (Figure 1.2). There is no intrinsic reason though, why the screened end products should differ in quality, style, or effectiveness as far as the audience is concerned. Video programs range from ambitious presentations intended for mass distribution to economically budgeted programs designed for a specific audience. This book will help you, whatever the scale of your production.
FIGURE 1.1
YouTube is a collection of both high-budget and low-budget video productions that millions of viewers watch online. Note that the video shown has been seen by more than 3 million viewers.

FIGURE 1.2
Today’s high-quality consumer equipment allows professional results—if you understand how to use it effectively. (Photo courtesy of Vortex Media.)
1.2 The need for “know-how”

Video production appears deceptively simple. After all, the video camera gives us an immediate picture of the scene before us, and the microphone picks up the sound of the action. Most of us start by pointing our camera and microphone at the subject but find the results unsatisfying. Why? Is it the equipment or us? It may be a little of both. But the odds are, that we are the problem.

As you may have already discovered, there is no magic recipe for creating attractive and interesting programs. All successful production springs from a foundation of know-how:

1. Knowing how to handle the equipment properly and the effects of the various controls.
2. Knowing how to use the equipment effectively. Developing the skills underlying good camerawork and sound production.
3. Knowing how to convey ideas convincingly. Using the medium persuasively.
4. Knowing how to organize systematically. Applying practical planning, preparation, and production.

As you work through this book, the know-how you develop will soon become part of your regular approach to program production. Knowing what the equipment can do will enable you to select the right tools for the job and use them the right way. In the end, sloppy production reduces the effectiveness of a program.

1.3 It’s designed for you

Most production equipment has been designed for quick, uncomplicated handling. After all, it is there for one fundamental purpose—to enable users to communicate their ideas to an audience. Video equipment is as much a communication tool as a computer or a cell phone.

1.4 Learning basics

It is not important to know how every function of the equipment works, but it is important to know its capabilities in order to get reliable results. Even with the most sophisticated video and audio equipment, you need to answer only a handful of basic questions to use it successfully:

- What is the equipment for?
- What can it do?
- What are its limitations?
- Where are the controls and indicators (menus, buttons, etc.)?
- How and when should they be adjusted?
- When adjusted, what will the result be?
- Will problems occur if these controls are misused?
1.5 Remember the purpose
There is no shortcut to experience. As you handle equipment, you grow familiar with its use. But don’t let the latest trendy camera handling preoccupy you. Many new camera operators have tried to show how good they are by quick moves, fast zooms, and attention-getting composition—where an experienced camera operator would have avoided these distractions and held a steady shot, letting the subject work to the camera instead. Smooth accurate operation is important, but appropriateness is even more desirable. In the end, it is audience impact that really counts—the effect the chosen camera treatment has on the viewer.

1.6 Equipment
Don’t get too enamored with the hardware. You do not need elaborate or extensive facilities to produce successful programs. Even the simplest equipment may provide the needed essentials. It really depends on the type of production you are creating. For some purposes, one camera is ideal. For others, a dozen may be insufficient.

What is done is more important than how it is done. If it is possible to get an effective moving shot along a hospital corridor by shooting from a wheelchair rather than a special camera dolly, the audience will never know—or care.

Sometimes extra effects on the equipment can tempt the camera operator to use them because they are there rather than because they are needed. On broadcast television, for example, wipes, star filters, or diffused shots are sometimes used in the wrong place, at the wrong time, just for the sake of variety and because they are readily available. What appears at first sight to be a sophisticated, stylish presentation may have far less impact on the audience than a single still shot that lingers to show someone’s expression.

VERSATILITY OF VIDEO

Video Medium
- The television camera provides an instant image in full color.
- Cameras may be automated and can be remotely controlled (Figure 1.3).
- Images can span from the microscopic to the infinities of outer space.
- Video images from several sources can be combined (inset, split screen).
- The image can be modified and manipulated (color, tonal values, shape and form, sharpness, etc.).

FIGURE 1.3
Robotically controlled cameras can be used in locations that are unsafe for an operator. (Photo courtesy of Sony.)
Overview of Video Production

CHAPTER 1

Video Presentation

- The video picture can be shown on screens that range from pocket-sized to giant displays or from a single screen to a “videowall” (multiscreen) display.
- Videos can be shown by themselves (on a television) or combined with other media such as a PowerPoint or on a web site.
- The video signal can be distributed instantly by cable (wire, fiber-optic), Wi-Fi, microwave, infrared link, or satellite.
- Videos can be stored online to be downloaded whenever it is convenient for the viewer.
- Video artwork and titles can be created electronically (computer graphics).
- See Figure 1.4.

Video Recording

- The video signal can be stored in different forms (photographic, tape, flash memory, DVD, CD, and hard drive/servers).
- Video recordings can be played back immediately and replayed many times. They can be stored indefinitely.
- Video recordings can be erased in selected parts or completely. New recordings can usually be made on the erased medium.

FIGURE 1.4
Video productions can be shown on many different media.
Most people’s experience of web video is characterized by the tiny, pixilated windows familiar to YouTube users. But tomorrow’s web users will expect service quality much closer to television, and major content owners like Disney recognize that they will have to step up to this mark to win and retain web viewers.

David Mercer, Principal Analyst, Strategy Analytics

1.7 What equipment is needed?

Let’s take a look at the types of issues that affect the equipment you will need. When working with a larger production, a wide range of facilities is usually available. Extra items can be rented from a rental house or production facility. Look through any manufacturer’s or supplier’s catalog or a video magazine to see the endless variety of equipment available.
On the other hand, a small production may need to work within the limitations of the existing equipment, unless it proves possible to augment it in some way. A lot is going to depend on the kind of program that you are making and on your specific approach to the subject:

- **Production style.** Even a straightforward situation can be tackled in a number of different ways. Each will have its merits and its drawbacks. Suppose, for example, you are shooting two people talking together (an interview or general conversation). You can treat this formally, by shooting them seated at a desk, or informally, by shooting them while they are resting in easy chairs. But to create a more natural ambience, you might show one of them working at a task, such as gardening, while the other looks on. Alternatively, you might shoot them walking side by side along a pathway. Another familiar approach is to shoot them within a car as they drive to their destination.

- **Variations.** Think about these variants for a moment. In each case there are restrictions for the camera and sound treatment. In one situation, the camera can be held firmly on a fixed mount; in another, the camera will probably need a dolly; while in another, it will be necessary to carry the camera on a shoulder or even attach it to the vehicle itself. Sound pickup problems, too, will vary. Clearly, how one shoots the action and where it takes place will affect the optimum gear for the job.

- **Shooting circumstances.** Obviously, equipment that is essential for some situations, like an underwater camera, proves unsuitable for other projects. While a robust camera mounting is necessary for sustained shooting, it can become an encumbrance if the camera constantly needs to be repositioned in crowded surroundings. At times, even a microphone may be superfluous if the shoot does not need audio; the sound content to the silent shots can be added during the editing phase (Figure 1.5).

If we simply produce a flow of TV images for mobile phones, then probably we shall simply say, “Well, this is just a gadget.” But on the contrary, if we create formats, which are specific to this new platform. Then we shall be able to meet [or exceed] the consumers’ expectations.

**Patrick Chene, Former Head of Sport for France Televisions, Currently Chair of Sporever**

1.8 **Is there a right way?**

Creating a program is a subjective process. Newcomers soon get the hang of the basic mechanics, but learning how to use equipment to persuade an
audience and influence their reactions is another matter entirely. Some “creative” or “original” production styles can be a pain to watch, such as a rapid succession of unrelated shots or fast cutting between different viewpoints. Newcomers who use these techniques hope to create an illusion of excitement and pace for a dull subject. After a while, however, these techniques only succeed in annoying, confusing, or boring the audience.

You can learn a lot by studying video or television shows, particularly those covering the topics you are interested in emulating. Review them over and over, and you will see that while some approaches are little more than stereotyped routines, others have an individuality and flow that is appropriate for the subject matter. Adjust your own approach to suit the occasion rather than imitating “the way things are always done.” If what you are doing does not have the impact you are aiming for, it is wrong.

1.9 The production approach

When preoccupied with ideas about how the subject should be tackled, it’s easy to overlook a lot of down-to-earth issues that have to be faced at some time or other, such as budgets, availability of facilities, labor, materials, scheduling, safety issues, weather conditions, transportation, accommodation, legalities, and so on. Again, a lot is going to depend on the desired program. At the same time, the potential possibilities will inevitably be affected by the expertise and experience of the production crew, the program budget, the equipment being used, the time available, and similar factors. With a little imagination and ingenuity, you can often overcome limitations or at least leave your audience unaware that there were any. Later we will explore typical strategies that enable you to do just that.

At an early stage directors should have given a great deal of thought about the production and the audience, settling basic questions such as these:

- **What is the program’s main purpose?** Is it to entertain, amuse, excite, or intrigue? Is the show educational? Are specific methods being demonstrated, such as showing how to make or repair something? Is the goal to persuade the audience—for example, to visit a specific place or to make a purchase? Or is the goal to warn them against doing so?
- **Who is the program being made for?** Is the intended audience an individual or a group? What are their ages? What production methods are most effective for the targeted group? Is it for the general public or for a specialized audience?
- **How will the production be seen?** Will the production be viewed online or on a large screen? Will it appear on commercial television or on a niche cable channel? Is it targeted at prospective customers in a store (such as an advertising display), for delivery to a student group at a school, or for an in-house corporate symposium? Perhaps it is intended for home study on an iPod?
If content is king, then content delivery is the power behind the throne. Reaching the audience requires knowledge of not just what they are watching, but how and where.

Chris Purse, HD magazine

The style that is adopted for the production, the pace of delivery, and how much to emphasize various points are all determined by the program’s purpose (Figure 1.6).

**TECHNICALITIES**

**1.10 Equipment performance**

Thanks to good design, the majority of even the most complex television equipment will perform faultlessly for long periods with little attention. But it is good practice to make regular checks and carry out routine maintenance.

It is simple enough to check that parts are clean (lenses, tape heads) and that controls are working correctly and ready for use. However, it is also important to study the instruction manuals that come with the equipment to know how to carry out the basic equipment checks and adjustments. If you are not an engineer, you may need the services of an experienced engineer to maintain equipment performance up to specification. But remember, don’t tweak (adjust) internal controls unless you know what you are doing.