Urgent and Confidential:

TOP

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BLUNDERS

TO AVOID
When Hiring a

VIDEO PRODUCTION COMPANY

Written by Addy Khan and Aaron Downes

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A Note to the Reader

This report is intended to give guidance on how to select and work with outside video production companies to produce and promote corporate videos and commercials.

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An Open Letter

from the Desk of Addy Khan

From:

Addy Khan Xperiment Media FZE Dubai Marina, UAE +971 4 278-0954 Monday, 9:37 a.m.

Dear Account Executive,

What you now hold in your hands is a culmination of my experience over the past three years, working with dozens of clients (including some high-level government agencies and some of the most well-known hospitality brands), as well as personally fielding over 457 phone calls and requests for proposals (RFP) from prospective clients.

You see, our world is changing... our personal lives, our client's business, our business, and everything that surrounds us they're all changing.

Over the course of 12 months, perceived weaknesses have become strengths, and certain strengths are now irrelevant. Global disruption has toppled archaic business models and false beliefs, and a select few have already capitalized on the chaos to build new profit centers they never thought possible just a year prior.

Here's my promise to you:

If you understand and apply the information in all "13 Blunders" of this report, you can increase your profits in record time.

Regardless of how big your agency is... Whether you've produced commercials before or not... No matter how many times you tried and failed.

Because right now, with this information, your ability to scale up your client services and win new accounts has never been more certain.

When I began to put my thoughts on paper back in the Summer of 2020, I was worried that demand for Hollywood-grade commercials and films would dry up. That clients would be too scared to invest in video. That the TikTok'ers and Insta-influencers would take over, and cheap amateur video would reign supreme.

Consequences of Poorly Planned Video

62% of consumers have a negative perception of a brand after experiencing a poor-quality video.

60% no longer want to engage with the brand.

23% hesitate to make a purchase.

Bright Cove

https://www.slideshare.net/brightcovecp/highcostoffree-infographicrev

"If you hire a company based upon their "cheapness", you'll unfortunately get exactly what you paid for...a cheap-looking, nonconverting video"

Tubular Insights

https://tubularinsights.com/animate d-explainer-video-cost/

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But boy, was I wrong.

High-Quality, Story-Driven Video Is Hotter Than Ever!

Something is happening in the marketplace...

- Currently there are billions (with a "B") of hours of video on the internet...
- More gets uploaded every day, most of it low-quality
- The sheer amount of content consumed every day makes it harder to leave an impact.

In fact, making a "Mediocre" Video is just as ineffective as making a "Bad" Video.

It isn't because the public has an attention deficit disorder, although many will say it does. Or that video is just too expensive, though it will be for certain businesses that continue to resist change.

It's far deeper than any of these things - it's the unfortunate price of admission many ad agencies and in-house brands will have to pay as we enter a new era.

And things ain't going back to normal.

Consumers have simply reached a saturation point in their lives **Why Your Client Deserves Good** Video

84% of comsumers have been convinced to purchase a product after watching a video.

WyzOwl

- → **80%** increase in conversion rates when video is included on your landing page or home page.
- → Boosts your Google ranking. helping company show up on first page of search results.

BiqCommerce

https://www.bigcommerce.com/blog/e xplainer-videos/

"...You're not just simply buying a video, you're paying for a proven. effective process. To put it even more plainly, you're paying for the results you're going to end up with."

Tubular Insights

https://tubularinsights.com/animatedexplainer-video-cost/

- the ease of making a video and uploading it means people are

pummeled with garbage, and worse... They don't even know what to believe anymore.

For account reps and CMOS who don't "get it" this is going to be a growing problem, like a terminal cancer that's left untreated. It will affect your ability to market effectively and profit. This loss in company profits might lead to you losing your job, unable to find work, unable to support your family.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Because right here in the "Top 13 Blunders to Avoid When Hiring a Video Production Company" I am going to show you how you can keep blasting on, earning great profits, hooking great clients, and making jawdropping, story driven videos and commercials that win awards...

And make windfall profits!

Are You Ready to Be the "Video Project Liaison"?

In several Blunders outlined in this eBook, I'm going to talk about how crucial it is for YOU to stay very involved in the video production process. You cannot sit back or delegate any of the high-level decisions that go on in this, or your video will fail.

Feeling overwhelmed and uncertain? Like you're not ready? Don't worry, that's natural. The only way through that is action.

I won't lie to you. It's risky to partner with an outside video production company. You'll be putting your reputation and career on the line - not to mention risking the loss of a client account. Think about it - you're paying thousands of dollars up-

front... for a product that has not yet been created. It's gonna' require a BIG leap of faith from you. And you'll have to make some very hard decisions along the way.

Hiring a production house is a lot of work.

Look forward to spending hours, days, even weeks researching different companies, reading tons of reviews, examining their work... and... finally interviewing the top choices.

You'll need to strike that very fine balance between budget, deadlines, and goals.

This "head-hunting" work will need to be done in between all your other client work. You'll wish you could be "out there" prospecting or working on something more exciting. It might even require you to do research on the weekends, or after hours.

But know this. This grunt work is nothing compared to the monumental task of doing it yourself ... Sourcing equipment ... Interviewing crew... Wasting a lot of time and money trying to learn this complex process yourself.

Just keep plugging away, keeping your eye on that light at the end of the tunnel. Once you select the right video production company, you'll have a trusted ally and advocate in your corner. Let them focus on all the nitty gritty details, while you focus on your client.

But don't think it's smooth sailing once you find a vendor, even a really good one. Because your life is about to get very busy once principal photography rolls around.

Being on set for the first time is thrilling, magical. Where else do you get to to mingle with beautiful actors and models, travel to breath-taking locations, eat like a king, and watch as a crew of talented artists build entire worlds right before your very eyes.

But.. film sets can be hectic, frenzied, stressful... followed by long stretches of just "waiting around", bored to tears. (We call it "Hurry up and Wait".) This life is not for everyone.

Okay, have I got you thinking to yourself:

"Gee, is it really worth it to produce a video at all?"

The answer is a bonified "Yes"... if you do it right. And in the "Top 13 Blunders to Avoid When Hiring a Video Production Company", I'm going to show you how.

Good Luck, and Happy Hunting,

adnan khan

Addy Khan Xperiment Media

P.S. As David Ogilvy once said: "You cannot bore people into buying your product". My advice, as you search for the right production house, is to always avoid "stale" and "safe" choices. Don't pick a bland production house. And strive to not make a boring corporate video just because that's what all the competition does.

FORWARD:

Don't Begin Your Journey Without an RFP

(Or: What the Heck is a Request for Proposal?)

It was the Summer of 2011.

I was fresh out of film school and needed a job to pay the bills while I pursued my dream – to become a Hollywood Director. So, I took a job as the marketing lead for this manufacturer in the San Fernando Valley. My boss was a very quirky guy. He would pop into the office every Monday morning with a brand new "business idea" he had just read about in one of his entrepreneur magazines.

One week it's: "Addy, I want to make a mobile app. Find out what it costs to do that."

Next week he's holding a Uline catalog: "Addy, find out what it costs to print 50,000 catalogs like this and mail them to distributors."

So, every Monday, I would do a Google search, and contact the vendors that appeared in the first 2-3 pages of search.

On each vendor's website, I would submit a contact form, and in the text box I would write: "Please just give me a ballpark quote. I don't have time to talk with a salesperson."

But every time... to my extreme annoyance... these vendors never just gave me a price. Instead, they would send these long, 20-point questionnaires. Or they would call me, which was even more annoying.

By the sixth or seventh week, I loathed Monday mornings. I wanted to call in sick – but I needed the money to keep my work Visa.

Then one Friday, I was on a call with the Account Executive from our ad agency to discuss our insertion orders. At one point I said, "I really hate this whole 'getting quotes' process." I wasn't asking for a solution – just venting.

But he answered something totally unexpected:

"Why don't you try sending an R.F.P.?"

"What's that?" I asked.

"Request for Proposal," he answered. "It's like a detailed document with everything a contractor needs to know about your project. I use em' all the time. Contractors treat you better cause' it's easier to quote you. They see I'm serious. When I get all the quotes back, they're easier to compare."

Until that time, I had never heard of a Request for Proposal before. In hindsight, it's astounding no professor in all four years of film school had ever mentioned it.

My life changed overnight.

Don't expect your production company to:

- Define your audience.
- Define the scope of your project.
- Define your marketing goals.

You can expect the production company to:

- Help with creative direction and storyboarding.
- Write the script.
- Cast and scout the location.
- Provide talent to accomplish the project.
- Provide equipment and crew such as camera, lighting, grip, and sound.
- Provide editing of final footage.
- Include animation and visual effects.
- Include audio and music.
- Provide insurance and permitting.
- Provide accounting and budget details as relative to the film.

Monday rolls around, and sure enough, another assignment from my boss. This time it's looking into website design quotes. Instead of Googling "web designers", I searched for "web design RFP templates".

In one hour, I had a standardized RFP. I emailed my RFP documents to dozens of companies. I even posted the RFP on web design forums and job boards – so *they came to me* instead of the other way around. (Something you can do with video production, actually.)

I got back over 15 quotes, all in a standardized format so it was easy to compare them. I got maybe three follow-up calls or emails. Best of all...

Using an RFP dramatically improved my working relationship with the Boss. I could now provide him with an informed, expert opinion on each vendor.

Conclusion: writing a Request for Proposal will completely flip the script on your vendor selection process. Not just for video production... but for every type of service you can outsource! You'll be saving yourself a lot of headache, and confusion... giving yourself a few easy-to-understand "choices" -- rather than a dozen, indiscernible "options".

In fact, this "choices" instead of "options" became my whole mantra for producing freelance video. And it's carried over into Xperiment Media's current mission statement.

Why You MUST Write an RFP When Hiring Video Production Houses for Your Client's Project

Too often, I see young startup advertising agencies (and a few "big" agencies), make the mistake of jumping into the commercial video "shark tank" without a formal Request for Proposal (RFP).

I've jumped on calls with some of these young, intelligent, ambitious account executives. I do my best to educate them on all of the planning, infrastructure, and people it takes to make just a 30 second commercial. About 50% of these young AE's will scoff, at first – they'll imply that I'm trying to make it sound harder than it really is. They'll ask me to justify my pricing.

Don't be one of those clients. Trust me, you're so much better writing the darn RFP.

If you still choose the "No RFP" road, you'll ultimately be picking your vendor based on either:

- 1. The lowest bidder.
- 2. The company that arbitrarily sticks out in your mind.
- 3. The company with the smoothest-talking sales rep.

One theme that you'll see throughout this *Top 13* Blunders report has to do with **YOU making a** strong first impression with potential video companies. I know, sounds backwards doesn't it? (Shouldn't they be the ones kneeling at your feet?)

I guarantee you will get quotes back from MORE and BETTER production houses if you send an RFP.

If you don't send an RFP, a number of companies simply won't quote you. You'll call or email a reminder... and they still won't quote you.

Don't Forget to Tell Them How YOU Want to Communicate!

The RFP isn't all about your client. Make sure the production company knows how, when, and in what way to follow up with you.

Which method do you prefer?

- Email
- Text
- Instant Messenger
- Fax
- In-person meetings

How?

- Impromptu / open door policy
- Scheduled (with definite in / out times)

Particulars that might affect your interactions

- Certain days or times that are best for you
- Unusual work hours
- Availability restrictions
- Deadlines for related / other projects

"To Hell with them" you say. But what if you're missing out on truly great talent? What if the only companies that are willing to play ball with your vague quote request are only mediocre at best?

As a video production house, I know that a prospective client who sends an RFP to us is serious about making a stunning commercial video. I will bend over backwards to address every single

requirement, give them preferential pricing (or an introductory discount), and essentially give more of my billable time to these prospects.

I know I am not the only production company that does this.

How to Write a Killer Request for Proposal

In order to recruit the best possible vendor, your Request for Proposal (RFP) should include the following:

- 1. Organizational Overview: your company / client's "mission", and project background.
- 2. **Project Goals:** how does this video serve the needs of the client?
- 3. **Project Deliverables and Specifications:** a.k.a. "Scope of Work". What exactly do you need the vendor to do for you? The more specific you can be, the more accurate your quote will be.
- 4. **Project Requirements:** completion dates, billing requirements, and maximum price range (hint: make it lower than your actual internal budget). In what aspects do you need the vendor to contribute solutions? And where do you need them to follow the rules?
- 5. **Proposal Format:** how do you want the bid laid out? One final cost? Or each line-item cost broken out? This is what helps you compare apples to apples.
- 6. **Proposal Delivery Instructions and Contact Info:** is this a *Closed bid* (invite-only)? Or an *Open bid* that vendors can share with other vendors?
- 7. **Proposal Evaluation Timeline:** give prospective vendors an idea how your selection process will work, including dates when a vendor will be chosen for the project. (Video companies will be clamoring to work with you if you include this.)
- 8. **Video Brief:** see **Blunder #2**. Essentially, this is a separate document that gets into the "creative" part of your video, such as your client's target market.

Red Flags

- Proposals that are full of fees and penalties for not delivering feedback by certain times. (Very common with bids that are *unbelievably lower* than the rest.) These companies will most likely be incentivized to make you incur these fees.
- Video company sales rep asks you follow-up questions that were clearly covered in your RFP. (Means they're skimming, and care more about *volume* of work over *quality*.)
- They submit a proposal to you that appears "generic" or "cookie-cutter" and did not address specific items in your RFP. (Trust me, their videos will be equally "generic".)
- Vendor's proposal language seems to imply they hold **Intellectual Property (IP)** rights to the final, broadcast-ready video. While it's not uncommon for video production companies to hold the rights to the primary, raw footage they shot for you -- it is NOT OK for them to retain IP on the final product.

Action Items

Consider including these details in your RFP for maximum effectiveness:

- 1. Your video production budget: believe me, this will signal to the production house you are serious.
- 2. **Security/Confidentiality:** if you don't want the vendor to publicize your partnership or display your video, say it up-front.
- 3. **Revisions and edits:** ask how many edits are allowed. Also ask the company to define what they constitute as a revision / edit.
- 4. If terms and conditions are long, call the vendor and ask them to summarize it for you
- 5. Ownership rights: by default, vendor keeps all the raw footage. But you can write in a clause that requires them to turn over all raw footage at the end of the project. (Just make sure you have *storage* – at least 1 terabyte!)
- 6. Ask if your company is expected to pay for **lunches and meals**. While the answer is most likely "yes", some vendors may not include this in the quote. It will become a "surprise" cost later on.
- 7. **Include Competitive Analysis:** yes, make them research your client's competitors. That way, it'll be on them to come up with a winning strategy and avoid making your commercial look like a "me also" copycat.

Blunder #1:

Not Defining Your Goals and Expectations

"You got a dream... You gotta protect it. People can't do somethin' themselves, they wanna tell you 'you can't do it'. If you want somethin', go get it. Period."

Christopher Gardner (Will Smith)

The Pursuit of Happyness (2006)

You ever have one of those days that's just a stone-cold bummer from beginning to end? Where you feel like a fool and a failure, and nothing's going right?

When I'm feeling really down, I pop in a worn copy of Gabriele Mucino's *The Pursuit of Happyness* on DVD. In the 12 years I've owned it, this movie never fails to give me that dose of encouragement I need.

If you haven't seen it, the film is the real-life story of Chris Gardner, a really smart guy down-on-his-luck, who's struggling to sell his invention (a special medical device). He knows his invention has value. He puts his life and his soul into this invention. It's his life's work. But he just can't find a buyer for it.

Suddenly, his entire life falls apart at once. He loses his apartment. Then his wife leaves him. And, to make matters worse, Chris is granted sole custody of his son (Jaden Smith).

Chris hits rock-bottom and has to build himself back up. He takes an unpaid internship for a stock brokerage firm – straying further and further away from his goal of making it rich as the inventor of this medical device.

But what Gardner discovers by the end – after his unpaid internship turns into a real job through Chris' grit and determination - is that *his goal was not his invention at all*. His hidden goal all along was to be a better father of his son.

I am a strong believer in setting goals and expectations. I never go into any commercial without nailing down some goals first. And like Gardner says: "You gotta' protect it."

But the funny thing about goals is... they change along the way. Just like Chris' dream evolves

due to his circumstances... you have to be open to the possibility that your video or commercial may look very different from the one you imagined.

But setting the goal is still crucial. Seeing this goal will set you on a trajectory that will result in a successful video that wins awards. (And makes cash registers *ring!*)

Know Your Goals and Expectations First

This may come as a reality check to some. But as the client, you need to come to the table with creative ideas.

"But Addy, isn't that the video production company's job?"

To a certain extent, yes. But if you want to achieve maximum results from your video production house, it helps to narrow down the possibilities a little bit. Otherwise,

Onboarding: Prepare for your Future Kickoff Meeting

- Include all stakeholders at project kickoff. Avoid misunderstandings about:
 - a. Goals
 - b. Budget
 - c. Timeline
- 2. Be transparent about your needs with honest, straightforward communication (They can't read your mind)
- 3. Be forthcoming about:
 - a. Wants
 - b. Needs
 - c. Goals
 - d. Expectations.
- 4. Provide as much information as you can in terms of client brand / agency:
 - a. Preferences
 - b. Guidelines
- 5. Collect as many research assets as you can to share with vendor
- 6. Consolidate and deliver feedback to vendor quickly

Some key info you should give your production team:

- Styles of video you love or hate. Share examples that captivate you (or have the opposite effect)
- Outline your company's hierarchal structure for the video company (at least for the people who will have input on the video). If the crew treats middle manager with more deference than the CEO things can become a little weird!

without direction, the production company (and your client) may impose *their own ideas* along the way that could negatively impact the final product.

Your duty: Define creative direction

Start with a few general ideas about the video's content. This will provide a starting point for pre-production discussions with the videographer about the video format, developing the script, and the length of the video.

For example:

- Will your video have a narrator? If so, do you need to production crew to find one? Or do you have someone in mind?
- Do you want the company owner to be interviewed on camera? Or interview customers?
- What will be the tone of the video? Will it be tongue-in-cheek humorous? Or serious and reflective?

How to Define Your Video Goals and Expectations

Make sure you have well-defined answers to the following questions *long before* entering the pre-production stage (see Blunder #3).

- 1. What is the **main goal** of your video or videos? Define the big picture. Imagine a map in your mind (or actually draw one) that guides overall message. Ask your client are they trying to:
 - a. Increase web traffic.
 - b. Raise conversion numbers.
 - c. Increase demo views.
 - d. Impress shareholders or business partners.
 - e. Attract more customers or thank your loyal ones.
- 2. What is the **video's mission**? Is it to:

- a. Help sell a particular product or service provided by the company?
- b. An overall "image" video to establish a company brand?
- 3. Who is your **target audience**? This is essential to establishing message, tone, and style. Example target audiences might be:
 - a. Millennials.
 - b. Current prospects.
 - c. Sales professionals.
- 4. Is it designed to appeal to your customers only? Or will it also be shown to vendors, shareholders, and investors?
- 5. If it's a business-to-business brand, is the video targeted at:
 - a. Distributors and wholesalers?
 - b. Or the end-users?
- 6. What is your **budget**? Sharing budget allows vendor to give you most that they can. There are many ways to express your expected budget. For instance, you could say:
 - a. \$5,000 for this video.
 - b. \$20,000 for the year.
 - c. Unlimited. (If that's your budget, can I call you?)

Once you write down these goals, and you've discussed them with your team and client, incorporate these goals into your Request for Proposal (see Forward).

Use your RFP as the "technical specifications" that guides your video project. Anytime during the process that you find yourself straying away from the original vision, refer back to this document. Whenever you're faced with a creative decision, your goals / RFP will help be your guiding light.

In Blunder #2, I'll tell you how to put together a Video Production Brief, an essential companion to the RFP that further defines the emotion and storytelling goals of your video project.

Red Flags

- Production company doesn't take your target audience into account.
- Production company doesn't appear interested in understanding your brand image.

Action Items

- **1.** What is the **deadline** for completing your video? Establish a clear timeline and end date to avoid delays and extra costs. Examples include:
 - a. Yesterday.
 - b. 2 months from now.
 - c. By start of fourth quarter.
- 2. Who are **key project stakeholders**? This is crucial to structuring meetings, pitches, and reviews. Answers might be:
 - a. Only me.
 - b. The Marketing Department.
 - c. Agency Account Executives.
 - d. C-Suite executives.
- 3. How will **distribute and promote** the video?
 - a. Email marketing campaign.
 - b. Social media schedule.
 - c. TV or web streaming.
- 4. What does your video's success look like?
 - a. Number of views.
 - b. Average percent of video watched.
 - c. Click-through rate.
 - d. Coupon or offer code redemption.
 - e. Television viewership KPI's.

Blunder #2:

Not Writing A Video Production Brief

Allow me to tell a "true" story, wrapped in a children's fairy tale. I call it:

The Tale of the Nightmare Commercial

Once upon a time, there was a wise old King who owned a very big company. This company's Brand was loved throughout the land. All the people knew it by name.

One night, the King had a dream. In the dream, he envisioned a spectacular TV commercial.

The next day, the King called forth his young, ambitious Account Executive, whose Ad Agency campions the project. The King's Brand and Agency hold court to discuss the commercial, and everyone leaves the meeting feeling very excited.

The following day, the Account Executive hires the best Video Producer in all the land. Agency and Production House work tirelessly for three months – planning, filming, and editing the commercial until it was just right.

Finally, the day comes to present the commercial to the King. The King arrives to his grand Boardroom and sits down in his throne.

"You're going to love this!" says the Account Executive.

The Video Producer dims the lights, and flips on the projector. As the commercial plays, however, they notice something odd about the King.

He doesn't laugh. He doesn't raise an eyebrow. He sits there like a stone (perhaps a spell! Oh no!).

The commercial ends. The lights come on. Everyone is silent for what seems like an eternity. Then the King bellows:

> "What is this? This is NOT what we talked about at all! I want my money back, or it's off with your heads!"

Well... the Account Executive and Video Producer try and try to fix the commercial. They reedit and re-shoot it several times. But the King's anger and confusion over the first video never goes away, and he rejects every new cut that the Account Executive presents to him.

And all the Agency's horses and all the Agency's men could never put the commercial back together again. (And both the AE and Video Producer get their heads chopped off). **THE END**.

Moral of the story? This tragedy was not the fault of incompetency. The King, the Account Executive, and the Video Producer were all smart, driven, creative, and hard-working people.

However,... at that fateful first meeting with the King and his court, the Account Executive failed to take notes. And he failed to put those notes into a Video Production Brief.

You see, while everyone left that meeting excited about the commercial – they all left with a slightly different version of it in their heads. The King. His Chief Marketing Officer. The Account Executive. His Art Director. And finally, the Video Producer. They all saw a different commercial in their minds. And... they never took the time to check-in with each other to make sure they were all on the same page.

And lest you think this is just Addy spinning tales, you're wrong. I have heard this horror story played out in many different ways.

| Don't be too sure. |
|--|
| Don't be too sure. |
| Importance of Writing a Project Brief |
| A detailed Video Production Brief can eliminate a lot of potential conflict between client and production house. |
| A good video production company is going to suggest creative possibilities for your commercial that didn't occur to you. This outside-the-box creativity is the real "magic sauce" that good production houses bring to your project |
| However, they DON'T know your client's brand and culture like you do. Your client has certain taboos and restrictions imposed by upper management or others in the company. |

For example:

Think it won't happen to you?

- Video crew plans to interview the general manager... but he's extremely camera shy and refuses to be interviewed.
- Branded documentary reveals certain aspects of the company's history that may be off limits (like that offensive mascot from the 1950's).
- Commercial has a pulsing techno beat.. and it turns out the founder absolutely hates techno music.

Your video production company must be made aware of these restrictions as soon as possible. The best place to codify these restrictions is the Brief.

Video Production Briefs Save Thousands of Dollars in Headaches and Re-Shoots

How do you avoid such a calamity? Simple. Write a video production brief before you hire a production company. If the Request for Proposal (discussed in the Forward) is the nuts-and-bolts technical specifications of your video; then the Brief is the "heart", or the emotional compass of your project.

Including a Brief with your RFP is the best way to ensure prospective vendors give you

BONUS: Create a Mood Board

Sometimes words just can't convey everything about your video's creative vision. So lay it out with a visual representation, known as a Mood Board!

Go grab photos from inspiring commercials, movies that are similar to your vision.

A good Mood Board should encompass everything visual, including:

- Cinematography
- film style
- overall color palette
- Lighting
- characters/actors
- location plans
- Music
- Graphics
- visual effects
- similar projects
- Fonts
- Logos

accurate quotations, as well as estimate the project's total budget. A good Brief includes all the element of a good story: when, where, what, why, and how.

A good video production brief will help you:

- **Define the Scope of Your Project:** what do you expect to get from your production company? Are they just coming on as "hired guns" to shoot video for a couple days? Or do you need a full-service firm to take you by the hand from concept through post-production and distribution?
- **Define the Purpose of Your Video:** why are you making this video?
- Who is your target audience? are you targeting people who already know about your brand? Or is this the introduction?

• What is your call to action? are you driving sign-ups? Generating brand awareness? Or driving people to a physical location?

• **Finally, Define Your Tone:** It's been said that all transactions are purely emotional. We justify our purchase with logic (facts and benefits) after we've made the purchase. Strong emotions elicit strong reactions. Make sure those emotions are in-line with your client's audience.

What do I mean by "tone"?

Let's say you want to convey the emotion of "Trust" in your video:

If your audience is a <u>start-up community</u>, you'd want a video with a friendly, personal tone. Maybe you interview real employees at the company.

But if your audience is <u>more "corporate"</u>, you might want to stick with a formal tone. Lean on facts, figures, and the company history.

Is All This Really Necessary?

In short, the answer is "no". Few production companies are ever going to ask you for a Video Brief. Almost none will outright *reject* your bid if you don't have a Brief. (Though, they might ignore your request.)

But I'll say this, having been on both sides of the advertiser > contractor relationship...

I WOULD <u>NEVER</u> HIRE ANY COMPANY WITHOUT FIRST WRITING A VIDEO BRIEF OR RFP!

Did my ALL-CAPS exclamation get to you? It did? Good. Because you need to **think of the RFP and Brief as your insurance plan** that will cover your ass throughout the harrowing process of video production.

FIRST: The Brief and RFP helps you <u>determine budget very early on</u>. You can submit your Brief / RFP to several production companies. The bids you get back will be easy to compare, because every vendor has a clear idea what you are looking for. (Plus, the fact that you included a brief will make them take you more seriously – they'll be hungry for your business.)

Once you gather prices, you can then post your brief (along with estimated budget range) on production job boards and let production companies come to you. (See Blunder #6 for a list of these job boards.)

SECOND: A Brief allows you to share your vision early in the process. When you finally sit down for the first exploratory meeting with a prospective production house, the vendor can suggest creative choices based on your in-depth creative vision. These meetings give you the opportunity to course-correct at a time when it's cheap and easy to do so – but without going completely off your compass.

In Blunder #3, I'll go into more detail about the exploratory meeting as well as give a better understanding of the Four Phases of Video Production.

Action Items

- 1. Will you require **additional assets** (other than the finished video), such as a shorter cut of the video to use on social?
- 2. Where will this video live? Will it be broadcast as a TV commercial? Will it air late at night, or during prime time? Will it be used on a website landing page / squeeze page? Will it be used for social media? Knowing the context matters.
- 3. Drill your client for a list of **brand rules or guidelines** that your production house should follow (a.k.a. Video Enterprise Standards, which I'll discuss in Blunder #4). Not all companies have this documented, and even if they do, lists are often incomplete. Brand guidelines include superficial things like design elements, fonts, logos, and colors. But

they also include taboos like drinking alcohol, smoking, or implying a certain political or religious bias.

- 4. **Know your client's key performance indicators**. Make sure these KPIs are quantifiable. (Esoteric things like "brand awareness" or "market share" are pretty hard to measure. Coupon redemptions, page views and video views are much easier to track.)
- 5. Be open to new ideas. The Brief should not be a commandment set in stone it is more a guiding principle. Innovative ideas often go against the grain.
- 6. Be honest about your expectations and be as transparent as you can with your production house and client (especially in terms of what the budget will allow).

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Blunder #3:

Not Understanding the Four Phases of Video Production

I once read a long article about the TV show *Mad Men* titled:

'Putting Don Draper on the Couch'

There were a lot of fascinating psychological insights into the mind of John Ham's star-making anti-hero, Don Draper. But what stood out to me about this undoubtedly "cool" character was *not* his trust and abandonment issues. What stood out had to do with something that most of us advertisers are not doing enough of. And this neglect will *kill* your commercial long before the cameras start rolling.

This all-important 'X Factor' that's critically missing from most productions has nothing to do with budget. Or how 'creative' you are. Or how well known your client's brand is.

No. What actually stood out in the article was the <u>image of Don Draper lying on the couch</u>. Puffing on a Lucky StrikeTM and staring up at the ceiling. He's just... *thinking*. And he does this *a lot* throughout the series. The genius thing Don Draper is doing here could be summed up into one word:

IDEATION

Specifically, **Concept Ideation and Development**.

You see, what might appear to some as "laziness", or time-wasting... is truly the most important step of any breakthrough video project. If you don't make the time for ideation, you won't have a good video. I promise.

The Most Important (and Most Over-Looked) Phase of Video Production

Most video professionals break down their production process into three basic phases:

- 1. Pre-production
- 2. Production
- 3. Post-production

The problem here is that Ideation gets buried somewhere in Pre-production, often as an after-thought. Or worse: it pops up in Post-production - during the editing phase - when companies realize their video is not working... because it has a weak foundation.

So please, don't skip the Ideation Phase. It really is the most important one. And it is the *least budget intensive* of the four. In this phase, you have limitless options before you. But it is also the most crucial phase to get things right – and it'll require lots of time, imagination, brainstorming, and research.

If you don't discuss Ideation, or have it in writing, the production company can put the blame on YOU if the video under-performs or gets de-railed.

This is the initial stage where we, as the production company, really get to know your agency and build trust. So, *you* can lean on *us* for creative and strategic advice.

Once the Ideation Phase is over, there is no going back. So, get it right, and allow as much time as you can to this process.

Ideation: More Than "Getting to Know You"

In this phase, we'll both discover your client's:

- Unique Selling Proposition (USP).
- Deep dive into the brand's current and former marketing strategies.
- Find the **Story Hook**.
- Define the **Ideal Customer.** Who are they? What are their biggest pain points? What do they desire most? And how does your product / service SOLVE those needs and wants.

- Find what Russel Brunson of ClickFunnels[™] calls the **Attractive Character**. The person that can best tell that story. Maybe its the founder, a celebrity, or a real customer. If we need to hire an actor, what is their age, look, and demeanor?
- **Hone our Offer.** Is it discount based? Time or "limited inventory" based? What can we add to make the offer's perceived value so overwhelming, ideal prospects just have to respond?
- Guarantees or Warranties. Where can we reduce friction in the conversion process?
- Gauge the market's sophistication level for your client's product or service.
 - o If it's a <u>brand-new category</u>, great! Let's make a campaign that focuses on solving your prospect's biggest pain point.
 - o If it's a "commodity" product, okay! Let's flip the script to turn your commodity into something rare and distinct.
- Finally, how do we tell a "sensational" story that stops viewers in their tracks and challenges their current beliefs?

Partnership Before Collaboration

I should mention not all production houses are interested in Ideation. I maintain there are **two distinct breeds of video production companies**, and they are:

- 1. Collaborators
- 2. Partners

"Collaborators" tend to keep their distance from clients. They get hired to do a job, and they do it. It's up to the ad agency / client to ensure collaborators "get" their vision. Aside from getting paid, collaborators tend to care more about getting that winning shot for their reels, even if it causes the project to go over budget. In fact, many collaborators will put vague language in their contracts expecting such overages to occur.

On the other side you have...

"Partnership" video companies (which I'm proud to say Xperiment is one). A partner company extends their services as if they are part-owners in your company. As if they are board members. One tell-tale sign of such a company is one that really goes out of their way to understand your client's company and unique, creative vision. And... one that pushes for Ideation.

In short, "Collaborators" shy away from Ideation.

"Partners" embrace Ideation.

I'm not saying Collaborators are bad. There are many types of projects and situations where a Collaborator is much better suited. Think "technical-only" type shoots like explainer videos, tabletop videos... or when your creative team is truly able to deliver Ideation themselves. In these cases, all you really need is a "hired-gun" video company.

But that's not how Xperiment Media works. I always make it clear to clients that Ideation is a necessary line item. It's worth the investment in time. And sometimes, I will turn down work if the client refuses to allow enough time to the Ideation process.

My best clients actually *want* me "all up in their business." They know from experience -- this is where the magic happens!

However... I know the idea of a production house getting too intimate with your client... even *poaching* your client... is a scary thought indeed. Luckily, there's a few ways to turn the Ideation Phase to your advantage!

How Advertising Agencies Can Ensure Total Control During Ideation

Whether you work for an ad agency or in-house, I encourage you to <u>take control of the Ideation</u> <u>process</u>. It's what your client is paying you for, after all.

You do this by putting your production company to work for *you*. Squeeze out as much research and ideation out of them as you can... so you look like the expert when pitching to your client.

If you or your agency have never produced a commercial before, your video production partner can fast-track you to a more diversified portfolio. As you get more videos under your belt, **you can start demanding bigger fees from your clients**... while maintaining a low overhead.

When you draw-up a contract between you and the video crew, be very specific about boundaries. If you need to "fake it till you make it", ask the production company about **white labeling** their services, so your client thinks you did all the video production in-house.

The Other Three Phases of Video Production

We spent most of this Blunder talking about Ideation. If you are unfamiliar with the other three phases, here is a quick rundown of each phase.

Keep in mind that once the script is locked-in, revisions or updates will cost you. Production costs will likely change as well.

Phase 2: Pre-Production:

- Write script
- Location scout
- Get permits
- Hire actors
- Select voiceover talent
- Storyboard
- Schedule shoot days

Phase 3: Production

- Shot list
- Shooting

BONUS: Bring Your Client to Set Day!

You don't necessarily have to be on set for the actual shoot. However, clients are welcome and encouraged to attend.

By all means, **invite your client - and their family - to the video set**. Use being on-set as an excuse to get to know your client better.

Hey, it's less exhausting than playing 18 holes of golf!

 Production day (or days) - when the action happens, and everything comes together to tell your story on video.

Phase 4: Post-Production

- Editing
- Record voiceover
- Add graphics
- Coloring and Grading
- Motion Graphics
- Animation
- Typography and Titles

One last think I'll point out about Post-Production...

"We'll fix it in Post" is an oft-used phrase in our industry. Sometimes it's meant as an ironic joke. However, Post-Production really is where the video magic happens. In post, your video will go through a transformative story editing process, usually with multiple rounds of feedback from your company. You will need to be available for reviews of the different video versions and give feedback. In short: don't disappear during Post-Production!

Red Flags:

- Production company has no official onboarding process. (Hint: they're probably very unorganized.)
- If the vendor can't (or won't) outline entire production process for you, be suspicious. They're probably hiding something from you, such as "surprise" fees.
- Vendor is willing to work with any client, so long as they pay.
- Unwillingness to collaborate with you in the Ideation process.

Action Items:

1. Make Ideation a necessary line item in your RFQ.

- 2. Before you sign a contract, ask: "How many revisions do you provide in postproduction" Ask for specifics; what does the company consider to be a "revision"?

 (Example: would the complete re-structuring of a commercial count as one revision?

 Would one or two surgical edits count as one revision?) Then, put these terms in writing!
- 3. **If you work in-house for the brand,** and are hiring a production company directly, ask the prospective vendor to describe in-depth what IS and IS NOT included in phases 2 through 4.
- 4. **Be honest, thorough, and timely with your feedback.** Know that adding extra editing time can get expensive. If you give the production company vague statements such as "I just don't like it," or "I don't know, something's off" your vendor has no choice but to interpret what you mean... and they'll probably get it *wrong*!
- 5. Ensure your client knows what that 4 Phases of Production look like. Make it clear to your client that you will need their thorough feedback, especially in the Post-Production stage. Be pro-active; set meeting dates; set and enforce deadlines for your client's feedback. Double-check these expected dates, and make sure they don't fall within a period where key decision makers may be preoccupied (they're on vacation leave, maternity leave, or during a major trade show or conference, etc.).
- 6. **Stay very involved in the Ideation Phase**. Provide as much research material and information as you can upfront.
- 7. **Money-Saving Tip #1:** If you have the resources and talent, write the script in-house (otherwise, many production companies offer this service as part of their production packages).
- 8. **Money Saving Tip #2:** Draw the storyboard in-house (a sketched representation of your video's story).
- 9. **Money Saving Tip #3:** Create a mood board (see Blunder #3) to speed-up the ideation process while ensuring you and the crew see eye-to-eye.

Blunder #4:

Not Hiring for Your Niche

Let's talk about the great and powerful online marketing mogul turned outer space explorer, Jeff Bezos.

Most entrepreneurs either hate him or love him, or both. Mention the word "Amazon" to any business owner, and their ears will perk up. It seems no matter what their industry is – whether it's selling sneakers to teenage kids or industrial automation equipment to plant managers – business owners are both "spooked" by - and envious of - Jeff Bezos. (They're all a little afraid of the Big Bad Amazon Monster crushing their businesses underfoot. No matter if they're eCommerce or a brick-and-mortar retail store.)

Amazon.com at first glance seems to have defied the laws of "brand" and "niche" – going from an online bookstore that made zero profit for almost 20 years... into the \$1.6 trillion behemoth that sells everything.

But, when you watch interviews with Bezos from the late 90's, you'll discover he had his niche business figured out from day one.

Amazon's "niche" was the World Wide Web (then, a wide-open playing field)! And they got in there first and aggressively. Their brand: selling everything from A to Z (it's even baked into their logo)... even when they just sold books.

Today – unless you're Alibaba – you'll *never* be able to compete with Amazon.com by selling *everything online*. The only way to succeed is to sell a <u>niche product or service</u> and become preminent in selling that product.

And so it goes with picking the right video production company. If you choose a company that "does it all"... you'll likely end up with a mediocre commercial or video. But choose a partner

that specializes – either in type of video, industry vertical, or preferably both – you increase your

chances of producing a phenomenal commercial by ten-fold.

Why Your Video Production Company Should Be 'Niche'

What do I mean by a "niche" video production house? First, I think we should clarify. The term

'niche' gets thrown around a lot. People often think it means one thing, and not the other.

So, let's take a moment to define this term. The Miriam-Webster definition of "niche" is:

"A place, employment, status, or activity for which a person or thing is best fitted."

Second definition: "a specialized market."

Take my company, Xperiment Media, for example. Our primary 'niche' client is Advertising

Agencies. As far as industry sector, we have experience serving agencies who serve the Energy,

Tourism, Hospitality, and Healthcare client sectors. The third dimension of our 'niche' is

creating commercials and films that look like Hollywood movies.

One way you can tell if a production house is 'niche' is if they don't do a lot of things. For

instance, Xperiment does not do any of the distribution, media buying, or promotion (ad agencies

are much more suited to this). We don't do weddings, video for seminars, explainer videos, or

instructional videos. We are not well suited to the pharmaceutical, non-profit, insurance, or

banking sectors.

Know Your Specific Needs. Hire Someone who Specializes in Meeting

Those Needs.

For instance:

If you need 2D animated video, seek bids from companies with exceptional 2D experience.

Need a catchy jingle or musical score? Hire one with a strong creative audio department.

Whenever possible, find a video production house that has experience **filming in the advertiser's given industry**. That way, even if you don't have a complete manual of <u>Video</u> <u>Enterprise Standards</u>, the video company can likely anticipate any unforeseen conflicts, and fill in those creative blanks.

Does Your Client Have Video Enterprise Standards?

Depending on the industry, your client may have certain regulations that need to be met when creating video, called **Video Enterprise Standards**. Some organizations have officially published Video Enterprise Standards. (This is especially true with public schools, universities, hospitals, and government institutions.)

For instance, regulations when shooting on the premises of an oil and gas company plant will be very different than shooting on a school campus around children, or in a hospital around patients.

However, a lot of businesses DO NOT have any published guidelines. But just because they aren't published, doesn't mean they don't exist!

As the ad account executive or in-house brand marketer, it is imperative that you try to collate any and all brand or industry "no-no's" as you can, so your video team doesn't accidentally film sensitive content when on the premises.

Red Flags

• "Everything Under-the-Sun" production houses. Those who say, or imply, that they do it all. (Any industry. Any type of video -- from prime-time TV commercials to shooting your family reunions.)

Action Items

- 1. Ask prospective video company's what their <u>area of expertise</u> is. If they are in your industry wheelhouse, ask them a series of "insider" questions to test how much they really know about it.
- 2. Request any documentation from your client having to do with **Video Enterprise Standards**. If they look at you clueless, ask for a company handbook and talk to someone senior at the company to dig up any and all "no-no's" as it relates to filming on the client's premises.

Blunder #5:

Not Considering Big Studio vs. Boutique Studio

There I was. \$20,000 worth of an un-insured RED Camera package on my shoulder. In the middle of the Saudi Desert. 98° F in the shade and climbing. Laying beneath a 1,000 kg. camel who was having a bad day. Grunting, spitting, and just itching to step on me and my equipment.

The Bedouin animal handlers said it was not a good idea to get under that camel. They kept saying "we cannot ensure your safety." But there I was anyway.

I picked up the radio and called "Action!" 50 yards away, a line of seven Range Rovers (1950's vintage) begin trudging along the crest of a sand dune. They drive in perfect synch through most of the shot. Then suddenly, the middle Rover stalls in the sand. It throws the other vehicles off. I

know right away it's not going to look right.

"Cut! Back to one."

It took nine gut-wrenching takes. Each take required 15-25 minutes to setup.

Meanwhile, the camel gets more cantankerous with every new setup. He starts bucking his legs. Giant hoofs lift up and slam the dirt just inches from my face. The Bedouin struggles to rein him in place.

Production Company Should Bring Skills Where You Lack (and Vice Versa)

I believe all agencies should review outside vendors with a "skill set Venn Diagram" to see how many of the vendor's skills and talent overlap with the agency's. And then choose the best vendor based on those skills that benefit the project in which you lack.

For instance, if your agency already has a skilled 2D animator or screenwriter on staff (and you've verified they actually are good), then you don't need to hire a video company who cites those skills as their strong points. You can also save quite a bit of money this way.

Later, when we reached town the crew and I went directly to a hospital. We all needed to be rehydrated by intravenous injection. I was treated for third-degree burns from sitting on that sand so long.

But when I saw those dailies... none of that mattered.

The shot was freakin' epic! I mean, it was Laurence of Arabia good!

Best of all, my fledgling, 1-man video production company was able to capture a show-stopping scene that **would have cost my client three times as much with a bigger, more established studio**.

Now that I'm a bit wiser and older, I try not to burn the candle at both ends anymore. But the point I'm making is this. These days - with current camera and editing technology – **you can make a Hollywood-grade commercial using a Boutique video company**. Long gone are the days when glitzy commercials could only be done by established film directors and a caravan of air-conditioned trailers and equipment trucks.

Yet, there are those times when you *really do* need the million-dollar production crew to get the million-dollar looking commercial.

The following is a short primer for how to identify if your video project needs the resources of a big studio. Or, if you can get the same value *reasonably* with a Boutique operation.

When Size Really Does Matter

If this is your first-time requesting bids from video production companies, let me save you a lot of time:

Most videographers DO NOT offer "standard pricing menus".

You will have to request a quotation from each prospective vendor, and they will quote you based on your requirements. Each vendor's will present their pricing in different ways.

When comparing bids, don't go in comparing who is high-priced and who is low. Instead, ask yourself: "Are they a good fit for my budget?" (You do have a budget, right?) Your available budget will be the ultimate factor in deciding Big Studio versus Boutique.

In general, the pros and cons of Big Studio and Boutique are the same as choosing any vendor:

| | <u>ADVANTAGE</u> | DISADVANTAGE |
|------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | √ Access to Crew | ⊗ Budget won't go as far |
| Big Studio | √ Access to more equipment | ⊗ Won't touch projects under |
| | | \$10,000 |
| | √ Personalized service | ⊗ Can easily become over- |
| | | booked |
| Boutique | $\sqrt{}$ Individualized attention | ⊗ Less access to crew |
| | √ Accommodate budgets | ⊗ Less access to more |
| | below \$10,000 | equipment |

Generally speaking, how much a video costs will be dictated by the industry you're in.

For instance, automobile manufacturers learn pretty quick that if they want a commercial of their sports car driving at high speeds through a dry lakebed or city street – it will easily cost a million dollars or more. Hence, they need a Big Studio.

However, an auto dealership that sells the same sports car can easily make a sleek, effective commercial for \$10,000 or less... just by filming the car against a green screen, with one actor speaking into the camera. Looks just as good if done by a Boutique company as it is by a Big Studio. So why pay three times as much?

So how exactly do you tell a Big Studio form a Boutique one?

These days, unfortunately, it's tough to tell right off the bat. Everyone has a sleek website. A flashy demo reel. You really can't tell until you receive a quote.

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However, there is one quick way to tell...

How Long Have They Been in Business?

This question is a good way to judge whether a company is "Big" or "Boutique". Typically, the longer they have been in business, the bigger they get (though there are exceptions).

The trade-offs between Young (Boutique) and Seasoned (Big Studio) video companies usually break down like this:

Young companies typically have:

- ♦ Newer technology
- ♦ More efficient ways of producing
- Hungry for your business, eager to please their clientele
- ♦ More willing to take risks

Seasoned companies typically have:

- ♦ More expertise
- A much larger portfolio of clients, with recognizable brand names and celebrities
- ♦ Tend to stick with what works

But whether you choose Big or Boutique, remember what I said earlier in this book about...

Partnership Before Collaboration

Recall how, in Blunder #3 (Four Phases of Production), I stressed the importance of "Ideation"? How you basically have two types of video companies (regardless of their size) – Collaborators and Partners?

You say you do remember? Good. Because unless you're prepared to hold your video company by the hand through the process... and assume all responsibility for failures (real or imagined by the client)...

... Then you should ONLY consider "Partnership"-oriented companies.

I know this is a pretty esoteric concept. But trust me – no matter if you're going with a big studio or a boutique one – go with Partners over Collaborators.

Red Flags

- Companies that over-promise and under-deliver. I find this most often with "Collaborators" who think they are being "Partners".
- Company has multiple email accounts. Look out for vendors that don't have unified URLs for their email accounts (i.e., "freemail" accounts that end with @google.com, @outlook.com, @mac.com, @yahoo.com, etc.). This is the sure sign of an upstart freelancer. In their eagerness, young freelancers are more likely to get in over their heads, on projects that are too big for them.
- Lack of online reviews. Yes, I know a great majority of online reviews are B.S. However... a company that has <u>zero</u> reviews online is either *very new*... or hiding something.
- Lack of communication. A good video partner should touch base with you at least 1-2 times per week through the duration of the project. To gauge if they will be good communicators, look for subtle clues in your first email exchange or phone call. Signs of a poor communicator include: Not "seeing" an email you sent; only reading part of your RFP; failing to send the material you requested.
- Quick to hand-off responsibility. A common trait of the "Collaborator", such companies are *passive* rather than *proactive*. This is so that any mistake caused by miscommunication will ultimately become your fault. (A tell-tale sign is if a company rep says something like "We don't agree but we'll do it your way").
- If the company starts showing these passive "Collaborator" signs or is blatantly not respecting your terms speak up! Tell them clearly in email (so it's documented) that you are dis-pleased and want corrective action. If they don't correct their behavior, demand that you want out of the contract... and threaten to bring your attorney in!

Action Items:

- 1. Ask the company what their production process looks like. And ask what your role in the process needs to be.
 - a. *Big Studios* afford you the luxury of sitting back while they do all the work.
 - b. **Boutique Companies** may require more of your attention and time.
- 2. **Know your budget**. Both your internal budget and the budget you show prospective video companies. Let your budget decide if Big Studio is even an option for you.
- 3. Accept the possibility that your video concept may be too big for your budget.
- 4. Ask the vendors **what is and is not included** in their quote, such as:
 - a. Actors
 - b. Music
 - c. Voice over talent
 - d. Source files
- 5. When reviewing bids, ask yourself these two questions about each prospective company:
 - a. Are they creative and business savvy?
 - b. Do they possess tried-and-true business skills that pay the bills?
- 6. Nine questions to ask prospective video production companies:
 - a. How long have they been in business?
 - b. Will they brainstorm ideas with you that will match your vision for the video?
 - c. Do they have professional script writer on staff?
 - d. Do they provide actors or have a casting company they can refer you to?
 - e. What type of equipment do they provide?
 - f. What about set locations, staffing numbers, and cost?
 - g. Is editing included?
 - h. (If you require it) Do they market and distribute the video?

Blunder #6:

Hiring the Lowest Bidder

A wise production sound teacher (and early mentor) once told me that if you want to be a successful freelancer, you have to look people in the eyes and ask:

"What's the budget you have in mind?"

He said that every bad job he worked on was caused by him (or the producer hiring him) *not* being brave enough to ask this question. And, he said you have to say it with a straight "poker face" – and be ready for a long, uncomfortable silence.

And despite my mentor's sage advice... I made this mistake a dozen times over.

Case in point: I'm on the 25th floor of this glass tower, sitting in front of a prospective client. He's what you'd call a "titan of industry" – he literally casts a dark shadow over me.

"Uh, so what's your budget?" I squeaked.

This titan of industry stares daggers into me... downright offended... as if I was asking which political party he voted for in the last election. Finally, he says:

"How about you tell me how much it's gonna cost? And then I'll tell you if it's too much!"

Long story short: we didn't end up working together.

If you're and ad agency exec, or even an in-house CMO, I'm sure you've experienced a similar reluctance from your own clients and prospects.

Over the years, I conquered my fear by recognizing the unique value we bring to clients.

Xperiment Media has a track record of producing commercials that look like Hollywood movies.

I know we make a quality product, and it's worth every shilling.

Here's the biggest lesson I've learned in that time: 9 out of 10 prospective clients don't include a video production budget in their RFP because...

They don't have a clue what their budget is!

In all their excitement to make a video, they haven't even thought about what they're willing to spend.

These days, I always tell them: "I need to know your budget before I quote you."

Some come back with a number, and I quote them. Others refuse to divulge a budget.

I make it a point not to work with the latter. And I'll explain why in this chapter.

Price Is Only an Issue When There's an Absence of Value

It's natural for anyone seeking services to ask, "how much will it cost?"

But mark my words: *Hiring based on lowest price is a recipe for disaster*.

That said, I can understand why many agencies and brands fall into the low-price trap. Most video production companies don't take the time to explicitly say what their specialties are and why you should hire them versus the next guy.

If you're comparing the bids of three video production companies – one is super low, one is super high, and the third is in the middle... and yet, none of the proposals adequately justifies the price... what else *can* you compare but price?

Here's a quick rule to live by: don't go with the company with the remarkably low price. I try my best to warn newbie account executives and brand marketers this all the time:

"The odds are not in you favor. Choose the lowest bid, and they *will* underdeliver. You *will* get low quality work. Trust me, you don't know what you're getting yourself into – getting a mediocre commercial that the client hates will be the *least* of your worries."

And yet, a large percentage of prospects don't take my advice. Why is this?

Lowest Cost ≠ **More Videos**

One prospective client – a marketing assistant for a brand that'll go nameless – told me this:

"My boss wants to make 10 videos this year. At your price, our budget would only allow us to make three. So that's why we went with Company X."

Here's why that line of thinking is wrong – it doesn't consider **quality**.

What do I mean by quality? I'm *not* talking about a video that simply "looks good." Instead, I'm talking about a **video that ages well**. One that is evergreen. One that continues to bring value to your company for years and years and years.

Think of those TV commercials you remember from childhood that are still airing today. The advertiser isn't re-running the commercial for nostalgia's sake. No. They're re-running the commercial because it's still making a profit!

So don't try to "get more video" at the cheapest price. Instead, use your available budget to produce fewer, yet higher-quality videos that last a long time.

Let's say you spend \$20,000 for a commercial. This commercial should last you between three to five years, so in essence, it's as if you're spending \$4,000 to \$7,000 per year. And for these years, this commercial continues to help increase conversion rates, customer engagement, customer acquisition, and create brand awareness – all on its own, without you having to do anything extra. Now tell me: is that \$20,000 commercial money well spent?

Know Your Video Production Budget (and its Limitations)

Have you heard of the Triple Constraint Theory? It's the one that says "Fast. Cheap. Good. Pick two." In other words, you want to balance quality, speed and cost with your video production.

Let's say you have \$500,000 to \$ 1M in the budget. Guess what? With a good story and good product, you can make a TV commercial that rivals any broadcast during the World Cup.

But, if you only have \$5,000, then a TV commercial may be out of your league. However, you can easily make a short, branded documentary, or a damn good-looking YouTube commercial that gets millions of views.

I'm not saying you have to compromise your vision for your budget. I am saying that your vision can be achieved in different ways, through different mediums. Be open to those possibilities.

TRUE OR FALSE?

Video production costs will depend on:

- Type of video
- Shooting Location
- Crew
- Equipment
- Talent
- Length of Pre-production
- Editing
- Sound
- Post-production

"Quotes for a 45-second commercial are too high. If I cut it down to a 25-second commercial, we will save money."

FALSE!

Duration (start time to end time of the video) barely factors into a video's cost – unless of course you're comparing a feature film to short, branded content.

Otherwise, crew and equipment costs will be mostly the same -- whether you're making a one minute or five-minute video. Duration won't even make a big impact in Post-Production unless the video needs an unusually high number of edits.

How to Choose the Right Video Production Company

Strike the Perfect Balance for your Budget

I recently "spied" on our competition to see where our pricing structure fit in the marketplace.

To do this, I literally pose as the president of a small ad agency (with a fake email, fake URL, and phone number), and I send out a flurry of Request for Proposals. The quotes we get back tell us how other companies would bid on the same project.

Yes, I know this is very sneaky – but how else could we do it?

What I found out was truly shocking. The same project bid from as low as \$800... all the way up to \$20,000!

I'm not exaggerating. The disparity between lowest and highest cost was that wide!

How to Get Production Companies to Come to YOU during the Bidding Process

Rather than doing all the work to write up an RFP, a video brief, and then scour the internet for companies.. you can actually post your RFP to forums and have companies bid on it! Just be prepared to get inundated with phone calls and emails.

These sites also let you browse listed companies, and provides a centralized listing of reviews for those companies that's a little more reliable than Yelp or google reviews.

- ProductionHub
- Clutch.co
- Storyhunter
- Thumbtack

So, who do you choose? In most cases, you will be best served looking for <u>companies offering</u> <u>mid-range prices</u>. But ask each prospective vendor about possible <u>hidden costs</u> (number of edits allowed, actor day rates, music licensing costs, journey charges, etc.)

Also, be reasonable in your search. Sure, you can get a wedding videographer to shoot your branded doc for a few hundred bucks. But you're definitely sacrificing the good quality video *you could have had* with one of the mid-range bidders.

And please, don't hire your nephew that just graduated film school. Even if he does own all the newest equipment.

There's no way around it: you've got to shop around. Get several estimates (5 or more if possible). And do your homework on each company. It's the only way you can make sure your project is priced right.

Look, I know, bidding sucks and takes time. But it's well worth it, as pricing can vary wildly.

One final parting word of advice: Whatever your client's original budget was... adding as little as \$500 to \$1,000 more can deliver exponential value to your client's video. This little boost can allow your production company to hire an extra set of hands, or upgrade equipment – kicking your video quality up a few notches.

So, try going back to your client, and ask for a little bit more. You might be surprised at their willingness to "budge" the budget.

Red Flags

- Your client is too focused on getting "more videos" at the cheapest price over any other consideration.
- If one production company's price estimate is remarkably lower than others... run!
- But, if you really want to roll the dice... ask the low baller where they are cutting costs (and ask yourself if it is worth it to cut these corners.)
- Client or agency / marketing team is determined to hire crew members for a half-day in order to save money. Guess what? Each crew member will likely charge you more than half their day rate because they have to make up for lost time and lost money.
 (Working a half-day means they can't schedule a second gig that day.)

"Cheap" video crews often DON'T shoot multiple takes -- either because they're
inexperienced or they're too eager to finish principal photography as soon as possible. In
either case, not having enough footage will KILL your project when it comes time to edit.
Better to have too much footage than not enough.

Action Items:

- 1. **Decide on a (rough) budget**. It doesn't need to be a detailed line-item budget. Just a "ballpark figure", approved by upper management. Your estimation will help the crew make important decisions in terms of:
 - a. Equipment
 - b. Personnel
 - c. Complexity of Production

2. Money Saving Tips:

- Train your on-screen talent in advance so they know their lines and cues before shooting begins.
- b. Reach out to customers for video testimonials and interviews. (Testimonials are a very powerful selling device.)
- c. Assign scriptwriting duties to a colleague.
- d. Use employees as actors and/or extras.
- e. Ensure the Director of Photography, Camera, and Lighting teams have at least a day of "blocking", or practice, with on-screen talent.
- f. Upload the video yourself (or have a fellow employee do it).
- g. Minimize any Special Effects that do not push the story forward.
- 3. **Plan for the Long-Term.** Hire a video team you can see yourself working with on future projects. Using the same crew can save yourself time, paperwork, and headaches. It'll also keep things consistent and uniform, so your final videos will have relatable styles, that look great together on your website and social media channel.
- 4. **Look for partner-centric video companies**. Build a lasting relationship that allows the video team to get to know you, earn your trust, and develop a short-hand language with you so there's less handholding required from you.

- 5. **Utilize your network to find talent**. Remember that your time spent endlessly searching on Google comes at a cost. Start your search by reaching out to your network to see who has hired video production companies before. Ask co-workers, other marketers, and local businesses too.
- 6. **Commit to** <u>being actively involved in the video production process.</u> This will lead to you spending far less time in the editing bay, fewer cost over-runs, and a better-quality video overall. Your production company's expertise might change your overall perspective, and that's a <u>good</u> thing! You will wind up with a much cooler concept when you work together.
- 7. **Choose Your Music Carefully.** Royalty-free music is the safest choice. Pay very close attention to its **licensing requirements.**

Blunder #7:

Hiring the First Video Production Company You Find

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This next piece "tough-love advice" is something every agency or brand needs to hear before hastily choosing the first vendor they find.

It comes from John Hughes' Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1985):

"Cameron has never been in love... If things don't change for him, he's gonna marry the first girl he lays, and she's gonna treat him like shit, because she will have given him what he has built up in his mind as the end-all, be-all of human existence."

--Ferris Bueller (Matthew Broderick)

In the movie, Ferris tries to show his best friend a good time before they graduate High School.

But Cameron (Alan Ruck) just *refuses* to open himself up to new experiences. He's a tortured soul who has been conditioned to believe he is not deserving of unconditional love.

Cameron reminds me of a few account executives and chief marketing officers I've met. Very smart businesspeople who went with the first video production company that returned their bid.

I consulted with a "Cameron" recently, who hired a deadbeat video production house...

... And re-hired them no less than five times!

As "Cameron" told me: "I knew each time I was going back into an abusive relationship. I knew they would never change."

Until we spoke, this "Cameron" really believed this is "just the way things are." That in order to produce a video, he had to let himself get dragged through the mud one more time.

So, how do YOU avoid being a "Cameron"?

How to "Get in Bed" With the Right Production House

In Hollywood-speak, producers and agents will often refer to signing contracts as "Getting in Bed" with someone. Think about it: You're signing-up to get *very* close and *very* personal with a total stranger... for a *very* long period of time. You'll be tying your financial futures together, just like in a marriage.

Be Mindful of Payment Terms

Contractors will typically ask for an **up-front deposit** – 10% is a pretty standard starting point. You will both agree to periodic payments as the video company completes specific milestones in the project.

If it's a simple one-day shoot: you might only need to pay the remaining balance after the project is edited.

If it's a more complicated project: because the editing process will be intense, put in writing how many revisions are required in the contract. Because the vendor will be commiting a lot of man-power and resources out-of-pocket, consider paying your vendor in incremental sums at the end of each shooting day. Then, pay the remaining balance after the project is edited.

Bottom line: Avoid "getting in bed" with the wrong partner.

When searching for a prospective video production company, ask yourself:

- "Are they the right kind of company to produce my video?"
- "Will I be comfortable working with these people?"

And for Pete's sake – SHOP AROUND!

Just like in personal relationships, the best way to avoid getting dragged through the mud is to get bids from at least 3-4 companies that fit the bill. Then, when you are confident you've found the right video production company, **let the other bidders know your search has ended**. And

that - while they did not win the bid - you really appreciate their time, and will keep them in mind for future projects.

That way... should your chosen vendor turn from Anakin Skywalker into "Darth Vader" ... you've got prospective vendors *who like you* in your back pocket!

Red Flags

- Sales representative does not ask many questions about your client's business. Or otherwise, they seem dis-interested in learning about you.
- Sales representative is over-eager to tell you about all their accomplishments, awards, and big-name clients.
- Run away if the prospective vendor asks for **cash payment**, **wire transfers**, or refuses to sign any agreements.
- Run away if they ask you to pay 100% of the production fee up-front. (Heck, don't even agree to pay 50% of the fee up-front.)

Action Items

- 1. With each bid, carefully analyze what you're getting especially in terms of **crew size**:
 - a. Does the vendor have a 3-person crew to handle lighting, audio and equipment?
 - b. Or a 1-person crew that handles everything?
- 2. Ask yourself: **Who is the vendor likely to work with?** Have they worked with companies like mine? In my industry? On projects similar to the video my client wants to make?
- 3. Ask if they have **liability insurance** to operate at the film venues you intend to shoot. If not, they'll likely get <u>short term insurance</u> and pass the price onto you. (I.E., your final cost goes up versus the bid cost.) Not all crews carry their own liability insurance. And not all liability insurance covers all venue types. Just know going in so you can leave a little extra room in your budget.

Blunder #8:

(False) Belief That "Professional Companies" Must Own Their Own Studio and Equipment

Here's a true story from young Addy Khan's freshman year of film school:

I got to know this kid in my Cinematography class (whom I'll call "Max" to protect the guilty). Max owned every high-tech toy a film nerd could want - high-definition camera; Zeiss lenses; professional-grade lights and stands; a \$6,000 camera jib; a prosumer-grade Steadicam; and a dolly with 20 feet of track.

He even owned his own Sprinter van to carry all his equipment!

Everyone at school wanted to work with Max. Anytime a student would ask "Who's a good DP?" or "Who has X piece of equipment I could borrow?" the answer was always Max, Max, Max.

I was seriously jealous of Max, until...

... The day I started working with him, as his 1st Cameraman. That's when I saw a very different side of Max.

We were working on a senior's student thesis film that was supposed to be epic. Big mansion in the Malibu Hills. An ambitious script. Choreographed fight scenes and gun play.

Max shows up *over an hour late* for the first day of principal photography. His tardiness then set the tone for next four days (plus subsequent, un-planned re-shoots), which turned into a grueling shit-show.

Max argued with the director... in front of actors and crew! He refused to talk with the sound crew (much of the audio had to be re-dubbed later). Each camera setup took 3-4 times longer than it should have.

And to add insult to injury... Max was blatantly *smoking weed* with other students... OUT IN THE OPEN... between setups.

[Myth] High-Quality Video Needs High-Priced Equipment

I tell the story of "Max" in order to illustrate this point:

The <u>best</u> equipment... in the <u>wrong</u> hands... will *still* look like a rank-amateur student film!

15 to 20 years ago, it was (mostly) true that "professional" production houses owned their own equipment, transportation, and studio space. Back then, it was more efficient and cost-effective to hire companies that "own-it-all" versus companies that rented their gear.

Back then, pro cameras and editing hardware / software were so astronomically expensive... that anyone who owned them had likely "Paid the Cost to Be the Boss" – it was the mark of a sought-after, top-level professional.

And back then, leaps in camera and editing technology only happened every five years. So, production houses could reliably make their money back on the equipment they bought.

But today, the video production landscape is completely different. It no longer makes sense economically for video companies to buy and warehouse a full equipment package. And the COVID-19 pandemic has only helped push this paradigm shift *even faster* in the last year.

And yet... too many agencies, brands, and old-guard production companies are STILL pushing this belief – that the "own-it-all" business model is the hallmark of a true "professional".

Let's set the record straight, shall we?

Expertise Over Equipment: How 21st Century Businesses Can Win in Video by Going "Lean"

In case you think I'm putting on airs... that Addy Khan is covering the fact that Xperiment Media doesn't own a warehouse full of equipment... consider these facts:

- 1. Video technology is making leaps and bounds every few months. (Last year's top-of-line camera is practically obsolete!) Meanwhile, raw material costs, real estate prices, and vehicle maintenance costs are in an erratic state of flux more so than in any time in history.
- 2. While prices for Hollywood-grade camera systems and gear remain astronomically high as they ever were... new pro-sumer cameras are entering the market, closing the gap between "professional" and "pro-sumer" quality every year.

Take a look at your own business. How many "hats" are you wearing (thanks to technology) versus someone in your role 20 years ago? How much of your sensitive business records are in "the cloud" versus on an in-house server? Why do clients demand <u>more work</u>... at a *fraction* of the fees they used to pay out?

The point I'm making is this. "Professional" video production companies – along with the rest of the whole world – are changing with the times.

We are evolving towards a <u>low-overhead</u>, <u>variable cost business model</u>. It now makes more sense economically to rent cameras, equipment, and transportation as needed. It's also more practical to rent studio space (or "co-operate" a space) than to own property.

Believe it or not, this low-overhead model is actually *better* for the client as well. Yes, it now a takes a little longer for you to vet and choose production houses these days. But on the flip side,

you can now *deliver Hollywood-grade commercials* to clients at a *fraction of the cost*. In the recent COVID pandemic, as you well know, this low-overhead business model is even more in vogue... and I predict that leaner, more agile agencies and production companies will emerge from this fire victorious – several steps ahead of our slow-moving competitors.

So how does all this impact your search for the right video company?

It means **the playing field has been flattened**. It means you should not ignore the lean start-up. It means you should question if more *established* companies that "own-it-all" are automatically "right" for your video. It means you have to <u>spend more time evaluating each candidate</u> during the bidding process.

Above all, you must find the company that's right for your budget and your client's niche. The company must *complement* your strengths and *compensate* for your weaknesses. Find a partnership in which you can both grow together, and you'll be un-stoppable!

In the next Blunder, we'll talk about how even the *most* qualified candidate can still be the "wrong" choice in terms of availability. And how to overcome unexpected delays.

Red Flags

- A rookie straight outta' film school who owns their own camera and editing software –
 who promises he/she can make a Hollywood-style video for you.
- Production company boasts or flaunts their inventory of gear or studio space over all other aspects of their business.
- You investigate other videos the company produced that *are not* featured on their website. These "hidden" videos look like a 5th grader shot it; a far cry from the company's sleek demo reel.

Action Items

- 1. **Equipment rental costs.** Does the production company include these costs in the bid price? Or do they pass the rental costs onto you as a variable expense later? Neither one or the other is "good" or "bad", mind you just be aware so there's no surprises later.
- 2. **Ask what cameras they intend to use.** Then, learn a little about that camera system.
- 3. **Learn a little bit about the different camera brands out there**. Pay attention to price points, brand names, and their technology. <u>VideoMaker Magazine</u> is a great place to start. (This way, when production houses quote a certain price point based on the camera, you'll know enough to know if they're BS'ing you or not!)
- 4. **Ask for a list of gear** they intend to use (lights, sound, tripods, jibs, dollies, etc.). Do a quick internet search of some of the items. If anything appears to be "overkill", ask the vendor why it is necessary for your video project.
- 5. See a particular shot or scene in the vendor's sizzle reel that you'd like to emulate for your own project? Ask what camera and equipment was used to pull it off and if the equipment for your shoot will be the same or comparable.
- 6. **Caveat to #5:** If you trust the company and they say they can pull off the same effect with less expensive gear LET THEM SAVE YOU SOME MONEY!
- 7. **Money Saving Tip:** if you plan to shoot an ongoing series of videos and you find a production crew you like consider **buying some of your own equipment** (preferably hardware that won't be obsolete in six months, like boom & lavalier mics, lights, stands, tripods, and dollies). Your production house might be able to discount future video shoots, as there's less equipment to rent, transport, and insure.

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Blunder #9:

Hiring a Company That Can't Accommodate Your Schedule

There's a trap that video production clients fall into...

And it's especially bad if you're a first timer.

The best way to describe it is...

"Not budgeting your time."

You see, most production companies will tell you **it takes 4-6 weeks** - from project kickoff to asset delivery – to complete a video (runtime between 25 seconds and 5 minutes).

That's generally true... IF you are *prompt* in giving feedback.

Unfortunately, many companies *take far longer than they expected* to return feedback. That leads to penalty fees, and the production house becoming *unavailable* to continue your project.

So, here's a story of one of my clients who has an unusually long internal review process – who actually did things RIGHT from the get-go:

Why Blatant and Sincere Honesty is the ONLY Way to Avoid Scheduling Delays

Nadia (not her real name) is my point-of-contact for a government contractor client. Nadia is a super-sharp executive assistant who knows her firm better than most of the C-suite. She knows that – due to regulations and legal concerns - the firm's bureaucracy moves like a sloth... clawing its way up a tree... with a 10kg weight on its back.

I sent Nadia our first video agreement form. It comes back 24-hours later by FedEx. The signature line was blank. But **she made over 30 corrections** to our Terms & Conditions section. The pages were full of blood-red ink, and in the margins were Nadia's new terms.

It felt like I was getting my High School trigonometry paper back, with a big "F" on it!

I call her, and Nadia explains to me that, in order to work with her firm, we had to understand that it would take 4-5 months *at minimum* for the board of directors to deliver their feedback. She estimated each subsequent revision would take that long as well. (I found out later this was because the board met once every quarter at their shareholder's meeting. It was the only time all 12 members were in the same room at the same time.)

All-in-all, Nadia predicted it **might take more than a year to complete the video**.

"If you feel our timeline will stretch your resources too much," she said. "Then I suggest you requote us at price that you feel is right. Or you walk away from this deal right now."

So, I looked at my calendar based on her input. I figured I could fit in all sorts of work between each shareholder meeting. I sent a revised agreement with a MUCH higher price tag. And 24 hours later, I get another FedEx envelope. This time, with a signed document.

And wouldn't you know... a little more than one year later, we delivered the final edit.

Our hero "Nadia" did two very smart things in her contract negotiation that I want you to pay attention to:

- 1. She was open, honest, and realistic about her company's decision-making process. (She straight-up told me: "You will not hear from us for very long stretches of time.")
- She read and understood the Terms & Conditions specifically the part about "Client Deliverables" and expectations.

You see, Xperiment Media (and most video production companies) have it written into our agreements that clients <u>MUST provide sufficient feedback</u>, notes, and other deliverables required to keep the project moving along. Otherwise, your project becomes "inactive" because you didn't hold up your end of the bargain.

And if you want to re-start the "inactive" project... you'll have to pay some (or all) of the remaining balance.

For instance, let's say I quote you \$9,000 for a commercial. I ask for 15% up-front, so you pay me \$1,350.

I then spend weeks getting the script, shotlist, and production schedule ready. I try several times to get a meeting with you and your client with no success. You stop returning our calls and emails, cause things are just so busy on your end.

Six months later...

You call us and say "We're ready to work on this video again. What's the next step?"

That's when I gotta give you the bad news:

"Your project is inactive, and you've voided the agreement. We'll need the remaining \$7,650 UP-FRONT to begin again."

Now, I know what you're thinking. "Six months? No way! I will NOT let that happen."

But don't be too sure, my friend.

Consider these sobering facts:

On average, **TWO-THIRDS** of all video projects go "inactive." Meaning clients pay their upfront fee, sign the contract and agree to all the terms... and then go *radio-silent* for six months or more.

Only HALF of those "inactive" clients never come back to re-start the project.

And HALF of all re-activated clients never still never finish their projects.

By the way, I've compared my numbers with several other production houses. These averages are pretty consistent across the board.

So, how do you avoid this trap?

Set A Video Production Timeline

As a client hiring a video production company, YOU NEED TO BE RESPONSIVE. A lack of response will hold up the delivery of your video and can cause you to incur penalties.

Does your client need time to gather approvals from various executives? Are those executives very busy people who are difficult to reach? Does legal need to get involved?

Then you need to be very realistic about your expectations for their feedback delivery... and set expectations for your client, so they take the video project seriously. To do this, you need a Video Production Timeline.

Start by asking your production house to draft their own production schedule.

Second, understand when *your client* expects the finished video to be ready. It could be your client's video is part of a larger marketing goal – they need it in time for a holiday sale, the rollout of a new product, a trade show, or an annual stakeholder meeting.

If you can't identify an event to tie the video's release date to, just ask your client to look at a calendar and ask, "In your mind, when do you see this video broadcasting on TV / live on the internet?"

Third, now that you know the broadcast deadline, it's just a matter of working backwards. Ask your client to try and identify as many potential "road-blocks" within that timeline so you can work around them.

What do I mean by "road-blocks"?

I mean any event that might affect the availability of your client's key personnel who are required to move the video project along. Common "road-blocks" include:

- Scheduling the CEO for an on-camera interview... while he's out of town on a business trip.
- Assigning time-sensitive tasks to an employee... who is expecting his or her first child any day now.
- Planning to collect B-roll footage of their busy office staff... at a time when the entire department is at an off-site training or corporate retreat.

Fourth, make sure to tie-up any loose ends with your production house, so they can avoid any potential "land mines" when dealing with your client. Give the crew guidance on what parts of your client's company need more attention... and what should be avoided.

For instance:

- The client wants to showcase their top-selling product as it comes off the assembly line... but they do not want the camera anywhere near their proprietary research lab nearby.
- If there are any off-site shots you want them to film (like a warehouse that's 50 miles away from the corporate headquarters or interviews of customers at their place of business).

Finally, put the video production timeline in writing... and do it as early as you can. Set up a time frame for:

- 1. Pre-Production
- 2. Shoot dates
- 3. Editing
- 4. Revisions
- 5. Dates for your team to respond to feedback
- 6. Delivery timelines

Send the timeline to the production crew and your client. Use it to monitor the project and make sure its progressing on schedule. Know that this schedule will change... but you'll be able to move the field goal when changes occur.

Try to give hard dates to your client for them to submit feedback. And keep your line of communication open with the production house.

Remember, you are the liaison between the production crew, your agency, and your client. That may require you to be the "bad guy" sometimes. You will need to politely, but *persistently* check-in for status updates. Being the taskmaster is no fun (especially when managing accounts for multiple clients), but it can be a little easier if you create a video production timeline.

Red Flags

 A prospective vendor takes an unusually long time get back to you (submits their bid later than others or takes days to respond to your email or return your phone call). These are tell-tale signs that the production house is swamped with work. Or they are woefully under-staffed or bad at time management. Many companies won't admit to you when they are over-booked, cause they're betting they can squeeze you in to keep the money flowing. But take this as a sign – don't work with them.

• Your client is a little flighty, inconsistent, chronically un-responsive, or has high rates of employee turnover (i.e. you're dealing with a new point person every time).

Action Items

- 1. **Rush Fees.** If your video has a very short deadline, or you just want to guarantee V.I.P. status from your vendor, ask the production house about rush fees. When you pay for rush fees, you pay for the right to work your production crew like a dog and expect miracles. If you are confident you can hit your goals without rush fees, at least pad the production budget in case you need to accelerate the process later on.
- 2. **Scout all of the locations** where video footage will be gathered. Don't just rely on Google Map images or send an intern to do it. <u>Take lots of photos</u> and try to imagine a 10-person video crew filming there. Is it far away? Is there access to electricity, plumbing, waste disposal? How far is it from the nearest hospital? If it's a factory floor, is it a very loud or hazardous environment? Is there a lot of public foot traffic that you won't be able to control? (Believe me, it sucks to chase down bystanders to sign talent release forms!)
- 3. **Write up a detailed video production timeline.** Send it to both the production crew, and your client (anyone who has involvement, from offices workers up to the C-suite).
- 4. Know how much time your team will have for reviews and revisions. Make sure everyone is aware of the schedule, so it does not delay the production team or cause you to incur penalties.
- 5. **Know how fast (or how slow) your client will be in submitting feedback.** This is much easier if you've worked with them before. If this is your first dance together, try to find an ally within the company's marketing department who has been there for a while. Get a sense if the decision makers are detailed and timely with their feedback. If not, know that you will have to more proactively check-in with them and possibly buffer the production timeline to allow for their extended review period.
- 6. **Schedule regular review meetings with your client** to gather feedback at each stage of the video's Post-Production (editing) phase. To ensure everyone shows up, make it a "party" with catered lunch. And don't forget to **send several reminders** prior to the meeting date. During the meeting, **have an agenda**, and put the most important feedback

topics at the top of the list. (Yes, you might have to act like a circus ring master, constantly "whipping" people back onto the topic at hand.) But having this meeting and getting all feedback at once is far better than passively sending a video link in an email or on a DVD... and expecting a busy executive to find the time to look at it.

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Blunder #10:

Being Seduced by The Sizzle Reel

You've probably heard the old advertising axiom:

"Sell the sizzle, not the steak."

As practitioners of persuasion (marketers and advertisers), we must always be on high alert – otherwise, our own "weapons of persuasion" can easily be turned against us!

Coined by Elmer Wheeler of the Tested Selling Institute in the late 1930's, Wheeler explained:

"The sizzle has sold more steaks than the cow ever has, although the cow is, of course, mighty important."

Once Mr. Wheeler discovered the *sizzle* in anything - the tang in cheese, the bubbles in wine, the whiff of brewed coffee - the customer was *his*.

I would say "sizzle, not the steak" is an apt description of the video production company's most effective and universal selling tool – the Sizzle Reel.

What is the Sizzle Reel?

Found on the homepage of most production company websites, the sizzle reel is a slickly edited highlight video of the company's best work. This video gives prospective clients a quick overview of what the vendor can accomplish. It demonstrates their scope of work, their various skills, and the clients they've worked with in the past.

The sizzle reel helps you determine if the production crew is right for your video -- without having to watch their whole body of work, read their entire website, or endure a long phone interview.

However... I have seen too many ad agencies and brands fall in love with *the idea* of working with a company because it has worked with big brand names. Or, because they were dazzled by special effects or fancy editing.

Worse... there are production companies out there "faking it till they make it" with expensive and dazzling sizzle reels. You only find out later that they have neither the talent nor the resources to back it up.

And once you sign the agreement and begin production, it's often very expensive to back out.

So how do you ensure you're getting the "sizzle" and the "steak" when choosing a video production company?

Make Sure You're Seeing Their Latest Videos

First, admit to yourself that you are susceptible to seduction. We all are. We often blind ourselves to red flags that should have been obvious. Whether it's a femme fatale in a red dress, or a business deal that's "too good to be true", there are times when we think "It won't happen to me." Or that the payoff is worth any potential pain and suffering.

And so it goes with sizzle reels.

Second, for each prospective vendor, seek out their completed final work. It might be on their website, YouTube page, or on a client's website. Ask yourself: does this align with my client's goals?

Watching the vendors' <u>completed videos</u> will reveal what their sizzle reel *does not*.

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One reason for this is that filmmakers spend *months* perfecting their sizzle reels... but it takes time to update their website.

So, the footage you see on a given sizzle reel **may be years old.** Most companies get better and more sophisticated with age. But some companies <u>may lose the star talent</u> that made their sizzle reel look so damn good... and their current stuff could be mediocre now.

So don't rely on the company's website to host their most up-to-date videos. Instead, hop onto Facebook, Instagram, or other social media channels and check the company out. Investigate any recent projects they've announced... and judge for yourself if what they're currently producing is *as good* or *better* than what's on the sizzle reel.

Think About Medium as well as Message

Today, consumers have so many different ways to watch your content. Different devices, different platforms, and different operating systems. (Plus, you have to account for older and newer generations of each OS!) You can't just think about broadcast television and ignore all other mediums. You'll be leaving out whole segments of your consumer base that prefer one way and not the other.

Good production houses are aware of this and will strike a balance in their filming to offer the same experience across devices.

What do I mean by same experience?

If you wanted to produce a sweeping, epic commercial that looks good on a 36" LCD TV screen, you also want to keep in mind that people may be viewing the same commercial on their tiny phone screen. Or, the ad may be re-purposed as a square Facebook video, losing all the detail on the right and left edges of the screen.

So, when you're evaluating production companies, do your research and think critically. Look for studios that can execute a project that is comparable to the one you're planning. And don't let the sizzle reel be your only determining factor.

RED FLAGS

- You look at the source of the sizzle reel (hosted on YouTube or Vimeo), and notice the timestamp says it's three or more years old.
- Does the production company have a variety of video types and styles? Or are they a "one trick pony?"
- You search for the actual videos the production company was hired to create... and don't see them anywhere.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. **Dig deeper into the production company's website**. Read the team biographies, their areas of stated expertise, read a few of their blog posts, and note the clients they've worked with.
- 2. Find the production company's most recent projects on YouTube, Vimeo, and their social media channels.
- 3. **Research the vendor's clientele.** Decide if the client-companies are similar in size and industry to yours. Watch any videos that are available on their site (and ask the vendor which videos *they* produced, if it's not clear.)
- 4. Pick a video you really like. Watch the same video on your phone, laptop, and television screen. Get a sense of how well the video translates to different mediums. Also, try streaming the video on a strong Wi-Fi signal; then try with your cellular data. If the video stutters or freezes a lot, that could mean the video company is not paying attention to their compression settings -- and that can mean the difference between someone watching your video or skipping it!

Blunder #11:

Not Hiring Locally

When my Western friends visit from abroad I always have to explain how certain English words have different meanings here in the Gulf.

No, I'm not talking about curse words or slang. I'm talking about the word:

"Local."

Where we are from, you know that saying someone or something is "local" can be a much broader statement than it is in other countries.

Being local either means you live in the same metropolitan city (Dubai, Kuwait, Cairo)...

... Or it means you're "geographically somewhere between Mauritania and Pakistan."

Historically, the MENA region has been (and continues to be) an inter-dependent, interconnected realm of traders and nomads.

Long before modern states existed, we've been trading merchandise, expertise, and ideas across the desert.

There's really no region in the world quite like ours, in terms of variety and quality of the things we exchange. (And each country has its strengths and specialties that complement the strengths of neighboring nations.)

I say all this because... while I want to convince you that hiring video crews locally is the best policy... that "local" needs a broader definition in our context.

Dubai: "Hollywood" of the MENA Region

If you want to find a world-class video production company, it's no surprise that the United Arab Emirates is the best country to find them. Whether you're in Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria or Morocco – the UAE (and Dubai in particular) is *THE* place to you should be find your video crew.

Other neighboring countries do things better than we do. Saudi Arabia, for instance, might be the place you find a good app developer. Or the place to buy media, because Saudis have a hypercaptive audience of well-to-do consumers.

If you need ancient-looking locations, go to Egypt. And believe it or not, you can replicate nearly any major city in the world with a little bit of creative location scouting in Lebanon.

But the UAE has the best production talent in the region, bar-none. Think actors. Hair stylists. Set decorators. Producers and filmmakers. A great majority of us got our training in places like Los Angeles, New York, Berlin, Mumbai, and Hong Kong.

The UAE is also the only game in town for equipment and hardware. Anytime a shiny new HD cinema camera is released in the United States – or a robotic dolly is released in Germany – several rental companies and production houses in the UAE will inevitably procure it.

The point I'm making is this. No matter what look or style you're going for, you can get it right here in your own backyard.

The Dirty Little Secret About Hiring International Film Crews

So, I still haven't convinced you?

You saw that sleek car commercial from a hot video production agency in Paris. You want THAT look -- and you don't need to look at anybody else's' demo reel.

Okay. But let me tell you what might (most likely) happen when you hire that fancy French film crew.

First, you'll be spending a fortune on air travel and accommodations (they might insist on First Class all the way).

Second, they will be renting almost all of their equipment locally, since shipping expensive cameras and lights overseas has all kinds of insurance limitations.

Third, Western countries have this perception that we are all sultans and oil magnates... with more money than we know what to do with. So, expect that international film crews will charge you enormous fees.

I have heard of ad agencies spending as much money flying out production crews to shoot on location as on the entire production itself. And then, there's the biggest secret of all...

"International" Video Production Companies Usually Sub-Contract Their Work!

Yes, you heard right.

Often, out-of-town video companies will sub-contract with local companies to save costs. So, either way, <u>you might ultimately be hiring locals anyway</u>... only you're still paying bloated fees for travel, accommodation and rentals!

Think I'm being a bad sport about this? Is it Addy just bad-mouthing the competition?

Certainly not.

If you want to hire that fancy French *professionnel de la vid'eo...* and you want to make sure your video looks like that sexy, FX-heavy sports car commercial one on their sizzle reel... just get them to agree in writing that the director, cinematographer, wardrobe, or actor (or whichever crew brought that "X" factor) be on location during production.

This way, you ensure the talent that made those spectacular shots are on-set for your video.

But... if I have persuaded you at all to consider the wealth of world-class talent here in the MENA... I promise you will save thousands upon thousands of dollars. All which can be put towards producing an outstanding commercial, as well as its distribution and promotion.

In the next blunder, I'll introduce you to the key crew members that will make – or break – your video production.

Action Items

- 1. **Hire video production companies based in the UAE, (specifically Dubai).** You will find a wealth of world-class, internationally-trained talent here... plus all the latest filmmaking gadgets, cameras, and gear.
- 2. **Avoid travel fees wherever possible.** This is one of the most un-predictable variable costs in video production. Your vendor <u>may not</u> calculate those costs up-front. But instead, charge you during or after production.
- 3. **Do your own location scouting.** This means going to every location you intend to shoot, taking photos from every angle, and noting the environment. Doing your own location scout will allow you to experience what the conditions will be like on shoot day and give your video production crew greater ability to predict some of those variable costs.
- 4. If you have secondary shooting locations that are 25 miles or more from your primary shooting locations, ask your production company what other options are available to you. Your vendor might be able to find a suitable location that's closer, or even re-create the environment in a green screen studio.

Blunder #12:

Overlooking the Importance of Crew

I've got a (sort-of) joke for you:

"How many crew members does it take to film a smart phone?"

Just one phone, in front of a green screen.

Did you say three? Five? Maybe 10?

Try 70 crew members!

It sounds ludicrous, I know. And when I was just a junior film school student, I thought it was outrageous too, until...

... I got my first paid Production Assistant (PA) job.

I was hired by my Cinematography Professor, who was directing a Samsung[™] phone commercial. "This is our first big name client," he said. "We had to go *super* low budget to win this job."

I show up to my first day, at this huge 70,000 square foot sound stage in Burbank. I walk inside, and it's FULL OF PEOPLE! Lighting, catering, rigging, the editors, the FX people... and an army of PAs like me fetching coffee and holding diffuser nets.

There was even a 3-person glam squad whose sole purpose was to make sure the phone looked flawless and spot-free at all times!

And what were we shooting?

One SamsungTM phone, propped-up on a "lazy Susan" turntable. And we *spent two whole days* just rotating this phone in different directions, at different speeds. This was so the VFX people had plenty of options to work with in Post-Production.

I thought to myself, "This is low budget? Give me half this crew, and I will make the most stunning student film ever produced!" So, I asked my professor why this "low budget" commercial was so complex.

"Contingencies," he said. "I absolutely had to eliminate the possibility of any delay, mistake, cost-overrun, or need to re-shoot."

He then explained how his big client was already spending millions of dollars in media buys. They expected this commercial to air at an exact day and time on national television. The reshuffling of even one 30-second commercial time slot would bring the entire house of cards tumbling down.

And my professor's company could get a "black mark" in the industry that could take years to erase.

WARNING: Commercial Film Crews May Be Larger Than They Appear

It is easy for the novice agency or brand hiring their first production team to think that a video is "simple enough" that a 5-person crew – ne even a *1-person crew* – could pull it off.

But ask yourself this question:

Is it a simple commercial with a few talking heads?

Or does you commercial contain choreographed fight scenes, car chases, 2D / 3D animation, or scenes that require large crowds of extras?

The complexity of your video will dictate the size of your crew, and the specialization of your video production company.

How To Strike the Right Balance of Crew Size and Specialization for Your Video

As I mentioned in earlier Blunders, when putting your video project out to bid, production companies will submit prices that may be wildly different (high or low) than the next one. Each company's rates will depend on their location, the market they cater to, the gear they own, how long they've been in business, and most importantly, their specialization.

For example, if you want a 360° video, there's only a handful of companies that specialize in it. Your price is going to be quite high.

MEET THE CREW

Writer: Whether it's voice over (VO) or a script featuring actors, the writer will be in charge of all copywriting and copy editing.

Producer: Leading the planning and coordination of everything from hiring actors, renting locations and planning out the shoot schedule is the Producer.

Director: Will lead the video's story execution and structure and direct the talent

Cinematographer: a.k.a Director of Photography (DP) is in charge of everything camera- and lighting-related. Responsible for artistic and technical decisions related to the visuals being captured.

Art Director: Responsible for the visual style on film, including props and the set.

Editor: This person handles everything post-production, including editing, graphics, animations and special effects. NOTE: other specialists may be hired to do animation, graphics, titles, etc.

When you find a production company you want to work with, take the time to ask a little background on the crew. Who is who? Who reports to who? Make sure to clearly explain your

vision to each crew member you interact with. It will inspire them and get everyone on the same creative page.

Make sure they know you want to be involved at each stage in the process – especially anything creative.

However, don't expect to be a micromanager. Be open to your production company's recommendations. For instance, they might suggest that your live action video should be *animated* instead.

If the end-product is memorable, gets the same message across, is on-brand... and at the same time, brings your production into a controlled environment (no stunt people, animal trainers, or location costs)... isn't it worth serious consideration?

Keep Shoot Days to A Minimum

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There's a term in our industry called

MEET THE CREW (CONTD.)

Motion Graphics Designer: Prepares design plan, concept and layout for motion graphics (think animation, but also moving text and graphics heavily used in commercials).

Key Grip: responsible for assembling and maintaining all camera supports

Electrician (Gaffer): In charge of the electrical wiring and setup for the production

Key Makeup Artist: Tasked with applying and touching up makeup to the cast

Sound Mixer: Captures the audio on set

Sound Designer: S/he will polish everything concerning your video's audio, including music, mixing, VOs and sound effects.

Colorist: One of the last people to touch a project, the Colorist ensures that each shot matches and looks coordinated with the overall video.

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"day rates", which describe how much a crew member costs to work on-set for a day. A crew

gear costs and any prep work they need to do before production.

member's day rate generally includes the time they spend on the film set for a day, their personal

As you can imagine, **the more days on-set** (Production phase), **the more your price goes up**. Have a frank discussion with your production team about ways you can minimize the amount of shoot days and hours on set. Really listen to their suggestions.

They may request taking on additional crew or renting more expensive equipment. Don't be alarmed by the extra cost. If you can eliminate one shoot day (or insure you don't have to reshoot anything), it's worth serious consideration.

Final Note About "Freelancers"

The word "freelancer" gets a bad rap in our industry. In fact, many production companies will try to create the illusion that they keep a 50-person film crew on their payroll year-round. This is so they can avoid using the word "freelancer" when talking to clients.

I'd like to set the record straight on "freelancers".

Freelance crew members (I prefer to call them "contract employees") help the production house to reduce their overhead costs... Stay lean in between projects... And the cost savings *really do* get passed onto you. Believe me, if every production house stayed *fully-staffed* like in the days of the old Hollywood studios ... NOBODY WOULD BE ABLE TO AFFORD VIDEO SERVICES!

One thing to keep in mind about contract employees:

Each person will bring their own unique style and background to your project. You don't have to worry about most crew members. For instance, the caterer, mic boom operator, the electrician, even the producer and cameraperson are (for the most part) interchangeable. These crew positions are not going to affect the final video quality in any meaningful way.

However, you should ask your production house:

- 1. If they are using contract workers for your video.
- 2. Which crew positions will be outsourced?

If you hired the production company based on one of their previous videos, ask yourself: "What was it about that video that stood out? Was it the quality of the animation? The cinematography? Sound design?"

Make sure your production company knows **you want that kind of quality**... and if possible... to **hire the same top-level creative people** that made the video shine. (Such talent can include the Cinematographer, Editor, Sound Designer, etc.) If one or more of those talent are unavailable, just look at the portfolio and resume of the key talent that will be replacing them. If you are unsure these "replacement" crewmembers can deliver, **tell your production company.** It just might be worth postponing the video a few months so that you can secure the talent you want.

In the final Blunder, I'll lay down some cold hard truths about how *agencies* should deal with difficult clients... and why even the best video production company might NOT be enough to save your commercial from certain disaster.

Red Flags

- Some production houses will overpromise and under-deliver. You really have to follow your gut instinct on this one. If their bid falls within the low-end of the price range... but they're promising complex animation, motion graphics, lots of moving camera work, fight or dance choreography... and they're sizzle reel doesn't quite jive with the experience they're promising... be very skeptical.
- The production house can't secure the director of photography who shot the video you really liked, but says they guarantee this other fellow is just as good. You look at the new DP's past projects / sizzle reel and just don't feel the "tingle" that made you excited about the first one.

• You ask the production house if they are using freelancers, and for a list of the positions they'll be filling on your video. The production house says, "that's confidential" or "you don't need to see that."

Action Items

- 1. Before you sign-on with a production house, ask to speak with some of the salaried crew members on their team who will be working your project. Get a sense if:
 - a. They listen and understand the story you want to tell.
 - b. Are interested in producing a video that will get you the desired results.
 - c. They seem pleasant to work with and communicative.
- 2. **If your video requires actors, hosts, or voice over artists**, ask: "Will casting and hiring these individuals <u>cost extra</u>? Or is it accounted for in the total production quotation?" If this talent cost is not included, demand a ballpark cost so you can factor it into your budget and avoid surprises.
- 3. **Money-saving tip for hiring actors:** Consider featuring your client's founder, sales staff, or customers. Just be sure these non-actors are okay with it and consider doing a "screen test" before going this route. Some non-actors have superb presence and feel comfortable on camera. Others may *freeze* when they see the red light come on (I've seen this happen to even the most gregarious, extrovert salespeople).
- 4. Ask the production house if they are using contract workers for your video, and which crew positions they will fill. If one of those positions is a key creative person that you wanted, research their replacement carefully, and only proceed if you feel confident this new crew member can deliver.
- 5. Let the video production company know that you want to be hands-on, and very involved both on-set and during the planning and editing stages.
- 6. Ask to be on-boarded into the company's **Project Management System** if they have one. Many companies are now using apps like Wrike, Basecamp, and Asana to keep tasks organized and keep projects on-schedule. Ask to get added to their PMS system so you can check in on all the moving parts in real-time.

Blunder #13:

Being Afraid of Your Client

In this final Blunder, I want to impart a cautionary tale for any ad agency executive that's living in fear of a difficult client.

I've worked with no less than fifteen very difficult clients in my career. These clients demanded far more of my time and mental energy than anyone else. They were never satisfied with a script or cut of the video edit. They were chronically late to meetings (or postponed them at the very last second). When they did show up to a meeting, they were often distracted and irritable. I always felt like they were clenching an imaginary gun. Finger on the trigger, ready to "fire" me (or sue me) at any moment.

In three instances, I even *knew* these clients were snakes from the beginning. Other agencies and videographers told me how the company violated their agreement, made their lives a living hell, and then didn't pay for services.

And yet, young dumb Addy Khan thought "It will be different for me. I will make this work." *And I let the snakes run loose in my house anyway.*

It took me *years* of getting burned, grinding my gears, and loosing thousands of dollars, to realize why I kept working with such clients:

I Needed the Deal Too Badly!

If you're not already caught in the trap of an "Impossible Client" – then heed my warning.

NEVER ENTER INTO A NEGOTIATION DESPERATE FOR A DEAL!

Even if you really need the money. Even if you have zero clients. Fake it till you make it.

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Because the person who is most willing to walk away from a deal ALWAYS has the upper hand in any negotiation.

And don't think you can out-smart an "Impossible Client" with all kinds of contractual obligations and legalese. Most of these types of clients are *sociopaths* – they'll violate every clause, lie to your face... and you'll spin your wheels trying to fight them in court.

When you do get burned, you're often better off accepting your losses... and vowing *never* to be so desperate for a deal again.

"Okay," you say. "That's all well and good for avoiding scary clients. What do I do if I'm already committed to an Impossible Client...? And what if they want me to make a video for them?"

I'll answer that in a minute. But first, let me clarify what I call...

The Two Degrees of Scary Clients

I put tough clients into two camps:

- 1. Difficult Clients
- 2. Impossible Clients

Difficult Clients tend to demand you put them first. They may yell, threaten, and be hard to please. But, when you take responsibility, let them vent their anger and frustration, and address each of their grievances quickly... they demure. They may even get <u>less difficult</u> over time. In general, these types of clients are "tough but fair."

Impossible Clients are equally "difficult" to work with. But on top of that **they lie**. And they lie often. They do things you (and most of us) would consider to be "un-ethical." They often

quibble about the definition of certain words. They try to spin what you say *against* you. The officers and employees of an Impossible Client are fearful, and ready to throw you under the bus to save their own job. And unlike mere "Difficult Clients"... Impossible Clients *never demure*, no matter what you do to appease them.

Both Difficult and Impossible Clients are an unnecessary strain on your time and resources – *especially* if you're a small agency just starting out. So why waste your time? The world is full of serious business clients that are willing to pay for superb advertising and video services.

My advice to you:

Only work with Difficult Clients if they meet all three of these criteria:

- 1. They pay well and on-time.
- 2. Adding their prestigious brand to your portfolio will bring more clients to you.
- 3. They are NOT Impossible Clients.

Otherwise, let both Difficult and Impossible Clients go and work with bigger agencies that can afford to deal with their crap!

Okay, as I promised a few minutes ago...

How To Produce a Video for An Impossible Client You're Already Stuck With

Not all of us can fire a bad client. Maybe you're an account executive that's been assigned an Impossible Client by the partners of your agency. Or perhaps you're an in-house marketer and *your boss* is the Impossible Client.

Either way, you have little say in who you work for. And maybe you have a family, medical expenses, car payments or student debts to pay off... and you *really need* this job.

All I can say is **try your best every day not to be "infected" by your toxic client or boss**. And start working on your <u>escape plan</u> now. Polish your resume. Update your portfolio. Submit your resume to industry hiring companies. Put in your application for new jobs. Just taking these small actions will help repair your self-esteem and reaffirm that you are worth more than this.

And if your lying, un-ethical client / boss wants a video?

Well, you already *know* you're potentially dragging an un-witting third party into this toxic cesspool. You *know* they'll get burned, chewed-up, and spit-out like every other vendor that's walked through those doors.

The most ethical thing you can do in this situation is to be as up-front as you can with your video company. Tell them how difficult your client is, what has happened to third-party vendors in the past, and offer ways to protect themselves and navigate the client's demands. If the vendor chooses to sign-on anyway, that's their prerogative. You did what you could.

Final Thoughts: Turn Fear into Opportunity

I don't pretend to know your personal and financial worries. I know you didn't pick up this eBook to get life coaching advice from a guy who makes videos.

But I'm just going to impart something that helped me in my deepest, darkest pits of despair.

I would look in the mirror and speak this mantra aloud to myself:

"Getting fired is the best thing that could ever happen to me."

"Getting fired is the best thing that could ever happen to me."

I would say these six or seven times to myself... until I actually start to believe it.

And I would imagine my mirror self was actually in that position... unemployed, without a single client... yet *free* of the prison of the Impossible Client.

Fired... but also "fired-up." Eager to pick up the phone again. To hustle. To start the rest of my life. "Get Rich or Die Tryin" as 50 Cent once said.

There's something uniquely electrifying and life-affirming about these moments of transition.

Living in fear is damaging to you, your company, and your family. And fear can cripple you permanently. Don't let any client or boss force you to live in such a state.

Red Flags

- Advertiser has a track record of hiring and firing ad agencies in quick succession.
- Big company you're eager to work with announces they are "considering" new ad agencies. **They want you and every other firm to pitch your campaign ideas** with mockups, teaser videos, and a whole campaign strategy mapped out. (Believe me, they have NO intention of firing their current agency they just want you to work like a dog to give them *free ideas*.)
- Client / potential client likes to "twist" words around. They re-define what the meaning of "is" is. They say things like "Well, technically what I meant was..." Or worse, they completely *invent things you never said* on a phone call or meeting.
- Advertiser has produced videos in the past using a different production house for each video. Double-red flag if the videos are crap, and the advertiser is quick to blame the agency / production house.
- Advertiser is over-eager to get a video produced, and there's not a clear reason why.

 They seem willing to cut any corner necessary to get started. Double-red flag if they keep "forgetting" to sign that proposal you sent over.

Action Items:

If you HAVE NOT YET signed a contract with a potentially Difficult or Impossible Client:

- 1. **Recognize common traits of a Sociopath.** This is a condition <u>most Impossible Clients</u> <u>have</u>. They make up 5% of the population statistically speaking, you WILL run into a few sociopaths during your career.
 - a. Deceitfulness repeated lying, use of aliases, and "shell companies."
 - b. *Impulsivity* failure to plan ahead.
 - c. Reckless disregard for safety of others.
 - d. *Irresponsible* failure to sustain consistent employment or string of failed businesses.
 - **e.** *Charming as Hell!* Yes, there is a dangerous breed of self-aware sociopaths that know how to pump-up your ego and exploit your "hot-buttons." Keep your guard up!
- 2. Ask yourself: "Will signing on with this client add prestige to my portfolio?" (Think: recognizable brand-name logo.)
- 3. Quote them a higher fee than you usually would. And set a minimum price in your mind that you are not going to quote below. Make sure you're being compensated for any unforeseen extra work you'll have to put in to keep this client relationship maintained. DO NOT LET THEM TALK YOU INTO A LOWER PRICE than the minimum you decided.
- 4. **Be prepared to walk away from the deal**. Even if you really want / need the money. Even if your agency puts pressure on you to "make it happen."
- 5. **Read employee review sites and consumer reports on the company**. There are plenty of resources on the web that will tip you off as to whether your prospect is a Difficult or Impossible Client. It's as easy a typing "[company name] + complaints" in a search engine. These websites are also a good resource:
 - a. Glassdoor.com
 - b. Indeed.com/cmp
 - c. TrustPilot.com
 - d. ConsumerReports.com
 - e. AngiesList.com
 - f. Google My Business

- g. Manta.com
- h. FourSquare.com
- i. TripAdvisor.com (for Hospitality clients)
- 6. **Double-check your Contract Language**. Then, triple-check it. Imagine that your opponent is looking for any reason to screw you over. Look for loopholes and vague clauses that could be "open to interpretation." If your firm retains in-house counsel, tell them about this "special client" and ask them to read through the contract.

If you have ALREADY signed a contract with a Difficult Client:

- 1. **Follow-up with grievances** *pronto*! Yes, your other accounts and sales prospects need care too. But they can wait a little longer. You signed on with this Difficult Client whether by choice or "luck-of-the-draw" and YOU signed on for the added crap they dish-out.
- 2. **Take full responsibility**. When your client gets angry, call them or meet in-person. Never pass blame on your teammates. Always admit the fault is yours (even if it's not) and assure the client that *YOU* will personally handle all grievances.
- 3. **Repeat-back and document.** On the call or at the meeting, write down each of the client's specific grievances. At the conclusion of your meeting, say: "Just so I am clear on my next steps to fix this, you said [list grievances]." The client may agree or clarify a few things. Then say: "So if we can cross-off each of those [number of grievances] points you made, we will be back on good working terms with your company?" Finally, when you return to your desk, send an email to your client, with all those grievances listed out, and your course of action to address those grievances.
- 4. **Set your personal boundaries**. Let your client know you are "un-reachable" at certain hours of the day. Reinforce those personal boundaries by NOT ANSWERING calls, texts, or emails during those hours. They'll eventually get the message, and respect you more for it.
- 5. "I'll get back to you." Say this anytime the client requests customized services when you are not totally certain you can keep the promise. Talk it through with your team and negotiate later when you have all the facts.

6. **Kill Them with Kindness.** Don't allow your client's frustration or anger affect you. Always maintain your calm and speak in your "normal" voice and tone. If they want to vent all their frustration to you... LET THEM! And really LISTEN to them. (Avoid the temptation to "solve" their issues, give excuses, or correct false statements.)

Conclusion:

Why You Should Hire a Video Production Company

Congratulations! If you have read through our *Top 13 Blunders to Avoid When Hiring a Video Production Company* report (or even just a few sections) you are **more prepared than 90% of agencies and brands stepping into this arena for the first time**.

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You're ready to go out there, decide on a video budget, find some production houses, look at their reel, size up the crew, and request some bids. But once you've narrowed down your prospective vendors, the <u>hardest part is choosing the right one</u>.

"Listen to your gut feeling"

Sometimes the choice is obvious. Sometimes it is not.

This report can only help you with the *objective analysis* (i.e., finding and sizing up companies).

This last part requires subjective analysis:

- What is your **personal feeling** about the final contenders?
- Who was the **best communicator?** (Look for *thoroughness* of reply as well as *speed*.)
- Who did the most to understand your needs?
- Who seemed **confident** without being cocky?
- With whom did you feel most connected to?

Not your first Rodeo? Maybe your agency already has some video production talent and equipment on-hand, and you've done smaller shoots before. You might be wondering: "Do I need an outside company? Or can we just handle this ourselves?"

How to Know It's Time to Hire a Video Production Company

- 1. **Your In-House Team is Swamped.** You've fully adopted the video medium, but all those videos add up. There will be seasonal busy periods during the year when your video team is at capacity. This is where a production company can help pick up the slack without you having to employ more in-house crew and invest in more infrastructure.
- 2. **When You Need an Outside Perspective**: It's easy to be *too close to your own work*, brand or product. Your in-house team might do a fine job with simple demonstration

- videos, testimonials, and interviews. But if you need a wide-reaching commercial or branded documentary, consider an outsider perspective.
- 3. **You Want More "Pizazz":** Similar to #2, if you want to take the next step above the simple videos you can produce in-house, production companies have the talent, equipment, and know-how to produce content that will *turn-heads* and blow your client's competition out of the water.

Why "D-I-Y" Might Be the Best First Choice

Today's audience is far more forgiving of video that looks "amateurish." In fact, it's become its own style. Several feature films have been made on iPhones™ (though, with a *lot* of special lenses and add-ons). And "Going Live" on Instagram, Snap Chat, Periscope, or Facebook can lend a feeling of raw, un-rehearsed "realism" to certain consumers that are jaded by (or pay no attention to) slick TV commercials.

So, if this is your agency / brand's first time ever making a video of any kind, **go shoot** something!

It could be an explainer video, product demonstration, or a montage of your trade show. Don't worry about audience reach, video views, or looking "professional" just yet. Grab whatever camera and editing software you have on the shelf and *make a video from start to finish*. Making your video in-house will teach you A LOT about the process. And it will help reveal where your agency's "talent gaps" are... and where they need to be filled.

Wrapping Things Up

We are all encountering a market – and a world – unlike any we have experienced before. For many advertising agencies, and by extension many businesses, there are huge hurdles ahead. At Xperiment Media, we believe in turning "struggles" into opportunity. We believe in adapting, in learning form others, and sharing what we have learned.

I hope that the information in this report helps you create an exciting, new profit center in your business with high-quality video. If you need help with anything, I'll be glad to give you a few pointers.

"You can take advantage of these uncertain times, and start offering profit-boosting video services tomorrow...

But only if you take action!"

And the sooner you start, the better.

Don't give it another thought. I want you to **contact me right now**. Let's talk about your personal and professional goals, and chat about what kinds of videos can grow your business this quarter.

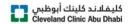
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WHO WE WORK WITH

















We give you choice, not options.

As the world becomes increasingly asymmetric, you don't need "more options". You need people who you can trust to narrow things down. You want to save your time, money and effort so you can focus on your core business. Our creative methodology helps reduce the friction between "I don't know what I want" to "This is what I need"

Commercials that look like 'movies'.

At Xperiment Media, our team is headed by Addy Khan, a filmmaker with over 10 years of experience working on both sides of the pond, in Hollywood and the Middle East. Our mantra is: if everything looks great in movies, why can't commercials be like movies? We apply this

philosophy and 'Hollywood' expertise to your TVC, brand film, animated video or social media stories.

Concept to Consumer

Have a great idea? Perfect, we'll flesh it out. Don't have one? No problem, our team of in-house creatives will dream one up for you. In either case, we learn about the psychology of your audience and what motivates their behaviors. Everything flows from there (like water, my friend).

- "You've made an absolutely gorgeous film for us. Thank you."
- JW Marriott Marquis Dubai
- "Loved the results. Good job!"
- Ras Al Khaimah Tourism and Development Authority
- "Brilliant films. Keep up the great work".
- —Saudi Energy and Efficiency Center, Saudi Government



Best in Dubai Production Company 2020