

Stuart Sweetow

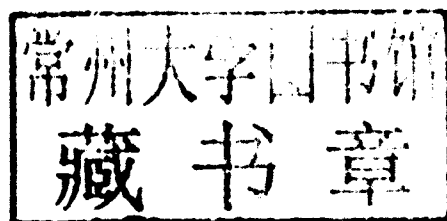
Corporate **Video** Production

Beyond the Board Room
(And Out of the Bored Room)



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Stuart Sweetow



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my beautiful bride Sandy, who gave me her encouragement and patience, and who found us a home with an office for me to write.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo courtesy of Cleo Brown.

Stuart Sweetow owns Audio Visual Consultants, a video production and consulting company in Oakland, California. He taught video production at the University of California Berkeley Extension and has written scores of articles for video magazines. On his company's website, www.avconsultants.com, are production-planning guides and tips on using video with social media.

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INTRODUCTION

Corporate video production has come of age. At one time, cinematographers referred to corporate videos as “industrials,” a genre to which they retreated between “real” films. Talking-head videos or unimaginative safety films dominated the field, and too often one might hear the word “boring” precede the term “corporate video.” However, as professional video tools came down in price, corporations invested in cameras and editing gear. A generation of enthusiastic filmmakers who sought access to those tools took jobs in the corporate world. While broadcast television was reducing staff, corporate media centers grabbed up the best and the brightest.

The television producer who craves the excitement of a live broadcast will get that adrenaline rush by transmitting a shareholders’ meeting live to viewers at home. The ambitious video professional who wants to meet a top corporate CEO has an opportunity to film him or her giving a talk and beaming it via satellite to employees worldwide.

In addition to TV producers entering the corporate arena, Hollywood cinematographers discovered that corporate execs were not as stuffy as they once thought. Over the years, innovative companies developed communication departments with creative staffs. They sought imaginative filmmakers to apply their cinematic artistry to produce engaging marketing and training videos. As corporations developed social responsibility programs and discovered YouTube as an avenue to reach the public, documentary filmmakers found they could support causes in line with their own humanitarian values.

Many companies have equipped their video departments with cutting-edge postproduction applications and network storage infrastructures. Some organizations send video messages via their satellite networks, and growing numbers use IP distribution. When researching this book, I found a trend where corporate video producers favored location filming over studio production. Smaller HD cameras enable speed and flexibility, and many video producers edit videos on their laptops during the flight home from a shoot.

Throughout this book I included examples of video applications that corporations use, such as customer communications, product announcements, employee training, and public relations. Social media has enabled corporations to relate to the

public in an interactive way. Nearly every major corporation has a YouTube page, and many companies film their customers giving testimonials or offering praise for their products. Sometimes ordinary people say surprising things on camera, such as the Chicago woman who said she and her neighbors were praying that Wal-Mart would open a store in their community. You'll read about that and other unexpected uses of YouTube in the social media introduction.

Production values of some corporate videos now rival Hollywood. AT&T created a series showing 20-something singles texting and exchanging files on smart phones with AT&T data plans. An educational film from Honda about their humanoid robot, ASIMO, combines elements of a science fiction film with artistic cinematography. IBM produced a series of videos for their "Smarter Planet" YouTube page that incorporate multilayered imagery together with smartly edited interviews.

Savvy video producers have reinvented presentations by using innovative production techniques to create videos that remove the boredom factor. There is no reason why employees or customers should be sentenced to "Death by PowerPoint" now that video producers can create lively, dynamic presentations with creatively composed video clips, dynamic 3D graphics, and carefully crafted scripts.

A well-designed short video has the capability to reach viewers on an emotional level. Poetic writing, rhythmic camera work, and a compelling soundtrack create synergy to grab the viewers' hearts and convert visitors to customers. The market researchers understand the incredible impact that video could have to their companies' bottom lines. Corporations are investing in video services to utilize the medium to the max, and video has become an integrated communications tool in the enterprise.

In addition to learning about corporate video production techniques and applying some of the examples shown here, it is wise for you, as the video producer, to learn about the values of the company you work for, how they use their brands, and who their customers are. Then you can apply those principles to producing videos that align with the mission of the enterprise. The literal image of the company is in your hands.

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CASE STUDIES

Introduction

Digital media and broadband connectivity have influenced the evolution of video production in corporations. Rather than distribute programs on DVDs, many companies use CDNs (content distribution networks) or satellite transmission. Employees watch videos via live streaming or VOD (video on demand), and videoconferencing has become an alternative to videotaping meetings.

While in past years organizations built their own TV studios, many video managers now prefer to film on location with portable production gear. Some organizations decentralize video services and train individual departments to use their own camcorders and editing software. Nearly all of the Fortune 100 companies have their own YouTube channels, creating further needs for in-house video production. Social media (including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) offer an opportunity to distribute videos to the general public, and this gives corporate video managers a major responsibility: to form the corporation's literal image.

Companies vary in how they structure their in-house video services. Corporate video units are sometimes called media departments or are part of a larger communications department or division. In some cases they charge their client departments for their services and operate as if they were an outside production studio. At other organizations, the video manager needs to propose each year's budget to the company-wide budget committee. Some video units get their funding from several different departments, and those video managers may have to juggle their priorities.

Let's take a look at some of the larger corporate video units headquartered in the United States to learn how they operate. You'll see that there is a wide range of video services that in-house departments offer, and the opportunities for employment or contracting are as varied as the companies themselves.

Corporate Social Responsibility— Google Heroes

Video producers with high ideals who want to have an impact on the world sometimes shun corporations as they turn to documentary production. At some companies, however, the corporate video team takes the task of documenting their firms' demonstrations of social responsibility. Such is the case at Google, the Mountain View, California company that spearheads the Google Earth Heroes project. According to Google, this is "a way to celebrate the individuals and organizations that have used Google Earth in their efforts to effect change."

One of Google's video productions documents how Google Earth helps track the movements of elephants in Kenya. The Google crew filmed an interview with the founder of the group Save the Elephants, and in the YouTube video, he explains how Google Earth links to the organization's remote tracking system. With B-roll of the elephants trekking across the Serengeti and animated graphics keyed over images from Google Earth, the short video serves as both a documentary discussing the problem and a corporate public relations piece to publicize the Google product. To protect the elephants from poaching or droughts, if an elephant stops moving during its migration, Save the Elephants sends a Google Earth file that shows where the elephant has stopped. Then the Kenyan wildlife patrol can dispatch a patrol to investigate.

Another video that the Google video team produced shows how the U.S. Forest Service uses Google Earth to track fires and plot the path through which a fire could spread. The video, also distributed on YouTube, includes animations of Google Earth displays. The Google video team shot on-location interviews with Forest Service personnel, who explained that climate change is contributing to fires starting earlier in the year, that the fires are larger than they once were, and that they burn more intensely. Google Earth helps the Forest Service's Aviation Coordinator track planes in the air from different agencies and coordinates the firefighting effort. B-roll of aircraft and fires add to the visual variety of the video.

A series of short, snappy YouTube videos, titled *Life at Google* (<http://www.youtube.com/user/lifeatgoogle>), helps new employees and recruits get an inside view of the half-million-square-foot Googleplex. Using rapid video montages of employees on the job, accompanied by their voices, and with quick shots of staff on-camera in the studio, the viewer learns about

the corporate culture at Google. You can view more Google YouTube videos at Google's official YouTube channel <http://www.youtube.com/user/Google>.

The video team is part of the Marketing and Communications department at Google. The Studio G Team, according to Google, “consists of video production and operations professionals who harness their creativity to produce a variety of engaging, on-message ‘Googley’ video communications. We produce these videos for the YouTube audience, and examples include product launches, product demos, branding videos, and executive speeches. Our talented and creative staff shares the ideals of Google’s mission, which is to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.”

Hamburger University and Sustainability at McDonald’s

Log onto McDonald’s website and you can view *The Road to Sustainability*, a four-minute video the company produced that shows their work “toward sustainable agriculture production by addressing ethical, environmental, and economic challenges.” A video montage set to music uses text rather than a voice-over narrator to explain such ecofriendly practices as recycling cooking oil and using recycled fiber in their packaging. The video producer interested in helping the environment will be pleased to see that this megacorporation partnered with Greenpeace to support a moratorium on illegal deforestation.

This video is also on the McDonald’s YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/user/mcdonaldscorp>), as are about 25 other videos, as of this writing, on other topics reflecting the company’s efforts at corporate social responsibility. McDonald’s joins many other major corporations that use YouTube to distribute public relations videos to the general public. Other videos are directed at potential franchisees, with a testimonial from a woman who started as a part-time employee at age 15 who now owns her own \$2 million business. In another YouTube video, new employees and recruits hear crew and managers tell “the truth about working at McDonald’s.”

Employee training at McDonald’s is done at the company’s Hamburger University in Oakbrook, Illinois. With a student population of 5,000, the 80-acre campus includes a 300-seat auditorium and 12 interactive education rooms, and it employs 19 resident instructors. The company recently opened a new campus in Shanghai, China.