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GUIDELINES FOR THE SCRIPTING & VISUALISATION OF A VIDEO / TV PROGRAM.

The word 'television' has as its Latin roots two words 'tele' meaning 'afar' or 'across' and 'vision' meaning 'to see'. The more modern use of the term 'see' in Latin means 'I see'.

Using the medium of television we are trying to get an audience to 'see' our message across the vast distances that television is broadcast around our country or across the world.

Our video program is something we want our audience to see and to have learnt from or have been entertained by!

If the audience 'likes' our video program then we have 'communicated' with them on their level of understanding. It is no use scripting a video program that our audience will not understand or be stimulated by. In scripting a video program we must 'entertain' at the same time as we are imparting information.

'Video' means 'I see' therefore the video script must be written in a visual manner and in a visual context.

Video scripting, too, is an act of communication, of the scriptwriter, with the production team!

Before the scriptwriter begins putting pen to paper, or thoughts into the computer, he/she must understand the following three principles:

1. Who will be the viewers. (This we call the 'Target Audience').
2. What are the objectives of the communicator or the video program's sponsor.
3. How can the visual medium of video facilitate the realisation of the sponsor's goals.

An audience profile should be carefully researched. We should find out if they have any prior knowledge of the topic or the product. Do they have any existing attitudes that we may want to change, or build on. We should know the audience's educational or technical knowledge about the subject of the video program. All of this information, if we can get it, will help to determine the content level of the video script, the type of language we will use, the visuals and the presentations techniques that we might employ to get our message across to the audience.

As well as giving an audience information, we must also entertain them, and in this way we help them remember the 'message' we are trying to communicate. 'Entertainment' is NOT a 'rude' word!

Know what you want the video program to 'say'!

State the program's objectives in definite terms. Do not deviate from your main objective. The 'aims' of the video program should be quite narrow. If the aims of the video program become too broad based and complicated, then the scriptwriter and producer will have to consider the need for a series of programs, rather than a one-off video program.

REMEMBER: The simpler the message, the higher the audience retention rate!
Principles of Video Scripting:

1. To raise the awareness of the Target Audience about a particular issue.
2. To enrich the Target Audience about the relevance of the issue to their daily lives.
3. To teach or instruct the Target Audience.
4. To entertain an audience.
5. Commercial: To sell a particular product by outlining its benefits to the audience.
6. Commercial: To show a product's technical features, durability or after sales service etc.
7. In-House: To inform employees about the company, new plans, job retraining etc.
8. In-House: To show new product development, quality control schemes, cost: effectiveness etc.
9. Corporate: To promote the company.
10. Corporate: To promote a social issue or concern with a low key, corporate sponsorship.

THE SCRIPTING PROCEDURE:

All scripts should begin with an outline which states the aim of the video program, and the target audience to which the program is directed. Always include a 'working title' for the video program. This helps to focus one's thoughts about the problem of the proposed video. State the approximate duration of the proposed video program.

VIDEO SCRIPT

WORKING TITLE: "GALLE------THE TARSHISH OF BIBLICAL TIMES".

TARGET AUDIENCE: Foreign Tourists.

DURATION: 30 Minutes.

SCRIPT OUTLINE:
This documentary video will look at Galle in its historical context, tell of its connections to biblical times, the Portuguese and British influences and show what the museum and archaeological survey departments have done to promote tourism in this living fortress city. The documentary will look at the fort itself, the museums, The Oriental Hotel and the tourist artifact souvenir, gem shops'.

* The Script outline serves the purpose of focussing the video producers attention as to the aims and objectives of the video program and to whom it is directed. The script outline opens up research directions and material to be collected. The script writer may be an in-house writer or a freelance writer commissioned to the research and the scripting. The script outline will contain information about the subject matter and how it will be treated in the video program. The target audience will be defined and the type of information and content to be presented will be discussed.
SCRIPT EXPLANATION or TREATMENT

* This will be a few brief explanatory paragraphs about the content of the proposed video program, based on the objectives and the target audience's background. The outline is written in ordinary prose and will explain WHY the video program is being produced, and by WHOM. Also the SUBJECT MATTER of the video program is explained.

"This video program is being made to advertise the tourist interest in Galle. The program will show the beauty of Fort Galle and tell of its historical interest and show that today it is still a living town. The program is being produced by the Sri Lankan Tourist Association. The video program will show the various points of interest in Galle, especially the old Fort, but also show the colonial Hotel Oriental and other places of accommodation. The program will also show the many tourist activities and shops that make searching for antiques and souvenirs in Galle an exciting and interesting experience. The duration of the video program will be thirty minutes and may be screened in-flight, in-house in Hotels or broadcast by Rupavahini. The video program is aimed purely at the foreign tourist.

The video program starts with a shot of passengers arriving at Galle station. Explaining that it is an interesting 2 hour journey from Colombo. Galle Fort is a 10 minute walk from Galle station. The life and activity around the station is shown and then the tourist looking at his guidebook walks over to Fort Galle. The tourist could have a beautiful Sri Lankan woman as a friend and guide. She will be a well educated woman and obviously from a Government department showing the tourist, (a writer), the sights, sounds and life of Galle.'

THE STORYBOARD:

This is a very useful production tool. After an initial recce during which still photographs have been taken, or sketches drawn, the video scriptwriter will put the 'pictures' into order, somewhat like a comic strip, so he/she can 'visualise' the intended video program. When the writer is happy with the flow of the pictures he will then begin to write a commentary or narration. Some writers prefer to write the commentary and narration first and then put the 'pictures' to the words. Either method is fine, it merely depends which way the writer is comfortable working. The pictures are usually pasted down the left side of the 'script' in sequential order, while the space on the right hand side is used for writing the commentary or narration.

SCRIPTING FOR VIDEO:

Scripting a video program is very different from writing a magazine article or a novel, which is usually quite descriptive. The video scriptwriter must write 'visually' by visualising the scenes and at the same time 'hearing' the words that will accompany the pictures. The video scriptwriter should not describe and explain scenes. The pictures should themselves describe and explain. The video commentary should enhance the video sequences. Words as well as music and sound effects will be used. Unlike the radio scriptwriter or print journalist, who is denied the support of moving pictures, the video scriptwriter must know how to use the technology of moving pictures, words

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and sounds to enhance the screen for better understanding by the audience through the television medium which uses the senses of seeing and hearing, to communicate with the viewers or target audience. Therefore the video scriptwriters choice of words should 'harmonise' with the pictures that appear on the screen.

ORGANISING THE VIDEO SCRIPT:

Your video script may pass through a number of stages, or drafts. Whatever you write first off will never be the final script. One must firstly write an outline and then work on this, expanding it, and changing it, as one develops the ideas and the visuals. Even when we eventually arrive at a script that we will shoot, when it comes to editing and putting down the commentary, things will change! However to start any video project we must come up with a written script that will give us a basis for working on, and changing, and developing.

THE DRAFT SCRIPT:

This may be a rough, skeletal detail of ideas and words, which can be visualised and used for discussion with the scriptwriter and video director. During the discussions the script will be amended as commentary and visuals are modified as an outcome of argument and suggestion. The video script should have the following features:
1. A clear grasp of the aim of the video production.
2. How the visual sequences and will both work together to express the aims of the video production.
3. The video scriptwriter should understand the restraints, the possibilities and requirements of the television medium.

REMEMBER:

If the video program objectives are not adhered to, the video program will run off the rails, and not even the best visuals or technical expertise will support your message.

THE SCRIPT

The video script, although of course, it appears in PRINT, it should express clear visualisation through the narration or commentary. The scriptwriter should use audible words and phrases. Sentences should be short and succinct. Where necessary indicate PAUSE signs to allow scope for the visuals. Any one narrated sentence may mean many visuals, or different angles and shots of the same talent or subject. Dialogue written for the talent, the narration or commentary should be natural and uncomplicated. Avoid abstract academic presentations and written essays. A good rule is to write as you speak, and then read aloud onto a cassette tape to gauge the effect.
The scriptwriter must be willing to change his ideas and prose, and to accept criticism from others during the planning and discussion stages. As the main purpose of the script is to communicate with others, the scriptwriter must develop an ear for listening to what other people say, and accept alternate views. The script should be written in an informal style, and read and sound as though it were conversational rather than didactic. Imagine you are speaking to one ‘real’ viewer who is a member of the target audience, rather than speaking to a mass audience of thousands of people. Try to understand the audience’s questions, expectations, doubts and possible objections to your ‘story’.

After typing up the script, you should read it out loudly to yourself. Do you think that the language flows naturally? Is it conversational and informal in style? If you think that it does not come up to scratch, then the scriptwriter must change his script by using a thesaurus to find crisp and succinct words, and use shorter phrases and sentences. All the time the scriptwriter must avoid complex sentences and stilted and convoluted forms of expression. Try to visualise the material appearing on the screen as the words are being spoken. This is why the scriptwriter matches his words up to the visuals before setting out to shoot any footage.

In a video program it is not necessary to have a continuous interpretation or commentary which explains the visuals. The visuals should fill in the ‘gaps’ during 'quiet' parts of the commentary. In any video program it is the visuals that are of paramount importance. The audience learns more from seeing than listening. So the commentary, narration and explanations are written to ACCOMPANY the visuals. In actual fact the script is secondary to the visuals. The script of narration, commentary and sound effects is used merely to add another dimension to the video program and not used to state the obvious. It is very important for the scriptwriter to know the target audience so he/she can choose the appropriate vocabulary for controlling the pace and delivery of the words. The commentary should lead the viewer, step by step, through the visual sequences of the video program.

THE SEQUENTIAL FLOW:

The various stages of the video program should have a logical flow to it. To put it simply it must have a beginning, middle and end! However many variations and directions may ‘hang’ off the continuum of the sequential plan. The sequential plan might have a vibrant beginning, an explanatory middle and an open ending or we could design a plan where there is a very low key beginning, an extremely interesting middle and an unforgettable conclusion. There are many variants on the sequential plan.

A video program is basically a series of visual sequences edited together, each dependent upon the previous sequence and building up ‘tension’ all the time to keep the attention of the audience. If the logic of the sequences is broken or unclear, then the viewers’ interest will wane and they will not be stimulated by, or learn from the video program. So all the time we must be thinking of how we are going to keep the audiences’ attention by interesting visuals and smooth flowing words and phrases that complement each other.
A script can, if necessary have a flashback. This is a flashback of visuals to reinforce a point. Likewise the script can provide for diagrams, models, charts and other supporting communicative material if the scriptwriter feels it is necessary to show the inside working of a steam turbine or a cross section of a diesel engine. But maybe this is old hat! With miniature video cameras or 'lip stick' videocameras we can get visuals from inside dangerous or unusual places or even inside the human body at the time of conception when the male sperm fertilizes the female egg.

So therefore it is a good idea to sketch the visuals and marry them to the commentary. This we refer to as the Storyboard script.

SCRIPT STRUCTURE:

The structure of a script can be thought of as a 'diamond'. Thin at the top and bottom and wide in the middle.

1. The beginning of the video script will be brief (and interesting to attract the audiences' attention) to introduce the subject and outline the purpose of the video program. The beginning should be attention catching and 'grab' the viewer. The video program should have sharp and imaginative opening phrases and sentences, great music or sound effects, together with eye-catching visuals.

2. The middle part of the script may be more descriptive or instructional and keep the viewers' attention by using a range of different shots, angles and camera movements. The commentary will be conversational and informal, backing up the visual sequences.

3. The pace of the script and the tempo of the visuals will increase towards the end of the video program, hoping to have captured the imagination of the viewer and leave the viewer with something to think about.

The format for the video script is usually A4 size paper, divided into two parts. On the left hand side of the page may be drawn the visuals, while on the right hand side is printed the commentary. Since video scriptwriting is for a visual medium, we should use words and phrases that have a visual relevance, mellifluous tone which together will impact of the viewer. We must be economical with words and use short, succinct and crisp sentences. The visual which appears on the screen should be almost self explanatory.
THE EIGHT 'C's OF COMMUNICATION:

As scriptwriting is a tool for communication it is a good idea to keep in one's mind the following eight basic ideas which contribute to the effectiveness of communication.

1. CAPABILITY:
The capability of the audience to understand the video medium. The scriptwriter must gauge their background, their educational level, interests, commitment to the subject, quality consciousness or purchasing power etc.

2. CREDIBILITY:
The credibility of the source of the information. Communication with the viewer is gained through trust, hence any technical, scientific, informational or commercial information might be presented by eminent scientists, engineers, educators or researchers. Reputable institutions or companies known to the audience might be used to give the program added credibility.

3. CONTENT:
The content should be relevant to the audience's needs and expectations and leave no doubts or confusion in their minds.

4. CONTEXT:
The context of the script in reference to a situation or subject matter which is of interest to the viewers.

5. CHANNEL:
As the communication with the target audience is through the visual medium of television, we must use the language of TV and video to explain the subject matter.

6. CLARITY:
A clear and concise visual presentation and a clear and simple script will assist the viewers in understanding the subject of the video program.

7. CONTINUITY:
Explaining to the viewer how he can get further information about the subject of the video program. The script should have 'guided' the viewer from beginning to end and with continuous interest in visuals and commentary assisted the viewer to 'remember'.

8. CONSISTENCY:
The script should be consistent in its approach to the subject matter. The script and visuals should be compatible with what was mentioned in the program. There should be no contradictions between the commentary and visuals.

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THE 'AIDA' FORMULA:

A = attention
I = interest
D = desire
A = action

This acronym is a useful communication device for any scriptwriter to bear in mind as he or she is writing. It will help to attract the attention of the viewer, which of course is most important if the viewer is to remember the content of the video program.

If ATTENTION is ensured at the beginning of the video program, then the appropriate commentary and visuals will create INTEREST, leading to a DESIRE to accept the message which will cause the viewer to take some form of ACTION.

This short outline for video scriptwriting has been written by Wayne Levy of Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia in conjunction with Professor S. Bashiruddin, Dept. of Communication & Journalism, Osmania University, Hyderabad, India. We hope we have given you some ideas for writing and visualising a video program. Now put your writing and visualising talents into action. However, don't forget to be willing to review, modify and improve your script through discussion with the producer and video director.