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# Video Production With Fewer Errors

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*If you make technical training videos, you know that the most expensive time to fix mistakes is after production. Here are ten steps that can help you prevent costly errors.*

**O**ne of the most frustrating—and expensive—tasks for video producers is having to correct errors after production. And technical videotape programs almost always require some revisions.

A simple, ten-step process can help you reduce costly mistakes. It will also help lessen the impact of necessary revisions on your total program. The process is designed for producers of small-scale technical videos, but it also might be useful for people who are responsible for video management at corporations, schools, government agencies, or production houses.

## **The case for a formal process**

Most video programs require post-production revisions. Technical videos are the most vulnerable because of the many details that must be absolutely accurate. Mistakes in technical videos can have serious consequences, particularly in videos on safety training for manufacturing companies.

The main concern is to ensure accuracy of content, but it's also worthwhile to reduce technical revisions—such as having to go back and substitute a cut for a dissolve or a long shot for a close-up.

A formal production plan can substantially reduce post-production revisions. The process should involve key decision makers early in the project

**By Rene G. Veilleux**

and secure their commitment to the production's ultimate success.

## **Step 1: needs analysis**

When a client requests a video program, the first major step is to conduct a needs analysis. Properly done, the analysis determines whether the program will meet the client's needs.

Simply put, the objective of the needs analysis is to research the problem that you're trying to solve or the need that you're trying to meet. A big part of this step is gathering data through interviews, observations, and reviews of records.

Interview the people who'll make up your audience. You can ask them for input on the problems or needs that your program addresses. It also might be helpful to interview their supervisors for different perspectives.

Don't overlook or underestimate the importance of thoroughly analyzing your target audience. Information on age, sex, educational level, job experience, background, and personal preferences can tell you how to design your program so that it appeals to your viewers. If they don't like how the program looks or sounds, it's doubtful that they'll get the message.

If your program is on skills training or a specific process, observation is as simple as visiting the work area to see firsthand how the job is performed.

Written references—such as productivity, safety, and personnel records—can be valuable. They can help to identify problem areas and trends that are relevant to the program's content.

Planning is crucial to a smooth and successful production. Project planning includes setting goals, creating schedules and budgets, and obtaining such resources as personnel and equipment.

## **Step 2: teams**

At least three teams are needed so that three organizational levels are represented. Multiple teams also bring different perspectives to the program's development. You'll need a production team, a review team, and a management team.

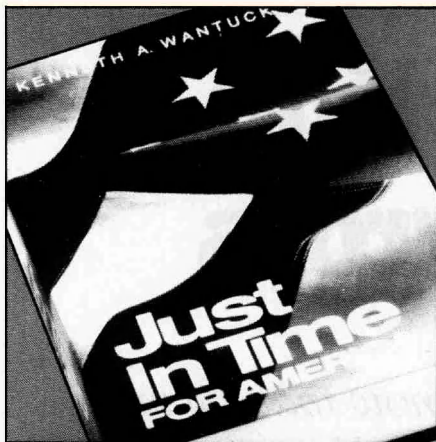
The production team will be involved in the hands-on development of the program. It includes a producer, director, instructional designer, scriptwriter, subject matter expert (SME), cameraperson, artist, and editor. In rare best-case scenarios, you'll have a different person to fill each job. Usually, people will have to play several roles.

For example, the producer, director, instructional designer, and writer may be the same person. But many productions require several SMEs to cover various areas of the content. If that's the case, it's important for the SMEs to reach a consensus on the amount of content to be included in the video and its accuracy.

The review team consists of people who regularly supervise the people who make up the production team. The review team may also include representatives from departments that aren't directly involved in the production but whose technical or political input is critical. For example, in an industrial environment it's usually a good idea to have someone from the safety department review the script.

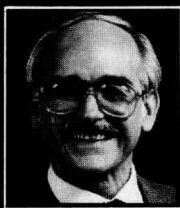
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The management team provides overall guidance and brings the company's managerial perspective to the program. This team is made up of managers within the organization who have requested the program and who can approve the final product. Their input is especially important for highly visible, critical programs.

The management team also defines the program. It sets the program's goals, which should be established early in the process in order to avoid complications later. The management team also can provide valuable insight as early as the needs analysis. Managers can access important information and assist in planning.

With the varied input that teams provide, you'll get a program that's more accurate and requires fewer revisions

than one that's the result of a more loosely structured approach. You'll also get a program that can be used for a longer time at less cost.

### Steps 4 and 5: script and sign-off

Having seen the demonstration, the scriptwriter can start writing. The demo tape, reference documents, and input from the SMEs should provide the writer with enough information to put together a credible script.

Usually, several drafts are required before a final draft and preliminary shot-list are submitted to the review

## The management team sets the program's goals

team. Making this a formal step emphasizes the importance of everyone's involvement.

Prepare a formal sign-off sheet that lists the members of the production, review, and management teams. Circulate multiple copies of the script for review, but be sure to have all the signatures on the same sheet of paper. The final script should incorporate any legitimate changes that are recommended or directed by the review team. The management team approves the final script. If agreement isn't reached at this stage, it could mean revisions later.

### Step 3: demonstration

Once the teams are assembled, development can begin. You should schedule a demonstration of the process or skill to be videotaped. Most scriptwriters aren't experienced enough to write technical scripts. They must rely on SMEs or observe the process that they'll be writing about. The best thing for a scriptwriter to do is to use both approaches.

A demonstration helps the writer to construct an accurate script. You can further ensure accuracy by choosing the most qualified people to conduct the demo.

Videotape the demonstration in real time, or as close to it as you can. Don't bother with special lighting or multiple-angle shots. An amateur camcorder with an open microphone for recording your oral notes can do the job.

The main purpose of this step is to gather information for the scriptwriter. The demo also lets everyone involved in the project get in some

practice, including the people who'll be on camera. The tape can be used later as a visual storyboard to help the production team develop the complete program. Still photographs produced from the tape by a video printer can be used to help communicate ideas to the other teams.

### Steps 6 and 7: rehearsal and additional changes

Once you have final approval, you're ready to go on to the rehearsal stage. Similar to dress rehearsal for a play, this step gives the on-camera people a chance to practice under real conditions. It also gives you time to work out any problems with camera angles or with timing between the audio and video portions of the program.

After rehearsing, incorporate any additional changes into the script and

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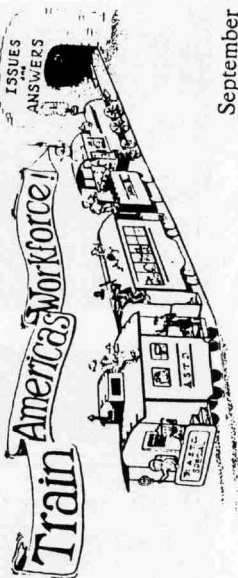
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shot-list. Significant changes should be reported to the review and management teams.

In some situations, it may not be necessary to rehearse. In the case of simple skills programs, for example, omitting rehearsals can save time and money. But jumping the gun may cause you to overlook mistakes that'll cost more in the long run.

**Step 8: final taping**

If the technical content has been carefully constructed, final videotaping should go smoothly. Everything you've done up to this point reduces the chance of problems arising during actual production.

You can further protect yourself from having to go into post-production by building in contingencies—such as shooting from multiple camera angles, shooting numerous

you've taped is accurate. Just like the big-timers in Hollywood, review your "dailies" (the footage shot each day) before you go into post-production.

At the end of each day of shooting or before starting shooting the next day, hold review sessions for members of the production, review, and management teams. By doing so, you can identify any problems with your shots while you're still on location. It's much easier to shoot retakes while everything's still set up and everyone's ready to go.

**Step 9: editing**

Even with an approved script and visuals, editing affects how many revisions you'll need and how difficult they'll be to make. If you organize your programs in segments, you can make any necessary revisions easier to execute. It's much simpler to correct

**You can never have too much raw footage**

cutaways, and recording plenty of pre- and post-roll-on shots.

Experienced producers know that many extra or unplanned shots often end up in the final program. You can never have too much raw footage. It's much easier to get the right shot the first time out than it is to go back for it.

Continuity and consistency contribute heavily to the quality of a final video product. There must be continuity throughout—in the shot angles, action, sound, lighting, equipment placement, and people. Using only one camera for the shoot may make it easier or more difficult to establish continuity. It depends on one's style, experience, and skill level.

Keep an accurate account of what takes place during the actual videotaping. This record can save time during final editing, especially if the editing stage is delayed for any length of time after shooting is finished. Make a note of which tapes certain shots are on, what script changes were made on location, and how special problems that arose were solved.

You must make sure that what

mistakes in a segmented program than in a continuous one, although purists argue that the former doesn't possess the same integrity. Revision problems and the need to get the program into circulation warrant using every error-reducing technique available—as long as it doesn't compromise overall quality and effectiveness.

Building in longer pauses between paragraphs in the narration also makes revisions easier. You can incorporate such pauses and still maintain the professional look of the program by using ambient sound or music as a bridge. But use restraint. Don't put in deadly 30-second pauses.

Another technique is to use graphics, especially when the content changes frequently. Graphics tend to be easier to revise than moving video.

Programs with a lot of special effects—such as digital video effects, wipes, and dissolves—are usually more difficult to revise than programs that use mostly straight cuts. This is especially true if your editing facility doesn't have edit-list management software.

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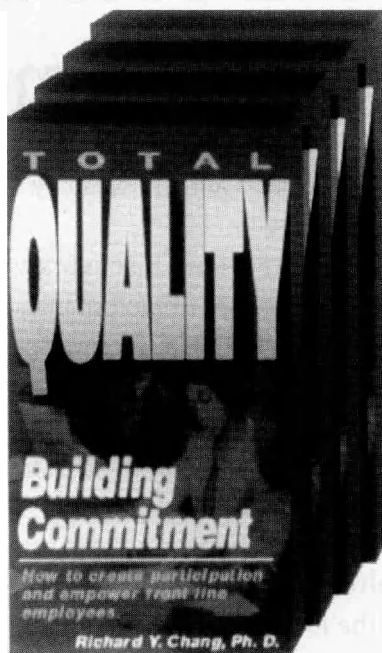
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Also, editors tend to be more reluctant to revise programs that have a lot of special effects, because of all the extra work that went into producing them. Effects may enhance the visuals, but they should also help convey the program's message.

### Step 10: final review

You've agonized over editing decisions, you've worked day and night, and you've finished your program at last. It's ready for final review.

You must now bring the interested parties together for the official premiere. If you're like most producers, one of your biggest fears is that a manager who isn't familiar with either the program or video production in general will make a remark that'll require you to do revisions.

You can relax a little. If you have involved the review and management teams from the beginning, they won't be seeing the program cold. In fact, they should feel a sense of ownership. Because they're reviewing their own decisions, they'll be less likely to request revisions.

Even if all the key people were involved in development and everything was done right, there's no guarantee that you won't be asked to make changes. That doesn't mean you've failed or that the ten-step process doesn't work. Chances are, you did make fewer mistakes. And it's likely that your attention to detail ensured that the revisions you do have to make can be done with minimal effort and less impact on the total program.

If revisions to the content are requested, it's usually because something has to be changed in order to make the program more accurate. If any suggested revisions are prompted by personal tastes, the managers will probably sanction the program as it is. It's their program, too. If no one defends the program, you may have to do it yourself. But be tactful. If you're not, the repercussions could be worse than having to make the revisions.

Sometimes it's better to leave a program "as is." Any abnormalities can be listed in accompanying written instructional materials or pointed out by the instructors. Often, such aberrations serve as points of class discussions. While this isn't a preferred approach, it may be more timesaving and less expensive than having to make significant revisions. ■