

"LET'S ASSUME THAT YOU ARE FACED WITH THE TASK OF PREPARING A SLIDE/TAPE PROGRAM. WHERE DO YOU START?"

PRODUCING AN EFFECTIVE SLIDE/TAPE PROGRAM

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It can provide elegance and aesthetic appeal . . . impact and sensory involvement.

"It" is the use of slide/tape programming which, with a reasonable amount of planning and creative forethought, can add all these things and more to virtually any training program.

The slide/tape medium is common to most organizations. It is used for new-employee orientations, sales meetings, management-development presentations, and dozens of other applications where audience impact, production economy and program flexibility are paramount.

Like any other communication endeavor, the success of a slide/tape presentation is directly related to the amount of planning that goes into it. This is Cardinal Rule Number One and holds true no matter how simple or complex the finished product may be.

Let's assume you are faced with the task of preparing a slide/tape program. Where do you start?

The real pros begin by putting down on paper three elements that are so obvious they are often disregarded:

1. *Objectives of the program* — A written statement of what your program is intended to accomplish helps crystalize your thinking and direction. Having those objectives in writing allows you (or your boss) to refer to them at any time during the production phase of the project to insure that each component being built into the presentation contributes directly toward your overall purpose.

2. *A description of the intended audience(s)* — A written audience description is vital in gathering and presenting materials that apply directly to the people you are trying to reach.

3. *A content outline* — After stating your objectives and defining your target audience, you are ready to collect and organize in outline form the content materials which support the program's objectives. All applicable materials and ideas — both visual and verbal — should be written down and

saved, even if some of them eventually are discarded.

A popular and extremely helpful aid in the program development is the storyboard which serves as a blueprint, and lets you visualize your progress and make necessary modifications.

Plain white 3x5 inch or 4x6 inch index cards are usually used in the initial planning stage. The idea is to indicate on the cards each point you want to include. The first card should indicate what the first slide in your finished program will look like; each successive card will show subsequent slide changes.

Exciting ideas frequently result if you call on some in-house creative help and brainstorm the program. Often, excellent ideas develop from what may at first seem to be impracticable suggestions. Encourage far-out thinking. You have nothing to lose at this stage of the game.

When the first storyboard "draft" is finished, the editing process begins. Cards with similar ideas are grouped; concepts that are impractical for filming, or that don't correspond with your objec-

tives are set aside (not discarded); and new or substitute cards are added.

When you are satisfied with the results, secure whatever approvals are needed.

Single Screen

For purposes of discussion, let's assume you will be using a single-screen format for your program. This is the simplest and most economical way to go, but still permits some degree of latitude in the hardware to be used. Several of the most common equipment configurations for showing the program on one screen include:

a. One 35mm projector, one tape playback unit (either cassette or reel-to-reel) and an operator with a clearly marked script in hand who manually advances the slides to correspond with the taped audio portion of the program.

b. One projector and a synchronizing tape recorder which automatically controls the projection equipment. The simplest and least expensive of these are cassette-tape units which use an inaudible "beep" to signal the projector to advance at predetermined points in the audio track. Using such a device permits showing of the program time after time with the slide changes always in perfect synchronization with the audio.

c. Two 35mm projectors, a "synch" recorder, and a dissolve unit which connects the two projectors and provides smooth, professional-looking slide changes without annoying blackouts between slides.

We list three combinations here, but the variety of programming and dissolve-control equipment is vast. If you want to explore the hardware field or need to add to your A-V arsenal, it's a good idea to talk to some of the audio-visual equipment suppliers listed in the Yellow Pages. Management types like the term "cost-effectiveness," and this is a good concept to keep in mind when considering A-V hardware. Sophisticated equipment is expensive and the special effects it makes possible should be viewed with a "Do I really need it?" attitude.

After the storyboard has been

developed to your satisfaction, the next step is usually a "running script" or "shooting script." We balk at the term "final script" because one of the beauties of the slide/tape medium is that changes and modifications are possible — and often desirable — at any point through the final slide-editing process.

There are a number of formats for the running script. A typical arrangement consists of blank rectangles positioned down the left side of an 8½x11" page (to indicate the sequence of the narration, descriptions and cues for music and sound effects and production notes indicating pacing, dissolves, etc.).

The keen writing and photographic abilities of the (one-person?) production crew comes into play at this point.

Because viewers must assimilate a considerable amount of information in a limited amount of time, with no chance to stop the program and repeat a specific point, it is vital that all elements of the presentation be presented clearly, simply and logically.

All graphs, charts and titles must be reduced to their simplest form so they can be easily read and understood. "Scenic" slides should be uncomplicated and of the highest technical quality. The recorded narration should be well-organized and use simplified terms and concepts written in a conversational style.

Remember that A-V involves a blend of audio and visual elements to create feeling and involvement among the audience. Getting the right balance requires pacing, timing, good aesthetic judgment and practice.

After the sound track is recorded and all the slides are taken and arranged sequentially in trays, it's time for the first rehearsal. This involves setting up all the equipment and running through the entire program. It's a good idea to take notes on any changes that need to be made, any equipment that is missing or needs repair and other pertinent information.

"Gee, boss, I'm sorry I forgot about that," does little to compen-

sate for *faux pas* in your presentation.

Cardinal Rule Number Two: Rehearse the program until you are tired of seeing and hearing it.

As a parting shot, here is a brief check list that may help your presentation run more smoothly.

- Make sure circuits (and extension cords) can handle the electrical load of your equipment.

- Use simple, reliable projectors. Kodak Carousel and Ektagraphic models are probably the most often used.

- Automatic-focus projectors are definitely worth their slightly higher cost.

- If at all possible, have on hand a fully focused projector in case of problems. It is far easier to swap projectors than to attempt to change a red-hot lamp that has burned out.

- Clearly label all slide trays, tapes and boxes.

- Unless there is a very good reason, don't splash too many images onto the screen in rapid-fire succession. By the same token, images left on the screen for too long a time lose the audience's attention. The content of each slide and common sense dictate the length any particular visual should remain on the screen.

- All slides should be relevant, attractive and easily understood.

- A dynamic audio recording is an important element and care should be used to insure a good balance of audio and visual elements to elicit audience response.

- If possible, keep all slides in a horizontal format when shooting and projecting.

- Use blank (opaque) slides at the beginning, end and anywhere in the body of the program that calls for a black screen. It eliminates squint-producing glare from a suddenly white screen.

- Many creative slides can be produced by copying graphics and still photos on a copystand.

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