

How to Avoid Making Bad Video of Good Presentations

By Jim Staylor

You want to document meetings to share with people who could not attend. You need to archive training for learners to review. Or, you aim to record other presentations to show later via media.

This article addresses the challenges to producing good quality video from live presentations. Herein are valuable insights and ideas you can use before, during and after recording to help achieve the best possible results.

Barriers to successful video usually stem from one or more of these 5 areas: content, presenter, lighting, audio and/or camerawork. Issues with any one can distract viewers and detract from your message.

Content – Some topics don't lend themselves to video. Interactive training with lots of hands-on audience participation may not work well on video. With no visual elements, you only have a "talking head." Even presentations supported with slides, have various impediments to being effective as video.

Presenter – The person giving the live presentation needs to be aware of and do certain things in order to help facilitate a good video recording. This includes dressing and moving appropriately, standing in the light, using a microphone properly, etc.

Lighting – Insufficient lighting means poor video. House lights usually get dimmed so live audiences can better see the projector screens. Unless lighting is added, however, the presenter will likely appear too dark to maintain appropriate detail for video. Can lights aimed straight down are rarely a good solution. They create shadows on the face that hide the eyes and make presenters look like "zombies."

Audio – Microphones on back-of-the-room cameras pick up every little noise between the camera and speaker. Whatever is closest will sound loudest. Good audio for video requires an external microphone, such as a wireless lavalier. For proper audio pick up, position the lavalier in the middle of the chest. Too high under the chin, the voice sounds muffled. Too low requires adjusting the mic level so you hear room noise. Mounted to one side yields huge variations in audio levels whenever the presenter turns his or her head closer to or farther from the mic. To hear audience questions, add another microphone or coach the presenter to repeat questions.

Camerawork – Most modern cameras offer sufficient quality to acquire a decent picture. How the camera is operated, however, plays a major role in the quality of the finished video. It's important to position the camera to capture a good angle on both the presenter and the slides – while not affecting or being affected by the audience. Also, consider whether to include audience reaction shots. Framing, composition and movement matter greatly to production value.

If you want the viewing audience to think, feel or take a certain action, first you must capture and hold their attention. Avoid having the quality of the production interfere with the value of your communication. The following ideas can help you during pre-production, production and post-production to increase the likelihood of achieving the desired outcome.

Pre-Production

Determine whether the topic warrants being recorded. Will there be enough of an audience to watch it later if you make the video available? If there are no visual elements, consider presenting the information in a manner other than video.

Scout the location. Determine where you can offload equipment and park your vehicle. Decide the best place to position the camera and find a place to plug into A/C power; Don't run out of batteries in the middle of recording a long presentation. Discover whether you might need to arrange or acquire some sort of riser to get you and the camera higher for a better angle on the presenter and projector screen.

Obtain proper equipment. You may have to rent, borrow or buy it, but get the following items for decent video recording:

- HD Camera with external mic connections
- Fluid-head tripod for smooth movements
- Wireless lav mic – compatible with camera
- Closed headphones to monitor audio recorded
- Small dimmable light (256 LEDs or more)

Optional equipment:

- External monitor
- Remote zoom control
- Second LED light for backlight

Check equipment. Test and troubleshoot equipment before each shoot to ensure everything is in working order and you know how to operate it properly.

Coaching For Presenters

Follow these tips to make your videos look and sound better. Additionally, the live audience will enjoy a stronger presentation.

Use a Video-Friendly Slide Style

When creating slides to appear on video, choose a darker background with lighter colored text. This helps balance the contrast between presenter and slides making it more pleasant to the viewer. Live audiences appreciate this, too.

Modify Slide Content for Stronger Communication

Because most people now view videos on tablets or smartphones – and we absorb messages in smaller bites – it's important for your slides to each contain a concise, compelling concept – best expressed with some sort of graphic (still photo, line art, simple chart, etc.) along with very minimal text support.

Though most slide presentation programs default to a hierarchy of bullet points, you don't have to – and should not – fall prey to just following that template. Research shows that many presentation experts warn against “Death by Bullet Points.” Limit text on any one screen to 3 to 5 lines with 3 to 5 words per line. It is acceptable to use one word or even none and still convey a powerful message on any given slide. For some projects, this might yield more slides, but the result is a much more powerful presentation. Consider providing, complicated graphs, statistics and other intricate charts separately in a handout or website referred to within the slide.

Practice Microphone Management

Without adding a separate audio technician and additional equipment, there's likely only one lavalier microphone. If the introduction should be included in the finished video, the emcee/host must stand right next to the presenter for the mic to hear. With a series of two or more presenters, allow time to stop the presentation briefly to switch the mic to the next person. If two people must present at the same time, have the two presenters stand shoulder to shoulder and clip the mic to one of their shoulders.

Podium-mounted microphones are helpful when presenters stay at the podium. If using a hand-held mic – wired or wireless – be sure to hold it properly. Grip the mic with your thumb aimed up, then point your thumb at your mouth. Hold the mic about 3 or 4 inches below your mouth.

Stay in the Light

In many situations, projector brightness is less than optimal. Lights are dimmed to help the audience see the screen, but this usually leaves insufficient lighting to properly capture good video of the presenter. When house lights are not up, lighting should be augmented. Ballroom conference sessions often use truss-mounted spotlights aimed at the podium. In more intimate settings, position one or two lights so they illuminate the presenter but don't spill onto the screen. Either way, it is critical for the presenter to stay in the light. Humans have a natural tendency to want to avoid the glare. Learn to fight the feeling and **STAY IN THE LIGHT.**

Avoid Crossing the Screen

If the podium is directly in front of the screen, move it to one side or the other. Check the background from the camera position to make sure nothing distracting appears behind the presenter, for example an exit sign or a seam in the air-wall. To avoid appearing in silhouette, never stand or walk in front of the projector screen.

Repeat Audience Questions

With only one microphone, the presenter must repeat any audience questions so they are included in the finished video. Otherwise, answers alone may sound silly and devoid of context. The live audience might not have heard the question either.

What Not to Wear

Avoid wearing all white, all black or very fine stripes – which all affect the camera image adversely. Earth tones or pastels generally look good on camera. Avoid wearing sparkly or dangly jewelry, which may either reflect distracting light into the camera or bump the microphone.

Add a Little Make Up

Consider using some oil absorbing sheets and/or applying a light neutral powder to reduce shine on your face. Sometimes it's the little things that make a big difference toward appearing professional or not.

Production

Position your camera so the presenter is not directly in front of the screen. This way he or she will not appear in silhouette and you will have the option to capture just the presenter, just the slides or both presenter and slides together. If your camera is somewhere in the middle of the room, you can capture audience shots occasionally, too.

Better... Bring a second camera to shoot the presenter and the slides the whole time. Use this angle when editing as a reference for timing their slide insertions. This allows you to keep your main camera as a close up or bust shot of presenters.

Best... Use a third camera aimed at just the screen, so for editing you just synchronize the recordings and transition between the different angles.

Use a good fluid-head tripod (prevents jerky movements) that's tall enough to position your camera above the heads of the audience so you have a straight shot to the presenters and the projector screen. Use a separate riser for you and your camera so your movements don't affect the camera. When zoomed in with the telephoto lens, any little vibrations become greatly exaggerated on-camera.

Add a small, dimmable LED light to brighten the presenter's face without washing out the nearby projector screen. Often room lights get dimmed to help the audience see slides better, but this kills your ability to get decent video of the presenter. Presentations meant for live audiences and video rarely are optimal for both.

Provide a separate microphone dedicated to audience questions. Otherwise, coach all presenters to repeat any questions so you have them on-camera.

Use gaffer's tape or clear packaging tape to neatly cover any cables that might be a tripping hazard.

Bring an external monitor, a remote zoom control and a tall director's chair so you can comfortably sit to view the image and easily control your camera without having to stand for 60-90 minutes staring into a little viewfinder.

Post-Production

A well-recorded live presentation may only need to be captured and encoded to another format so it can be uploaded to the Internet or burned to DVD. With the proper technology present, you can even stream certain presentations directly to the web in real time.

Otherwise, a video editor may need to perform additional post-production activities, including:

- Adjust audio levels to achieve consistency throughout
- Apply audio filters to reduce room noise such as air-conditioning
- Tweak the video with filters to improve overall image quality
- Add opening/closing title graphics
- Add music or sound effect under graphics
- Convert and insert actual slide contents as graphic images
- Insert scan-converted slide contents with animations included
- Encode the video in a variety of formats for final display, and/or
- Combine video and slides for an online or mobile interactive experience

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jim Staylor is a video professional with 30 years experience working on movies, TV news, commercials, video games, and corporate communications. He has managed over 10,000 hours of projects including video of live presentations such as:

- *Sony Global Leadership Seminars at UCLA Anderson School of Management*
- *Wireless Life Sciences Alliance conferences and educational expos*
- *Random House Publishing presentations at Comic-Con*
- *MIT Enterprise Forum San Diego's monthly meetings*
- *Continuing Medical Education and Grand Rounds for Sharp HealthCare*

Staylor has taught video through The Art Institute, Platt College and the University of California San Diego's Digital Arts Center. He produced the media training series: "How to Keep Your DO-IT-YOURSELF VIDEO from Looking Like You Did It Yourself." Jim currently serves as in-house video producer for Sharp HealthCare in San Diego and occasionally teaches and offers video services through Staylor-Made Communications, Inc.