



# VIDEO KILLER TIPS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This is perhaps not the typical tutorial, but VE thinks that it was about time to make an overview over essential tips and tricks to help you along with your filming and movie creation. There are different segments to making a movie, and VE has tried to put together the best tips from all of them – from preparations to the finalized video.

## 2. PREPARATIONS

### B. EQUIPMENT

Know your equipment. It doesn't have to be the newest and most fancy, but knowing how your camera operates, how it records sound for instance, is essential in order to produce a good shoot or movie clip. You might also think through what kind of equipment you need. Is the camera enough, do you need an external microphone, extra light and so forth. At least have one spare battery available – fully charged. Keep it in your bag! Esta muy importante! Or there is the option of hiring equipment of course.....

### C. PLAN AHEAD

Unless you are taping on holiday and just want to film whatever comes along, you will benefit from having some kind of plan of what, where, when and how. But even on holiday, your movies will improve with a little bit of planning. Just think things through and try to foresee what you'll need to make your masterpiece. And of course, if you need actors – it's a good idea to let them know and talk with them before the actual filming starts.

### D. STORYBOARD

Something that might help preparing as well as under the filming is to have some kind of storyboard – sketches or drawings to visualize what your intentions are with the filming and different takes.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

### A. INSPIRATION

Looking for that special look or scene you like to copy? Check out the original and figure out how to do it beforehand. You can also check out the Internet for tips on how to accomplish certain effects and how to shoot a good movie.



#### **E. SCRIPTING**

In short terms this means having a sketched plan over the different scenes and overview over angles to shoot, camera positions and so forth. Specially designed software programs for this purpose are available.

#### **F. LOGGING AND LABELING YOUR TAPES**

When you use multiple tapes or DVDs when recording – you need to keep these organized. If you in advance mark them properly, it's easier afterwards to locate the right one in the right order. You can for instance use a PDA or similar and take short notes regarding the content and what's on tape 1 with the different scenes listed at what time they start. Then you do the same for tape 2 and so forth. Get the picture? Literarily!

#### **G. LOCATION**

You should always be sure that the location you are going to use is suitable and that you will be able to film there. A little planning, getting the overview, getting permissions if needed and stuff like that ought to (read has to ) be prepared in advance.

#### **H. THINK LIKE AN PROFESSIONAL**

This sounds a bit odd perhaps – if you in fact are an amateur. But if you run into trouble, just try to think things through – what would the pros do? And it might work. This goes for both preparations as well as under the actual filming – and editing of course.

#### **I. INSURANCE**

If you have some common sense, insurance of your equipment, staff and so on, is a very good thing to consider – and do! There are specialized companies that do this and will of course cost some dimes.

#### **J. USE THE INTERNET FOR RESEARCH**

If you are wondering about how to film, what gear you should upgrade to, or tips on how to handle your crew, you'll definitely find loads of good sites on the net.

### **3. SHOOTING**

#### **A. THE RULE OF THIRD**

When shooting film, try to divide your screen into two rows and three columns. And when filming, let the object stay anywhere but the centre square. This will bring a much more depth to your movie and help keeping the focus. As you can see from Fig. 1, the sign is the main object and the road gives the “frame” depth.

#### **B. FOCUS**

Remember to stay in focus and try to keep a track of your main object. Or don't, if you intend to have other parts of the scene in focus. Also learn ho to operate the manual zoom and focus on your camera – so you can operate this when needed.

#### **C. LIMIT ZOOMING**

Try not to use the zoom option too much. Let the objects move around without always zooming in and out. The movie will not be so dizzy and you'll often get a “cleaner” shot. Zoom instead when you are pausing the filming if you need a close up. Or retake the scene – but this time with your camera closer. Let the objects move from or towards you and keep the camera still.

#### **D. START SHOOTING EARLY (PRE-ROLL)**

Don't press play when you call “action”. Start to roll the film a couple of seconds before and press “stop” a couple of seconds later. This can easily be cut away in the editing process and prevents you from loosing what you thought you had recorded.



#### E. EASY AND STEADY MOVES

When you are moving, remember that shakings and disoriented filming can destroy a good take – unless you *want* it to be shaking..... A good investment might be a tripod or you can lean against something for support. As you can see from Fig. 2, if you try to follow a movement, the output might not be too good.....

#### F. DOLLY

A professional dolly to ensure stable shots is expensive. Why not try rollerblades, a shopping cart or a stroller of some sort. Have someone push and you are set.

#### G. AE EFFECTS

When shooting film, you will most likely have plenty of effects to choose from – depending of your camera. Do not use these effects since all of them can be added later when editing. And keep in mind that you can't restore a clip with effects applied – at least not without considerable trouble and effort, to its "normal" appearance.

#### H. ANGLE

When shooting kids, descend to their level in order to make the film look normal. Or film from above if you want them to appear small. Or film from below if you want them to appear big. Can be a cool and nifty trick. Also try different angles for the same take.

#### I. QUALITY

Never use long or extended play when capturing a movie. This will lead to poorer quality – as you will notice when importing the video. It's much better to invest in an extra tape or DVD.

#### J. SOUND

Remember that you will be closest to the microphone when shooting. So what you say will be loud and clear while what the people you are filming are saying may sound distant. In other words, don't talk behind the camera unless it's a part of the film of course.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

#### K. TAKES

It is always good to have too much raw material than finding out too late that the very important scene went to the shitter. Try to have at least two takes of important scenes – perhaps from different angles. That way, you can cross clip and reduce the risk of having just poor clips. With digital video, you can also play back after shooting to check the result of course. Even on holidays it might pay off to have your wife, girlfriend or kids do the same thing over again if you fear that the first take wasn't any good.



#### **L. FRAME YOUR SHOTS**

Try not to fill the entire screen with your main object, but frame the object with the surroundings. It will look better and you prevent that parts of the objects will be missing or disappear when viewed on a TV (this is known as “safety margins”). The focus point should be on the main object however. But making extreme close-ups might be effective as well – if that’s the effect you are after. As you can see from Fig. 3 and Fig. 4, the latter looks more dramatic in my opinion. No cutting of heads and feet!!!

#### **M. SECURITY**

Always keep your original recordings in a safe place. You never know what will happen – so instead of risking losing valuable raw material, keep the tapes. You’ll need a VERY huge disk if you intend to save all your projects and captured films after you have made your film. So, keep the original and delete the rest – after you are done.

#### **N. BLUE SCREEN**

If you plan to use the chromakey effect and play around with this one later on, there are a couple of things to consider. If you intend to “remove” persons from their background, the background should be a solid color. If you don’t have a blue or green screen, a bed sheet with strong color might do the trick.

#### **O. FILTERS**

If you are looking for that film look and don’t have a pro camera – a filter might help you along. Using a skylight filter, the colors will automatically look more natural. If you can’t afford a proper filter, a stocking or pantyhose over your lens might do the trick.

#### **P. LIGHT**

Light is the key factor to getting a good picture. Light can be manipulated and created on the fly, but require some tools or screens. Professional screens or reflectors can be purchased or you can build your own with linen and some framework.

#### **Q. CONVERSATION**

If you have a conversation, it might prove difficult to get all the talking along with reactions from the opponent *and* an overview of the scene. Try capturing the whole conversation in one good take and do a couple of more takes from other angles afterwards. When editing, you can cut and paste the various scenes together but keeping the original audio. Having two or more cameras will of course make this easier.

#### **R. KEEP COOL**

If you are in charge of the film and things do not develop the way they ought to – don’t lose your cool. Yelling and screaming might help, but a motivation pep talk might take you further. Your state of mind will normally reflect on the ones around you. So appear to have things under control and learn to think outside the box. Be creative and an inspiration – and the ones around will work harder and better.

### **4. EDITING**

#### **A. PLANNING**

Before you start transferring and creating, think things through. Preferably store all the projects, captures, stills on a separate hard disk. Mixing your operating disk with videodisk will slow your system down. Plan what folders to use and how to name everything so that you can easily find it later on.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

## B. PREPARE YOU PC/MAC

You might be faced with some trouble if you have a slow or very old computer with out-of-date hardware. Check with the requirements from the manufacturers before starting. You should also make sure that you know where you are saving your projects, rendering files, stills, video clips and so forth. Be sure to have enough disk space. One hour with captured video in avi-format is approximately 13GB! Plenty of RAM is good!

## C. TRANSFER AND STORING

You need some sort of way to have your recording from your camera to your computer. Firewire (iLink or "1394") is the best option in VE's experience, but you can get all different kind of capture cards. You should always work with video files that are stored on your computer – and not store them on external disks. The same goes with other resources that you are using.

## D. LESS IS MORE

When it comes to editing, a good basic rule is that less is more. Don't overdo the effects and fancy stuff. Keep it simple and try to focus on the story you are telling and not show off all the effects your video software can do. The same goes with transitions. You don't have to let everything spin away. A simple swap or cross fade might be just as cool and give your project a more professional touch.

## E. KNOW YOUR SOFTWARE

As with equipment, you don't need Sony Vegas, Avid Xpress PRO or Adobe Premiere Pro to make an excellent movie. You can make great movies with Ulead Videostudio, Cyberlink PowerProducer and even freeware as Microsoft Moviemaker and Avid Free. But know how to operate and use you software – play around and learn how to do things. This will save you loads of time. And of course, a good creative mind can make rocks shine. In Fig. 5 is mere a few examples of software.

## F. TELL A STORY

Most of the times it will pay off to remember this. Not show of what you can do with your computer – try to tell the story instead and that will shift your focus and perhaps make the editing process easier as well.

## F. DELETE

Do not delete anything you have been working with if this is an object used in your movie. Most software only adds reference points to the timeline. So if you add a picture and later delete this, the program will ask where's the picture and the gap will be filled with a black matte..... Not funny at all if it happens.....



#### **G. INTRO**

A punchy intro to your movie will set the audience in the right mood. Make them ready for the main movie – and it's a great way to show off your special effects skills. Having a poor or boring intro might make your audience more skeptical and even leave before the film starts – if you have screwed up the intro big time.

#### **H. RESOURCES**

You can find virtually anything on the net – legal and illegal resources for your film. However, there are plenty of free pictures, movie clips, sound effects, fonts and much more to be found. Which can be used in your project. You can even buy royalty-free music and add this if you like. Or you can make your own music using some kind of software and effects – or record narration. Choosing the right music for the individual scenes is an art – check out films by Tarantino for inspiration!

#### **I. SKILLS**

Good editing skills comes only after trying, failing, succeeding and doing it all over again. You should experiment with your software, find out what it can do or can't do. Use available sources and find solutions to your trouble. Online forums are a great place to share experiences. Having a users manual might help, or use the built in help function and seek the answers there. Don't expect your first movies to be excellent – they won't! But you will get it right if you put in enough time and effort.

#### **J. BE BOLD**

Do not always go mainstream. If you have an idea, put it into motion and show it. Doing something unusual could sprite up the movie and gives it that personal touch. But also be willing to listen to advice from others. And you have to know the rules in order to break them? Don't you?

#### **K. CUTAWAYS**

Don't be afraid to cut away unnecessary clips or film. It's much better with 30 minutes of quality movie or one hour with boring stuff. Keep it simple and short. Cutaways need to be captured when filming of course – unless you care for one more trip outside....

#### **L. 4-3-2**

Something similar to cutaways is to make a trailer of your video. Start with 4 minutes; go down to 3 and then eventually 2 minutes. That will give you some challenges and perhaps make you see what you need and can drop. That will be a good training session in other words.

#### **M. MIXING OF STILLS AND MOVIES**

You can add stills to your movie, but it might look a bit unprofessional. Instead, make a still out of a frame if you need a still image – before it comes into motion. Or slow the pace down. Stills are normally included into a "Special" section on the DVD – but make them into a timeline with sound, transitions and text.

#### **N. SOUND IS IMPORTANT**

Having the right sounds or music can make or ruin your film. The music should emphasize the content and help build the story. Playing elevator loops during a car chase might sound fun (and can be), but some rock might be better to get that exiting feeling. Also keep some ambient noise – it sounds better than crystal clear music



### **O. LESS IS MORE**

You don't have to make a trillion transitions and add effects to all your clips.... A good effect is one that's not visible! Most of the time a simple cross fade is more than enough. Keep it clean and it will look more professional and the focus remains the actual film- not the effects.

## **5. FINALIZING**

### **A. FORMAT**

Now, what kind of movie are you going to make? A DVD, streaming for the web or are you simply make a new file. Important to keep in mind, as this will decide what options you have and what you need to do to make it happen. Also try to keep all your footage within the same format, 4:3 or 16:9. In Fig. 6 you see a couple of options into which you can output your movie – depending on your hardware and connections of course.

### **B. PLAN YOUR DVD**

Especially if you are going to make a DVD, draw up a sketch of your project, what menus do you need, how will you navigate, which buttons to use and so forth? A decent plan will make it so much easier when you put everything together and will save you loads of time.

### **C. BACKUP**

Don't delete your reference files and project before you are sure the DVD is working properly. Having tested that all the chapters play OK and that the sound is where it's suppose to be - is a good thing. Preferably keep the original projects and make a batch capture if possible. Use an external hard disk for finished projects if you can afford it.

### **D. MAKE YOUR OWN**

All software VE knows of comes with loads of presets for virtually anything. But, as with editing, try not to use them as they are. For instance, when adding a background to your DVD, try to use a clip from your own takes. Buttons and so forth can be altered so that they look different. Take a look on how it's done with the retail DVD's and get some inspiration. Keep it cool and don't overdo it.

### **E. SHOWOFF**

The only way to improve your skills and get a feeling for what your audience wants – it's time to show your movie and get some feedback. This can be accomplished with viewing with your family, going to a film festival or publishing on the web. The world is at your feet!

## **6. SUMMARY**

So, that was a very brief run through of the different aspects and things to consider before making your masterpiece. You can accomplish almost anything if you put your mind to it; a simple keyword is planning – before, under and after the filming. Your project will benefit a whole lot and your editing will be easier.

The list is by no means complete. I have listed things out of my experience and learning by doing/failing. If you have some spare time, it might be well spent acquiring some video training videos as well – they can be very inspiring and educational. Good luck and make your next movie stand out from the rest! ■■