

## **How To Get Pro Results From DSLR Video.**

The big change in low budget videography in recent years has been the advent of High Definition Video on affordable consumer Digital SLR cameras. This means that with the right know how, and preparation you can achieve results on a low budget that would have cost a fortune to achieve a few years ago. These cameras are the next phase in a revolution in film-making which started with affordable non-linear editing systems like Adobe Premiere and Final Cut Pro at the end of the 1990s.

Like changes in editing, this change has been felt acutely far into the world of TV and film production as the DSLR found champions in experienced cinematographers like Phillip Bloom and Vincent Laforet. The extreme narrow depth of field possible when using fast lenses, and the ability to shoot true progressive footage was the antithesis of the deep focus, interlaced video look. Low budget video could look sexy for the first time.

Since then budgets have been slashed and the industry is still running to keep up with changes in work-flow, and squeeze the very best out of these astonishing cameras, whilst waiting for the 'professional' video camera manufacturers catch up.

It is important to remember that these cameras were designed to take high quality still images, video was an after thought, an additional feature. There are things lacking which film-makers need in order to produce high quality work. Film-makers have to deal with these limitations physically and also mentally.

To start with, a stills camera body is built to be steady for an instant. Professional video, and film cameras are heavy, solid things that are built to be held still for long periods on the shoulder. A stills tripod doesn't have a fluid head, so smooth movement is practically impossible. So you'll need a solid tripod with a video head. Always use the tripod when you are using a long lens.

If you're going to hand hold the camera you'll need a stabilising rig. Without it hand held shots will generally look shaky - there are a lot of Heath Robinson camera-prosthetics available to buy or to make. Don't be afraid of DIY solutions, sometimes they work better.

Along with the rig you'll need a loupe view-finder (or better still a small HD monitor, which will attach to your rig or your hot shoe.). DIY solutions to this problem are trickier to find - but it's essential for shooting in bright sunlight and for managing the focussing challenges posed by the narrow depths of field you can be faced with in low light.

There are also endless slimmed down versions of professional grip equipment, like dollies, sliders, cranes, clamps – but to be honest, if you're going to need these for a production, then you might as well just rent the real thing.

In professional film and TV production sound is 50%., and you always needed a dedicated sound recordist. This is what you need now. DSLR cameras are to sound what a machine gun is to flower arranging. Hire a sound recordist, or maybe your musician friend already has some decent microphones and a portable H4N recorder. Film is a collaborative process – get them to handle the sound, you have enough to worry about getting the image right. They will give you digital files to synch up with the reference sound from your in camera microphone. (There are programmes like Pluraleyes which can do this for you).

Whilst someone else is worrying about the sound you can think about the composition, framing and lighting. You should have a variety of lenses, a zoom lens (like the Canon 24 to 105mm, F4) but also at least one fast lens (like the Canon 50mm, F1.4). For DSLR filming you are not using auto-focus – so you can find excellent value, old, manual stills lenses which you can use with an adapter.

If you are shooting in bright light you'll need a Neutral Density Filter to stop things down so you can keep the film look given by the 180 degree shutter, (this means the shutter is set to 50 when shooting 24fps). When you're in low light don't shoot below 1600ISO, half that when possible – just because these cameras are good in low light doesn't mean you have to use them without additional light. The extreme narrow depth of field can look amazing, but it should fit the context.

You should also be conscious of the limitations of the camera's compression – distortion due to the rolling shutter and moiré problems, and of the limitations of the length of the takes, typically 12 to 15 minutes shoot accordingly.

So, internet, now that I've told you all this I expect a noticeable improvement in those Youtube videos. I'll be checking!

*About the Author: Maria Fuchs-Alcox has had a distinguished and colourful career as actress, singer, film-maker and shameless hagiographer. She is feline puppet and was a founder member of the "Gran Teatro Pervarotti" - the first opera house to be built in cyberspace. She is currently marketing director at Video Production in London.*