




PRODUCING FOR LOW BUDGETS GENEVIEVE JOLLIFFE

Q – What is the job of a producer on a low budget or short film?

Gen – It's largely blood, sweat, grit and determination – it's about keeping the whole project going when there are no real resources. When I am producing, I work closely with the whole team and everyone helps out with whatever is needed, be it a new location, actor, prop or just a cup of tea. It's all hands on deck! Even the director gets their hands dirty.


Q – How does it all begin?


Gen – Often out of necessity. Someone just has to start solving problems. For many film makers, myself included, producing is part of just getting the job done. Unless you know anyone more qualified who is willing to work for nothing, it usually means that you are the producer. That said, there does need to be a dividing line between the director and producer, assuming they are not one and the same – which is possible but not recommended due to workload, especially during the shoot.

 gen@guerillafilm.com

 www.twitter.com/guerillagal

 www.crazeepictures.com

 www.guerillagal.com

 Join our Facebook group 'Guerilla Film Maker'

Producing a low budget film is a crazy mix of production management (organizing people and stuff), line producing (getting great deals), juggling problems, not going to sleep for 2 months, haggling with agents, sweet talking policemen, acting as cast and crew therapist and pretty much anything else you can imagine! You are constantly flitting between problems in a state of crisis management. It's all a product of working with inexperienced people (oneself being one of those people!) and having no real resources to dip into when it goes wrong – and it always goes wrong!

Q – Is it better to work with a partner?

Gen - In my experience, guerilla film projects evolve out of relationships, so yes I have always worked with a partner, sometimes producing, sometimes writing, sometimes directing. A project has a much better chance of making it to set if a producer and director collaborate from a concept level as everyone is so much more invested and acting as one unit. When you team up with a 'complimentary' partner, all sorts of magical stuff begins to happen. When you are down, they are up. If you are good at writing, but hate accounts, they are good at accounts and hate writing. It's about finding someone who compliments your skills and you compliment theirs. If you then both have drive and a shared vision, then that's when the magic happens, and it can happen VERY quickly.

Q – How do you fund a film?

Gen – We have always sought and found private investment and that has worked very well for us. It's about getting passionate about the project as people tend to invest in the film makers more than the film. But it's essential you are honest with people about your experience and the likelihood that they could lose money. The chances of success are very slim – but every few years there is a breakout film like *Paranormal Activity*. The chance that yours is that film is very small, but... it could be the one. Only time will tell.

The kind of deals we have cut with investors have varied, but in the end, the simplest is always best. We ended up with a simple 'loan agreement' that said, you loan us \$10,000 to make the film (usually as a group of investors making up that ten grand) and when we sell the film, every dollar that comes through the door will be split 50 / 50 between us (the film makers), and them (the investors group). We also added a clause that said we could deduct reasonable expenses

FORM A COMPANY?

1. If you are learning film, or if you only intend to share your work with friends or on YouTube, you may not need to create a company.

2. If you want to sell your film and make money, you will need to do accounts and may also want to form a company.

3. Keep your receipts. Even movie tickets could be claimed against tax.

4. Call an accountant and ask for a free one hour consult. Ask for a free consult with a local bank manager too.

6. Seek advice from anyone you know who runs their own company.

7. Take a book keeping course.

8. Forming a company sounds great, but it's a lot of hassle and costs money. Make sure it's the right choice before doing it.

too, like annual accounts and some running costs, but they must be reasonable costs.

Q – Should you start a company?

Gen – Yes. As you can begin to offset all your camera and editing equipment against tax, you look more professional with a company (with business cards), and perhaps most important, you are now learning 'how to run a company' - and the business side of film making is as important as any creative aspect of film making. It's usually the creative stuff we have fallen in love with, and so we tend to avoid the business side. Doing accounts is just not as much fun as writing a script - well not in my books! But like a script, you need your accounts to be done properly or your whole empire will collapse.

Q – What equipment does a producer need?

Gen – Not much really. A phone, a computer with internet and a printer / copier. That's pretty much a mobile 'production office' and you can setup business almost anywhere there is power and Wi-Fi. You don't need any special qualifications, contacts or equipment. Just passion, a great idea and the ability to convince people it is such a great idea that they should get involved too.

Q – From what I have read about other film makers and how they have made their films, it seems that producing is like operating in constant crisis. Is it really that bad?

Gen – It can be! The key is adequate planning and realistic goals. You spend your time constantly projecting into the future to anticipate problems and deal with them before they blow up in your

face. And of course there are so many variables on a film shoot that this is almost impossible – but the very act of projecting forward and figuring out solutions prepares you for the unforeseen. Try and surround yourself with helpers who can protect you from smaller problems. Big problems will of course work their way up the chain of command until they land in your lap, but smaller ones should be dealt with by the people who surround you. That way you can devote yourself to the big issues and not get entangled in time consuming and often over emotional smaller problems.

Q – *What makes your life easy?*

Gen – Having the story based in as few locations as possible. Minimal cast means less hand holding and ferrying around. A tight script with no baggage that wastes resources. Of course enough money to pull it off always helps, but most of the time the ability to make the movie with *what you have* is all the money you really need. The cliché is true at every level of production – *‘there is never enough money, time or light’*. Don’t wait for money, take the plunge and go with what you have, but be smart about how you use it.

For me, the thing that is most important is the knowledge that the concept, genre, casting and the execution of all of our resources, will result in a picture that is marketable. I know from experience that film making is a long haul and you need to be able to sell your work. It’s not something that is negotiable or to be embarrassed about – it should be up front and centre stage. We **MUST** sell this movie.

Q – *What advice would you offer a new film maker?*

Gen – Learn all the different skills and jobs in the film making process, such as sound recording, production management, editing, writing – all of it – as early in your career as possible. You don’t need to be an expert in each, but you do need a good understanding of as much of it as possible. This will give you a great foundation from which you can deal with daily problems during a production.

Aim high – many film makers fail because they are just not ambitious enough. But be smart in that ambition too. It must be achievable and you must have a strategic plan that you can execute right now, or at least in the very near future.

Most important is to just get out there and keep making movies and learning.




FUNDING CHRIS JONES

Q – How much should I spend on a film?

Chris – That depends on you, your film and where you are currently sitting in your career as a film maker. Generally, a trend we have seen over and over is that people spend too much money, too early in their career. They make a great short and think they are ready for a feature, and then they get a lot of money based on that short, and end up messing up their big break. You don't want to do that as, by definition, you can only make a 'first feature film' once, and people rarely give you a second chance.

The nightmare scenario is going into a meeting and pitching a great idea only to be asked how your last film performed, then having to tell them, 'it made no money'. I hear it over and over: 'If only I knew then what I know now, and if only I could have that first chance again, I would do it all differently.'

Pace your career and make a strategy whereby, when you find real money (and you will), that you can spend that money wisely on a film that will serve both your career AND your investors. Before taking any big money, I suggest most new film makers should produce a micro budget feature for \$1,000 so that they get the experience of story telling in 90 minutes. It's so very different to making shorts.

 chris@guerillafilm.com

 www.twitter.com/livingspiritpix

 www.livingspirit.com

 www.chrisjonesblog.com

 Join our Facebook group 'Guerilla Film Maker'

THE PROBLEM WITH DEFERRED FEES

One way film makers have kept budgets down, is to offer 'deferred fees'... 'work now and we will pay you from the profits'. We don't recommend deferred fees. Not because we don't feel you should not share in the success of your film, but because your film is most likely not going to make any money. And even if it does, it will be a small amount. Only one in a thousand films becomes a Paranormal Activity success.

But for the outsider looking in, because you are a great sales person and you push your film out there, your film might look like it could be the next Paranormal Activity.

And if that happens, you will get calls from irate crew members chasing their deferred fee from a perceived pot of gold that just doesn't exist. It makes for very bad future relationships.

If you must do deferred fees, make all your accounts transparent so that people can really see the state of play. That usually silences any complaints. If a crew member is insistent on a deferred fee, they may be getting involved for all the wrong reasons. It may be wise to move on.

Q – Where do you get money for low budget films?

Chris – I wish I had a straight answer. I could cite you literally hundreds of films where the financing has utilised a different model each time. And with social networking, it seems anyone can reach anyone else now. And that relationship could lead to your next investor, contributor or sponsor.

Q – Give us some ideas of how to fund a film.

Chris – First off, for low budgets, the best money to raise is the money you don't spend. So keep your budget down by being a cunning producer. Second, have a mix of funding ideas operating in symphony. There are online websites for people to make donations, but you'll struggle to raise any significant money this way. Have a go, but unless your idea really motivates a large group of people, you're going to struggle. Everyone is now trying 'crowd sourcing' like this, and once everyone is doing something, it's time to look elsewhere.

I definitely suggest you should look to friends and family for small 'family sourcing' donations. But keep those amounts of cash small and manageable. You

KEEPING INVESTORS HAPPY

1. Where possible, fulfill any promises made. It may not always be possible to fulfill a promise (one of the disadvantages of low budget film making), but make it a priority to do so at almost any cost.

2. Regular updates can be delivered on a secure website or emailed PDFs. If the line of communication goes cold, so will the investor.

3. Press - this is great for keeping people happy. Everyone associates press coverage with success, but beware, this may produce a false sense of financial returns on the part of the investors.

4. Several low budget pictures have allowed investors to act in the film in return for cash. It works and everyone is happy. Beware of problems if their scene is cut - make this possibility known in advance.

don't want to take any money that you must pay back, as owing money to friends and family is a terrible weight on the creative soul. Plus, you may need to go back to them for more money in the future.

And for myself with these small donations, I am always very clear that there will be no financial returns. It is not an investment. It's a contribution (I don't like the word donation either, for me it feels a little too beggar like).

Q – Why would anyone just give a film maker some money like this?

Chris – You have a lot to offer. With blogging, webisodes and social media, you can take a contributor on an amazing creative journey. Plus you can offer credits on the film, a copy of a signed DVD, tickets to a swanky premiere, set visits, posters etc. To most people, if they know you, if they believe in YOU (not the film), they will be prepared to risk a small amount of money on what will give them the nice fuzzy feeling that they are helping, as well as a good story to share with colleagues and friends.

The psychological distinction is that they are buying 'an experience' and not donating to a cause or investing in a business. So £50 or £100 is still a lot of money for people to just 'give', but if you deliver on what you promise, they will get value for money – it's the same price as an expensive night out on the town, or a birthday present for a loved one. And once one person is hooked, encourage them to invite all their friends too. It grows virally. I do feel film makers need to move beyond the ghetto of other film makers on Facebook and in the Twitterverse. I see a lot of film makers asking

film makers for money! And I cannot stress how vital a 'personal connection' can be with this model.

Q – What about investors who put in cash?

Chris – Yes, getting back to where money comes from. There are all manner of legal entities into which people with money can invest cash, get tax relief or some other benefit, but for that you will need to be setting up a production company and hiring lawyers and accountants, all of which costs money. If you are ready for that structure in your career and if you can raise that extra money, then it's a good idea.

For others, we have operated investment as 'a loan' with a premium. It's a straight deal where an investor puts in say \$1,000, and if the budget is \$10,000, they get 10% of the investors share. It's simple. Then from sales of the film, from the very first dollar, we split it 50/50 between the film makers and investors. So the investor in this example would get 5% of all gross receipts from the very first dollar. This works because it feels fair, it's very simple and easy to remember. There is an example contract on the www.guerillafilm.com website, though you MUST get it looked over by your own lawyer and accountant before utilising.

To help, we have always created a document about the film, the company, the film makers, added photos and artwork, budgets, schedules etc., and passed that around. It isn't a direct invitation to invest, more a kind of 'what we are doing' pamphlet. Creating that document always helps organise your thoughts, set goals and deadlines, and excite others. People often read it

5. Treat them as a VIPs and introduce them to the cast and crew. They are, after all, the people who funded your dream.

7. All correspondence should be impeccably presented. Checking spelling, formatting and accuracy before sending out should be second nature but often isn't.

8. If things are going badly, let them know. Investors would rather know things are going badly than hear nothing at all.

7. Give them a credit at the end of the film.

8. A micro budget feature film is a VERY long term investment, maybe 15 years. Consider how you are going to manage that commitment.

9. Above all, be honest and stay in touch.

and ask 'How can I help?' In this day and age of the Internet, it's a good idea to print it on nice glossy paper too, it will make you distinct.

Q – How much contact with the production do you need to give investors?

Chris – Well if you are doing a good job for your crowd sourcing people, such as running the blogs and Facebook pages etc., most investors will be happy with that. Remember, they are investing in you - the film maker - and not so much in the film or business itself. So they want to feel connected. If you want to offer more sensitive financial details, set up a private area of your website where they can log in and view details online. You want to minimise how much work you need to do to service their expectations as that can eat up resources, and you want to be using those resources to cast your film, rewrite the script, design a poster etc.

Q – Should you start a company?

Chris – If it's a commercial proposition, yes. If it's a learning project or a film that you are using only as a calling card – maybe...maybe not. You should get insurance and open a dedicated bank account though, just to keep everything clean.

Q – What is the real chance of an investor getting money back?

Chris – It's a tough marketplace out there, and films are selling for shockingly small amounts of money. There are so many films available it has become a buyer's market. If you focus on targeted theatrical releases which you manage, DVD sales which again you manage, and then work hard for TV deals, and international sales, you should make some money back. But of course, the more you spend, the more you need to recoup. There is no easy answer to this. Sales agent Julian Richards, whose interview is in the sales section of this book, offers an insight into the real value of a film, not the mythological value.

Q – What about grants, arts bodies and government money?

Chris – There is money out there, all over the world. But my experience of that kind of funding has never been great. It usually comes with lots of strings attached. It could be tax benefits, but you need to shoot it in a specific place, or it could be funding from an arts body, but you need to tell a specific story. And

CREWING UP... WHERE TO FIND CREWS

Whether you are shooting a camera test, an Oscar™ contending short or a micro budget feature, you will need a crew.

As your film making ambitions and productions grow, so will your crew needs. At the same time so will your relationships with other film makers, and those relationships lead to crews who are looking for experience right now. Relationships and personal referrals from other film makers are by far the best way to find crew, but you need to be in the game to build those relationships, so get going now. There are plenty of resources on the web too, such as Mandy.com, ShootingPeople.org and Craigslist.org. Use them and share any new resources you find with your community.

At the most basic level, you simply need help. It could be switching lights on and off or making tea for an actor, all the way up to operating Steadicam or performing complex stunts. So why would anyone help you? There are two main reasons. First is experience (they get to learn while you pick up the cost of their education). What if they screw up? Well that's why they are doing it for free (or next to nothing). The second reason is for a credit as they are building their resume. There is a third reason too, which is simply that people love making movies. It's kind of an addiction.

There are some crew members who will need to commit to the long haul too. You may need help in your office months before the shoot, and these guys would be what we call 'production assistants'. They help fix any problem thrown up by the production. You may need an editor too, one who may need to commit to months of work. Editors and PAs are special crew who become close allies on your journey, so choose wisely.

It's important to treat you crew with the utmost respect. You are a new film maker, so you are going to be underfunded and inexperienced. Shit will happen. It's how you deal with it that counts. This is why planning and prepping is so vital to your success. It's a small world and word gets around if you behave like an idiot.

when any kind of committee gets involved, it will probably take longer to make, and may end up becoming a pale reflection of what you set out to do as so many other people end up 'having their input'. It does work well for some film makers though, so you should pursue it and create relationships. It just hasn't worked for me in the past.

Q – What mistakes do you see over and over?

Chris – The same mistakes we have all made, because we fall passionately in love with our films. We believe completely, and ultimately promise too much. That's why I don't like doing deferred fees now. It sets up film makers to create poor relationships three years down the line. Just be careful what you promise your investors (and crew are investors if you offer deferred fees). I find a good way to express it would be, 'There is a good chance you will lose your money, a good chance you will get some of it back, a smaller chance you will get it all back, and very small chance that this could go through the roof and be the next *Paranormal Activity*.

Perhaps the biggest mistake is taking money from sources that, if you cannot repay, will cause you serious problems. So convincing a family member to mortgage a home, or using your credit cards heavily, all are very bad ideas. And I know film makers will continue to do this! So you have been warned!

Q – What advice would you offer a new film maker?

Chris – There is a fundamental contradiction at the heart of funding a low budget movie if you make one assumption – *you need to pay back the money*.

First, there is never enough money, time and light to get the movie produced in the way you want. Second, the more you invest, the more likely it is you won't fully recoup your budget. It's a dilemma that has no direct answer. You must find your own way to make this equation work for you, your investors and your backers.

Be aware that you are wearing rose tinted spectacles when it comes to your film. In reality the relationship between you and your film is more like dating a crazy person. At first it's thrilling, but can quickly become very hard work if you don't manage your own expectations, and those of others around you. Just remember to enjoy it and have fun.

CREWING UP... HOW BIG IS YOUR CREW?

One of the biggest expenses on any film is that of your cast and crew. Just feeding, transporting and equipping them eats a sizeable chunk of any production budget. And then there is the pay! So the question becomes, how big is your crew? There are several major departments on any film. They are always headed up by the Producer and Director...

- 1. Production and organization** – Headed by the producer, with production assistants, assistant directors (who co-ordinate between the office and set), location managers, runners, script continuity, drivers and catering. Can include the writer and Director once production begins.
- 2. Camera & lighting** – a department that can expand rapidly as camera formats move up the quality ladder. Includes lighting cameraman, camera assistants, focus pullers, grips (moving the camera), gaffers (lighting).
- 3. Sound** – Usually a two person team of sound recordist and boom swinger.
- 4. Design** – Covers make-up, costume, production design, location dressing, props, set dressing, special effects. Often the most neglected area for low budget productions, and that neglect often shows too!
- 5. Cast** – That's the actors, and they do need special treatment.
- 6. Post Production** – Editor and edit assistants. There may be conduits between Camera and Sound and Post Production to facilitate the movement of the footage (sound and picture). There may also be someone who is dedicated to backing up and archiving data, especially if you are shooting digitally and capturing files and NOT to tape.

Whether you are a crew of two or an army of thirty, you need to cover each and every department base.



DOING DEALS IVAN CLEMENTS

Q - How do you get great deals?

Ivan - I should preface this with the fact that you need to be passionately driven by the project that you are involved in. If you are not sold on the project, then how can you sell anyone else? Pick up the phone and start talking to people. It's amazing how much people want to help in this business. And everyone is very forgiving of naiveté. It seems to me that almost everyone has been through mountains of crap to get where they are. Unlike school, where inflicting the same pain on newbies as was once metered on them is held in high regard, peers in the film business seem to actually want to help. How mad is that?

Q - How do you deal with the fear of picking up the phone and cold calling?

Ivan - Making the first call is always the hardest. It's a bit like approaching someone you fancy. You're full of excitement but you fear rejection. Just take the plunge. If you get rejected first time, remember, there are plenty of others to try. Have you seen the size of the 'Knowledge' in the UK? Or the 'Hollywood Creative Directory' in LA? Both are big directories, really big. Another great way to look at it is not that it's cold calling, but rather rapport practice (thanks to Gary Craig for that).

Q - Why would anyone give you something for free?

 ivan@withitfilms.com

Ivan - I never view it as getting something free. I prefer to view it as relationship development. What you're saying to whomever you are trying to get to collaborate with you is this, 'roll with me on this and you'll get my future business and referrals'. And you better be good on your word. If a lab gives you an unbelievable deal, make sure you go back to that lab with paid work. This will give you credibility and the word will spread. Go bad on your word and people won't let you use their toilet let alone notice that you're alive.

Q - Why do you think others don't get such great deals?

Ivan - I'm not sure really. I can only tell you what I do to achieve results. Be funny. Most of the time this business is merciless if you're not on the creative side. Make someone's day with a giggle and you'll get miles ahead. Lift spirits, cajole, be cheeky, ask for the moon always, always be VERY thankful for whatever you get. Make them feel like merciful gods. People like to feel that they have done something amazing for someone else. Don't you?

Q - How do you know what to ask for? If it costs 100 grand, how much should you try and get it for?

Ivan - Something I learnt early on is never to pay rate card. If you've actually got money to spend, you should be able to get at least 40% off that quoted rate. That was minimum for me. 50-60% is achievable. It's not unusual. Here's a deal I negotiated with a well known film stock company which we'll call Major Film.

DOING DEALS

1. Don't buy it or rent it, borrow it from a friend.

2. Be polite but unreasonable in your request for what you need. Be flexible too. People usually want to help.

3. Offer to pay upfront for a bigger discount.

4. Ask for advice first, then ask if they can help. That way, when you ask for help, they already have a relationship and they also know that you have no money. Their advice will probably be useful too!

5. The more prestigious your film, the more you can get deals. So aim very high in your concept, shooting formats and casting.

6. Always pay your bills on time. Other film makers will follow in your footsteps.

CONT...

7. If you cannot pay your bills, stay in close contact with the folks to whom you owe money.

8. Communicate over the phone as much as you can, or better, in person. And only use email to follow up. Email is not an ideal way to ask for help.

9. Give gifts to those who really helped – a cheap bottle of wine works wonders. Make friends and keep friends for the next one.

10. Offer credits and tickets to the première, but don't expect people to be wowed by this nowadays.

11. If you get paying work, offer those who helped you out with paid work or rental. Look after those who have helped you by paying back the debt.

12. Get it in writing.

13. If you get a free deal on kit, they will still want you to have insurance, so it's never really free.

I needed 100,000 feet of 35mm stock. Rate at the time was 24p per foot which came to £24K + tax. At the time, this was way beyond anything I could afford. I invited the chief sales exec for a drink in a bar on Wardour Street, central London. I began by talking about HIM and his life (we later on became good friends). I definitely wanted to go with this company as they were much more friendly and accessible to guerrilla film makers like myself. After a few drinks we drifted into the deal. I said 'look Joe (real name withheld), I'm only doing this deal with Major Film because of you. But I'm absolutely flat broke'.

'So Joe', I continued 'How about this? I've got £8K I can give you today if you can defer the balance till we hit profits and the VAT until I get that back next quarter?' It was the ballsiest ask I'd made so far, but also the easiest in a way as I had no choice. There was no more money. Joe laughed, 'you've eaten the ass out of my trousers.' We shook on it and I bought another round.

Q - What helps sell the deal?

Ivan - Yeah, this is where you can get really creative. Get a great DP who's looking to break out of commercials and into film. They're usually wealthy and will happily work for free. Then when you go to hire equipment and lights, mention who the DP is and that he's agreed to use them exclusively on the next few jobs if they'll give you a major deal. Or, if you've managed to land a known actor, use that to attract a great DP or other great cast. I got a top class camera operator on my second film simply because he'd done several huge Hollywood movies and had a month to kill. Sell the sizzle of your project and people will come. Sometimes they'll work for peanuts and

sometimes even free or deferred payment. As a guerrilla film maker, you've got to be creative. Tell a DP you've got an A lister gagging to play lead role (unfortunately the actors often pull out at the last minute – but by then everyone is committed).

Q - Where do you find investors?

Ivan - This is the harder side of getting your film made. You've got the great script and now you need the finance to make it. Unless you're independently wealthy and can finance the project, you're going to have to raise the finance elsewhere. And there's no easy answer to finding investors. Family and friends. Network through them, they usually know someone who knows someone. I personally prefer private investment as you are in control of the project. If you go for public money sources, like the Film Council in the UK, or other deals in other

HOW TO MAKE ENEMIES AND ALIENATE PEOPLE! E-FAIL...

'Write a long email about your amazing film, send it to someone you have never met, and it's sure never to get read.'

Most people send an email when they want help. That's all well and good, but... people help people they know. People they like. People they feel a connection with. That's one reason why nepotism exists. So you need to get to 'know' the people who can help you – and that's why networking is so very important in this business.

Sending an email is the least effective way to make a new connection. Email is primarily a tool for short introductions, short fact based communications, and of course, gossip. Yet some people write pages of information about their film, making astonishing requests at the end, and all without knowing the recipient personally! Those emails are headed for the delete button.

Pick up the phone. Write a letter. Drop in and say hello. Offer to buy coffee, a drink or lunch. Create a real world personal connection where you can really interact.

BUDGET AND MONEY

1. You will go over budget! So plan for that.

2. There are no rules. You can get everything for free if you work hard and people like you. Try before you buy!

3. It's easy to cost out kit. Make a spreadsheet and add it all up.

4. People are harder to cost, as they come and go, and will want feeding and transport. Keep a close eye on these costs.

5. Be meticulous about keeping records and check everything. Get a left brained friend to help.

6. Always get a receipt.

7. Pay your bills promptly. If you can't pay promptly, call and explain.

8. Don't forget post, sales, PR and festivals. They cost too.

countries, there are always strings attached and hoops to jump through. But if you're happy with that, all well and good.

Q - What were your biggest mistakes as a producer?

Ivan - Underestimating the catering budget. I can't tell you how important this is on set. On my first feature, where the money was tight, I had near rioting because of the poor quality of the food. I acted fast and all was ok. **FEED YOUR CREW PROPERLY!!!** Especially the camera crew or you're likely to find a dolly wedged somewhere fairly unpleasant.


Though I successfully made two features with people working for deferred fees (the only way I managed what I did), I would advise not taking this route as it takes away some of your power. You're reliant on good will and have to work that much harder to keep everyone on your side. From their point of view, they don't have to take any shit, and can walk any time. On my second film, I had to constantly replace camera crew and gaffers because they had to take paid work when it came up. Praise your crew as often as possible. Everyone wants to hear they are doing a good job. On set it will often become VERY stressed and from time to time, people will blow. Let them do it, and let them do it to you if possible and simply soak it up and don't react. Walk away once they've finished and talk to them later. It's usually momentary and in time will seem insignificant.

Q - What advice would you offer a new film maker?

Ivan - That's rather a broad question. First, obviously read GFMH! Do any of Chris' courses while he still has a chance to do them. Do Dov Simmens. Read Robert Rodriguez' 10 minute film school which is free online. Then get to it. Set a date that you're actually going to start principal photography no matter what.

Raise as much money as you can and actually start filming. Make a feature first, don't waste time with a short unless you have a very good reason for doing so (you can read all about why Chris and I decided to go down the short route in his book).

Features are much easier to sell than shorts. But seriously, get or write a great script that means something to you, challenges values, makes people think. You will only learn the true craft of film making by doing it. It's wonderful, fulfilling, scary, heartbreaking, back breaking, exciting, fun...the list goes on. And I can't get enough of it. Good luck to all of you.



THE BEST MONEY YOU
RAISE IS THE MONEY
YOU NEVER SPEND!

BLAG IT, BEG IT,
HOWEVER YOU DO IT,
GET IT FREE!





P.A.
JUDY GOLDBERG

Q – Production Assisting - what are the challenges?

Judy - First of all – leave your pride at the door! Whether it's your first job out of college or you're 40 years old and you've given it all up to finally pursue your film making dreams, you must be prepared to do anything and everything that's asked of you. Even if you're clearly over qualified. On low-budget films the lines between roles can easily become blurred as you'll always have a fraction of the crew you'd expect on bigger budget productions. So if it's just you and the runner in the office and the runner has been sent out on an errand, then while he or she is away, people will look to you to get the coffee, organize lunch or photocopy call sheets even though it's not technically part of your job description.

On small productions the troubleshooting and problem solving can often become very personal. The last production I worked on we shot in approximately 8 locations but only paid for 1. We utilized over 40 extras and only paid for 10. And the majority of props and dressing came courtesy of the crew. At the end of the day a lot of our resources came from the production team calling friends who had houses, or friends who were actors and getting them along for a sandwich and a fun day out. So when you overhear the producer and the director talking about how the hell they're going to find a Labrador puppy or an electric guitar for that crucial scene tomorrow – don't be afraid to tell them about your dog loving friend Dave who's in a band. It might not always work out but you will be seen as someone with ideas who wants to help and this can only ever be a good thing.

 judy@lobster-snyder-productions.com

 www.judysyoyo.com

Q – Aside from production problem solving, what else should you be doing?

Judy - In a busy production office it's imperative that you keep your eyes and ears open at all times. Even if you're knee deep and engrossed in complex travel itineraries or battling to get tomorrow's call sheet finished, LISTEN to what's going on around you. More often than not what's being discussed in the office WILL involve you and, either what you're doing today, or what you'll need to be doing tomorrow. I cannot stress enough how much it will make your life easier by paying attention to each and every conversation within your earshot. Once your ears become attuned to the environment, it will become like second nature.

Similarly, always be aware of your surroundings. Keep an eye on who has gone where and with whom. So when the producer calls in a terrible flap because he can't find the director – rather than shrugging your shoulders and looking vacant, you can tell him immediately that the director just stepped out to the bathroom. Also, always be sensitive to the hierarchy on set and the importance of certain situations. For example, if the director is in the middle of an intense conversation with the producer, this is not a good time to interrupt. Unless, of course, you have the lead actor stood in front of you demanding to see the director! It's important to learn and recognize what is important and what's not. You will make mistakes in the beginning, everyone does and generally everyone will be forgiven for them ONCE! Learn from that first time and don't ever make the same mistake again, people under pressure are never *that* forgiving.

Double and triple check any document you have prepared before it is distributed. Mistakes are made when you're tired and complacent, especially when working over old templates (this happens a lot with call sheets and travel itineraries). And I guarantee that however thoroughly you think you've checked a document, you will always find another mistake the second you hit the 'send' button. A great PA will make OCD their friend!

Q – What advice would you offer a new PA?

Judy - Always ALWAYS, carry out every task (no matter how menial) quickly, competently and with a smile. Being good at your job and easy to work with is what will get you hired again and/or a great recommendation for that all important 'next job'.



PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT ANDREW ZINNES

Q – What is the job of a production manager?

Andrew – My job is to run the production office and make sure that all the departments have whatever they need to make the film. I also keep track of the budget.

Q – What kind of office would you put together?

Andrew – Do it out of someone's home so you don't spend any cash on office rental. Then all you need is a good internet connection, a decent computer and decent cell phones. The key is to stay organized. Keep your casting separate from your location files. Make sure you have a good receipt file. And try to stay digital so you don't have tons of paper lying around.

Q – What are some prep things you can do to keep costs down?

 zee@guerillafilm.com

 www.crazeepictures.com

 www.script-tonic.com

Andrew – The biggest thing is to go through the script and see if there are any trouble spots. Animals. Kids. Rain. Snow. Lots of extras. Crazy props. Expensive locations like city parks or docks. Elaborate stunts or special effects. I make a list of these things and then talk to the filmmaker to see if we can cut or alter them in a way that gives the same effect. So a city park becomes a friend's backyard or a car chase becomes an on-foot chase with a fistfight at the end.

Q – What legal forms and documents do you need to have?

Andrew – For low budget films, not many. You should have a basic location release, talent (actor) release and maybe a vehicle release. If you sell the film to a mainstream distributor, they will want to see those things. You can find sample documents on www.guerillafilm.com.

Q – Do you deal with insurance or permits?

Andrew – I do. But for movies at this level, it probably won't be an issue. You need insurance for renting equipment or for going to certain locations. Avoid locations that want permits and insurance.

Q – How do you stay on budget?

Andrew – Always haggle. Start by politely asking for everything for free and then go up from there. Offer them credits, publicity or a promise that you will use their services exclusively for the whole day or shoot. I once got a 70-ton crane for free because the guys who owned it liked the idea of it being in a movie.

Q – What common mistakes do you see?

Andrew – Not budgeting enough time in prep so I can get all the elements sorted out. I can get just about anything the production needs, provided I have enough time.

Q – What advice would you give a new filmmaker?

Andrew – Don't give up. For every day that you feel like you want to reach for the whiskey bottle, there will be day in the future when you can't believe people are paying you money to do what you do.



CASTING TERRY TOCANTINS & J.J. MAYES

Q – Should I use friends as actors?

J.J. – Only if the script is about your friends, as then you're not asking them to do anything that isn't themselves. But when you ask them to be something other than themselves, and when they have no training, you are not going to get what you want.

Terry – It's like asking your friends to help you move. You save all that money, but sometimes your friends don't show up or they break your glass coffee table because they're not professionals. No, you want to hire real actors and hopefully actors who do things other than act so they have experiences from which to draw.

J.J. – You already have a relationship with your friends with defined roles. If you ask them to be in your film, you are changing the relationship, asking them to do something that is unusual. That can create resentment and a hostile work environment. When you bring in professional actors that are excited about your project, they want someone to be in charge and tell them what to do.

Q – What are the first steps to starting the casting process?

 nitrocasting@gmail.com

J.J. – You want to use breakdown services or use free online casting websites. You don't have to be in New York, LA or London. Things have really changed now where everything is online. It used to be that you placed an ad and then got all these 8x10 envelopes with pictures and resumes. That has gone.

Terry - Some good ones in LA are Now Casting, LA Casting, Backstage West and East and in the UK, Casting Call Pro. They want you to list with them because you are getting work for their subscribers.

J.J. – Then the next thing you do is break down your film by making a list of every role you need filled. And then on these services you list the role, the age range and the character's description. If you need a Native American or someone really tall, you list that. Actors are always scouring these sites and even if the role doesn't pay well, but it's a good role, they will do it because it's a good building block.

Terry – They will travel to work with you. They will take a week off to do it. And if you find someone far away who makes your \$200 film look like \$2 million, you can't put a value on that.

Q – *When you are sorting through all those headshots, what should you be looking for?*

J.J. – Your first call is the picture itself. If you see someone that looks like what you think the role should look like, then that's number one. When you flip over the picture and look over their experience, you can garner a lot from the directors they've worked with and the venues where they've played. If you aren't familiar with that kind of stuff,

CASTING & ACTORS

1. *Cast actors, not your friends.*

2. *Schedule enough time to find your actors, they are the most important thing to get right on set. Make the investment.*

3. *If you can get help from a casting director, do it.*

4. *Agents are tough to deal with. Their job is to get good jobs and good money for their client. They will see you as neither, even if you think your script is great.*

5. *There are lots of online casting services – some useful, some not. Google them all.*

6. *Actors are different creatures, don't ever expect them to behave like crew.*

7. Work with actors as much as you can, on shorts, exercises and other peoples films. It's important to be around actors so you are comfortable with the way they can 'be'.

8. The bigger the name, the more they MAY need to be 'handled'. Don't be surprised at special dietary needs, picking up and dropping off and general diva like behavior.

9. Be honest about working conditions and pay BEFORE the auditions.

10. Remember to engage with actors and don't just sit behind the camera barking orders.

11. Beware of offering actors different deals. If one gets more than another, it can lead to anger. Everyone should be there to be part of the dream and not for the cash.

then look for someone who has some experience to help. Look for someone that has some training.

Terry – An actor that has another discipline like playing the guitar or piano – something you can see and do – is amazing. An actor that can speak another language is amazing. Even if they have no experience and are just taking acting classes, that's enough. I kind of want to meet that person and see what they are about.

J.J. – Sometimes actors will cram in every activity they have ever done in their life in order to make up for lack of experience. That's not necessarily a good thing. You want to see marketable skills.

Q – What's a good way to organize the casting?

J.J. – You want to look at each part together. Let's say that your parts are Suzie, Kip and Renaldo. You want to look at all your Suzie's together, all your Kip's together and all your Renaldo's together. Then it is fresher and easier to compare each person-to-person and more likely that someone is going to stick out in your mind.

Terry – Have a place for your actors to sit. Don't treat them like cattle. Give them five more minutes than you expect in the room. They are actors. Number one: actors feel. So if you put them in a stressful situation, they aren't going to act for you. Number two: actors talk and bitch. They might get one audition a week and they will put all their energy into it and if it's an awful experience, they get on the phone with every other actor they know or they update their Facebook and they say you are an asshole. And your rep is mud.

J.J. – About the audition itself, if you are low budget, you need to see less people and take more time with them. If you are a big budget film you can see tons of people and afford to make a mistake if you get something wrong. You can always recast and catch up. On a small budget, you don't have that luxury. So taking more time with each person, you get a chance to let the actor act, which they love because they feel like they are working. You get them to read the monologue or the scene and then you give them adjustments. Then you can see how they react and communicate with you. That will inform you as to if this is a person you can and want to work with.

Terry – You are trying to find a thoroughbred rather than just a horse. If you have an eight-hour day and you see 100 people, you are not going to see anything rise above the average. No one is going to break the mold. But 25 people in 8 hours and one person breaks the mold – that's worth your whole movie.

Q – What is good feedback to give an actor during an audition?

Terry – Always improvise. Throw the script away. Or if there is a significant script, have them read it, then give them the conflict in the scene and have them just go off. If they can do that then they can show up on the day and be great. There are a lot of great technical actors, but if you throw them into a hotel room in Fresno and say 'I need you to cry right now', with all these grips and hot lights around, they fold. Check their range. After they have done their first take with their own choices, give them something that is 180 degrees different. If the scene is that they are crying on a riverbank because their brother is dead, then the next time

12. Do not cast from your bedroom! Find a professional location.

13. Actors can drop out for many reasons, so keep backup actors in your folder. Do not burn any bridges.

14. Learn to spot both real talent when it's in the room, and actors who will be troopers – you will need both.

15. Film auditions as after seeing 300 people, faces tend to merge.

16. Keep on casting until you get the 'right' actors and not just 'some' actors.

Get the right
cast and your
film will almost
make itself!
SPEND TIME
AND
RESOURCES
CASTING

tell them to do it while they are laughing because they've been on speed for four days. If they can pull it off instantly, then that is someone you want to work with.

Q – When would you videotape an audition?

J.J. – Do it for callbacks. It's too much work for the first round. The other time to do it is if someone has to see the actor and they can't make the auditions.

Terry – Actors are sensitive. If you have no camera in the room for the initial meeting, the actor will be himself or herself and be charming. At the callback, the actor has had a few days to prepare and is ready for the camera.

Q – What is the best way to hire an actor?

J.J. – The director should make that call because then their first real interface is very positive, as they want them to be in their show. But you must have specifics to appear professional. Tell the actor the role you want them to play and when you think they will be shooting. Tell them they will have a script by a certain date. If you are paying them, tell them how much. It doesn't have to be concrete, but you need to have a general idea.

Q – What should you do if you want to go after an actor that is known?

J.J. – You have to do research and find out who their agent or manager is. But it's a process and you have to have all the details of your project – your budget, your shoot dates, the plot – because you are going to go through a screening process. You start with the lowliest person in the agency and if you clear them, then you get bumped up a level. You have to establish that you are real and not making something in your backyard. Call early in the morning, early in the week. Have a website presence as they are going to check up on you. Give them a one sheet of what your project is. There are people wasting their time all week long with useless projects so if you are on it then you stand out. The actors want to work with you – you just have to get through the representation.

Q – What are the biggest mistakes that you see that drive you crazy?

Terry – An actor having an awesome audition and not shutting up afterwards. An actor should do a great job, shake your hand and leave.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Low budget film shoots are notoriously hard work. When casting, be clear about conditions, pay and expectations (anything like nudity, swimming, driving, extreme night shoots etc.). When speaking to actors on the phone to arrange a casting, repeat this information so they cannot later claim they were unaware.

Almost all actors embrace low budget shoots (if they know what they are getting into), but some can become difficult and make your life hell – especially if you are disorganised and unclear about what you need (and with the best will in the world, inexperience and under funding are a deadly combination). Once you have started shooting, you can become prisoner to their whims and needs – what you do? You can't fire them. Listen to your instincts BEFORE you commit to a casting choice.

Above all, stay friends. No matter the shit that goes down, always rebuild the bridge, hug and makeup. You may need them for a reshoot.

J.J. – Not spending the time to think about what you want. If you just cast a wide net, then you are wasting time. You can change your mind, but at least you had a thought to change.

Q – *What advice would you give a new filmmaker?*

Terry – Take an acting class. Find out what it's like to be on the other side so when you come back behind the camera you will have a better ability to talk to actors and see their talent.



Q – Most new filmmakers can't afford a set or studio, so they must shoot on location. What does this mean?

Kathy - Deciding on where to shoot isn't just determined by budget. One also has to consider what the needs of the story, script, and schedule are. If you are shooting a walk and talk with no special effects, action sequences, etc. then it's often better production value and more cost effective to shoot on location. A dressed house or back yard, a dressed office space or industrial area can often be found for low cost especially when little impact on surrounding area is possible.

Q - What should you consider with regard to sound, light and power?

Kathy - When tech scouting, don't forget your sound department! If shooting in a kitchen, restaurant, bar or commercial space make sure any refrigeration equipment, air conditioning systems, exhaust or fans are turned off or unplugged for that low rumble will end up on your soundtrack. Check to be sure telephone ringers are off or unplugged. For exteriors, note any construction in the area or industrial plants - things of that nature.

They will make shooting exteriors frustrating and expensive when you hit post-production. Note what time of day the scene takes place in the script and

 kpmccurdy@yahoo.com

LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION

The central idea of a micro budget film will often be set in, or revolve around, a single location. And that location should be one that you have in your back pocket – be it uncle Albert's boat, the neighbor's cabin in the hills or a disused warehouse that your friend owns. In short, find a location and design a film around it.

This will help with a number of crippling problems.

First, you will probably get the location for free, or for very little money, and often without difficult questions about insurance, access, shooting times etc.

You will also keep your cast and crew in a single place, and moving a cast and crew is a great way to waste time and spend money. Finally, you'll also get access at all times, even for reshoots many months down the line.

remember to note where the sun will be at the location on the day you will be there. Note if any buildings or objects will block the sun and create shadows or the need for additional lighting. Also consider if the sun is blasting out the location the grip department will want to load silks and frames on the truck. As far as power considerations, the only location power options are plug-in 'house' power or tying in to a larger source of power at a location, typically a commercial building. The former source is used for 'kinos' lights or 'practicals' and the latter requires a licensed electrician, insurance specifics and careful practice. When building a production day, try to keep your locations as close together as possible for large company moves eats up a lot of time and money.

Q - Can you get multiple uses out of one location?

Kathy – Depending on the script, you might be able to use multiple rooms in the same house. So you could get your bathroom, kitchen and bedroom scenes, etc. all in one place. You can also dress a room for something else. So a living room could become an office waiting area, the back yard becomes a park and the front doorway could be the entrance to another house or an office building. In a commercial space, you can make a hallway look like just about any hallway in any other building. The same goes for elevators. And remember, there are other

LOCATION TIPS

- 1. Shooting on location can be a major advantage as you will have to do minimal set work, merely dressing.*
- 2. Space can be a major problem as even the biggest of rooms will become sardine like with a full crew.*
- 3. Shooting outdoors can be a problem as there is no way to control the weather.*
- 4. Always try and get permission to shoot wherever you intend to be. Sometimes, if you can foresee problems, it is best to simply dash in, shoot, and get out as quick as possible. If someone turns up to find out what is happening, try to get them interested and involved, and claim complete ignorance.*

things you can use from your locations that go beyond creative needs. You may be able to get crew parking, catering and offices and staging for green screen in a parking lot of your location.

Q - What is production value and how can a good location help you achieve it?

Kathy - Production value is the term used to describe value for money as it appears on the screen. The right location can offer great production value. A practical location has a reality and a feeling that a set on stage can't duplicate, which is especially true of exteriors. On screen will be a depth, a layered visual experience, and an atmosphere that can further define a character, explore story, further the plot and open up a script.

This is as important for blockbuster Hollywood special effects movies as it is for ultra low-budget first-time filmmakers. In the former, it makes the fantasy worlds more real and believable; in the latter it gives a gravitas and a professional look to the overall work. For example, *The Blair Witch Project* was really creepy - the forest was an integral part to the story, character development, and overall tone.

Q - Should you try to get permits or permission when you are low budget?

Kathy - Filmmakers should always follow all laws and regulations for filming in the area they have chosen. This will protect you in case of accident, lawsuit or emergencies. Film permit authorities have forms to fill out or the film liaison will ask specific questions in order to determine what will be needed to ensure public safety as well as that of the film crew. They typically want to know if you

are using a generator, how many people in your cast and crew, how many and what type of vehicles you have, where you will film, park your crew, park your working trucks and park your base camp. They will want to know your hours of operation and prep and strike days and plans. They will want to know all contact info for the company and what activity you will be doing - stunts, SFX, pyro, etc.

Many low budget films don't have money for permits in the budget. If not, take steps to creatively address the issue with the writer and director. For example, if the script calls for a scene on a boat at a dock in a city marina and you can't afford that - examine the essence and purpose of the scene and ask if there is another, less expensive way to achieve that - can that scene be set in an harbor office?

Q – Can you reduce the cost of shooting on location?

Kathy – Spend a lot of time prepping as you can avoid costly mistakes by learning as much about a location as possible. Film during regular hours in residential areas and during non-business hours in commercial areas. Shoot multiple scenes in one location. Keep crew-parking close to avoid the need for shuttle vans. Communicate accurately and timely to your crew with all pertinent information regarding safety, rules and regulations, and location-specific needs. Reduce or eliminate night shoots in residential areas. Also expense goes up with the amount of crew, extras and activity. Locations in cities tend to be more expensive than rural areas unless it is some kind of landmark or preserve.

5. *Getting to and from difficult locations can be very costly in terms of time - one hour travelling is one hour less shooting.*

6. *Use movement orders. This is a piece of paper with a photocopied map (the route picked out with highlighter pen), explicit directions and mobile phone numbers for those who get lost.*

7. *Facilities for the crew on location can be a problem - a place to eat and sit will be needed, and a toilet must be provided - you can't ask your star to squat in the bushes.*

8. *Closing down streets is difficult. The police will be as helpful as they can, but they have crimes to stop and don't relish the thought of holding the hand of a new producer.*

9. *When choosing a location, don't forget the sound.*

10. Film crews trash locations. Clean up after yourself, leave muddy boots outside, ban smoking inside etc. Remember, you may need to return to the location if there is a problem.

11. Think creatively - many locations can double for several different parts of your story. This will minimise the time you waste moving between places.

12. Beware of the cool location that is impossible to either light or get cameras into, buildings with big windows cause lighting problems, turrets with narrow stairwells are tough for carrying kit, anywhere in big cities will cost you simply in parking alone.

**Q - How can you avoid damaging a location?
What if you do mess something up?**

Kathy - Use layout board, bubble wrap and mats to protect floors, wood, and wall coverings on interiors. I've seen camera people put tennis balls on tripod legs for the same reason. Minimize crewmembers inside a location and allow appropriate prep time and set up time for each shot so folks aren't rushing. That's when accidents happen. Ask crewmembers to remove utility belts with swinging hammers/clips and other metal object on them if filming in tight quarters. Monitor proximity of set lighting equipment and grip equipment to sprinkler systems. If the sensors register the heat given off by this equipment they can turn on the sprinklers, soaking your set, crew, and equipment as well as causing water damage to the location.

If something does get damaged, note it immediately and document it with photos and witnesses for insurance purposes. Encourage your crew to bring such things to the attention of the location manager or member of the producing team so that the producers are not blindsided later on by an irate property owner or worse - lawsuits. Be proactive in arranging for the damage to be repaired.

This can save you money and your nerves and those of the property owners. Make sure you have insurance and all your locations are named as additional insured to cover yourself in the event of major damage. Most damage is of the sort that can be repaired with little fuss so just make sure to be on top of it.

Q - Are there any tricks to getting locations for free?

Kathy - Be honest, up front and transparent. Have proper insurance and show the location owners that you are a professional and serious filmmaker. You might not have a budget, but you have your integrity and passion - show it and prove it. Explain what you want to do, why you would love to have the privilege and honor of filming at their property and what you can offer in return - insurance protection, a meal with the crew, and your undying gratitude. Maybe invite them to a screening, give them a copy of the final film if the location features prominently, perhaps contact the local paper and sing the praises of the establishment or owners. And always write a thank-you note. Good manners are always in style.

Q - What information should you give the director and the rest of the crew about a location?

Kathy - Safety requirements like hard hats, protective eyewear, appropriate shoes, etc. Some properties have sensitive needs like neighbors whose property should be avoided or business owners with deliveries or events happening during filming. This all needs to be communicated to your crew in a timely manner. If a property owner does not wish to be involved in the filming be absolutely certain to inform your entire crew to keep themselves and their equipment off that property. Obviously, the crew will need to know where to park, where their working trucks are, where base camp is and where bathrooms/catering/extras holding are located.



SCHEDULING CHRIS JONES


Q – What is scheduling?

Chris – When you write a film, it unfolds, scene-by-scene, page-by-page, in a specific order. When you shoot a film, you rarely shoot it in that same story order. Often you need to shoot all the scenes in one location together, all the scenes with an actor on the same day and so on.

With very rare exceptions films are shot 'out of sequence', and the shooting for any production is called the schedule. When it goes wrong, or is not planned out well, your shoot can turn into a logistical nightmare.

Q – Who creates the schedule?

Chris – On big projects, it's often the first assistant director, or another member of the production staff. But on a small film, or short film, it should really be the director and the producer. Directors need to be involved as they have the specifics of how they want to shoot each scene in their head. They will also be forced to bite the bullet on how they physically approach the film (up until now it's been in their head, without actors throwing tantrums, rain, traffic and short days). Almost every director complains there is not enough time, money or light – and

 chris@guerillafilm.com

 www.twitter.com/livingspiritpix

 www.livingspirit.com

 www.chrisjonesblog.com

 Join our Facebook group 'Guerilla Film Maker'

SCHEDULE AND BUDGET ARE GOLDEN

If the screenplay is the blueprint of the film for the director and actors, then the schedule and budget are the blueprints for the production team. In fact, the budget and schedule should be considered scripture! When a director disregards the need to stay on budget and on schedule for a guerilla film, life can get pretty painful very quickly because there is no more money!

Shooting late every night, or throwing in extra shoot days that should be 'days off', is all possible, but it will impact on both cast and crew, and over a short period of time the quality of their work will suffer and they will slow down. Shooting over schedule is just plain counter productive. On the flipside, we have visited sets where astonishingly, the production wraps early most days! This is also a problem as either the production has over scheduled and therefore is wasting money, or more likely, the director is not getting enough coverage (shots).

Work on that schedule almost as hard as you worked on that script, and then go back and work some more on that script too (ideally cutting out six pages and the car crash!)

that's true, but your job is to come out the other end with a completed film, irrespective of those limitations.

Directors doing the schedules will be forced to compromise their (often) over ambitious visions, and lose some battles in order to win the war of coverage. They should be compromised into shooting a scene in three shots instead of the seven they had planned in their head, BUT also keep the resources for the most important scenes when they really do need those seven shots for added impact. It's about choosing battles.

Q – What do you use to create a schedule?

Chris – There are some software tools out there, and I am sure they are all excellent, but I have found writing down the information on small cards, laying them out on the floor, and then arranging them in order to be the most efficient way. You kind of always need the big picture, and you can't get that on a

computer screen. And no-one has any difficulty in understanding a card system. It's cheap, easy and very efficient. Once you have your shooting order, you carve it up into days and type it all out in a document on a computer, before printing and distributing to the crew.

Q – What information is on those cards?

Chris – Everything you need to know from a logistics perspective – scene number, location, day or night, interior or exterior (remember interior can be shot at night by blacking out windows), weather conditions, special props, vehicles, special effects, weapons. And, of course, all the actors (characters) and extras, plus special notes such as 'Jim's clothes are wet from scene 26'. When the director does this breakdown, lots of information that the production team might not come up with may be revealed. If an actor has an availability problem, maybe scenes can be split, shooting one actor against one wall, another actor against a different wall in another location? It's hardly ideal but it will get the job done.

Q – Scene numbers? What if there is a rewrite after the schedule is completed?

Chris – It's a headache for us all. So many variables make the schedule a work in progress until the very last shot. Maybe an actor won't sign up until the last moment, maybe they have certain dates they cannot do, maybe a location falls through at the last minute, maybe it just rains... All these things will change your schedule as you shoot. But by far the biggest headache is script rewrites.

Typically, the film makers hold on to stuff in the script that should be cut, and only in the final few days of prep do they really accept they need to be pruned out, and maybe new scenes, with new numbers, will be added.

Of course you cannot reformat your script as all your old scene numbers will change, and so you will need a new system, where scenes may be called 26B or 14C for instance, and they will be added to the schedule. Those new pages of script should also be circulated to cast and crew on paper that is not white - typically pink pages are the first colour to be used and denote this is a script change from the final 'locked draft' – and subsequently a whole rainbow of coloured pages may end up being used to accommodate more rewrites. The real lesson is to cut the script hard and merge scenes BEFORE circumstance and budget force you to cut – no-one wants a 3am rewrite under pressure.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Simple dialogue scenes can move quickly. If you have just two characters facing each other while talking, you can shoot a master, and their close ups quickly.

Complex dialogue scenes move more slowly because having multiple characters may mean multiple camera / lighting setups. Also, you have more people to cover with close ups. If you know how you plan to edit the film later, you can shoot specific shots and leave what you know you won't use. However, this may limit your options in the edit if it does not work as planned.

Action scenes - especially those with stunts, take longer than you will expect as aside from setup time, they may need to have many different angles for editing. Stunt scenes take even longer because they must be planned down to the smallest detail, always putting safety first.

Cutaways and establishing shots - Close ups of newspapers and sides of buildings really make your film flow and take very little time to shoot. If you don't get them during the primary shoot, get a skeleton crew together and pick them up on weekends after principal photography wraps.

Night and Rain - The rule of thumb is that it will take you four times as long to shoot any scene that involves night or rain. Rewrite avoiding both if possible.

Day or Night - You may be able to shoot interior night time scenes by blacking out windows and vice versa. Always try and block locations together, then block day or night scenes within that location together, then see how that fits with other elements like actors or special props etc.

Track and Cranes - Any time that you move the camera other than on the tripod or on your shoulder, it will take twice as long because of setting equipment.

Production - It takes time to move trucks, equipment and people. Changing costumes and sitting in make up slows people down. Sets may need to be redressed and cameras reloaded. Then, there is lunch! Factor these things in.

Remember the Golden Rule... STAY ON SCHEDULE!!!

Q – How do you go about arranging those cards?

Chris – I begin by putting locations together, as moving a full cast and crew is very time consuming. Then you consider the day/night aspect and put all the day scenes together and night scenes together. You also consider if there are any other story locations that could be shot in the same physical location (shooting in a house is one location, but could you dress a room to look like an office? Or use the back garden for a woodland? Can you shoot more 'story' locations in one 'physical' location?) That's the first pass.

Then you look at the actor / prop / special requirements aspect. As a rule you want to hire actors, special effects guys, expensive cranes and the like, for as few days as possible, and so you kind of group those people and things together. That starts to change the schedule. Of course you want to minimize production moves, and so you start to get creative.

Very quickly you may realise that you could do with a rewrite to accommodate ideas that were great at the keyboard, but a nightmare in execution, especially when you have no money. This is where it's vital to have the director involved so that you can say..."Sure, if you really need it you can have it, but you will need to cut 'X' amount from the schedule, so tell me now what that is..." Very quickly they may come round and agree to a rewrite, or they will fight their corner as they feel what they are asking for is actually essential.

Q – How long will it take?

Chris – For a feature, about two days to get a good solid first schedule – but there will be constant tweaks.

Q – It sounds like a nightmare!

Chris – It's one reason why many successful low budget films are shot in one physical space, even if the story is set in a few locations. It's just a smart way to spend your very limited resources. If you plan a film with the location in mind (which ideally you have before you even think about making the film) you can spend most of your money on the screen instead of moving people between locations. Planning is essential to a successful shoot.

Q – What should a film maker look out for when scheduling?

Chris – Creative people are always optimistic – in their imagination it will always be sunny, there will be no traffic, the shoot will not fall behind, there will be ample parking etc. So have plans in place for when your Spidey senses start tingling. The big problems are always stuff like there is too much night shooting (where everyone is tired, you work in the dark and get half the shots you need), or there is rain in the script. Shooting in moving vehicles can be problematic and costly and it really adds very little value to the story – could that scene in a moving car be shot on a park bench? Or an even more appropriate and do-able story location? Of course you don't want to rip the guts out of the story by sanitizing everything, you need to find the right balance. Often the easy way to deal with it is to say, OK if I had to deal with this myself, with this much money, what could I actually achieve? Maybe it's time to cut the three elephants from the script, unless it's a film about elephants!

Q – What advice would you offer a film maker?

Chris – Bite the bullet weeks before you shoot. Go through your script and rewrite to make it cheaper and easier. You have limited resources and you don't want to squander it on things that really do not impress audiences – they want a cracking story that keeps them connected to characters and their dilemma – and that's really about what happens and to whom, not so much where it happens, or if its night or raining. And remember, a schedule is NEVER completed.

REWRITE FOR THE SHOOT

1. Before getting to set and finding out you don't have enough money, time or light, bite the bullet with a script rewrite.

2. Don't waste precious resources by filming redundant sequences that you will cut in post production. Cut now.

3. Listen to advisors and your gut niggles about stuff you suspect should be shortened or cut.

4. Don't fight it! We promise, your script can be shorter!

5. Merge minor characters into a single one. Try it!

6. Try merging scenes into one location. Does it really need to take place in several locations?

7. Rewrite night into day, write out the rain, unless you REALLY need it.

8. Do all of this as soon as you can, ideally BEFORE scheduling.




INSURANCE PAUL CABLE

Q – What insurance might I need for a low budget film? What is the basic package?

Paul – There are two aspects to this. First is equipment. If they get their equipment from a supplier, say Panavision, they may get half a million worth of kit for free, and their budget may only be three thousand – maybe it's a short film to be shot over a weekend for instance. Panavision are going to need insurance and won't let the film makers take the equipment without seeing a valid insurance policy. Not only will they need the equipment covered for things like loss, damage or theft, but secondly, they will also need 'loss of rental' cover to compensate Panavision for their loss of rental if, for instance, the camera has been damaged, needs repairing and cannot be rented out for two months. So a short film might need to purchase a minimum premium cover, and that could be a very large percentage of their overall three thousand budget. It's a real problem for them and I acknowledge this.

In the UK, film makers will also need what's called 'public liability' insurance, to protect the public and property should something happen (usually for £5m). Often locations will require this insurance in place before they allow a crew in. By law in the UK, the film makers should also take out 'employers liability' to protect the employees of the production company, with cover of £10m.

 paul@pdc-media.co.uk

In the USA they have similar cover for public liability (or CGL as it's known) which will also be needed. If they are hiring crew, workers compensation may be necessary too.

Some film makers choose not to take out insurance if they perceive that they can get away with it, especially in America where it is even more expensive. Often they have bought their own cameras too, and so then the risk is entirely theirs for equipment hire should there be a problem with their camera and equipment.

Q – What usually happens on those films, where everyone is working for free, with half a million's worth of equipment and only a few thousand in the bank for production?

Paul – They make a lot of calls and piece it together from several brokers, often without being sure that they have the right cover. I often suggest that they buy the equipment rental insurance from the company who is giving the kit to them for free as these companies usually have that facility. They may also hire a freelancer who buys annual insurance, and so their equipment is already covered (a sound recordist with their own sound recording equipment for instance).

Q – Could they enter into a co-production with a bigger company in order to sit under their umbrella insurance?

Paul – Yes that is possible. There is also 'material insurance' too, which would insure digital data and film negative. We are moving more digital now, and if a production has adequate data backup built into the budget and schedule, it's rare for anyone to make a claim for loss of data.

Q – Do you look at any paperwork?

Paul – Yes, I read the script, look at the budget and schedule, so that I can make a better assessment. I try and stay in touch with the film makers and nurture a relationship with them so as to keep good communication channels open. Often I advise people to put in well thought out contingency plans into their strategy rather than buying insurance.

Q – What about dangerous stuff in films?

ACCOUNTS & LEGAL

STARTING A COMPANY: *If you're making a film and using other people's money, then it's always a good idea to set up a company through which the entire film production will be put through. Accountants and lawyers are very expensive, so we suggest you buy a good business start up book in which 95% of your questions will be answered. You will then be able to calculate what type of company is the best for you. There are several different company formats you can set up depending on what country you're in and also for what purpose. i.e. in the UK, you could set up a limited company which gives you just what it says, limited liability in the event of a disaster. In the US, you could set up an S-corp, which offers limited liability, being taxed as a partnership and taxed only once, not again through a company tax. For more info on this, check out the US edition of The Guerilla Film Makers Handbook and/or consult with an accountant or lawyer. Bear in mind there are additional fees for having a company and depending where you are, can be expensive (i.e. in California, you must pay \$800 for the privilege of doing business there.) In addition you have to submit audited company accounts each year.*

Reclaiming Sales Tax: *In certain countries you can reclaim the sales tax on your purchases through your company. In the UK, there is VAT (value added tax) on every purchase (with some exclusions such as food, books etc.) If you've set up a company, then you can become VAT registered and reclaim the VAT. However, you will also have to charge VAT on invoices on any sales to UK companies and individuals. In Australia, the sales tax is known as the GST (goods and sales tax) and they have a similar system. In the US, it's on a state by state basis on whether you can claim your sales tax or not. The taxman isn't too fond of filmmakers as until you've made sales on your film, you will always be reclaiming VAT / sales tax. And in many cases, your film sales are done with companies and individuals outside the UK and therefore you're not required to charge VAT. Hence, make sure your accounts are always in order, NEVER cook the books for the VAT man or you could go to prison.*

Depending on the scale of your budget, other tax relief schemes are available for the prospective investor, such as in the UK the Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS), the UK Film Tax relief which is provided by The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (see the DCMS website.) In America, different states offer tax benefits if you shoot there.

Paul – Health and safety is important and risk assessments are needed now, and they need to be done properly.

Q – And how do documentaries differ from narrative drama?

Paul – Documentaries can be more work and we have to be careful, especially if the subject matter is contentious. Errors and Omissions cover should be considered. If you were making a documentary about pharmaceuticals for instance, you may have problems as those companies have deep pockets and may take legal action against the production. So we need to be more vigilant and considered with a documentary.

Q – What is E and O insurance?

Paul – Errors and Omissions Insurance – it's a policy that covers libel, slander, defamation, breach of copyright etc... and is now needed should you want to get your film distributed in the bigger territories like the USA and UK. The BBC now requests an E and O policy on new productions for instance. The problem is that it can cost \$12,500! Many indie film makers just can't afford that and so they buy the E and O cover at the very end, when they have a sale of their film in place. Then they either get some money to cash flow the purchase, against the sale with a broadcaster for instance, or they build it into the deal with the distributor or sales agent.

Q – What advice would you offer a new film maker?

Paul – Talk to people in the business, people with experience, and get some recommendations of who they would use. Call a few people specialist insurance brokers and see who you develop a good relationship with. It's often better to spend a little more to get the right broker, than it is to penny pinch. Also check what you are covered for as I see many film makers thinking they are covered, when in fact they have not really read or discussed in detail what and what is not covered.

The problem to always remember is that while insurance is not key to the making of a production, if claims do occur, they could potentially put the film-maker out of business.

FISCAL SPONSORSHIP

If you can get non-profit status in the US, any money given to use is tax deductible to the donor. It's best to join an organization that has 501 c 3 status rather than become a non-profit yourself. The donor makes the donation to the non-profit and they earmark it for your project. That way you can still make money off the film. Everybody wins! This works well for documentaries, but there's no reason it can't work for fiction as well.

THE BUSINESS PLAN

If you're seeking investors, then it's a good idea to have a business plan. It's also good to have to make you look at your project and really know it well. In this small document you will list a synopsis, wish cast list, your company and who's in it, your background, any crew, a plan on how you will make the film, when, where and for how much and a cash flow etc. How much is it going to cost, where is that money going and when do you need it, when you're going to shoot and for how long etc. Then you need to look at, who will buy this film, is there a market for it, what precedents are out there to show it can be done. Remember investors will be people who believe in YOU, what YOU are doing, and are excited by being involved in your quest, and can afford to lose their money if it comes to it.

LEGAL PROBLEMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- 1. Make sure you get all your paperwork in place and have a chain of title; talent release forms, all contracts with investors, actors, crew, stills photos, music etc.*
- 2. Make sure you have all the rights you need for copyrighted music, stills and video footage: you have the rights forever, you can edit an actor's performance, it's for all media worldwide etc. In the US, check out Fair Use laws that allow you to use these things for free in some cases.*
- 3. Remember if it's the other side drawing up the contract, everything will be in their favor – so make sure you do the contracts to make sure you're protected.*