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Making Magic: How to Create a Short Promotional Library Movie

The Pitch:

In the spring of 2014, our library dean asked us—a faculty member and two staff members—to make a promotional video for the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Libraries to be shown at New Faculty Orientation in August. Never having made a movie before, it would be a learning experience for each of us.

Concept Meetings:

First, we wanted to publicize the library in a creative way. We watched several online videos for inspiration, and our favorite, “Tour the Library” by Harper College Library, was entertaining but still informative: we liked the tone and wanted to emulate the style.

Second, we agreed that three-minute videos were ideal. UNH's Dimond Library is beautiful, and we wanted to show off the physical space, but it wouldn't be possible to tour the whole building. We also needed to highlight the three branch libraries and our library partners who also offer services in the building. Fitting all this into three minutes would be a challenge.

We wanted to tie the library into the UNH brand. We asked the UNH mascot--Wild E. Cat—to participate, appearing in the background at various points on the tour.

Finally, we needed a hook. We imagined a vintage-style flight attendant character guiding patrons on a light-hearted tour. Our colleague Nikki wears fabulous glasses: as the guide, she could push up her glasses to trigger magical transportations from one location to the next. This motif accomplished the goal of quickly moving from place to place and added a touch of humor. It further gave us a movie title: “Magic is in the Air at Dimond Library.”

Begging and Bribing: Finding Partners

With our concept in hand, we knew we needed more help.

Dimond Library shares space with the Parker Media Lab (PML), in-house experts who loan video equipment and provide help with production of multimedia projects. We arranged to meet with the lab in the early stages of the project.

The lab's director had us work backwards from our deadline, August 25th, to develop “do or die” dates for various stages of the project. From that process we determined that the script needed to be completed by the first week of July, and shooting finished by the end of July, so we would have plenty of time for reshoots—which he promised we would need—and editing, which can take significant time also.

We admitted to having no experience operating a video camera or using the lighting equipment, and our tight schedule did not afford us time to learn. Mike and Shane from the PML agreed to partner with us to become our crew.

The Script

On our volunteer time, writing the original 16-page script took the month of June. At first, we wanted library staff from all of the service desks to have a spoken line. Then we discovered a rule stating that one page of script worked out to about one minute of film. The PML confirmed this sad news, and we had to reassess what we wanted to say. We refocused our message and, after cutting more than two-thirds of our draft, were left with the bare essentials: the guide would do nearly all of the talking and everyone else would be included as background extras. The PML also had us create a storyboard, which did not require us to draw pictures but list the who, what, and where of each scene.

Casting: Extras! Extras!

We still wanted to include as many colleagues as possible, so we sent out a library-wide email invitation to participate. Few people responded, but individuals were flattered to be asked again in person. Most, it turned out, did not want high-stakes speaking roles; if anything, they were more comfortable in the background or participating in a group setting. As filming commenced and news about the project spread, more people expressed interest. Enthusiasm grew even in departments that were originally skeptical of our project.

And...Action!

Once we had determined the availability of our library partners and actors, and had booked UNH's mascot "Wild E. Cat," we met again with the PML to determine a shooting schedule. We learned that scenes are often not shot in chronological order. Using the storyboard, Mike and Shane helped us determine the most efficient order of filming, taking into account everyone's busy summer calendars.

Each day presented a number of logistical issues. We announced times and locations on the library email list to alert library employees what areas to avoid if they didn't want to be filmed. We also posted signs to alert library patrons that filming might be temporarily disruptive. We asked all participants to sign a waiver allowing us to use their images.

Mike used a single tripod-mounted camera for filming. Although the camera incorporated a microphone, Nikki wore a wireless microphone and another was placed near anyone with a speaking role. Shane worked the lighting equipment, including various lamps and shades, but set-up took considerable time: many adjustments were needed to reduce shadows and provide consistent lighting across each location. Finally, cross-checks were necessary to ensure that lighting and sound were both adequate before filming could begin. While we waited, we blocked scenes, practiced lines, and waited for Mike to call the shots. As actors, we began to understand the movie star's lament, "I'll be in my trailer."

Take Two!

Since the PML staff were now arranging the lighting and operating the camera, there was initial confusion as to who was really directing. At the first location shoot, we completely deferred to Mike to tell us where to stand while he set up the shots. After filming the first few scenes we went back to the Lab to view the footage, and it was clear to us that none of it would be usable. The scenes didn't align with our vision of

promoting library spaces and services. Signs weren't visible and the framing wasn't right: we weren't capturing the library's architecture as we had hoped.

We learned the hard way that we should have taken pictures of the spaces to give our cameraman more of an idea of what we wanted captured in each scene. After realizing that we needed to be more specific, we went around to the locations for all of the movie's scenes and took photos of what we wanted captured in the shots.

But these early attempts nevertheless provided good experience and we learned a number of important lessons.

1. **Wardrobe:** In early scenes, Nikki's dress made it awkward to hide the microphone. Costuming changes were made for the reshoots, but we needed to ensure that Nikki and any other actors appearing in multiple scenes wore the same clothes and had the same hairstyle each time.

2. **Multiple Takes:** Even if no one made a mistake, it was important to film multiple takes so the editor could have choices when editing. For some scenes, we needed a couple of takes to get a variety of lighting options, or responses from the actors. The subtle differences became both more obvious and more important.

3. **Crowd Control:** We had wanted the library to seem bustling, but it was July and most students were not on campus; we had to stand in for a number of service providers, and staff had to pose as students in some scenes. For the one big group scene, we recruited as many staff members, partners and willing patrons as we could find to fill up one of the large quiet study rooms. We filmed this scene last and finished with a wrap party, providing pizza to celebrate and thank all of our helpers.

Shooting the scenes took a total of fourteen hours over seven days.

Editing: Snip! Cut! Paste!

Nikki, our tour guide, also became our editor, visiting the PML regularly and using Final Cut Pro to piece scenes together. The program was very intuitive and it was easy to learn the basics without needing much help. She first viewed all of the takes of each scene watching for the slight variations in the lighting and the actors to decide which clip worked best. Since the scenes were filmed according to location, casting, and lighting requirements, more and more could be stitched into chronological order as contiguous scenes were shot and edited.

Once she had a complete video, it was time to add sound. Final Cut Pro comes with a large selection of sound clips, so she used "Ascending Bell" for the glasses' up-motion disappearing, and "Descending Bell" for appearing. We also agreed that the movie needed some subtle background music to help set the tone. Nothing in Final Cut Pro really captured the mood we were looking for, but we were referred to Incompetech.com. The music on this website is freely available through Creative Commons licensing as long as attribution is given. We found the perfect song, "Monkeys Spinning Monkeys," which captured that 1950s educational-video feel we were going for, and we used "Motivator" for the credit reel.

Once our editing was complete, the PML helped us trim superfluous seconds between scenes and used more of the advanced Final Cut Pro features to add color correction and audio leveling.

Nikki usually spent no more than an hour at a time, and all told, editing the movie took approximately 20 hours.

The process taught us another good lesson: Keep the bad cuts. WE made two copies of the final video: one for general audiences, such as the New Faculty Orientation, and a slightly longer version with a blooper reel and added film credits, including professional sounding job titles for all of the participants.

Screening: Roll Out the Red Carpet!

We gave a preview showing to our library dean in the Parker Media Lab. She agreed that we achieved the result she was looking for: informative and friendly introduction to the library with a touch of whimsy. She laughed in all the right places and decided a red carpet event was in order to debut the video to the library.

The premier was held in Dimond Library's instruction room. The dean invited everyone, ordered popcorn and movie snacks, provided a plastic "red carpet" runner, and surprised us with cardboard cut-outs of "attendees" George Clooney, Marilyn Monroe, Frank Sinatra and Hugh Jackman. We screened the long version so everyone could view the feature, the bloopers, and the credits. Participants enjoyed seeing their names, and many stayed afterwards to take pictures with the "celebrity" guests.

The project culminated in real success: we received much positive energy, goodwill, and collegial feedback. And even folks who were skeptical, ended up impressed by the finished product.

The video was shown at the UNH's New Faculty Orientation, and afterwards, the Library's web manager uploaded both versions to the library's YouTube channel. We were then able to share it on Facebook and post it on the Library's homepage.

The video has since been viewed hundreds of times and has been shown across campus as part of student trainings and freshmen orientation; one college added it to their first-year experience video collection, and professors from various departments across campus have shown it as a way to introduce their students to the library.

Continued promotion is the biggest problem. The library doesn't currently have a marketing person who can promote and share the video widely. We'd love to have more YouTube views but we also know we must work to find appropriate venues and receptive academic departments/faculty on campus who will use it in classes, projects, and in other venues across the university.

The Critics Weigh In: Lessons Learned and Pro Tips

Remember these cautionary tales before tackling your own project:

Filming in summer is challenging: the weather can be HOT or otherwise difficult; mascots need to breathe, and star costumes can get damp. Decide whether the population density makes your campus look desolate. Filming during the school year presents its own problems. Pick your poison.

There's a reason why movie stars have trailers. Lighting takes forever! But it's also important to keep light levels even and reduce shadows. Even simple scene set-up can be trying and lengthy. Work with extras to manage expectations and patience levels.

Reward generously. Pizza works.

Haters are gonna hate. Not everyone is going to love the project or the interruption that filming involves. Work around them.

Channel your star power: cast according to strengths and interest level, but don't be surprised if someone unexpectedly steals the scenes.

Emotional intelligence goes a long way in recruiting talent. Ask gently, directly and/or repeatedly if necessary.

Storyboard from the earliest ideas – take still photos of locations and what needs to be captured (signs, architectural features, etc.).

Reach out to partners but balance authority – know who the director is and allow them to direct.

Things change all the time: film discreet scenes that can be edited out or reshot; keep information general to increase the lifespan of the final product.

Use what you have: look for unique objects, art, people.

Camera angles can highlight collections, architecture, or departments.

Come up with a short, searchable, discoverable title.

If you don't have a space similar to the Parker Media Lab from which to borrow equipment and get help, don't lose hope! Put the word out among your student workers and colleagues. There is almost always someone with equipment and experience willing to lend a hand. Many point-and-shoot cameras also record video, or try smartphone video instead of a camera (note: GoPro cameras can induce motion-sickness, so use with caution). Use angles and the time of day to help with lighting.

“The ~~Book~~ Article was Better”

Although this wasn't a research project, we recognize that others may benefit from the words and experiences of others. Sass (2002) noted that “[l]ike Starbucks, librarians can use the personal touch to build a brand,” and although Circle mentioned video marketing as a trend to watch in 2009, video is far from being passé. Bedard (2015) asserts that “video is just at the dawn of its influence” and by 2020 will be a standard branding tool. Martin (2012) notes that even short videos, if they are informative and entertaining, can increase awareness of spaces and services. Henrich and Prorak (2010) document their success in using the school mascot in their instruction videos and argue that “[t]he ubiquitous nature and convenience of YouTube offers even more opportunities for libraries to broadcast themselves, both for instructional and promotional purposes” (665). Morehart (2013) discusses the social media video app Vine. Sandy, Krishnamurthy and Rau (2009) document the value of pre-production scene set-up and reiterate the time needed for post-production editing. If your staff is leery of live-action, tech maven Ekart provides tips for experimenting with web-based animation (2012). Nolet (2010) provides a good overview of equipment and software choices, and Dalel and Lackie (2014) discuss video creation and marketing around campus.

Appendix A

Budget and Equipment List

Budget:

Money for pizza and soda for 40 people

Red carpet premier materials were paid for by the Dean's Office

Mascot time was donated

Equipment List:

Camera: Canon XA20

Microphone (on camera): Sennheiser K6 Shotgun Mic

Microphone (on Nikki): Sony Wireless Lavalier Mic WCS-999

Tripod: Aluminum Manfrotto Compact Advanced

Light: Lowel LC55EX Rifa-Lite eX 500 watt Softbox

Reflector: Raya Collapsible Reflector Disc (42")

Final Cut Pro

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