"Post-Production Prep: 5 Tips to Make Your Edit Sessions More Cost-Effective"
by Tanya Spann Roche
Copyright 2006

Ah, hindsight--it's always 20-20, right? Well, for your edit sessions at least, here are some tips to enhance your foresight and save you some valuable time when you find yourself under the gun in post.

1) Create a paper edit with time code reference numbers. The standard practice during the linear editing era (listing selected shots in order for editing including descriptions, source tapes, and in and out points), paper edits sometimes get left by the wayside in today's non-linear world of digital footage and increasingly quick turnaround deadlines. And for short projects, paper edits aren't always practical and may not provide any additional help. However, on a project with a lot of source material or one that will take a while to complete, a bit of quality time spent in advance between a producer and his or her VHS or DVD copies of the source footage (with hopefully a time code window burned in) can save a tremendous amount of time later on in the edit suite. Paper edits don't have to be 100% exact, but they certainly help the producer see before the edit how the existing source materials will fit together best and reveal any overlooked gaps that need filling. Using time code numbers for in and out points can also give a pretty good estimate of the project's anticipated running time.

2) Get transcriptions with time code. If you have a lot of interview footage to sift through, you can save yourself a great deal of time by having transcripts made with time code notes. This way you can choose the perfect sound bites on paper without going blind watching all of your footage over and over while trying to decide what will work best. Especially if you don't have any production logs, the money spent on transcribing interview footage can pay for itself many fold during post-production when the client wants to know what other sound bites are available.

3) Transfer any unusual footage formats in advance. And oftentimes "unusual formats" can still include anything that is not on tape. If you are utilizing DVDs, Windows Media files, Quicktime movies, MP3 files, or any other digital formats, you should check with your editor to see what format is preferred for your various sources so that you can arrange any conversions or transfers in advance and save time during your edit session. Sometime digital media files can take longer to convert digitally than their actual run time, and even with footage on a digital tape, you may need to arrange for a transfer depending on your edit facility's specific set-up. When you plan these conversions or transfers before your edit, you also have the flexibility to choose the best way to convert your media while preserving the highest quality image instead of having to simply go with the fastest way during an edit because of a looming deadline.

4) Plan and script your graphics and effects. Editors love being creative instead of just acting like button-pushers, but because graphics and effects are so time-intensive to build, we need input from you, our clients, on what kind of look, feel and pacing you have in mind for your titles, graphics and other effects that will complement the entire show. The

more description or even examples of what you want that you can provide, the quicker we'll be able to tell you the best (fastest, least expensive, insert your favorite post-production adjective here) options to get to your polished final product. When a producer comes into an edit saying "just give me something cool," the end result can be frustrating for everyone if the definition of "cool" isn't established up front.

5) Choose your production music in advance. Whether you have a music library in-house or you're relying on your editor's library, many production music companies have their complete catalogues available on the internet, so you can listen beforehand and know which piece or pieces of music best match the emotions, message and timing of your project. This can save you time during editing especially if your production is face-paced or montage-based, because editing first and adding music later can sometimes require re-editing to fit the beat.

While these five tips don't guarantee that you won't run into any hiccups or time-wasting snags in post-production, they may save you some time, money and a few rueful whispers of "if only I had known..."