Film and Video Production for General and Commercial Audiences: Three Reader-Initiated Case Studies

Marketing Documentary Film in the Mass Media

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Introduction

Between September 15, 1980 and December 15, 1981, the film THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE sold 720 copies. The 35 minute documentary on sexual harassment of working women in America, with Ed Asner as the host, has grossed over $500,000 in one year. ABC Video will distribute the film exclusively after the second year of release, thus guaranteeing nine investors a return on the $40,000 they invested.

These are the bottom line facts summarizing the marketing of THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE. This paper will briefly describe how this documentary was marketed and sold from the perspective of the film's producer and the owner of the film's distribution company.

The best way to start to discuss marketing of anthropological or other documentary films is to clarify the purpose. The goal for anyone involved in film must be clear from the beginning and must be adhered to rigidly. Essentially, personal goals can be divided into two broad categories: profit and non-profit.

Most academics involved with graduate work and advance degrees from universities exist in the non-profit world. Professors receive salaries through university work by way of contracts or grants or, increasingly, via consulting. In short, our work is not concerned with making a profit for our employers. Most documentary filmmakers have the same orientation. They may have emerged from this same tradition through film schools or as their own hobby but, more importantly, they receive grants and gifts from foundations which are tax-free and they show or give their products to public and educational television. This is the standard model (hence personal goal) for the production and distribution of most documentary films.

However, there is another model: for-profit. It has taken this former university professor some time to get used to thinking of working to make money. But once that basic choice was made, it was important to accomplish that goal. The difference in thinking in terms of making profits is profound. Profits dictate the choice of subjects, guide the coast and time of production but, above all, provide clear goals and direction. The bottom-line of profit making ventures is significant for one other reason. If money is made on a film, money will be available for the next one and the next. That fact alone has the potential for breaking filmmakers from being dependent on grants and gifts.

There are, of course, clear choices as a result of a profit making goal. Whereas the university system or its satellites have restricted choices, the business sector provides many: to work for someone else, to work for yourself, to form a partnership, to build a business. I chose the last. The one foregone conclusion in the film business is that distribution is where the big profits are made. Film production is simply the creation of a product for someone else to sell and from which to get rich. Creating and producing films is an art form that by itself does not produce profit.

Once a goal and direction is determined and implemented, the marketing of a documentary is comparatively simple. This paper will review what was done in marketing THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE as a for-profit film project. The data is summarized. The facts are a result of experience in distribution and may vary with other information obtained from other sources. While references are made to some printed and published reports, the actual figures on the film business are often muted or secret. The best and most authoritative resource file is the magazine VARIETY. References here are from that prime source, as well as a few other printed sources and knowledgeable people within the industry.

The Market

Making films has a mystique and an aura surrounding it of glamour and wealth. The facts are quite different. Of the over 7,000 members of the Screen Actors Guild, only a few hundred have regular work and of those only a very few classify as "stars." Each of the film unions and guilds has a similar employment situation. But the figures are even more devastating for women and minorities. The
NAACP, which has given annual "Image" Awards to women in film, has not done so for 1981. There reason was that "There were no black women in major film roles." Women in general suffer within the film industry. Aside from the very real problems of getting old, beauty but no brains, and sex for work, there are very few films made each year by women producers or directors. In 1981, the estimate of feature films directed by women was around 2%. That is a high number given that few women have directed films over the entire history of the industry.

These are sobering facts. Yet, women, for example, are major consumers of the mass media. Daytime television is dominated by female audiences, as is prime time and theatre attendance. Women constitute 52% of the American public and the media with its advertisers and sponsors know it. Thus, the choice of subjects for making films can be somewhat narrowed or at least a focus can be achieved.

The subject matter for THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE was chosen because, in large part, it had a built-in audience of 52% of the population. There were, and are, other subjects for film which are made for profit. But of the half dozen topics considered for production by Clark Communications this seemed a natural. It was a subject of interest to women: sexual harassment was about to be declared illegal under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The film could be produced in at least two different forms for marketing (institutional and broadcast versions of the documentary). The key was keeping the film tough and direct which meant sticking to a strong pro-women premise. This would be a feminist film and therefore, also, assure a built-in advocacy sub-group from the total female audience. The lesson is obvious: before making a film for profit, do a market study, know who will buy the product, and why.

There have been three traditional markets for films over the last thirty years: institutional, broadcast, and theatrical. However, within the last five years two new, and as yet not clearly defined, markets have emerged: cable and video disc. The former is typically considered as part of broadcast. The latter is an entirely new category, since its audience is the home market. In terms of value and dollar profits, consider the following four major markets. (THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE was produced for two of them: broadcast and institutional.)

Theatrical

Feature films produced for theatres can gross millions. They can also lose the same millions. That factor alone makes film investment a high risk business. The big winners are very few and far between. Documentary films have little or no theatrical value. But, again, that depends on how they are marketed.

Recently, some documentaries have done fairly well in limited theatrical release. An entire network of independent producers has emerged. One such group in New York City is the Independent Film Project. Their goal is to market independent feature films, mostly documentary in content. Another company in New York City, First Run Features, has targeted "art houses" as their major exhibitors. Their goal is to make profits on these independent features. While gross profits are not spectacular, they have been respectable. Some films have even made money. Foreign film distribution can be even more profitable for documentaries. Yet another New York company has specialized in this market. The American Film Institute magazine AMERICAN FILM ran a special section on this subject and cites the industry estimates that 40 to 60% of total box office grosses come from foreign markets.

Clark Communications, Inc. has begun distributing packages of documentaries nationally to college campus theatres, a heretofore small, specialized market. Its WOMEN BEING package of four women-oriented documentaries including THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE has been moderately successful.

What serves as an important point here is not that the theatrical market as "big time" and "too far removed" or "distant" for the filmmakers, but that it is an important goal for quality and profit. Theatrical films usually imply a certain production quality that sets them apart from television, training and documentary films. That fact alone translates into profit. But profit in itself is significant. Theatrical films warrant public attention in terms of newspaper review, stories, and word-of-mouth. Any film released in theatres, therefore, will automatically have a higher value in the other markets.

Broadcast/Cable

Without going into much detail, the broadcast television industry is dominated by three networks (ABC, NBC, CBS). Each owns, by FCC regulation, a maximum of five television stations but has about 185 affiliates or local stations that air their programming. These affiliates in turn are owned by other companies, who also are limited to owning only five television stations. The owners often form broadcast groups within their larger parent corporations. The sale of documentaries to networks, group or individual stations is what constitutes the broadcast market.

The difficulty in this market is that the networks rarely buy outside (independent) product for documentary use. They have their own news or special unit staffs. They buy "clips" or pieces but rarely an entire film. The broadcast groups are in a similar situation, except that they tend to delegate purchasing decisions to each local station. In short, the sale of a documentary is best done at the local station level through each station's program director. This is called syndication and it constitutes a major film distribution business itself.

However, for the aggressive documentary film producer, there is also barter or the sale of a film to a local station in which the producer has about five minutes of advertising time that she/he must sell and receive profits. The local station, in turn, receives five minutes that it sells separately for its profit. For this market, CCI produced a broadcast version of THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE titled SEXUAL
SHAKEDOWN (from the book by author Lin Farley who appears prominently in the film), also hosted by Ed Asner. All the figures are not in yet, but estimated gross revenues are between $150,000 and $200,000 for the barter deal of thirty local stations.

Cable constitutes an entirely new field. Basically, there are the cable operators, numbering in the hundreds, which carry local stations as well as others from outside the immediate area. Then there are pay cable and cable networks which supply programming as diverse as feature films to sport events. Home Box Office and Showtime represent the former, while USA Network and ESPN, the latter. There are a growing number of others also with specialized audiences, such as; women - ABC/Hearst "Daytime"; cultural - CBS Cable or RCTV Cable; health - CHN Cable; X-rated features - Cinemax; or "soft-core films" - Playboy Cable or Penthouse Cable. There will be even more. Some will survive; more than likely most will merge or go broke. But now and for the future, they provide a ready market for documentary films of all forms, length, and types. The problem is that they do not pay well.

THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE, for example, was sold to ABC/Hearst "Daytime" for $30,000, a very respectable figure. However, that was linked with a larger acquisition deal with ABC Video. It also represents about $1,000 a minute. Warner-Amex, a new cable operation, offered roughly $1,000 in total for THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE for the same deal. Estimates for documentaries on HBO vary by many factors. Even for features, there are no norms or rules.

Only one factor stands out: the value of any film is dictated by its performance either at the box office, sales, or public appeal. Essentially, that factor is the reason why it is best to release any film, even documentaries, first in theatres and then to cable and television. At the very minimum, a theatrical release will generate publicity and film reviews. For this reason alone, the market-wise producer would be best advised to budget for some limited theatrical release of a film, even if it means "four-walling" (renting the theatre).

The media market is such that value is pegged to perceived popularity, whether or not this is real or make believe. Again, a regular reading of VARIETY tells the story best. This formula is the guiding light behind the production and distribution of HEALING THROUGH THE HEART with Norman Cousins. The film is being produced as a documentary feature (80-90 minutes) with funds allocated toward theatrical release. The film's value rises accordingly.

Institutional

Perhaps the broadest and most diverse market is the rental and sale of documentary films to institutions such as libraries, businesses, universities, non-profit groups, governments, and others in big business. There are dozens of companies in this market that distribute films. Whereas in cable, television, and theatres, there are far fewer distribution outlets, the institutional market is loaded with them.

Some distributors specialize, as in education or health or business. Others concentrate on a sub-group of these areas such as drug and alcoholism within health. Others try to combine all fields under one large umbrella; they take any and all films that they think they can sell. CCI has become such a company, not willing to limit itself.

The institutional sales area holds great potential and consequently has attracted, in recent years, some of the major media corporations. Time-Life had an active department in this area until 1980 when the corporation decided to limit all its film activities. But, two of the three major television networks (ABC and CBS) have started Video or film institutional sales divisions to market their own broadcast documentaries as well as others.

However, the narrowest segment of the market (the institutional distribution of feature films including college theatres) is controlled by only two distributors, Swank and Films, Inc. hold a monopoly over almost all films released by the major studios for institutional rental and sales.

Sales in this market vary, but the average appears to be that a film may sell roughly 100 copies over its lifetime of seven years at an average of $500 each. The gross profit of $50,000 gives both the distributor and producer some idea of its budget and profit potential. That is one reason why THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE is considered a smash hit with 720 copies sold in just over one year.

Disc/Video

The greatest unknown sales potential rests squarely in this market which has developed to meet the home consumer. Primarily, the market has concentrated on selling or renting feature films to the home audience. With almost 2 million video tape recorders in homes today, the potential here is enormous. Again, only a few major distributors exist with exclusive rights from the studios.

However, there is also a growing interest in the future of this market for educational and informative programs. That translates into documentaries. A few major corporations are now looking into this "new" market. For example, Magnetic Video, a division of Twentieth Century Fox distributes all its feature films to the home. But it is also "looking for" other films, especially in the documentary area which are "travel" and "pretty picture" oriented.

Time-Life recently expressed an interest in a film project that I plan to produce from my book, THE PREGNANT FATHER. It is the "perfect gift" to be sold in super-markets and department stores for the home market.

As yet, gross figures are only estimates. The next page represents conservative, yet somewhat realistic, figures on the high and low return that can be made in all the markets described above. The figures include average percentages taken out for producers and distributors. Obviously, the distributors get the lion's share. To calculate the producer's average net profit, each producer's line total should be added together.
The Film Product

Making a film is similar to making a car, a lamp, or a pen, when done for-profit. A few comments are worthwhile because the basic film school elements that are taught for the production of film tend to be overlooked or dismissed in this context.

For example, as can be seen from the discussion on the market, the making of a film can be determined by or predicted by the market itself. That is, who will buy or see the film; and will this determine the viability of the project? These questions demand thought prior to even pre-production of the film and even warrant attention while the film is in post-production.

The issue is significant if the producer seeks private investors. They will want to know the market and even want a distributor to commit work, or staff, for distribution. Others sell their ideas, as treatments or story outlines. Still others invest their own money to write a script on speculation. No one formula exists.

Packaging, however, is usually the best approach to putting together a film product. The producer should have an idea, research the market, get key staff committed (writer, director, camera-persons), and sign talent (actors, narrator, documentary subjects), as well as develop a "classy" prospectus (the treatment plus legal and financial opinions). Much of this requires a financial commitment on the producer's part. Even that financial risk is appealing to investors. When, and only when, the producer puts himself or herself on the line, does the investor have faith that the project will be done and sold. Anything short of that raises serious questions about the idea itself and ability of the producer to produce.

The key problem in producing film is money. Budgets for documentaries can range from $10,000 to $200,000. HEALING THROUGH THE HEART has a $300,000 price tag. Getting those funds represents the crucial and most difficult task.

Finding a writer or director or cameraperson is not that difficult. Equipment is easily rented. Stock and materials can be bought. Even editing and mixing facilities are found in all large cities. But the money will either get the film going or relegate it to a dream.

<table>
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<th>Revenues (One Film)</th>
<th>FAIR</th>
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<th>EXCELLENT</th>
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The Distribution

For the producer with an idea for a film, some idea of the distribution is in order. The chart presented above indicates some of the percentage splits. A further explanation would be helpful. There are no standards but there are rough estimates. Furthermore, if the producer is uncomfortable about making the “deal,” it would be advisable to seek out an agent, an attorney, or even an executive producer who knows the industry.

First, most deals are based on percentages. The typical institutional deal occurs when the producer receives 20 to 25% of the gross sales while the distributor gets the rest. Some distributors will give an advance against the percentage. The figures vary from a few hundred dollars to many thousands. However, it is rare for a distributor to advance money on a film idea alone. Usually the advance is for the completed product. All deals can be made verbally but should be in writing.

Many distributors ask for “all rights.” But a producer can designate which rights are given over and which are retained by the producer. That would be wise depending on the distributor. Most specialize in one or the four markets, meaning that a product sold institutionally rarely is marketed by that distributor to television or cable. The opposite is also true.

Television deals also vary. Typically a set purchase price is made for exclusive airing. The distributor and producer split evenly. However, in barter and syndication a 10 to 15% commission is paid to a broker who sets up the deal. For cable, the system appears to be somewhat the same.

Feature films are the most complex, not from a percentage perspective but from the collection end. “Producers,” according to one very knowledgeable attorney with a major distributor, “never see a dime for their first film that we handle. It’s only with their next ones do they get any revenues.” The reasons are very apparent. The gross box office receipts are given for films regularly in VARIETY. But the producers only see a net profit. And at that it is not true net profit figures. More accurately, the producer’s receive a net-of-net profit. Here is how it usually works:

The exhibitor (theatre owner) takes 10% of the gross. However, that gross is defined as after the exhibitor’s cost are met. Essentially, the gross is a net. The distributor then receives 90%. That gross number, however, is really a net because it usually means after the costs of exhibitor and distributor advertising, promotion, and overhead. Again, the number is really a net. The result can yield very little for the producer. Few features receive advances.

This is not meant to cast doubts upon either distributors or exhibitors. The fact is that most films are budgeted at one figure for production and an almost equal number for distribution. The feature that cost $5 million (a low-budget to make), will cost $1 to $2 million to distribute. HEALING THROUGH THE HEART cost $200,000 to make and another $100,000 to distribute.

Finally, the producer can distribute the film him/herself. To do this requires additional funds for a brochure, prints, shipping, telephone, and salaries. THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE, for example, required an additional $80,000 loan to start its distribution. That was double its production costs and investor risk of $40,000. THE WORKPLACE HUSTLE continues to cost roughly $20,000 a month to distribute. It also serves as an example of the best way to sell an institutional film. Depite a nice brochure, direct mail was not very effective. Advertising in very particular magazines and professional journals (personnel ones) on the heels of some excellent press coverage proved to be the most effective. A feature story on the front page of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL was invaluable. Subsequent AP and news releases were extremely significant. The power of the press does translate into sales.

Conclusion

The future for documentary films is bright. Without a doubt, the new markets offer more potential now than ever before. However, the increasing difficulty in obtaining grants for non-profit films should spur more film producers down the for-profit path. That is probably just as well. The integrity and message of a film need not be lost because a film is being made for profit. But the wise producer will do some market research prior to undertaking any film project. This one factor may make a difference. Ironically, market research is simply “field work.” Anthropologists are well qualified to do it.

Notes

1. Woodrow W. Clark, Jr., Ph. D., an anthropologist and former research associate at UC Berkeley, is President of Clark Communications, Inc., a distribution company formed in 1979 and President/Executive Producer of Woody Clark Productions, Inc. formed in 1980. He is currently finishing a film HEALING THROUGH THE HEART with Norman Cousins.

1. References made to film include video-tape. While video-tape is an important element in the mass media, the fact is film still sells 2 or 3 to 1.
VIDEOGRAPHY IN MARGARITAVILLE: THE SUCCESS OF VIDEO HISTORY PROGRAMS ON COMMERCIAL TELEVISION IN KEY WEST

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Introduction

Old Florida is disappearing in the wake of monumental development and rapid population growth. Dilution of local dialects is just one indicator of this change. How it used to be can be found in the stories of the people who were in Florida before the Sunbelt boom began.

The Florida International University Media Center is charged with producing instructional resources for our academic units. For years, we have been developing a small-format, multi-camera, video production facility to accommodate the programmatic requests of the faculty. Likewise, we are charged with generating our own programs. When we acquired our first electronic news gathering (ENG) camera and recorder, our production staff brainstormed ideas for an ongoing, in-house production project. This was how we developed the idea of a videographic series of interviews concerned with the historical and cultural preservation of Florida. We knew we could adapt many of the oral historians' methods with the new, rather unobtrusive equipment.

In late 1978, we formed an Academic Advisory Board to provide advice and expertise to the project. Enthusiastically, the board members encouraged the endeavor.

As the Media Center Director, Arthur Waugh was aware of some video work being done in the Appalachian area, but decided to work with the board and begin the project while we researched other endeavors. Samuel Proctor, Director of the Oral History Project at the University of Florida at Gainesville, added additional support. We received an incredible lift when we learned that Alan Lomax was back recording blues singers in the Mississippi Delta using small-format ENG equipment.¹ Our production unit and our academic board knew we were on the right track. Our recording energies intensified.

Knowing that the storytellers in Florida are disappearing, the FIU Media Center has initiated a project to discover and capture some of the remaining raconteurs in the state. Using the color video medium and eliciting conversations relating an individual or group of individuals to this place, we have developed a project called FLORIDA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

With the publication of Florida novelist Harry Crews' autobiography, A CHILDHOOD: THE BIOGRAPHY OF A PLACE, we adopted as our thematic frame:

Nothing is allowed to die in a society of storytelling people. It is all -- the good and the bad -- carted up and brought along from one generation to the next. And everything that is brought along is colored and shaped by those who bring it.

If that is so, is what they bring with them true? I'm convinced that it is. Whatever violence may be done to the letter of their collective experience, the spirit of that experience remains intact and true. It is their notion of themselves, their understanding of who they are.

The academic significance of the oral historian has long been established, and we believe that the videographic technique adds another dimension to an already important endeavor. No one argues the value of other media. However, we prefer to employ what is presently the state-of-the-art technology -- the video medium. Employing the videograph to gather oral histories is a new field of endeavor. FIU is in the vanguard of this endeavor and we have perfected our techniques through three years of experiment. FIU Media is proud to be in the forefront of what is fast becoming a universal collecting method. This medium, properly used, is relatively unobtrusive; a medium that permeates our society; a medium which we believe provides a viable account of a subject and an environment; a medium suited for our basic inquiries of "Who are you?" "Where did you come from?", and "What are you doing here?"

Purpose

FLORIDA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY pursues two major policies. First and foremost of these is the acquisition of recorded material relevant to the historical and cultural preservation of Florida. Recordings are in the process of being transcribed and indexed according to subject, theme, location, etc. Both video recording and transcription are then housed in the Special Collections Department of the Florida International University Library. The second policy is a programmatic one wherein materials are edited into broadcast programs aimed at a broad interest audience in order to provide a "high visibility" awareness of the project. However, both aspects of the project are dedicated to the maintenance of a high degree of concern for academic credibility and subjective verisimilitude.
Objectives of the Project

1. To make materials available for scholarly research. All raw tape is transcribed and housed in the Florida International University Library Special Collections section. All tape is available in the University Film Library and is made available to the Florida State University System on a cost-per-copy basis.

2. To preserve an audiovisual record of Florida history through personal recollections of long-established, prominent and not-so-prominent residents.

3. To examine the special characters of some Florida communities and, in turn, of Florida as a whole.

4. To identify and examine social and economic dynamics within the context of public educational programming.

5. To discover occupational patterns unique to specific areas of the state of Florida.

6. To compare and contrast lifestyles, mores, ethics, politics, and religion in various Florida communities.

7. To acquire a visual record of the past and make some generalizations about its relativity to the present and the future.

8. To explore such ideas as “common experience” and “collective consciousness” as they are manifested in the dialogues elicited from our informants.

9. To advance public understanding of local historical developments and to provide easily accessible materials for local historical projects.

The Key West Focus

The Florida Keys, a 150-mile chain of coral rock islands, rest inside the only live coral reef in the continental United States. Outside the reef, the Gulf Stream passes between the Keys and Cuba -- the northernmost passage out of the Caribbean Sea. It is because of this geographic uniqueness, historical significance, highly visible cultural identities, and accessibility to our institution, that we focused our initial energies on the southernmost tip of the chain -- the island community of Key West.

Participants

1. The Florida International University Media Center. The Media Center at Florida International University has been an instructional support service since the university opened in 1972. As a unit of the Division of Academic Affairs, the Media Center is charged with the acquisition and production of non-print instructional materials, and the acquisition, maintenance and modification of all audiovisual equipment for the university's two campuses.

2. The FLORIDA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY Academic Advisory Board. This board is composed of Florida International University professors and administrators. The broad spectrum of academic disciplines reflects the range of possible research endeavors generated by the project. As a body, they assure the academic posture of FLORIDA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

3. Community Advisory Board for FLORIDA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY -- Key West. This board is drawn from Key West community leaders and noted humanists from outside the Florida International University community who have a professional interest in the project. They are vital to the project, acting as liaisons to informants and the community at large, and offering insights and otherwise inaccessible information to the Project Director.

Production Plan

Preliminary

1. Isolate and establish informants through several means:
   a. Contact with community leaders.
   b. Recommendation of other informants.
   c. Recommendations from the Board of Advisors.
   d. Our own perceptions of viable subjects.

2. Discuss the project with the proposed informants and follow through with any necessary research.

3. Establish and obtain releases from those subjects amenable to being videotaped.

4. In collaboration with the Board of Advisors, develop a priority taping schedule using the following criteria:
   a. Potential contribution to project.
   b. Age.
   c. Health.

5. Establish recording dates and locations. The locations will be areas which identify the subject with the proposed subject matter.

On-Site Recording

6. Upon completion of scheduling, a videographic crew will accomplish the videotaping. The crew will consist of the Producer/Director; Assistant Director; Lighting Director/Cameraman; Engineer/Audio Person; Video Engineer; Still Photographer; Cataloger/Script Person; and Academic Advisor.

Post Production

7. Raw tape is cataloged and transcribed, and the indexing process is instituted.

8. Upon completion of the cataloging, the editing process will begin, and appropriate members of the Academic Board of Advisors will be consulted to assist the Project Director in their areas of expertise and to assure an accurate rendition of the informants and their discussions.

After conceptualizing FLORIDA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, it was necessary to develop an understanding of our "presence" and our "project" in the subject area, Key West. What better opinion could there be than having programs broadcast all over the local cable public access channel?

With a general synopsis of our project and with some rough-cut tape, we met with B.G. Peterson and Burt Metcalf of Tele Media Company, 1704 North Roosevelt Boulevard, Key West, to discuss what, if anything, could be done to have our project "promoted" to the community.
Both men agreed that we had something of value and that if we could develop broadcast quality, twenty-eight to fifty-six minute programs, they would provide air time for us. Thus, the programmatic aspect of FLORIDA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY developed rapidly.

We had done our initial recordings on state-of-the-art, electronic news gathering equipment by a professional crew, and had excellent editing facilities in our production area, so the spectre of providing broadcast quality material did not present a major obstacle. It became evident that our early planning regarding the quality of our recording was astute when it became possible to air tape.

Our approach to the programs became either "personality" or "thematic" oriented, and our first program, "Key West’s Capt. Tony: The Early Years," was aired in June of 1981. Although we supposed a beneficial reaction to having our project become highly visible through broadcast, we were not prepared for the incredible response by the community.

In a city noted for being closed and "uncrackable," our first program brought amazing response from many members of the community desiring to help us locate informants or provide whatever help they could. The general attitude was "Why had no one asked our opinion about things before?" or "You are the first who ever cared what we really thought." Obviously, the programmatic aspect became an important means of access in order to accomplish the more significant academic aspect of video documentation for scholarly purposes.

Presently, we pursue our recording diligently, attempting to collect as much material as possible and, as time permits, programs are completed and aired on Tele Media. The broadcast aspect has been of paramount importance to FLORIDA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. It has given our crew a high visibility in the community; it has enhanced our credibility with our subjects; it has taken the academy to the community and, in turn, brings the community to the academy. Our frustration now is one of how much has to be done, how many things to gather, and we must pace ourselves accordingly to meet the objectives we have defined.

Notes


VIDEO WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN

John M. Bishop

THE LAND WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN, a sixty minute program by Alan Lomax, Worth Long, and myself, explores the musical and socio-economic origins of the blues. A co-production arrangement with the Mississippi Authority for Educational Television made it more advantageous to produce in video than film as we originally planned. Field recording was done with an Ikegami HL-77 broadcast ENG camera and a JVC 4400U portable ¾" recorder. The tapes were up-dubbed to 2" Quad for CMX editing. The program aired nationally on PBS and is now distributed by Phoenix Films in both 16 mm and video formats. Shooting in video rather than film had both advantages and disadvantages. Although we strove for a film sensibility, the peculiar freedoms and constraints of video influenced every stage of our work.

COSTS: Video is particularly cost effective for high-ratio, unscripted shooting. We budgeted twenty hours of tape and shot forty at an additional cost of only $1000. In film, the additional cost would have been closer to $15,000. With film, a major part of the budget is irreversibly consumed by raw stock, processing, and workprinting before you know if you have material for a good program. A video production will ultimately cost the same as film, but the big expense comes in signal processing and editing at the end of the project.

PHOTOGRAPHY: In video, what you see on the monitor is what you get. You compose and edit on the same screen that will carry the final product. Video is a less abstract way of dealing with an image than is film because you are always working with the equivalent of a timed print. Video lighting, for example, is quick and easy, whereas lighting for film requires artful metering and the ability to visualize how the film will read a scene.

SOCIABILITY OF VIDEO: Video makes it easier to work with informants because they are clearly "on television," a modality they understand. Everyone knows about Instant Eye News, but the general consciousness about film places it somewhere between JAWS and Army hygiene instructional.

Instant video replay turns informants into participants. They think of new songs and stories, suggest other topics to photograph, and become more involved in the process than they could in a film.

After looking at a few takes, blues singer Jack Owens ran back to where his blind harmonica player, Bud Spires, was sitting and said, “I wish you could see us, boy, I swear I wish you could see us. I’ve never seen that before in my life, never, believe your ears. I could hear myself playing and you blowing, and see it just as plain as I’m sitting here looking at you.”

The social and psychological benefits of video replay are great enough that I would consider using a video viewfinder and a ¾" VCR to make instant rushes on a future ethnographic film shoot.

DISADVANTAGES: Video production will be easier and more beautiful when a non-composite standard is adopted for recording. NTSC was invented for live transmission; it was never intended as a production medium and is poorly suited to recording. All videotapes contain hidden technical errors that accumulate with each generation and which require engineers with innumerable digital devices to correct. Somewhere, for a price, every problem can be made right if you don’t run out of patience.
and money.

Engineers are frustrating to work with, they generally have greater interest in the waveforms on an oscilloscope than the program content. They would throw out the Mona Lisa for excessive horizontal blanking.

Sound is the Achilles heel of video, particularly 3/4". Despite great care with mike placement and mixing, our sound was compromised by the recorder's primitive audio circuits and lack of post-production sound sweetening facilities. Double system sound can be recorded on a Nagra by using the 60 Hz, vertical sync pulse as the pilotone reference. In any future video music shoots, I would take this added trouble.

EDITING: Editing video is not as easy, or straightforward as editing film. It is very difficult to cut picture to sound, or to delete a shot from a sequence if it doesn't work. Even the latest 3/4" convergence editors (@ $50/ hr) give crude control compared to flatbed film editors. I prefer using the much cheaper 1/2" EIAJ decks on which I can manually rock the tape to find the precise edit points.

For this program, my original 3/4" tapes were dubbed to 2" Quad with SMPTE on the cue track, 3/4" with SMPTE on track 2, and 1/2" EIAJ with SMPTE in the picture. I did the creative editing on the 1/2", producing a shot list of SMPTE codes. This was the basis for my 3/4" CMX edit which incorporated some later restructuring and additional fine cutting. The edit list from the 3/4" CMX edit was used to assemble a 2" Quad master. My active participation was required at every stage. In a comparable film edit, all decisions and fine cutting would be done on the workprint (equivalent to my 1/2" tape), and generation of the printing master would be routinely handled by a negative cutter and the laboratory.

DISTRIBUTION: Video is not easily distributed. With three videocassette and two videodisk formats, libraries are resistant to video; 16 mm still reigns as the most important distribution medium. THE LAND WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN was rendered in film by Image Transform, a proprietary process that generates a high resolution color separation on fine grain black and white film which is then optically printed to produce a color negative. The results are superb, but expensive, and this additional cost must be figured into a video budget.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NOTICES...

14th Annual Conference on Visual Literacy
November 17, 18, 19, 20, 1982
Robson Square, Media Centre
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Theme: Seeing Ourselves - Visualization in a Social Context

Deadline for Submitting Proposals: May 1, 1982

Our view of ourselves has impact - personal, social, national, international, subcultural, crosscultural. How does visual languaging demonstrate this? The 1982 VLVA Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia will explore this process as it is to be found in film, television, still photography, architecture and other visual media. Many of our keynote speakers have already been chosen and they will address themselves through their own media to this theme. The National Film Board of Canada is only one of the agencies that will take an active part in the 1982 Conference.

You are invited to submit a proposal for a presentation at the 14th Annual Conference on Visual Literacy, November 17 - November 20, 1982. Please send your proposal as soon as possible but no later than May 1, 1982. Special consideration will be given to early arrivals and presentations which relate directly to the theme - Seeing Ourselves - Visualization in a Social Context (later proposals will be considered if there is room on the program.)

We are seeking presentations in six content categories:
1. Research and Theory: Presentations on basic or applied research in the role of visuals in learning and communication.
2. Classroom Applications: Practical applications of visual literacy strategies for reaching specific curricular goals in a subject area of in the visual literacy field. Includes program development, project demonstration and exhibit, and reports.
3. Media Type: Reports which look at the special characteristics of a medium, and its role and contribution to learning. Special consideration will be given to television, film, and media fields related to television (animation, graphics, photography, etc.).
4. Communicating With and Responding To Visual Messages: Sending and decoding visual messages. Applied to television, this might include media literacy programs, television/film criticism projects, home-made productions (access projects, home animations or films), etc.
5. Roundtable Discussions/Debates: The issue of television and its influence on learning and behaviour continues to be hotly debated. These special sessions would team presenters having differing opinions and theories for presentation to and interaction with each other and conference attendees.
6. Exhibits: Works (single or multiple) are sought for exhibition which "speak for themselves" visually. Works may be examples of personal, professional, classroom or commercial visuals in any medium.

Presentations may take many forms:
1. A presentation of a formal paper with visual illustrations.
2. A presentation of a visual experience with sound.
3. An audience participation session.
4. A "hands-on" workshop.
5. Any other mode of your choice.

Proposal responses will be made by July 14th. Please follow the instructions listed below when preparing your proposal, providing all of the information requested.

PROCEDURES FOR SUBMITTING PRESENTATION PROPOSALS FOR THE 14TH ANNUAL VISUAL LITERACY CONFERENCE,
NOVEMBER 17 - NOVEMBER 20, 1982

I. Prepare cover sheet.
   A. Provide all information requested (be sure to indicate the length of time and equipment needed).
   B. Include names of all participants in your presentation exactly as they are to appear in the programme.
   C. Write a brief (200 words or less) summary of your presentation.
   D. Submit four copies of the cover sheet.

II. Describe your proposed presentation. Please avoid jargon.
   A. Required for all:
      1. Prepare a summary, not to exceed 1200 words.
      2. Include the following (this summary must convince the review panel that your presentation merits inclusion in the conference programme):
         a. description of your plans for the presentation (include the topic
and its significance. Describe the who, what, where, how, when, why of your presentation.
3. plans for quality control of visuals.
4. qualifications of presenters.
5. special features (this is especially important for exhibits and roundtable discussions).

B. Research papers only:
1. Statement of problem or purpose of study.
2. Methodology/Procedures: of data collection, sampling, and analysis.
3. Results.

C. Exhibits only: Exhibitors are responsible for setting up their display, and providing display boards (tables will be provided). Please note if any audio-visual equipment is needed. It is hoped that displays will remain for the duration of the conference.

III. Prepare a package which contains:
A. four copies of completed cover sheet.
B. four copies of abstract or summary.
C. two self-addressed, stamped envelopes (to be used to (1) acknowledge receipt of your proposal, and (2) to communicate the Programme Committee’s decision).

IV. Mail the package to:
Dr. Patricia Groves
c/o Capilano College
2055 Purcell Way
North Vancouver, B.C. V7J 3H5
in time to reach Vancouver no later than May 1, 1982. The committee will begin reading proposals as soon as they arrive. Early arrival will be appreciated.

SELECTION CRITERIA: The selection of proposals for presentation will be based on the following criteria:
1. the quality and quantity of visuals. Presentations without visual support are discouraged.
2. relationship to the conference theme and overall concerns of the International Visual Literacy Association. Proposals need not be limited to the conference theme, however.
3. timelines (looking to the future) and importance of the topic.
4. firm commitments from participants to make the presentation.
5. receipt of completed summaries or abstracts, and permission to include them in published conference proceedings.

KEY SPEAKERS
John Culkin,
Associate of and authority on Marshall McLuhan,
Founder of the Centre for Understanding the Media, New York
Freeman Patterson,
Director of Stratford Shakespearean Festival,
Past Director of CBC Drama
Betty Nickerson,
Authority on children’s art as communication
Founder of All About Us/Nous Autres

The National Film Board will be playing a major part and among other things, award winning filmmakers will be participants in the Conference.

REGISTRATION FEE * - Payment received before September 30, 1982 - $75.00
- Payment received after September 30, 1982 - $90.00
* must be postmarked before September 30, 1982.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL OR WRITE TO:
Dr. Patricia Groves
Sociology Department
Capilano College
2055 Purcell Way
North Vancouver, B.C. V7J 3H5
(604-1911, Local 257)