

Tips for Shooting Digital Video

Get Close, Focus on Sound

Digital video news reports can be an easy way to add a multimedia element to your website or blog. But if you're going to shoot digital video you're going to want it to look professional. Here are some tips for achieving that.

1. Get Up Close. Too often, beginning videographers shoot their subjects from too far away. The result is that the person being interviewed looks more like part of the background than the focal point of the shot. So don't be afraid to get up close and personal - just a few feet away if possible - with the person you're interviewing. A closeup shot that reveals a person's facial expressions is much more interesting than seeing them from a distance.

2. Get Good Sound. You can get a great shot but if the audio is bad it's all for naught. Getting close to your subject not only makes for better visuals but for better audio as well.

Also, if you can afford it, buy an external microphone to plug into your camera; built-in mics usually aren't great. And try to conduct your interviews in relatively quiet areas. Many mics will pick up lots of ambient noise, so if you interview someone in a busy cafeteria or gymnasium, the background noise may drown out what your subject is saying.

3. Avoid Panning and Zooming. It's tempting to try using the zoom lens found on most digital cameras, or to pan across a wide area as if you're shooting some kind of Hollywood epic. But unless you have a tripod most such shots end up looking jumpy and unfocused.

A good rule of thumb: Shoot different things separately. So if you're covering a basketball game, shoot the court in one shot, the hoop in another, the sidelines in another, and so on. Don't try to pan back and forth between those things.

4. Use a Tripod When Possible. Most beginning videographers think they can get clear shots just by holding the camera tightly in their hands. Then they discover how difficult it really is to keep the camera steady. So use a tripod when you can. Tripods are especially good when you're doing a long interview with someone and the camera doesn't need to move.

5. Don't Shoot Into the Sun. Shooting outdoors can definitely be a challenge. But it can be done right by avoiding a common mistake: placing the interview subject with their back to the sun. When that happens the camera compensates for all the bright light the lens is picking up and suddenly the person you're shooting appears dark. It's better to shoot in partial shade, or with the sun to the side of your interview subject.