

How to make a local documentary

10

EASY-TO-FOLLOW

steps for the amateur

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Today video cameras are available at quite reasonable prices and many people have their own, to record visuals of home activities such as weddings, parties and social gatherings. Some people use their video cameras to shoot outdoor-life scenes or to capture footage of animals in national parks. Others use their video cameras to capture footage of pertinent issues in our social lives, for example, HIV/AIDS, tik, and animal and people abuse. These can be described as documentaries. This article focuses on the latter.

South Africans are on par with the rest of the world regarding the making of local documentaries. In my previous position as film and video selector I had daily appointments with local producers and directors who submitted local documentaries for approval. During that period I gathered information from various directors and producers on how to make documentaries. This has enabled me to provide readers with ten easy-to-follow steps to make one's own documentary DVD.

STEP ONE: RESEARCH

The very first thing one needs to do is research. What message do you want

to convey? Is it a documentary on social problems on the Cape Flats or is it a documentary on baboons in Cape Point? Research will also provide you with a topic and a title for your documentary.

STEP TWO: BUDGET

Determine your budget beforehand: how long will it take to complete? Do a cost analysis of the input costs, such as transport, accommodation, film material, payment of actors, equipment, hiring of film crew, type of camera as well as the marketing of the DVD.

STEP THREE: SCRIPT

The script refers to the text of the proposed topic you want to film. Before you start filming, write down the 'story'. This will determine the what, the where and the how. Content is very important. If you decide to do a documentary on tik you need to list the material to be included. Are you going to do interviews with people or organisations on the causes of tik abuse, or with the very people who are using tik? You can capture the victims' reactions while on the drug, and in rehabilitation. If you have made a list of what your message is, it is easier to capture the right footage

relevant to your title and topic from the start.

STEP FOUR: EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

In producing a documentary you need the correct filming equipment. This includes the following: a video camera that complies with broadcasting standards, that





is, colour and sound; high quality cordless microphones or boom microphones which are fitted on a stand, and suitable sound equipment.

STEP FIVE: TARGET MARKET

When you produce a documentary you need to establish who your target market is. Are you pitching to the general public, a corporate client or the SABC?

STEP SIX: FILM CREW

The film crew includes the producer who puts the whole project together; the director who tells you what to shoot, based on the script; the scriptwriter who writes the story of what is going to be filmed; the camera person who does the shooting of the film; the sound person who records the sound; the narrator who does the commentary throughout the documentary and the editor who edits the film. For a local documentary the producer performs all of the above roles (most of the time) to save costs, but for a bigger project it might require a film crew as the project might be too extensive to be handled by one person.

STEP SEVEN: EDITING

Every film needs to be edited. This means you need to cut certain unwanted footage that is not relevant to the topic, or you need to make the film shorter. There are different of these programmes available on the market for editing such as AVID Software, ADOBE Premiere and Photoshop packages. Many of these packages include video-editing software that will make it easy to edit the video. During the editing process the video is broken up in sequences to maintain continuity. Music and narrative have to be added to the footage. The music and the narrative are recorded separately and then just added to the footage. Then the editing is done in order to put it all together. The method of editing is very important. You need to lay down the sound track; add video clips to the narrative to correspond with the footage; break the film into chapters or tracks; design the menu and design the credits at the end of the film.

STEP EIGHT: DESIGN THE DVD COVER

This is a very specialised procedure. If you know how to use Photoshop or CorelDRAW software you may attempt to do it yourself, but most of the time an independent designer is used.

STEP NINE: REMUNERATION OF ACTORS

Depending on the footage collected, one may pay actors for the material or give them a copy of the video or DVD when completed (this all depends on the agreement between the producer and the actors).

STEP TEN: MARKETING

When the documentary is completed you need to market it. First determine the price of the DVD. Then register it with the Film and Publications Board to comply with legislation. Have the DVD copyrighted. Advertise the DVD and finally, sell it to a client.

