Single-Camera Video Production

FIFTH EDITION

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Mary Tomazina Wemple Musburger Houska, for teaching me the value of integrating art and technology.
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Introduction

This text has been written to provide three groups of video enthusiasts with enough information to produce acceptable single-camera video productions: the media production student, the professional who needs a refresher on the basics, and the first-time video camera owner. It is a basic, introductory book designed to point the beginner in the right direction. This is not an advanced book in preproduction research and writing, nor is it a book on advanced techniques in electronic editing. Each of those subjects deserves its own title.

I wrote this book from three points of view: first, from that of an instructor introducing the techniques that lead to quality video productions utilizing a single video camera; second, from that of a practitioner who has spent 50 years working in professional media and learning the contents of this book the hard way—by making mistakes until I finally got it right; and third, from that of an academic fielding 20 phone calls a week from people new to electronic production who desperately want information about single-camera video production.

This book outlines the process of working with a single video camera from beginning to end, with an emphasis on the actual production process. First, though, you must lay some groundwork before you pick up your camera. The video camera and the recording medium used remain two complex pieces of equipment, despite efforts to simplify them. The process by which a video image is created is also complex, and you must understand it in order to properly utilize the benefits and master the restrictions of the medium.

The first chapter of the book outlines the production process, emphasizes the importance of goals and audience analysis, explains the production workflow process, and discusses the importance of technology. The second chapter contains a simplified explanation of how and why video and audio signals are created. It also describes the technical restrictions of a digital system. The third chapter describes the equipment: cameras; recorders; and audio, lighting, and mounting equipment. With the first three chapters providing a firm base, the fourth chapter carries you through the production process from preproduction planning (much more important than most beginners realize) to setting up, rehearsing, shooting, and striking. The fifth chapter details the digital process by exploring lighting and audio techniques. The sixth chapter concentrates on the digital nonlinear editing process, techniques, aesthetics,
and the importance of shooting for the editing process. The final chapter outlines methods to move your career beyond the classroom: finding and earning an internship, preparing for the interviewing and job search process, and approaching your first and next job.

As the media production world rapidly moves toward an all-digital environment, I have included those changes that are critical for single-camera production. From experience, I am aware that the rapid changes require new information on virtually a weekly basis. I have attempted to anticipate some of those changes, but at the same time, I have avoided making any wild guesses as to the next level of production developments. There are too many new concepts and proposals in the works—some of them will be working years from now, others will be gone within 6 months. All we can do is watch, take advantage of what the field has to offer, and remember that it isn’t the paintbrush that makes the difference, it’s the mind and the hands of the artist.
Additional Comments on the Fifth Edition

The layout of this text includes major changes from the old format, in which editorial copy was placed on one page with illustrations on the facing page. In the new format presented here, figures and photographs are interspersed with the editorial copy as needed to illustrate or clarify a point. More than 100 new figures and photographs replace drawn figures.

The emphasis will expand on the concentration of digital equipment and production techniques applicable to field video production and nonlinear postproduction. New sections on production workflow, audience analysis, modern formats, distribution methods, and career planning extend the value of this book.

A key factor in the move of media to an “all-digital” production format is the realization that all media must start in an analog format, and for humans to comprehend the messages, the messages must be returned to an analog format. Media converted to a digital format may be easily manipulated without loss of quality but cannot be viewed or listened to until converted into a form a person’s eye and ear can interpret. For that reason, some analog theory and technology remain as critical parts of this book and will remain so until humans can directly interpret a digital signal.
Acknowledgments

One cannot work in the video business without relying on many other people. This is not a solitary business, and throughout the years many people have made major contributions to my knowledge and career. Here are a few of many: Parks Whitmer and Sam Scott, who started me in media production and kept me going; Art Mosby, who paid my first television paycheck; Bob Wormington, who let me develop my directing skills; the thousands of students at Avila College, University of Missouri at Kansas City, Kansas University, Florida State University, the University of Houston, and Central Washington University who constantly reminded me that I don’t know everything there is to know about media production; and my wife, Pat, who lets me think that I do.

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