



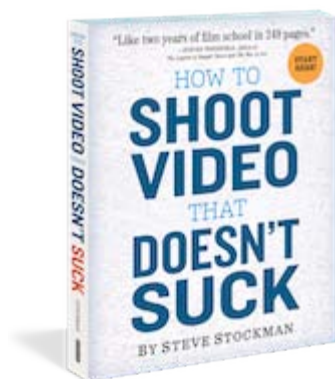
A Cure for the Common Video

Talking heads are everywhere on the web. Here are five tips to ensure the heads on your site are being heard.

Your new executive director explains why he's excited to join the organization. A student in your after-school program tells how it's changed his life for the better. A donor describes why she supports your nonprofit and hopes others will, too. Three talking heads, each with a heartfelt message to deliver, and all turned off before the video is done.

What made viewers tune out? Maybe it was the bad lighting that made the E.D. almost impossible to see, the poor sound quality that made the student hard to hear, the weird camera angle that made it look like the donor was talking to someone on *another* website - or maybe it was simply that the whole darn thing was dull.

In his new book, *How To Shoot Video That Doesn't Suck* (Workman Publishing, 2011), Steve Stockman, a veteran film, television and commercial director analyzes a wide range of problems that makes videos hard to watch.



He specifically addresses the challenges of making talking heads interesting in the section, "How To Shoot Interviews and Testimonials," and considering how common these kinds of videos are on nonprofit websites, you may want to consider the following:

Make the talent comfortable.

Are they sitting or standing in a relaxed position? Do they know it's okay to use their hands? For commercials, I tell people that I'm going to be talking to them for 10 minutes but will only use

three seconds of what they say-and I don't know which three seconds until I edit. So I'm not going to worry about what they say, and they don't have to either-we're just having a conversation and we'll figure out what to use later. Another great way to relax people is to start the interview

June 2011

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slowly. Bytes are cheap. Waste some card space while you make small talk to help them relax into the conversation.

Make it a real conversation.

In an interview for a web series on diabetes, a very together, self-assured older woman answered a question about using insulin with an aside that it was easier for her to control her blood sugar since she gave up alcohol. Curious, I asked her just how much she used to drink. "Eight or nine beers a day" was the surprising answer, which led to a great interview about how her alcoholism had almost killed her. If I hadn't been listening, I would have missed it.

In a normal conversation, you respond to what the other person says. A good interview works that way too. Listen well, and allow your natural curiosity to guide your questions even if it leads you to something you weren't planning on asking.

Eyes and Eyelines

You need to develop a conversational trust with your interviewee. One great way to do it is by making strong eye contact. Have the subject look at you, not the camera, so you can talk. The *eyeline* refers to where a person on camera is perceived to be looking. In an interview, you don't want your subject looking way off to one side so that only her profile is visible; better to have her looking right at or just off camera. If you've established good eye contact, that means your face needs to be right next to the lens—easy to do if it's on a tripod or shoulder mount.



An example of a talking head that is nicely lit, well framed by the camera, and with a good eyeline.

Once you've set a position, look through the viewfinder and see what it looks like when the subject looks at you. Does it look natural? If you don't like it, move yourself and your camera until they're looking good.

Some people can answer questions right into the lens, which makes us feel like they're looking right at us. Kind of cool in some videos—if they can really pull it off. Most people are more comfortable with eye contact, so they'll be looking at you, not the camera.

Sound

Unless you're a foot from your subject, don't rely on your camera's microphone. Any sense of intimacy will be destroyed by distance and echo in the voice track. Always use lavalier microphones or booms.

Think about your location.

I watched some interviews on a friend's website recently. He's the CEO of a consulting company that caters to high-end media companies. He's brilliant, so what he said was excellent. But the videographer sat him in front of a blank off-white office wall. Not a limbo background, which would have been hip, but an ordinary painted wall.

The white paint picked up and amplified the white in his hair, and the diffuse shadows on the wall made the video feel impoverished

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GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

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somehow. Backgrounds add information to all videos, but unfortunately this one communicated "old" and "cheap." Worse, it missed an opportunity to tell me something good about him. Location gives us context. A media consultant could be against a wall of video monitors, in a newsroom, at a podium with great PowerPoint video running behind him. He could be in front of the Museum of Television and Radio or casually addressing us from his beautiful office or home library.

An interview with anyone against a blank wall is just a waste of an opportunity to enrich your story with context.

(To learn more about *How to Shoot Video That Doesn't Suck* and to order a copy, click [here](#).)

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Summer Storytelling Starts July 6th

Our most popular online class returns with new content.

Storytelling: Tapping the Power of Narrative returns in July to help you tell more compelling stories about your organization's work, but we've made some important changes and added new curriculum. Over the four weeks of the class, we will cover:

- The fundamental structure of good stories
- The 7 qualities that make stories memorable
- The most common mistakes in storytelling and how to avoid them (***New***)
- The 6 kinds of stories you must tell, and how to tell them for advocacy, development, recruitment and more



Each online class runs 1 hour, and our next set of classes are scheduled for July 6, 13, 20 and 27 from 9-10a PT each day. Tuition is \$500 per student and discounts are available to organizations registering 3 or more. To find out more and reserve your space, click [here](#).

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Why Some Webinars Work (When Most Don't)

Join us on July 29th and learn how to make your webinars more engaging.

To save time and money, more organizations are conducting trainings and meetings online, but most of us have not been taught how to run a successful "webinar." As a result, these virtual gatherings are often boring, plagued with technical problems, and waste the time they're supposed to be saving. So get some training! Join us on July 29th from 11a-12n PT (2-3p ET), and we'll show you:

- How to keep participants engaged from beginning to end
- The fine details of creating a good online experience
- How to use your two assets (voices and visuals) to maximum advantage
- What we learned from talk radio that makes webinars better



Tuition is just \$125 and discounts are available to organizations that register three students or more. To get additional information about ***The Webinar on Webinars*** and to register online, click [here](#).

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