

# VIDEO BLOG

How to plan for your Annual Conference

## ■ AT A GLANCE

- + Definition of Pre-production
- + Overview of the elements involved
- + Causes of potential problems
- + How to keep on schedule
- + Top tips to ensure things go smoothly



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# Pre-production...what's that all about?

The contract for the event production has been awarded. The first production meeting with the client has taken place. All changes to the original creative proposal have been agreed. Any budget variations have also been agreed. The pre-production schedule (critical path analysis) has been signed off by all concerned.

The producer is now ready to launch into the pre-production phase. This is where the production for real begins and there is an immovable deadline.....the live production date! For the producer, from now until the production is completed.....time is the great enemy!

Irrespective of the lead time, every day of the producer's time is allocated to the hundreds of details necessary for a successful production. For longer lead times the pace can be fairly leisurely but for very short lead times the work rate can be really punishing, involving night work, weekends and holidays. One thing for sure, the producer will aim to have all the pre-production work completed 1 week before arriving on-site for the fun part!

So what comprises all this mysterious work which seems to eat up such large chunks of time?

Of course it is impossible to be precise in this epistle as events come in all shapes, sizes and complexities, ranging from the one day event to an international roadshow. So here are a limited number of items which tend to be common to most events:-

- Chair creative meetings with in-house team
- Brief in stage set design, scriptwriting, graphics design and production
- Brief video crew and agree crew numbers and budget
- Establish necessary fit-up and operating crew numbers and book them
- Brief Production Manager
- Negotiate and book studio time for graphics, sound recording, video edit
- Select and book v/o artiste/s
- Recce production venue with Production Manager
- Receive script outlines from client

## ■ Here are some useful tips:

- + Remember, time is the enemy.
- + There's a lot to do. Look at the Critical Path issued.
- + The more time you give the Producer, the better.





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# Pre-production...what's that all about (cont.)?

- Select and book transport company
- Book accommodation for crew members
- Arrange crew transport
- Maintain daily update diary
- Book special f/x
- Agree quantity and type of lighting, sound, projection, a/v equipment
- Negotiate prices for same
- Attend regular client update meetings

This is by no means an exhaustive list and there will be many other calls on the producer's time, depending on the nature of the production. But hopefully this will demonstrate the sheer scale of the pre-production process. This is of course all part of the producer's life, and will work smoothly provided that everything that has been agreed with the client remains so!

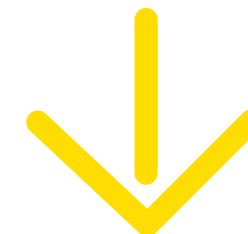
No, I don't live in a fool's paradise! I have never been involved in a production where the original brief remains unchanged from beginning to end! There is an automatic assumption by the producer that there will be some, I repeat some, changes en route and the wise producer will leave a little slack in the schedule to accommodate them. So what are these delays and changes which can have some horrific consequences?

## **Missed deadlines.**

This is a perennial problem for the producer. Unfortunately it is a truism that many clients pay scant attention to the production schedule they have signed up to! Production is the key focus for all in the production community. Having said this we all understand that, for the client, the production is only a small part of their responsibility. The company must be kept running! So the producer will understand if there is an unavoidable delay in production meetings or the delivery of client assets, script outlines etc. He, at all times, will try to be as flexible as possible. However, it is quite a different matter if the delay is caused by a presenter who has not studied the production schedule agreed to!

## ■ **Here are some useful tips:**

- + It's OK. We appreciate sometimes the brief may change during pre-production.
- + The more it changes the higher the risk of things going wrong.
- + Missed deadlines can cause chaos and often incur extra cost.





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# Pre-production...what's that all about (cont.)?

## **Changes bloody changes.**

If I had a fiver for every time I've heard that agonised cry from a producer, I'd be a rich man! As already mentioned, some changes are expected. Information for graphics and scripts for example, need to be up-to-the-minute accurate. It may be that a late addition to the presenter line-up may be necessary, advertising material may change for a variety of reasons. These are necessary changes and must be accommodated. However, changes brought about in mid stream by one or more of the client team having a 'great idea' are hardly welcomed. The time for this was at the first production meeting!

Changes and delays are expensive!

Please understand if the producer is less than enthusiastic towards delay and changes. It is the producer that must inform the client of the financial implications of such actions. No producer wishes to 'bust the budget', it offends them! But some of these issues can carry a high financial penalty! Technicians booked for pre-production will have blocked out the period booked in their diary, so a change of date will incur a cost for time lost. Studio bookings also carry a double charge if the dates are changed. If the delays and changes are substantial, they may involve the producer in re-writing the entire schedule and a change to all agreed date from then on!

The producer of course gains nothing from these alterations. His fee remains unchanged.

The message here is therefore, changes and delays are O.K. if they are absolutely essential. It will therefore avoid giving the client co-ordinator a nervous breakdown if the production schedule is studied very carefully by all concerned, at the initial production meeting.

If these tales of woe and misery sound like a full-on whingeing session....my apologies and this was not my intention. I merely 'tell it like it is' and recall some of the issues that continue to be problematical to this day.

## ■ **Here are some useful tips:**

- + Avoid continual tweaks. These are probably the biggest cause of problems.
- + Remember, the Producer hates going over budget as much as you do.
- + Don't worry. Small and limited changes are perfectly acceptable.





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# Pre-production...what's that all about (cont.)?

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In fact, the majority of pre-production operations run really smoothly, despite a few necessary changes.

Yes, the producer does need the involvement and co-operation of the client, but he will always take the minimum amount of time possible out of their diaries. In any event, a first class client co-ordinator can shoulder the majority of the time commitment required.

*RS*

*The author of this series is Robert Scott, who was one of a small group of Producer/Directors from theatre and film who, in the early 70s, 'crossed over' to use their professional talents in the field of commercial events. They gave birth to what is today a multi billion pound industry.*

*Robert is an expert in live communications and a veteran with over 30 years experience producing and directing many hundreds of major events worldwide.*

*Robert is now Managing Director of Mindset Communications.*

**CONTACT US**



# *In the next vlog...*

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In video blog 7 we'll be talking about the pressures and realities of the rehearsal schedule.

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