

THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

FROM WEBSITE DESIGNER TO FILMMAKER



Ian Hunt reveals what inspired him into studying for a career in professional filmmaking and his plans for the future

Two and half years ago I started as an undergraduate studying BA Digital Media Production at the Arts University College Bournemouth, which from 2013 has become the Arts University Bournemouth. I was convinced at the start of my degree that I would concentrate my studies and project work on web-related topics and eventually graduate some three years later as a website designer. But, thanks to a chance meeting with a guest lecturer from the professional film industry; my studies, my project work and future career interests have taken a radically different path.



Ian Hunt with some of his kit



This key first lecture had a very simple concept; divided up into small groups, each one would write, create a storyboard/shot list and edit/produce a 2-minute short film by the end of the day using the lyrics of a song for inspiration. Our group had the chorus from KT Tunstall's, 'Black Horse & A Cherry Tree'. For the production the

technical parameters were set as follows - we were restricted to using a mobile phone to film, but we would have access to a suite of iMacs all running Adobe Creative Suite CS5 for editing, which meant we could use iMovie or Premier Pro CS5. I remember my only concern at the time was 'where are we going to find a horse' but, of course, we found one in the end.



Studio set-up with green screen

I wondered about the mobile phone restriction for the project when we had access to several Sony HVR-Z5E Camcorders, but now I can see that this limitation was put in place in order to generate creativity. It would have been so easy to use the camcorders with their zoom lenses to capture the image of a horse from afar. But with just a mobile phone we ended up sneaking up on a horse in a damp field, armed only with a recently purchased apple from the University Refectory to tempt the horse close and so get the shots we





DSLR camera with mounted Rode Videomic



needed. By the end of the day I was hooked. In less than a day we had created a short 2-minute film, filmed in HD (on my Sony Ericsson W995), edited in Premiere Pro CS5 and which was also a faithful representation of the lyrics from a song chosen to be the soundtrack for our short film.

Arts University Bournemouth

We are extremely lucky at the Arts University Bournemouth with access to a large number of cameras and film/video equipment including DSLR's consisting of several Canon 5D MII's, Canon 550D's, 600D's and 650D's. This switch to DSLR's has revolutionised the way we students approach projects. For example, you can

work individually or in much smaller teams on a project. Video clips are captured directly onto Flash or SD memory cards, no more capturing from tape. Another bonus of capturing your footage direct to SD cards means it is so much quicker to get video clips into the computer ready for editing.

As a creative University, students cannot

help but be inspired and to be creative; this is helped by collaboration between the courses. I have worked with Acting, Makeup and Costume courses to make films, in fact all the essential resources and skills that a filmmaker needs.

Student films – the approach (Not just for students)

Pre-production

From the very early days of the short film unit and throughout the course, it has been instilled into us that preparation that is pre-production is the key to the successful production of a film. But I'm getting slightly ahead; the process actually starts with the idea development. Student films tend to default to films about the Homeless and most recently Zombie films. I've made or been involved in the making of both. So how do you come up with an original idea for a film? There's the mood wall, or a scrapbook of things that interest or inspire you. This can be anything; examples could be photographs of people, materials or just ideas for colours. The social networking site Pinterest has updated this concept recently. Pinterest lets you pin images of things that you like and/or inspire you. You can share these Pins with your collaborators and hopefully out of all of this pinning and sharing, that unique idea for a film just pops out at you.

Sometimes a client sets the subject for the film and so the challenge then becomes how to interpret the instructions and come up with a unique and interesting way of fulfilling the brief. Again, the mood wall can help, as will a brainstorming session either with team members or your friends.

Now that you have your idea for a film, it's time to start pre-production, which means everything that you need to do before you start the actual filming process. Included in that list of things to do is to first create an outline of the film, a script if there is any dialogue, storyboards/diagram and a shot list. You need a film location and almost certainly actors unless the team/crew are also happy to be on camera. For some locations you will need permission to film particularly if it's in a public area. You may need a risk assessment; we produce one of these for every film production. In fact, without one of these you will be unable to book equipment from the stores. How long is the film, is it a short or feature length? Finally, or maybe this should be the first thing to consider, where is your film going to be viewed? Online on YouTube and Vimeo, on a self-hosted website, DVD and so on, there are many possibilities.



Filming

To give you an idea of what is involved, I produced a short film with another student of a Team GB athletes evening training session for the Long Jump. The pre-production, including the recce of locations took at least 10 days, but the actual time filming was less than 2 hours. Most of this pre-production time was spent creating storyboards, shot lists and trying to come up with a unique way of producing a film that would make it more than just a video of an athlete training.

The key concept in the end was to try and capture the drama in the sport by showing the build up, the explosion of effort required to be the best at their sport. The filming took place on a very cold and dark winters evening under stadium floodlights; this is where the DSLR's low light abilities make it the ideal camera for the job. Having researched the key elements of the Long Jump, the dramatic build up at the start is where the athlete psyches themselves up before starting the approach and run up to the launch point. These would be the scenes to capture and, for dramatic effect, using close-ups and different angles.

During the filming process we decided to film additional shots not in the original shot list. This is always a good idea and it proved true for this film as we used most of these in the final footage. Additional shots can include those taken at different angles and distances of the scene planned shot list, but they could also be of anything. That is, anything that adds to the films interest - for example, a full moon, wind in the trees, a sunset or sunrise.

Don't forget the importance of sound

As important as the visuals are, the sound has equal if not greater importance. Many problems with visuals can be fixed in post



production but sound usually cannot, so this has to be captured right at the outset. This highlights a problem with DSLR's, most of which do not have a headphone socket and the means of monitoring the sound being recorded. There are ways around this, such as using Magic Lantern, but the only way really is to record using a standalone sound recorder like the Zoom H4N rather than record sound direct to camera. I personally use Magic Lantern on my Canon 60D, which means I can monitor the sound being recorded from my cameras hotshoe mounted Rode Videomic.

Post production - editing

Premiere Pro is a non-linear editing program and it is the preferred editing tool for our course, although we do have access to alternatives including several Avid editing suites in the University used by the Film Production course.

Remember those additional shots? I used these so that I could create rapid cuts to match the music soundtrack. Cutting to a different shot for each beat of the music. Modern editing trends mean rapid cuts,

especially in an action film. These cuts add to the dramatic effect, the quicker the cut the faster the pace of the film.

The choice of music is important too. I'd already researched the perfect soundtrack with a beat to match the movement, building up to a crescendo at the end, which was perfect for this type of on-screen action.

Towards the end of the editing process is the time to add special effects (if required) and also work on any colour grading.

Get feedback

It is always a good idea to preview your film to a group of friends before going public with your latest creation. I usually upload my film to YouTube as unlisted and then send the link to friends for their comments. Typically, based on the feedback, I fully expect to have to do several changes to the final edit before the film is ready to go public. For University assessment we present our films to our peers for critique. This is when you find out if it's good, could be better, or it's a real stinker. But no matter whether the feedback is positive or negative, learn from it. This can only help you to be a better filmmaker. ■

IN LESS THAN A DAY WE HAD CREATED A SHORT 2-MINUTE FILM, FILMED IN HD (ON MY SONY ERICSSON) AND EDITED IN PREMIERE PRO CS5