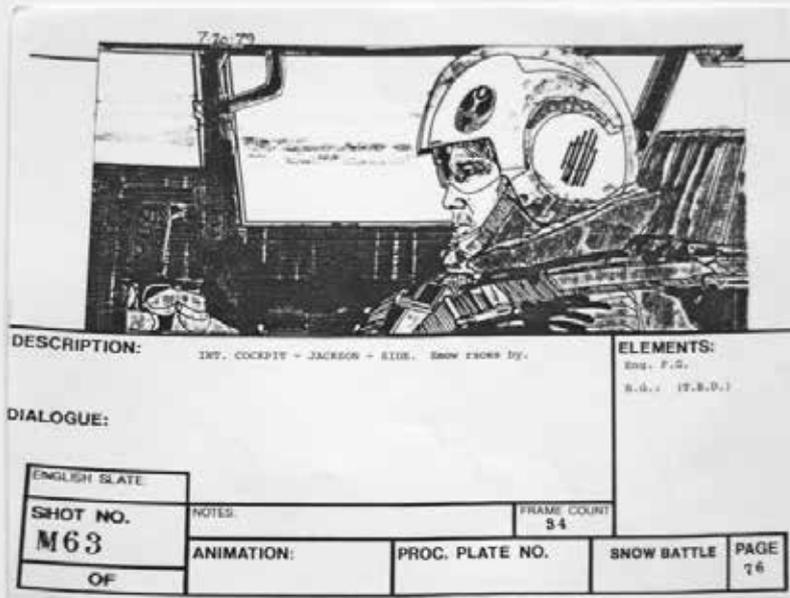


ALPHA



## How to create the perfect brief for your corporate video

### White Paper

*Making your corporate video stand out from the crowd begins by producing an informative and purposeful creative brief. Here we take some ideas from Hollywood legends on how to make the process a success from the start.*

### Loud and clear

When Oscar-winning screenwriter [William Goldman](#) was working on the script for *Marathon Man*, he would read scenes aloud to see how they sounded. The noises emanating from his apartment so alarmed the woman next door she called the police, because she thought Goldman was taking part in sadistic torture rituals.

This Hollywood anecdote tells us three things.

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Firstly, whatever you're creating, reading it aloud helps to get a grasp on the pace and feel of the piece, as well as the quality of the dialogue, if it's a script. Secondly, you should think about the effect the piece will have on an audience – are they likely to be so taken by it they call the police? Thirdly, don't eavesdrop on your neighbours. Or maybe, do eavesdrop on them.

A corporate video isn't an Oscar-winning movie, but that's no reason you shouldn't aim high. And the production process starts where it does for any film project, be it a Hollywood blockbuster, a short indie film or a corporate video for a fundraising campaign: with the concept or the brief.

Whether you hire a video production company to make your film or you plan to make it (or part of it) in-house, getting the brief right can be the difference between success and failure.

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## The three Ws: who, what and why?

Let's take the example of creating a fundraising video. Your organization needs funding for a specific project, maybe to build a new workspace for an initiative helping give graduates who are interested in your industry's field a step up. Ambitious, but also the perfect subject matter for a corporate video.

Ask yourself three questions to begin with: what, who and why? **What** is the subject matter? **Who** is the intended audience? **Why** are you making it, as in, what results are you looking for? It's what Goldman would do.

Using the example, your subject matter is obvious: a place where people can be mentored as they take their first steps in your industry. The results you are looking for could be: a) you want the money to fund this project; or b) you want to attract graduates into the scheme.

The intended audience is the trickiest one, and will need some careful thought as it will affect the tone of your video. If you're aiming at sharp-suited city investors, both the message and the way you communicate it will fundamentally be different from a video designed to appeal to young graduates desperate to get out from under their parents' roof.

The same video cannot serve both demographics: you have to make two videos or, at the very least, edit two versions of the video. If you forge ahead with creating one video for multiple audiences, it will require mixing up your messages, communicating different aspects of your project to speak to your divergent demographics in different tones.

Unless you have secured Spielberg (a master in four-quadrant storytelling, or conveying a story or message in a number of different ways to speak to a number of different audiences) to direct your video, don't even try it.

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## Structural thinking

Let's go back to Goldman. In the late 1980s, Goldman wrote a screenplay version of his book *The Princess Bride*. It follows the classic story-within-a-story format, which gives the audience two reasons to stay in their seats: they've got to see how both stories end.

The other device that this film uses, which can be so effective in corporate video making, is narration, or the use of a [voiceover](#). In the film, the audience is guided through the plot by Peter Falk's warm, crackly voice as he narrates the fantasy story of the princess bride to entertain his grandson, who is ill in bed.

The point here is that a [well-written voiceover script](#) is an easy way to create structure, to give your video a beginning, middle and end like other movies. Your narrator script will lead the audience through your video, introducing the subject matter, steering them through the points you want to make and the ideas you want to introduce them to, and finally ending up at your objective.

Also, many corporate videos tend to include sections of interviews, with company members for example, who are required to explain specific aspects of the subject matter in more detail. Importantly, the narrator script serves as an authoritative voice which also serves as a linking device to the different sections of your video.

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## Engaging with the creative process

Speaking of structure and story... what about that? Once you've got the answers to your what, who and why questions, where do you go from there?

Now we come to the crossroads of creative involvement. Sure, you're the main stakeholder, but how much of a stake, or control, do you want in the video's production? The level of detail in your brief should explain or, at least, reflect your desired involvement with the project.

You might want a totally "hands-off" approach, and hand the whole project over to a specialist company – in which case, your brief will pretty much begin and end at your what, who and why questions.

But, if you have preconceived ideas about the content, look and feel of the video and the way you want to communicate to your audience, your brief should contain a substantial amount detail (maybe drawn up as a storyboard, Hitchcock's preferred method of building a narrative) and should, ideally, be accompanied by supporting material about your company and information on the subject matter, as well as prior access to filming locations and interviewees.

And, if you're going to take a more creative role in the video, be bold. Where have you got your ideas from? Watching a hundred other corporate videos? Sure, that's important, it'll tell you what the "main ingredients" are, but don't follow the recipe slavishly.

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## Original ideas

Goldman again. He won two Oscars for his screenwriting talents. The first, in 1970, was for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. It doesn't matter if you've never seen the film, but it's more than likely that you've heard of it, everybody has: it's legendary.

It's the story of, not surprisingly, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, AKA Harry Alonzo Longabaugh. It's a Western (which is tricky, because the genre doesn't appeal to everyone) and a bromance. The other notable thing about the film is that it has a sequence featuring a non-sequitur song and a bicycle. Very peculiar things to find in a pre-Tarantino era Western. In other words, find your identity and express yourself – don't be bound by convention. But also, don't be crazy just for the sake of it.

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## On-screen presence

And, in a last segue (via Robert Redford), we come to *The Great Waldo Pepper*. Again written by William Goldman, this is the charming yet bittersweet tale of a travelling aviator in the 1920s, who is courted by Hollywood to recreate aerial dogfights with his WW1 adversary.

It is perhaps not the most famous of Goldman's films but it was successful at the time, bringing in a box office of \$20 million, having been made for only \$5 million. Firstly, Goldman has a hand in its success because Waldo Pepper, the character he created, is a charming, funny, brave, idealistic, unstoppable fount of energy, integrity and enthusiasm.

And secondly, because, well, Robert Redford. This is one of the films where he has a kind of symbiotic relationship with the character he's playing: there is an aura. The point here? The people you select to "star" in your corporate video, to take part in it, have to *want* to be a part of it.

Coercion won't work. If you persuade a colleague to "do their bit" in the video, their reluctance will radiate out from the screen, undermining your message in the most fundamental way imaginable. Like Waldo Pepper, they have to be enthusiastic about what they're going to be talking about, happy to talk about it, confident, passionate and knowledgeable.

When these qualities shine out of the screen, the audience sits up and takes notice. In the case of a fundraising video, this will be the moment when they click the "donate" button on your company page.

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## A good story, well told

There is no winning formula to creating a brief for a corporate video, but there are a series of steps to follow and a number of things you should take into consideration that will set you on the right path.

William Goldman himself didn't always get it right. Remember *Dreamcatcher*? Nobody does. It was terrible, even though, or perhaps because, it was adapted from an over-twisty, plot-heavy Stephen King novel.

So, don't aim for *Dreamcatcher* and overload your corporate video with information, details, effects and aliens. Aim for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and deliver a single message well, with authority, honesty and enthusiasm.

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