



## TIPS FOR DEMOS THAT WORK

**BANG.** A finger hits eject - the disc goes into the "NO" pile and the process moves along.

So the first rule of building a demo should be this. **MAKE THE FIRST THING THEY SEE THE BEST THING THEY SEE.** If you've got something brilliant, slick, touching, moving, or funny on your reel, **LEAD WITH IT.** Don't waste everyone's time with a long explanatory rolling title crud. **NOBODY CARES.** They want to see what you're capable of doing. **END OF.**

**Personal story.** I used to have a voice demo (same function as a video, but for voice over work) where I started out by saying something like: "Hi, My name's Joe Bloggs, and this is my voice demo tape. You'll be hearing a variety of spots from my 5 years as an actor, (and about fifteen seconds more of intro) and then I put a really funny spot that seemed to crack everyone up - followed by about a half a dozen other spots. I sweated over balancing between funny and serious spots, calm and high energy, and put some character voice stuff on the end. After using it for about a year, I was talking to a client I'd landed through the demo. I mentioned the funny spot on the reel and he looked blank. "What spot?" he asked. "The spot about the elephant (pause) at the start of the tape (another pause) right after the intro?" "Oh," he replied, "I never heard it. I decided to book you after the first 10 seconds of your intro - I didn't have time to listen to the rest."

There's the brutal reality. Anyone looking to hire you will know if you make the cut in the first 30 seconds of your reel.

Which brings us to another challenge when it comes to building a demo reel in the brave new world of high-tech video making. If you're like a lot of today's beginners you're probably something of a jack-of-all-trades. You might shoot, edit, do your own graphics, maybe some motion effects, etc. etc. etc.

So what do you put first? If you start with a bunch of tricky 3D titles in a local car add - and the client is looking for someone to shoot "News" style interviews - you're stuffed. Even if you can do the kind of interviews they need, if the examples of that kind of work are buried at the back end of your demo, they may never get there.

Today, there's no reason to have just one "DEMO". After all, changing the order of your clips so that the stuff up front is as close as possible to what the client's looking for is as easy as a little drag and drop. It takes finding out what the potential client is looking for BEFORE you send a demo out, but that's a GOOD THING! The more you know about what they want, the better you'll be able to satisfy them. Win/win.

### The PROCESS.

As you work on projects you feel reflect your capabilities, make short digital copies of the very best parts of them. Take these clips and clone them. This will become your "demo

source file". Next, put on your creative thinking cap. Build an opening, perhaps a few bridge pieces, and a close. At this point, there's nothing wrong with assembling everything into a complete presentation so that you're ready with a basic demo if someone calls you in a panic and wants you to rush them a sample.

But if you have a little more time, it's easy to revisit your "virtual demo" and think about whether any tweaks can help you make a good impression on THAT PARTICULAR POTENTIAL CLIENT. The point here is simply to take advantage of the nature of this new non-linear world and use its strengths to your advantage. And that includes spending a reasonable amount of time customizing your demo. After all, impressing clients is what improving your bottom line is all about!

Oh wait. Before we're finished there's one last touchy subject.

Do not, for one second, EVER think - for even the briefest moment - of trying to pass off someone else's work as your own. I know it can be a little bit of a "gray area." But it shouldn't be. If you did the title graphics, but didn't direct or produce the whole piece, be honest. Stick a slate that says "title design" up front so that everyone knows what part of the work was your contribution. This applies to music just as importantly, if you use samples ALWAYS be upfront about it! Passing off work as yours, when you really didn't do it is a loser's game. Think about it. If the client hires you expecting you to be at the level of the work on your demo, and you don't have the goods to DO work of that caliber - it won't take long for people to find out. And then you risk moving from the classification of "somewhat inexperienced" to "dishonest." And that's a very, very bad place to be. Okay, now that you know some of the basics, get to work.

Because even if you're like me and dread the demo dance, it's always better to do one BEFORE you actually need it.

Remember, keep it short and simple - put your best work right up front - and, oh yeah, don't forget to put your contact information on it - believe it or not, I have a friend who wanted to hire someone based on his demo, only to discover that there was no telephone number or contact info ANYWHERE on there.

I wonder how long it took him to figure out why he wasn't getting ANY calls?

Good luck.



When you're new to the video production business, there's nothing more fun than watching other people's demos.

And there's probably nothing LESS fun than sitting down to make one of your own.

After all, this is your visual calling card. Every flaw, every less than perfect moment reflects directly on you. And can potentially affect whether you get more work - or starve. No pressure here.

When you sit down to plan one, there are only two things about which you can be absolutely sure. First, nobody's going to pay you a PENNY for all the work you're about to do. And second, as soon as the reel succeeds in getting you work, it's instantly obsolete since your newest (and hopefully best) work won't be on it. I see them as a necessary evil on about the same level as dental work. Still, just like ignoring the tooth twinge that eventually results in a root canal, not having a reel - or at least the building blocks of one at hand when someone calls saying they've heard about you and want to see some examples of your best stuff - leads to panic work. And panic work is typically not the best we can do. So take a proactive stance and make today the day you face the demo "beast" head on.

### Here are some tips.

The first word in "demo reel" is DEMO. A demo is a SHORTENED version of something. Key word: shortened. Even if you're totally, hopelessly, madly enamored of that one hour gig you did recently (you know, the one that makes everybody come up to you, in tears, after to congratulate you) don't even THINK about slapping the whole thing on your demo. In the world of demos, shorter is always better. Let me say that again. **In the world of demos, shorter is always better.**

Imagine having to watch a stack of 50 demos. The decision maker (or worse, the poor "selection committee") jams disc after disc into the machine. The title appears and the brutal countdown begins. Their goal, typically, is to find a couple of finalists as fast as possible. At the FIRST SIGN of weakness - a misspelling, a bad edit, anything tiresome, ugly or distracting