

Insider tips for
creating successful
marketing content
on time and
on budget

10 Secrets from a Veteran Commercial Content Producer

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blend.

About blend



Matt Bijarchi

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Matt has spent 25+ years executive producing branded content. His experience includes leadership roles at some of the world's most iconic advertising and entertainment marketing firms, including stints as Head of Integrated Production for Y&R, Executive Producer of Media Arts at TBWA/Chiat/Day, and as a marketing agent at the Creative Artists Agency (CAA).

He has gained a powerful reputation for delivering excellence and a fiercely loyal set of industry allies for a simple reason: he followed the rules of a system that can be highly wasteful, stressful and expensive for everyone involved.

The agency behind the most satisfied clients at the world's fastest growing brands

Blend is a creative marketing agency based in Los Angeles. We help people and businesses in the creation and evolution of their brand experience, from strategy to digital. We apply creative and strategic thought to deliver effective, sustainable, and inspiring marketing solutions at scale. We are Omni-channel in that we can create branded stories and the platforms they live in. We are nimble, hungry, project based, relentlessly focused on ROI and we do world-class work with global clients.

Our Clients



1. SIT BACK AND ENJOY THE SHOW



The biggest mistake clients can make on TVC productions is micromanaging on shoot day.

It's like watching a diner walk into the kitchen of a restaurant to tell the chef how to cook, and that's not good for anyone. It's time-consuming, costly, and generally unproductive. Shoot days are finely choreographed productions involving 25+ highly paid specialists working in concert on 14+ hour days. It's best to allow those shoot days to flow uninterrupted, as planned.

It's not a control thing, it's about efficiency and flow. It's about getting things done, on time and on budget. Your agency is there to serve you. They want you happy, they want you involved, and they want you to have all the control you want — upfront. In the planning stage. That's where client input and feedback is both essential and invaluable: on the creative brief, the scripts,

the storyboards, the shot list, the callbacks, the fittings, etc. You will have the opportunity to help craft and approve everything before the shoot, so that's really where you want to pay close attention and manage the process.

Due diligence done, the best thing to do is sit back and watch the symphony of skilled professionals do what they do best from a monitor at video village, content in the knowledge that you've done everything you need to do to ensure a great edit. The director isn't going to move on without getting your approval, so let them set the tone and cadence of the early takes. If something's off, the producers will make sure the director gets the necessary coverage.

2. KNOW YOUR LINE PRODUCER

Well, know them in the sense of knowing who they are and what their role is; you may never actually interact with them. Be that as it may, and despite what some of the other players might think, the line producer really is the unsung hero of production, the engine that gets it started and keeps it moving, the true secret sauce.

The line producer knows all.

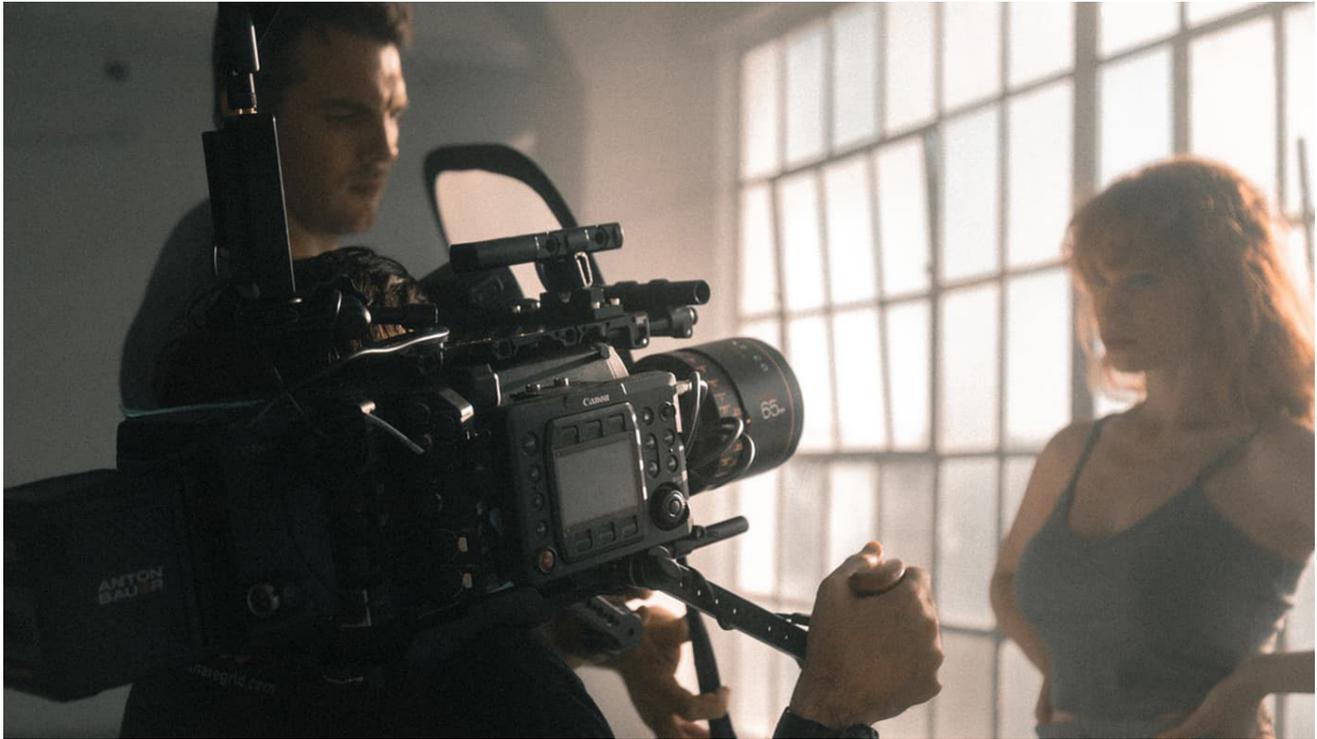
They have broken down the script. They have hired the department heads. They know what the costs are both above and below the line. Every penny of it. They know what's happening, and they know when and where it's happening. They're in

charge of spending, safety, and location scouts. They're the hub, the negotiator, the peacemaker, the multi-tasker, the time manager, and the problem-solver. Just for starters. Not only do they know everything about the nuts & bolts of your production, they are the person that the client and agency communicate through (instead of approaching the director) during shoots.



And while the line producer might also be the person most likely to say, “we can’t afford that,” they’re also the person who might just be able to juggle the budget to accommodate something, or at least explain why it isn’t really needed. More to the point, they are a fount of knowledge. So be aware of them — know who they are, and if they happen to slow down long enough for interaction, grab the opportunity. A little time spent with your line producer can result in a big education in production, and that can take you a long way.

3. SOMETHING SHINY



More often than not, it's the director that people think of as having the most control over a shoot, and that's true to some degree. The director is the person taking command and running the show, especially in terms of the actors.

"a good DP is key"

But working hand-in-hand with the director is another director, one that is responsible for the entire look of the shoot. That person is the Director of Photography, otherwise known as the DP. And as anyone who's ever been distracted by something shiny knows, beautiful footage can be very seductive, and very persuasive.



Since this is advertising after all, a good DP is key. A good DP can quickly evoke emotions with images, bring a cinematic feel to a setting that is crucial in terms of driving the narrative and selling your branded story, and just generally solve a lot of problems with pretty pictures. But while there is no shortage of good DPs out there, what you need is a little more specific: you need a really good DP with experience in your category.

If you're selling shampoo, someone who specializes in shooting cars outdoors is probably not the right choice. What you want is someone with experience in your category so that your product can be seen in the best possible light, both literally and figuratively. The right DP will make your product shine, and that will, in turn, make you shine.

4. NOBODY WANTS A CHEAP MATTRESS

Creating content is a process consisting of many players and parts. And the unsung hero of post-production, is the editor.

That said, editors, much like shoes and mattresses, play far too important a role to cheap out on them. You want to get the best editor you can afford; otherwise, you'll be paying for it in other ways down the line.

Often holed away in a room somewhere with a giant monitor, involved in activities that no one else on the production could perform, the editor's job runs the gamut from technician to artist. They are essential on the most fundamental level: without an editor, you've got nothing but a series of scenes and shots. But organizing that footage and stringing those shots together in the way that best conveys your message is nothing less than an art.

A good editor is skilled in the art of persuasion, and with myriad tools at their disposal, they, more than anyone else, have the ability to enhance, inform and alter our perception of the final product.

Using everything from cuts to music to graphics, they can mold the same footage into multiple versions with vastly different tones and paces to evoke various moods. Add to that their uncanny ability to "fix it in post," whatever it may be, and you can see why a good editor is worth the price, and why they should be given the space and time they need to work their magic.



5. OH SHOOT, WHY DID WE WAIT UNTIL SHOOT DAY?!?!

On shoot days, you want everything to run like a well-oiled machine, and the best way to ensure that happens is through rehearsal.

**Rehearse
Rehearse
Rehearse.**

Those are the three best tips for mitigating risk on shoot days.

You've already gone through pre-production. You know what's supposed to happen and everything looks great on paper. But there is simply no substitute for rehearsal. For running through it all IRL. It builds confidence, it creates familiarity, it gives the key players a chance to interact and collaborate, to try different things and to find new things, and to do it all in a way that simply isn't realistic on a shoot day when the clock is ticking, and money is being spent by the minute.

Too often only stunts are rehearsed, but even without stunts, even on shoots with limited dialogue and/or action, rehearsals are extremely beneficial. If you can afford a rehearsal day, do it. If you can't afford a dedicated rehearsal day, try to double up on the day of the tech scout. The production crew will most certainly have a tech scout on location prior to the shoot day to plan for lighting and just generally scope out the scene for any potential problems that could arise when the camera is rolling. It's good practice to ask for a rehearsal at the same time. If that's not possible, get a read-through. Whatever you can get, get it. Rehearsals save time and money.



6. FEED ME

Remember the last time you were hangry? Either you do, because it's the only thing you could think about. Or you don't, because your brain shut down entirely after you punched that wall. Nobody likes being hangry, nor is it much of a motivator beyond the aforementioned violence. Moreover, we all love food — yes, even crew members.

Look, I know it can seem crazy, excessive, extravagant — like a luxury you can't afford. But the reality is that, regardless of budget, you simply cannot afford to not feed your crew well, and first.



Here's the thing: the crew is going to bend over backwards to please the client, and they're going to work their asses off to surpass client expectations. But in this one area, the crew's needs have to come first — both on the budget line, and in the actual food line.

The significance of a well-fed crew cannot be overstated. And we're not just talking about sandwiches and snacks. The crew is working hard, and they need the fuel and comfort of a good, hot catered meal. Providing top notch catering and craft services not only keeps things moving along on schedule, it makes the crew feel appreciated and cared for, which in turn makes them want to work that much harder for you. They also both need and deserve access to that hot meal before anyone else. Let the crew eat well, let them eat first, and will not only be a more desirable client, you will also be a better human being.

7. DRESS YOURSELF

Anyone who's ever spent time getting ready to go out or made a last-minute wardrobe change knows the importance that clothes play when crafting an image.

And because wardrobe has a creative role in telling your story and brings value to a shoot, it's always best to have a full stylist budget, if you can afford it. But because that's not always the case, sometimes you have to cheat. Luckily, wardrobe is one place where you can actually cheat and save money without negative consequences. There are some hidden benefits, as well.

If you are on a tight budget, offer your talent a nominal wardrobe fee and have them bring in five outfits in different color combinations. Just give them some parameters; your talent can take direction as well as

anyone. It will save you time on fittings and you're much more likely to get a great fit from the start, because some of that work has already been done — by your actors, on their own time.

Just as importantly, you're going to get something that they feel comfortable in, something they believe makes them look good, something that will boost their confidence — all things that will show up on camera and ultimately benefit your content. And you've put a little cash in the talent's pocket in the process. It's a win for everybody, and you just saved money better spent on catering!



8. I SAW THAT



Another integral part of production that you may not be familiar with is the script supervisor, commonly referred to as the scripty.

Once again, someone doing a huge and hugely important job while getting very little acclaim. C'est la vie. Script supervisors aren't flashy, and they're too busy working to draw much attention to themselves. But they have a lot of responsibility, and how well they do their job directly informs how well the editor will be able to do their job.

The script supervisor oversees continuity, which includes wardrobe, props, hair, camera angles, and anything else visible to the human eye. It's their job to make sure that consistency is maintained from take to take so that different versions can be cut together seamlessly, and they do that via keen observation and detailed shot-by-shot

notes. The better the scripty, the easier it is to load and organize the footage, and the smoother and faster the editing process will be.

It might not sound all that exciting, but the reality is that continuity errors can ruin an otherwise perfect shoot day, kill credibility, and occur surprisingly easily without a watchful eye to prevent them. This is not the place to pinch pennies, even on a low budget shoot. Hiring a good script supervisor is the best way to protect the hard work of your talent and crew, make the editor happy, and ensure yourself flawless content.

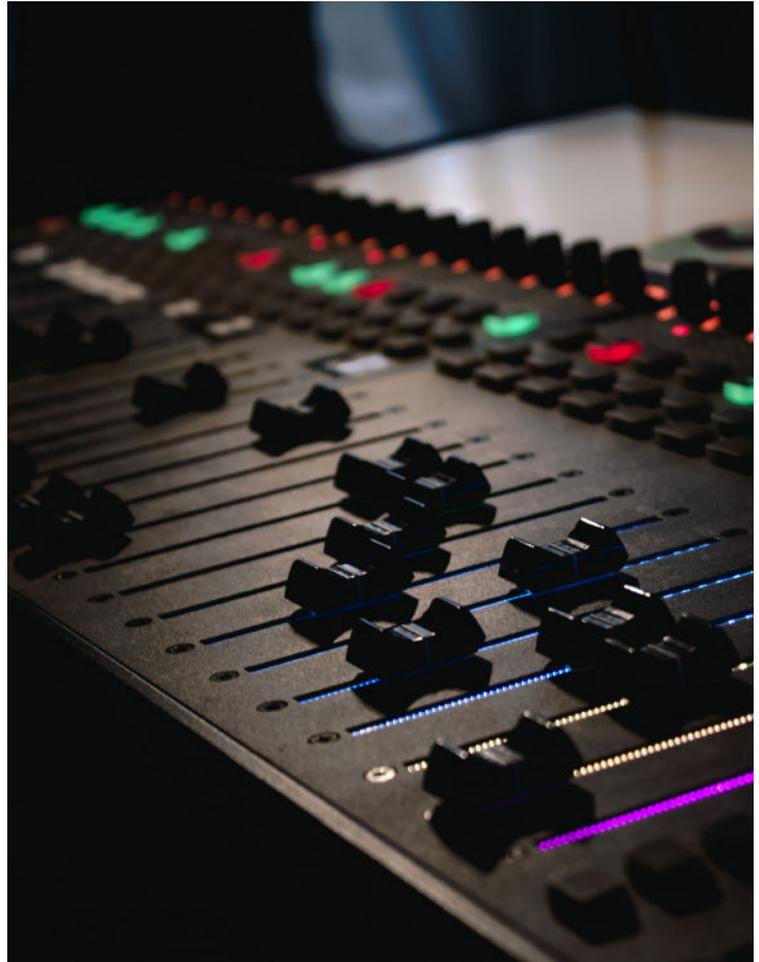
9. MUSIC TO MY EARS

People most often make decisions with their hearts, not with their heads. That being the case, emotional engagement is everything in marketing and music is one of our greatest tools in that regard. A song can instantly take you back to a specific time and place in your life and elicit a powerful emotion you weren't feeling 5 seconds earlier. The sound of chimes blowing in the wind will send chills right up your spine and have you looking over your shoulder. Jingles can play on a loop in your head on, creating brand recognition and loyalty, whether you like it or not.

Music has power.

Even if it's just background music. And even if some of your viewers will have the sound turned off, music is still super important. Without it, you risk people tuning out.

The good news is that music doesn't have to cost a lot of money. But it does have to cost you something. Free tracks are definitely not the way to go. They will cheapen your content faster than you can say, "Haven't I heard this on every corporate video I've ever seen in my entire life?"



Consider alternate licensing services instead. There are plenty of them, they're affordable, and they allow the editor to search for music that will build on and enhance all the work that's already gone into your content. It's the icing on the cake.

10. WHEN WE STRAY, WE PAY

It's a rush to be on set, especially when it's not something you do very often, which makes it easy to get caught up in the excitement and start asking for extras — extra set-ups, extra takes, extra coverage, etc. But those extras cause delays and overages, and the last thing anyone wants on a production is to go over budget.



Sticking to the plan is key to staying on budget, and that is why pre-production is so incredibly important, and why you should endeavor to be involved in every aspect of pre-production, as unsexy or trivial as some of it may seem. It all matters in terms of wrapping a project on schedule and on budget. It is far easier and far less expensive to make changes in the planning stage than it is to make them once you've got a crew of 25+ assembled, all of whom are being paid by the hour, with every partial hour billed as an hour. Moreover, last minute changes throw everything out of whack, take people right out of “the zone” and just generally mess with the production's chi.

And don't think just because the cameras have stopped rolling, you're safe. It's possible to stray in post-production as well — with extra cuts, extra revisions, extra animation, etc. There are myriad ways to go over budget. Any time you're not sticking with the plan that was agreed upon in pre-production, you're straying, it's costing money, and someone has to absorb that cost.

Know what you want, pay attention, get involved. Ask questions, offer suggestions, whatever you've got to say, pre-production is the time to say it. Because when we stray, we pay.

Thank You

If you'd like to discuss creating content for your brand, please email:

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