

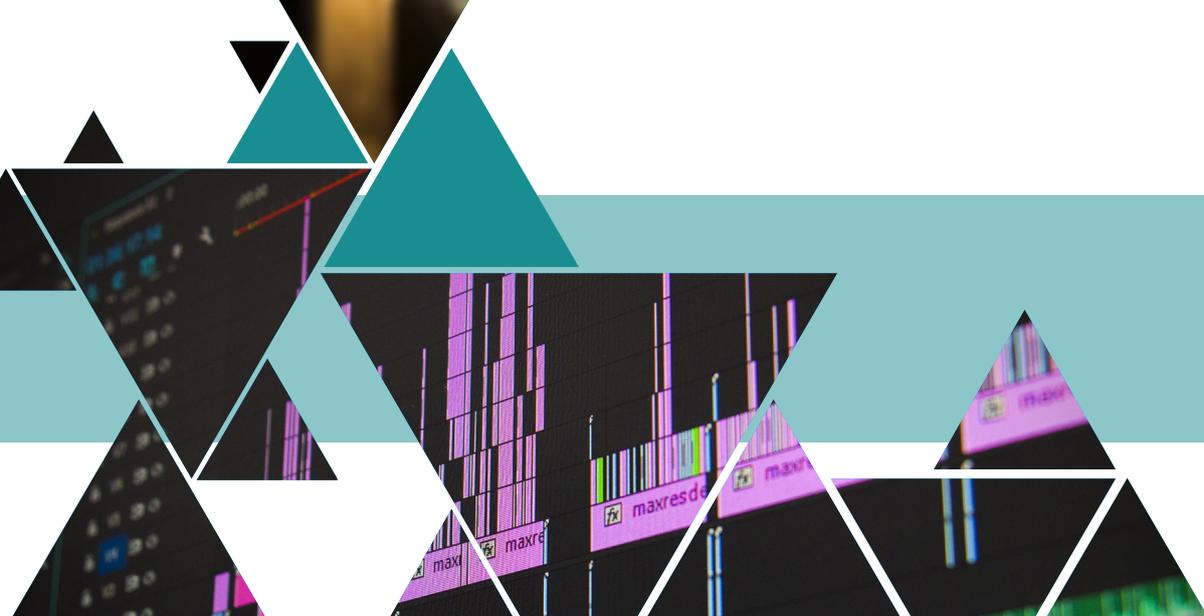


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The Cost Of Content Creation



A closer look at the various factors that can influence the cost of content creation.



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Pre-Production

There's so many factors that can alter the cost of content creation that it's impossible to put an exact figure on what things are going to cost, but careful planning can provide a road map for not only how much it will cost, but also how long it will take.

Every start-up business has to invest time and money before opening their doors to customers or clients. Content creation is no different. Locations, equipment, crew and talent often require a deposit or to be booked in advance. Purchasing props, costumes, and general consumables may also come into the equation.

Pre-Production Checklist

Script - The blueprint that no project should start without.

Locations - Where is the content being created?

Talent - Who's appearing in front of the camera?

Crew - Who's working behind the camera?

Equipment - Do you have everything you need to complete the project?

Art - Featured props or costumes depending on concept.

Budget - How much is it going to cost and how much do you have to spend?

Scheduling - The above will tell you how long you need/have to complete it.

The thing that makes it so hard to qualify budget without going through each item one at a time is that the cost for these items vary greatly. There's a big difference between using employees in front of a camera and hiring actors or even a celebrity. Likewise there's a cost difference between using available locations and hiring locations.

There is a cost versus quality equation that goes into every budget, especially when looking for ways to save time and money. It's a balancing act that requires careful consideration. Using the above examples in regard to video, an employee might jump in front of a camera for free, but are they going to have the same presence, poise, and vocal delivery as a trained and experienced actor? Of course not, but that's the cost versus quality equation that every project needs to balance.

Time

Forget the expensive equipment, the front of camera talent or behind the camera crew. The single biggest factor that will vary your budget is going to be time.

Most freelancers operate on hourly, day, or weekly rates and sometimes a combination of these things so time acts as a multiplier that can either help or hinder your budget if you fail to take the time equation into careful consideration.

Working With Time

If time is the most expensive thing then it can feel like it's a race against the clock, but that doesn't have to be the case.

Most freelancers who have a day rate will generally reduce the cost per day if they're booked for consecutive days. That's why they also have weekly rates which are per day cheaper than a single day rate. Anything you hire such as equipment or locations tend to operate in this way as well.

Staying in the video realm, which usually has the most moving parts to negotiate, if a video shoot is going to take three days it's more cost effective to book locations, talent, equipment and crew for three days rather than trying to break it up.

This includes the principal of buying in bulk. If you're intent on multiple pieces of content, or in this example, a series of videos - it's best to get them all organised and shot at once as opposed to spacing them out.

Scheduling

There are a lot of things that can change how the length of time it takes from start to finish. That's why coming up with a realistic and actionable schedule is very important for keeping everyone on track.

A good schedule will not only make sure things are done in an orderly fashion but it will also minimise waste whether it's travelling to locations or only having what's necessary to complete the project.



Talent

Talent is the term to describe those who are seen and heard in whatever form of content you're creating. Actors, models, voiceover artists, musicians, podcast hosts. These are the people tasked with delivering your message and drawing the audience in.

Picking the right face or sound to represent your brand will largely rely on your content objective, concept, and the overall tone you want to present.

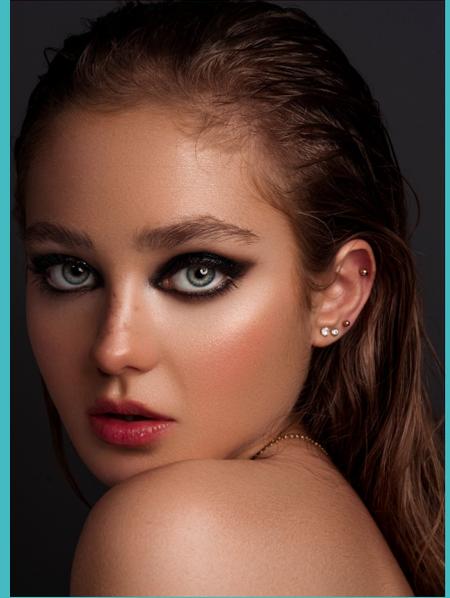
For example, would you really use a beautiful model to give tax advice or a heavy metal band to represent a fabric softener? No, not unless you were purposefully looking to subvert expectations for comedic effect.

Authenticity and Ability

There's a reason why they're referred to as talent, and it's usually because they've dedicated a lot of time acquiring that talent and can perform on cue when required without the added stress that nerves and uncertainty can bring.

A lot of people think that using real people who are employed there adds authenticity, and to an extent that can be true, but it's important to be aware that a nervous, uncomfortable employee won't look and sound authentic, they'll look and sound fake.

That's not to say real life employees or business owners can't work, but as always, there's an added risk in going with unproven talent.



It would take several pages to list every possible crew role, how they fit in and what they bring to a given project. Chances are, you don't need to know as it's unlikely your requirements will need a crew big enough to cover every role.

What is important is making sure the crew is big enough to cover the needs of the project, whether it can be completed with one person, five, or well over a dozen.

Rates vary from crew member to crew member as some roles are specialised and harder to find. Level of experience will also come into the equation.

Crew and Equipment

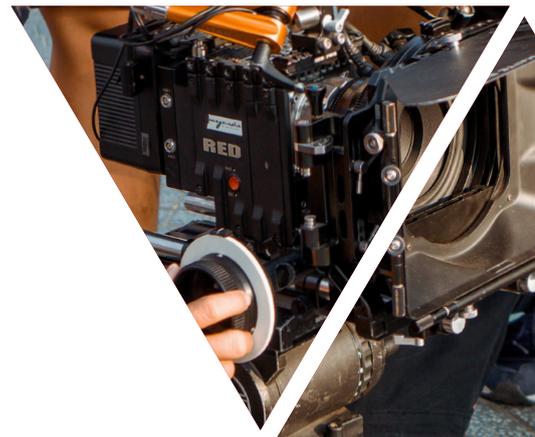
Crew will often come with their own equipment, and their rates will reflect that if you're happy to use the gear they supply, but it's rare that the gear available will fit every purpose and that's when you might need to go to a rental house.

The simpler the project the more likely it is that the crew will have everything on hand they need to complete the job with minimal fuss, but in the planning process you may find reasons why extra budget is needed to complete the project.

Crew Size

Crew size will vary from project to project. It may require several specialised roles to ensure the project meets the highest quality or something simple could be completed by a solo freelancer, a one man band if you will, who has enough knowledge in multiple areas to reach a high standard for the project.

Employing several crew members versus one is going to create a cost difference, but remembering how much of a factor time is, many hands make light work. It's all balance and compromises, and what best suits your project.



Post Production

Editing/Colouring

Editing and colouring can mean different things depending on what sort of content you're creating, but for the most part the intention is the same. It's about taking the basic image/video clips and creating a piece of content that draws an audience in and engages them, leaving them wanting to know more.

As most photos/videos are shot in a RAW format now, they begin with little in the way of contrast, colour, and saturation. This makes editing and colouring a vital stage for a polished outcome in the content creation process and can't be overlooked.

Sound/Music

Sound can ruin a beautiful image, whether it's poorly captured audio or a poor choice of music that doesn't suit the mood or aesthetic.

Sound is like a referee in sport, they're vital to the process, but have the ability to either enhance or ruin the experience depending on how good or bad they are. Overall, an audience can tolerate lower quality visuals more than they want to deal with horrible sound.

CGI/Motion Graphics

Like most things in content creation, this is a very difficult topic to cover in a short amount of time. Post production visual effects can range from a simple lower third, which you often see on the news or in information videos with a person's name when they're first introduced, to full blown CGI involving green screen, 3D, particle effects integrated within video.

Post Production Roles

- **Editing** - Whether it's video or photography, very few pieces of content don't need some post production touch ups to bring out their best.
- **Colouring** - These days most cameras shoot in RAW formats. That means contrast, saturation and colour are minimised and added later.
- **Sound Design** - No point having something that looks good if it doesn't sound good as well. Not all projects need sound, but those that do need it done right.
- **Music** - Ever try watching a movie without a good soundtrack beneath it? So much emotion comes from music.
- **Foley/ADR/Voiceover** - The process of adding sound effects, a narrative voice or replacing poorly recorded dialogue lines with cleaner versions.
- **VFX/Graphics** - This can range from simple graphic text over an image to fully integrated CGI.

Very few projects require the extreme end of the spectrum with full blown Hollywood level effects, and as always, keeping it small and simple is often more effective than going after an unjustified wow factor.

Cost

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Quality

When you know what you're looking at, there are a lot of ways you can reduce cost and save money when creating content.

Every person has networks and connections they can reach out to whether it's looking for a hard to find prop or a more suitable location.

Cheaper isn't always better, but it's a compromise you'll often need to consider before going ahead with any content creation.

Like most things there isn't a defined right and wrong answer, simply a series of compromises that need to be considered and can only be done on a project by project basis.

Below though we've listed some of the more common areas where people can and often look to save money and then examine the risk and reward of cost vs quality.

'You get what you pay for', and when you try to save money and time there's a risk and reward balance that you will face from time to time.

Cheaper doesn't always mean lower quality, it just means greater risk that the quality will drop. You have to be sure that the money saved is worth it, especially if the overall product doesn't meet expectations which could directly affect how good your ROI is from the content.



- Use friends, family and employees as actors in front of the camera.
- Use free locations.
- Using stock Images and music.
- Writing your own script.

- Definitely cheaper, but actors/models train tirelessly to be convincing and authentic on camera. A poorly delivered message is not a good message.
- Locations are often dressed up to be more pleasing than they would normally appear. Most free locations are pretty plain and flat, and can often make the video feel cheaper.
- It can be very expensive hiring a photographer to do multiple set ups/ shoots, same with original music. However, you don't have exclusive rights to it and the same piece of music or image could pop up anywhere else.
- On the one hand, you know your business, objective and message better than anyone. On the other hand a skilled and experienced writer can communicate more in fewer words.

Tips and Tricks

Better Planning Saves Money

This is true in any industry. Poor planning can push a budget well beyond initial expectations, especially when it comes to that crucial ingredient - time. Always look for ways to save time through planning.

At its simplest, planning is often a domino effect. The script will tell you your schedule, the schedule and script will tell you who you need and how long it will be to complete the project - and from there you can start to figure out your budget.

What you want is to pay for what you need to complete it - not spend twice as much for a bunch of 'just encase' hypotheticals.



Use What You Have

Yes, there's always a quality risk involved when trying to save money, but it's an avenue that should always be explored during the planning stages.

Once you know what you need and how long you need it for, it never hurts to ask around. If you can get something that's perfect or acceptable for what you need then why would you pay hundreds - even thousands - of dollars to secure the same thing elsewhere?

Like water, budgets can be fluid, and with a bit of know how that include removing some of the water when it threatens to overflow rather than constantly pouring more in.



Prioritise Time

It's cheaper and you get more value out of shooting for a full day than only a few hours or half a day. A multiple day project provides more value being completed over consecutive days rather than stretching it out over several days spaced out over a few weeks.

Does a video start, go elsewhere, and finish at the original starting location? Shoot the start and finish together. Projects are often created and especially in the case of video, shot out of order to maximise time and value.

Summary



Content creation cost is fluid, and elements can be removed and added freely, potentially affecting both the cost and quality of the overall content. Finding the balance between quality and acceptable cost come down to the individual, what they're willing and have available to spend.

Establishing and utilising a proper planning process that allows you to not only manage costs, but find areas where you may be able to save money is essential in coming in on budget without compromising quality.

There's rarely a perfect solution, which is why thinking ahead, even if it means starting at the end, is such an essential step when planning your content. If you understand your objective, working your way backwards will provide a solid foundation for what's needed to complete your project.

Summary Takeaway

- Know your objective. It all starts there.
- Time is essential, know how it can affect the cost and quality of content.
- Pre-Production/Concept, Shooting, Post-Production, Delivery - plan each step carefully.
- Cheap, Fast, High Quality - generally you can only pick two for any given project.
- Be resourceful - use what you have available.
- Simple but effective. The best pieces of content usually are.

