

DECONSTRUCTING THE DEMO

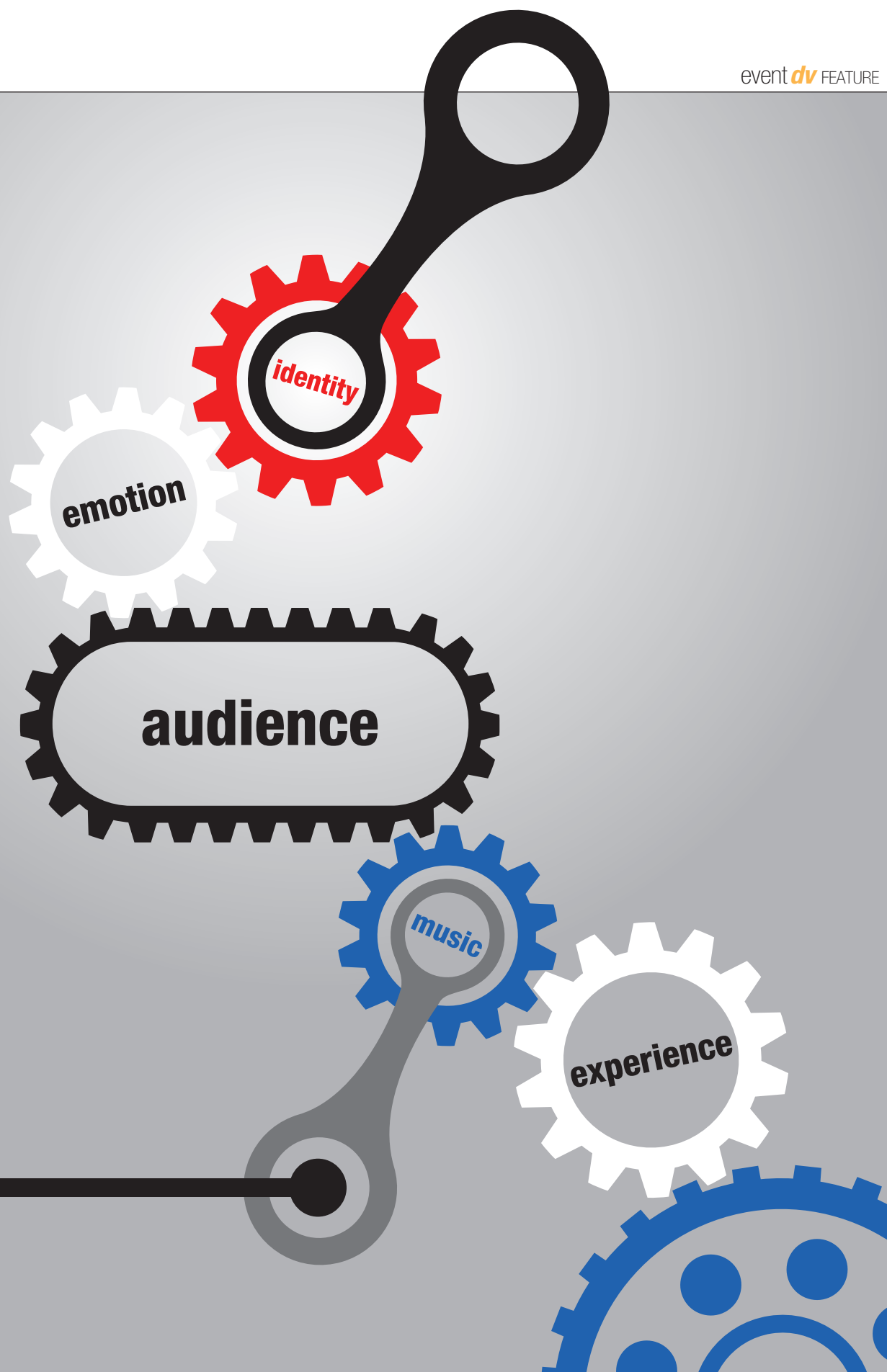
The Experts' Guide to 100 Things Everyone Should Know How to Do, compiled by Samantha Ettus, is based on the premise that often "the simplest things are the hardest to master." The simplicity of no-brainers such as washing your hair, telling someone a story, or even breathing makes it so these primitive tasks come naturally—but at what price? We are doing them—and ourselves—an injustice, she reasons, by not taking the time to become maestros of mundane activities.

To guide readers in perfecting their handshaking or lipstick-applying skills, she has compiled 100 chapters of golden rules, techniques, and instructions from 100 experts. It was this book—no offense intended—that came to mind when we approached the subject of creating a demo.

To those outside the industry, a demo may look like little more than a compilation of clips set to a song with a good beat. Where's the challenge in that? Anyone can amass a number of clips and lay down a Top 40 track. Of course you know there's a difference between what award-winning videographers do and what your teenager can throw together and post on YouTube. While it may look deceptively simple to a bride, a demo that tugs at her heartstrings and speaks to her directly, inciting her to get out her phone and make a call to book a videographer, is one that was crafted with hours upon hours of care and calculation.

Just ask any videographer who's contacted Julie Hill of Elysium Productions how debilitating demo-creation "writer's block" can be. She gets so many requests from videographers seeking advice that she'll be





offering a weekend-long retreat on the craft of writing demos through the Re:Frame Collective (details to come).

This month, we've asked five studios renowned for their award-winning demos to give us their own golden rules for creating something "every videographer should know how to do." In terms of their approaches to demo creation, our experts fall into two broad categories. The first includes those who take more of an eye-candy approach, weaving together a pastiche of their most jaw-dropping clips. Hill, Cloud Nine's Bruce Patterson, and Vantage Point's Laura and Steve Moses represent this style, which we'll call the Collage Style. The second approach includes those who prefer to use their demo as a way to articulate to brides not just through images but also through words, their philosophies, and their credentials via narration and soliloquy-style testimonials.

Representing this style are CVP's Brett Culp and David Perry of the eponymous David Perry Films. We'll call this latter style the Mission Statement Style.

A few tenets overlap, such as the need to unearth that eureka song or to forge an emotional connection with a bride. It's how exactly this connection is bridged where the two styles diverge. We hope our gurus' golden rules will demystify the process of producing an award-winning demo to help you master the making of your own.

IT'S NOT A DEMO; IT'S A MISSION STATEMENT

Go ahead and watch their demos—www.davidperrystudio.com and www.brettculp.com—or take our word for it. For Perry and Culp, the thought of creating a collage-style demo seemingly never crossed their minds. Instead, Culp, for example, started almost from scratch. Use of his own found footage is minimal and was replaced by



For Brett Culp, creating a demo "is a way to express my heart, my passion, my philosophy when I can't be there in person."

storyboarding, scripting, hiring professional voice-over (VO) talent, and painstakingly engineering how he would articulate to brides what his company represents.

Culp's demo is closer to a short infomercial, for lack of a better term, than anything else I can think of to compare it to—except he's not selling kitchen knives but rather a philosophy. In his own words, "I feel like the demo is a way to express my heart, my passion, my philosophy when I can't be there in

person." Reminiscent of one of those 5-minute movies you watch before touring a museum or geographical attraction, it begins with the VO talent booming, "What is a story?" Arguably, this touch immediately gives the demo an authoritative History Channel-type feel. After a few minutes of graphics, testimonials, and an on-camera appearance by Culp himself speaking directly into the camera, it concludes, "You are a beautiful story." When the VO tells you to "Embrace it. Celebrate it. Capture it. Share it. LIVE it," you're sold.

Similarly, Perry's demo doesn't mince words telling you why you should hire his studio. A litany of golden-locked Latter-day Saints brides (Perry has carved out a niche for himself shooting temple weddings) croon into the camera about their weddings and how David Perry made the event even more special—and how he should be the one to make your wedding perfect too. In case you're still unsure whether he's got what it takes, a succession of clips with locations clearly labeled at the bottom of the screen dominates the demo. "Find out why we've all chosen David Perry," it begins. If couples who've had temple weddings in Portland, Ore.; Washington, D.C.; Newport Beach, Calif.; Salt Lake City; Nauvoo, Ill.; Mt Timpanogos, Utah; Mante, Mexico; Las Vegas; Boise and Idaho Falls, Idaho; etc., have chosen David Perry, shouldn't you too?

Now that you've gotten the gist of their approach, let's look rule-by-rule at Culp's and Perry's demo do's and don'ts.

RULE NO. 1: IF THEY CRY, THEY BUY

It's unanimous in both style camps: Creating an emotional connection is a demo's *raison d'être*. A truly great demo calls for Kleenex. Think watching the conclusion of *Extreme Home Makeover* followed by a Hallmark commercial, followed by a Humane Society PSA.



Brides don't watch a demo to be impressed by a videographer's shooting techniques or high-tech gear, David Perry says "They want to feel the emotions of their day."

Perry quotes the familiar adage, "If they cry, they buy."

To him, too many videographers get caught up in touting their cutting-edge techniques or state-of-the-art equipment, elements that don't interest most brides. "They want to feel the emotions of their day," he says. When a bride says your demo is beautiful, don't think it's because she noticed your rack-focus or the way you judiciously applied a plug-in.

"They don't say it's beautiful because of your shots or effects," warns Culp. "It's an overall experience. They can't dissect it." But you must be able to dissect it in order to know why it worked. He continues, "Most clients do not see the real art of your work. They're unable to. All they can do is acknowledge the emotional experience they're having while they watch it."

RULE NO. 2: KNOW—AND SHOW—YOUR MARKET

Now, how to push those buttons is the million-dollar question. Rule No. 2, according to Culp, is that in any demo worth its salt, a bride can see herself as the one in front of the camera. "Brides need to be able to see themselves in the demo," he says, not underestimating the challenge this can pose.

He relates a not-so-tender moment in his studio that made this fact quite obvious. After screening a sample wedding video for a prospective client, he asked the bride for her reaction. Not hesitating, she replied honestly, "I

hated it. I could not stand that girl's dress!" Clearly, he says, it wasn't the production value in question but the very real fact that this particular bride couldn't see herself in that video.

It's like staging a house, Culp suggests. But decide if you're selling a Cape Cod or a castle. For instance, CVP targets platinum brides, so you won't see any clips of the reception held in the small Baptist church down the block mixed in with shots of a wedding soiree featuring Cirque du Soleil performers or Tony Bennett. "If I know I'm sitting down with clients who are doing a half-million dollar wedding, I've got to show them a demo that shows half-million dollar weddings." He admits that there are probably couples who can afford him but assume they cannot, based on his demo, but the loss leader doesn't trouble him. "I know who I'm after," he says frankly.

To that end, Culp's demo serves as proof, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he can handle a couple's extravagant affair. "They say to themselves," he imagines, "'Someone else who's having a wedding like mine, on a budget like mine, with the entertainment of mine chose him. Clearly, he knows how to do these kinds of events.' Can a million-dollar bride see herself in that video? You bet she can."

Closely related to the need for a bride to be able to envision herself in your demo is the Barbie-doll factor—the need for her to want to actually be the



David Perry's demo doesn't mince words telling you why you should hire his studio. A litany of golden-locked LDS brides describe their weddings and how Perry made the event even more special; he will make yours perfect too.

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SGM-1X

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SGM-X

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person in your demo. Culp puts it more bluntly: “It’s best to put beautiful people in your demo.” Unashamed, he says, “That’s not bad! Every commercial where they want you to buy those jeans, they don’t show an ugly girl wearing those jeans.”

RULE NO. 3: SHOW YOUR EXPERIENCE

So you’ve weeded out the Princess Fionas and the VFW hall clips. The next guideline for making that emotional connection, according to Perry and Culp, is to convince the bride that, just like her fiancé, you’re her one and only.

Make sure she can see that you’ve worked with many kinds of brides, ceremonies, and, in Culp’s case, faiths by incorporating shots from multiple weddings. Use varying production techniques to show that you are experienced.

But don’t trust the clips to speak for themselves entirely. Be sure to get your message across by providing video testimonials. Go ahead, Perry says, and “add some testimonials to your demo from past clients to reassure the bride she is making the wisest choice.” Satisfied brides and family members make good references, as do any vendors and clients you’ve worked with whose names may be worth mentioning.

As we discussed earlier, Perry’s demo is testimonial-heavy and, almost like a resume, lists the locales and temples he’s filmed at. One of the take-it-from-me brides in Perry’s demo happens to be Carmen Rasmussen of *American Idol* fame. Why did she choose David Perry Films? “Because they’re all about the music.” The demo goes on to showcase vignettes of nonwedding work including a montage of transportation-themed Date Videos (featuring smiling couples atop horses, motorcycles,



Reminiscent of one of those 5-minute movies you watch before touring a museum or geographical attraction, Brett Culp’s demo begins with the VO talent booming, “What is a story?”



Cloud Nine’s Bruce Patterson says, “I’m not selling Johnny and Suzy, I’m selling the product, so I want to show them the kinds of shots that will be incorporated into their wedding, as a product.”

ATVs, skateboards, and snowboards) and some Super 8 work.

Celebrity event planners make cameos in Culp’s demo to show that he’s a popular choice for discriminating brides who can afford the best of the best. In a rare real-moment clip, a client on stage with a microphone waxed poetic before an audience on how his friendship with Culp grew throughout the production of a biography video, which was screened afterward.

If these testimonials aren’t enough to convince you that Culp has what it takes, a shot of him being interviewed on *Entertainment Tonight* might help. Or the short clip of, um, Tom Clancy’s wedding.

RULE NO. 4: TELL A STORY

The Mission Statement style’s coup de grâce is its luring in of brides with your story or your company philosophy. For Culp, the way to do this is to ask himself what his company is

really about and then relay that information to the viewer. “The first question to me, even before I sit down to look at the first clip, is thinking about my own company. What is my company really about? What is my identity? My brand? What am I trying to sell to a client that’s unique about me? What really would set me apart from other video companies?” In his current demo, his answer is storytelling. “At this stage, our company is really about stories. The beauty of stories, the idea of stories. The demo itself is our story as a company.”

Perry sees stories as the real drivers of the emotional connection as well. “The key to creating an emotional connection is to tell an individual’s story. Sure, you need some flashy shots from multiple weddings to get the bride’s attention. But then share a heartfelt, romantic, and emo-

tional story of one person because it’s easier to connect.”

HOW I GOT INTO COLLAGE

Now let’s look at the other school of demo creation: videographers whose demos are unscripted, relying in large part on eye-candy. For the most part, these studios let their collages of clips speak for themselves, with the help, of course, of a rousing soundtrack. In contrast to Perry and Culp, who want

brides to project themselves into their demos, Bruce Patterson reasons, "I'm not selling Johnny and Suzy, I'm selling the product, so I want to show them the kinds of shots that will be incorporated into their wedding, as a product."

Likewise, Laura and Steve Moses prefer the collage-style approach because it allows them to pull shots from a greater pool of clips. "Plus," they add, "the variety of brides and locations will make the piece more interesting. One of the benefits of this type of demo is that many types of shots from any part of the wedding day can be used, and they don't have to be in chronological order."

Chronology does play a roll in Julie Hill's demos. She walks viewers through the wedding day with a three-act structure, but she uses many different weddings in each act. By doing it this way, she is able to illustrate the range of her work, from cool time-lapses and fish-eye lens shots to Super 8 clips and tear-filled toasts. And as a secondary benefit, she can defend her rates "by showing the amount of time we spend in post."

These collage-style demo creators abide by another set of criteria, which they share with you here.

RULE NO. 1: MAKE 'EM FEEL IT

Again, your demo is nothing if it isn't a tear-jerker. It might sound passé, but, Steve and Laura argue, "Females operate, to a certain degree, on feelings. Touching them emotionally is the key to selling your product." Their 2008 WEVA CEA Gold-winning demo (www.vppvideo.com) accomplishes this by appealing to the fairy-tale fantasies many women are thought to develop as little girls. It is meant to touch not just brides but their doting mothers.



"One of the benefits of [the collage] type of demo," say Laura and Steve Moses, "is that many types of shots from any part of the wedding day can be used, and they don't have to be in chronological order."



Julie Hill says that the cool time-lapses, fisheye lens shots, Super 8 clips, and tear-eyed toasts she shows in her demo allow her to defend her rates "by showing the amount of time we spend in post."

"It's important to keep in mind that your target market is women," they advise. "Not necessarily young women but women in general, because a bride's mother will often play a significant role in the choosing of vendors."

To do this they begin their demo with a montage of adorable little flower girls twirling in their frilly white dresses to the tinkling of a piano. "An Enchanted Journey," it begins, "From the dreams of little

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girls to the ultra-beautiful, ultra-chic brides of today.” It goes on in this dreamy, ethereal tone, eavesdropping on couples vowing their lives to one another.

RULE NO. 2: IT’S ALL ABOUT THE MUSIC

Proponents of the collage-style demo will tell you that the single most important thing that sets an award-winning demo apart from the rest is the song. Hill won’t create a demo until she finds the perfect piece of music. “That’s what really drives a demo. I don’t think it’s effective unless you have the perfect music.” Her thing is to find three songs that go together well to accompany her three-act demo. For her, one song isn’t enough. “People’s attention spans are short. They get bored of the same song. We want to make sure we take the viewer on a roller coaster of emotions.”

If the song falls flat, so do the emotions, Patterson says. “Some people can have great shots, but if the songs fall flat and there are no lyrics that evoke emotion or excitement, it really takes away from the impact of the clips.” Your music needs to evoke either emotion or excitement, or both, he says.

The song he chose for his current demo (www.cloudninecreative.com) is a song that’s actually about weddings, by the Newsboys, an Australian Grammy-nominated Christian pop-rock band. Once he found the perfect track, his next task was to edit his clips in time to the music. “Not on the bass beats,” he says, but to illustrate what’s happening in the song. “Pay attention to the lyrics,” and time the song properly for greater impact. In Patterson’s demo, as the Newsboys croon about a



The Moseses strike an emotional tone early on by beginning their demo with a montage of adorable little flower girls twirling in their frilly white dresses to the tinkling of a piano.



“Attention spans are a lot shorter now,” Patterson says. “There’s a lot of video to look at online, and people might click off. If you save your best shots for the very end, they might never get to them.”



To Julie Hill, making every clip count means making sure every clip reflects her current style, not her style from 3 years ago.

father walking his daughter down the aisle, you see the same image on-screen.

It should be pointed out that collage-style demos aren’t totally without ambient sound. Some sound is used judiciously. Patterson is careful when using natural audio because, “Depending on what you put in, it can either add to or distract from the demo,” he says. To the Moseses and Hill, sound bites are essential to conveying emotion. “We have never produced a demo without them,” say the Moseses. “We’re anal about audio,” admits Hill. She prefers to weave a track of background audio in with the soundtrack. And she wants people to notice. “We do want people to realize that because we feel like half of our video is the audio.”

[EventDV does not endorse the unauthorized use of copyright-protected music in wedding and event video but will continue to discuss it as a common industry practice until the relevant rights and usage issues are resolved. —Ed.]

RULE NO. 3: HIT ME WITH YOUR BEST SHOT

Make every clip count, advise adherents to the collage style, with a few simple strategies. First, only clips of the highest video and audio quality should make the cut. “Crystal clear images and audio are of the utmost importance,” say the Moseses, as are beautiful images. “Do not underestimate the power of beauty. Beautiful images speak deeply to women on an emotional level.”

Second, don’t include a clip “just because,” Patterson says. One of his pet peeves is the use of “so what” filler clips, and he does his best to avoid being tempted

in the
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Cloud Nine Creative
www.cloudninecreative.com

Brett Culp
www.brettculp.com

David Perry Films
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Elysium Productions
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Vantage Point Productions
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to use them, settling only on unique clips. Placement of your strongest shots should be at the opening and the closing of your demo, where you want to make the most impact. "If it goes out with a whimper, that's the last thing people are going to remember."

But having an impactful beginning is even more important. "If it doesn't come in with anything creative, or inspiring, or different," then you'll lose them. "Attention spans are a lot shorter now. There's a lot of video to look at online, and people might click off. And that's the worst thing that can happen. If you save your best shots for the very end, they might never get to them."

To Hill, making every clip count means making sure every clip reflects her current style, not her style from 3 years ago. She's already sizing up clips to nix for her next demo. "We're always improving our work," she says. "One thing I don't like about our current demo is that it's 4:3, because a lot of our footage that I used for that was before we had HD cameras." Her next demo will reflect her updated style—all HD, more real time, and the incorporation of some new filters she's started using.

RULE NO. 4: HIGHLIGHT DIFFERENT TRADITIONS

This rule goes hand in hand with Rule No. 2 of the mission statement-style demo, "Know—and Show—Your Market."

Without any chuppahs or henna tattoos in your demo, you're not likely

to attract the attention of a bride planning a non-Christian wedding. Don't limit your demo to clips featuring one faith (unless that's truly all you cater to). Make your demo a smorgasbord of ceremony types to show that your company is diverse in order to appeal to a larger spectrum of brides.

In addition to portraying a variety of faiths, Hill says she makes it a point to try to relate to different markets, such as the high-end market or Southern belle brides. She says, "Whatever's shown needs to totally relate to your market by bringing in those traditions, relating to them with clips and music."

RULE NO. 5: BREVITY IS THE SOUL OF WIT

Watching a demo should feel like the titillation of new love—you're left craving more. You may have an hour's worth of demo-worthy clips, but your demo must be brief (meaning 2–4 minutes), say the Moseses, whose demos have become shorter over time (they're on their 10th).

You need to capture a bride's attention immediately when she visits your website or walks past your booth at a bridal fair. "You need to 'wow' her quickly so that she'll look further into your work. This type of demo is not about showing how great you can film and edit a ceremony; it's all about impact—fast."

Succinct demos are conducive to the emotions you want to elicit, says Patterson, whose demo clocks in at a brisk 3:10. You want high-impact and excitement. You want viewers to cry or laugh, or both.

"My philosophy is shorter length and more impact." And, he points out, "You have to consider attention spans."

A bride has a lot of ground to cover when planning her wedding. If she wants to watch a feature she can go see *Bride Wars*.

On that note, we'll wrap up so you can get started on the simple task of creating a demo—that is, the not-so-simple task of mastering the craft.

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