



Selling Storytelling: Producing Corporate Identity Videos, Part 1

In as few as 30 seconds, a singular corporate identity video can convince a website visitor of a company's expertise, poise, and uniqueness. But it's easier said than done, of course, so we talked to four leading producers about how they approach these types of projects. In this 3-part series they'll share their secrets on telling and selling corporate stories.

By [Liz Merfeld](#)

Posted on February 29, 2012

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From modest start-ups to Fortune 500 companies, streaming media producers are seeing a groundswell in the number of businesses seeking to use online video as a component of their identity strategy--a best foot forward, if you will, for would-be customers visiting their website. With video widely supported by major social media channels like Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, companies not utilizing video as an identity tool along with more traditional branding methods are

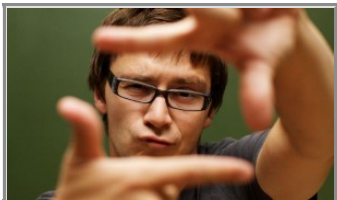
really missing out.

In as few as 30 seconds, a singular corporate identity video can convince a website visitor of a company's expertise, poise, and uniqueness. Most of all, a well-produced video is that company's first impression writ large, a window into your persona, putting a potential customer at ease and gaining their trust.

Considering that one video can be purposed to reach a global audience through a variety of channels--homepage, social media, e-newsletters, print ads featuring QR codes, on mobile devices--it can reap an incredible ROI, and at a fraction of the price of more traditional marketing avenues.

We recently asked four streaming media producers sought out for their corporate identity work to share their insights and experiences in producing such pieces. In this first installment of a three-part article, we'll hear about how they approach each client project and view some examples of their work

The Producers



First up is Ryan Koral of [Epic Motion](#), who recently spun off his commercial work into a new division called [Tell](#) in Royal Oak, Michigan: "Almost all of what we create goes online. A lot of the companies we work with now have a desire for social media relevance. Content is everything. The more stuff you have to show off, the better."

Next is Rochelle Morris, formerly of Sauvignon Media Creations in

Melbourne, Australia, who also recently rebranded her company, now called [Preface Films](#), to give commercial work equal attention.

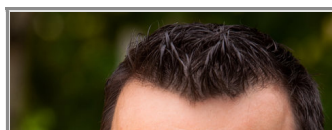
"People are time-poor and want information at their fingertips," she says. "DVDs may be a great avenue for a particular market; however, they also can be put away and forgotten or lost. The advantages of using social media with a web clip is enormous: using tags, links, and posting on multiple formats allow a business to become more visible with less cost. For some companies, it may be the only advertising they need to promote their business."



Joining the discussion is Keith Kelly, president of [Innovative Communications](#) in Naperville, Illinois, who has specialized in creating digital media for Chicagoland businesses since the 1990s. He offers 60-second promo videos [60secondmedia.tv] designed for use on websites as well as longer-form corporate videos that help businesses present their products and services to website visitors. He says the fun for him comes with devising a creative way to tell someone's story: "PowerPoint killed companies' creativity," he laments. Too often, to attract new customers, management will "just give an administrative assistant a script and have them make bullet points."

Dave Williams of [MediaWave Video Productions](#) in

Philadelphia took a break from shooting at a convention in Las Vegas to share his approach. Working mostly with small- to medium-sized companies, and offering identity films ranging from 30 seconds to 10



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minutes, he says,"Our clients have told us that their video has impacted their bottom line. We've found if companies don't have them they quickly realize that they are missing the boat. Even something as simple as behind-the-scenes holds a lot of interest for a lot of people. These videos capture viewers right away."



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To storyboard or not to storyboard? Should the story drive the interviews or vice versa? At what point in a corporate project do you set video length and budget? These questions and more are discussed in Part 2 of our Producing Corporate Identity Videos series.

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Telling the Stories

There are surely as many ways to tell a company's story in a compelling, memorable way as there are capable producers. So when a client invites you to tell their story, where do you start? With experience, you'll likely have a comfortable idea of the flavor of identity video that might work depending on what

rough category the business falls into, whether a boutique cupcakery or a manufacturer of medical equipment.

These first conversations you have with a client can be delicate interactions, in which they describe how they envision their video turning out, and you gracefully lead them toward a piece that will accomplish their goals while captivating viewers. Your challenge is to vet their ideas, however solidly they may be presented, and help companies think a little more outside the box, if needed--say, if their vision involves discourse that starts out something like, "Hi. I'm John Doe, president of XYZ company..."

"Sometimes all they want is someone to come in with a camcorder and shoot a talking head for 5 minutes," says Kelly. The trickiest part is getting past initial questions like, "Do you guys do video? OK, we'd like a 10-minute video--how much?" and mining more information to get a more fine-tuned sense of what they really need, not necessarily what they think they need. "They usually know they have stuff they want to show off that's new and they've heard video is a good thing. I try to get them to be more customer-focused, less company-centric" in their videos.

When the Frain Group, a company that sells used factory production equipment, approached Kelly with the idea of doing a single video, he began asking questions. One of their goals was to combat the perception their industry suffers from--that of a junkyard full of angry dogs. After digging deeper, he realized that what they really needed was multiple videos to convey the full scope of their story. "In talking to them, I found out there were several different facets, differentiators. There were really four videos." Kelly created four 3-minute identity videos for them to display on their home page: one overall introduction, one describing their philosophy and approach, one featuring their showroom, and one featuring their engineering services.

[The Frain System](#) from [Keith Kelly](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Asking the Right Questions

Approaching each new client with questions like "What are you hoping the end result of the video will be?" and "What are you really trying to accomplish with it?" helps to flush out each project. In the end, says Koral, "our hope is that people trust us that we're doing that for them." In his own mind, while he's first speaking with a client, he's figuring out what type of video might work for them.

For example, does the piece need to include narration to tell the story, or should it be purely visual, or



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even text-based? To determine the best way to tell someone's story, he also asks clients for desired outcomes, their key message, and their call to action. "From there we determine what it makes the most sense to do." Take, for example, the extremely different approaches to two of his identity videos below.

Burnstein Community Health Clinic from [Tell](#) on [Vimeo](#).

In the identity piece Tell produced for the Gary Burnstein Community Health Clinic for underinsured patients, for example, it was evident that interviews would be an appropriate way to drive the story because patients could communicate the impact the clinic has had on their lives. But in a video for an exciting cyclocross event called "Stomach of Anger," it wasn't enough to interview participants about how energizing and fun the event has been in previous years. They had to show it, and to more effectively do this, they left out any narration. Visuals and music and a bit of text get the job done.

Stomach of Anger from [Tell](#) on [Vimeo](#).

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Avoiding the Hard Sell

Morris, too, relies on her clients to impart their goals, but hopes that they will in turn rely on her to craft the concept. Incredulity is an important characteristic in the formative stage. It's at this stage that she can scrutinize the company's beliefs about how they are unique and address the challenge of creating a point of

difference. Hearing what they think of themselves helps her understand their mindset, and what they feel works and does not—even if they're mistaken about what really sets them apart or what their ideas for the video will convey.

It's important to listen to what client says about "who their target market is, what their goals are, who they want involved, and obviously a budget point for the project," Morris says. "This will help us decide on the direction we will take. Most small-to-medium enterprises have an idea or a goal but don't know the best approach to get that message across." Perhaps, for example, they use turgid language that they think is fresh and unique. She feels it's her job to clue them in.

Once she and the company reach a consensus about what their key differentiators are, and she assures them that creating an authentic piece will resonate better than a hard sell with their target market, they move forward. "We feel that our audiences are far more in tune to authenticity than a hard sell, so this as a whole is the approach we take—creating an authentic piece."

One intriguing company she was charged with creating an identity video for is Urban Workspace, a use-as-needed office space and secretarial service shared by multiple businesses.

Her challenge was to promote and bring character to the "virtual" office space, a relatively new concept in Australia. The client asked her to highlight three key elements: location, secretarial service, and the boardroom. Her task was to meet this goal while connecting each key point as a holistic solution. While she could have taken a perhaps simpler route of creating three separate pieces, she found a way for these elements to work seamlessly as one clip.

[Melbourne Corporate Video // Urban Workspace ~ Business Profile](#) from [Preface Films](#) on [Vimeo](#).

A Professional's Touch

By and large, companies are glad to have a professional shaping the concept. Williams points out the advantage of displaying samples of his identity videos on his website. "Most of our clients have come to us because they've seen films we've done for other companies. They already know what we've done and what they like. It's a great starting point. They can imagine themselves in those films. Someone might call us and say, 'I saw the film you did for such and such. We want to do something like that.'"

Generally, Williams' projects take one of two directions--a more detailed treatment followed by storyboarding and scripting, or a testimonial-based video in which the script basically writes itself. An example of this style would be the identity video he produced for the Feastivities catering company, which features several interviews of event and wedding professionals who work with Feastivities as well as chefs

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features several interviews of event and wedding professionals who work with festivities as well as clients who work for the company.

Next week, we'll explore the process of developing treatments, storyboards, scripts, and getting those approved by clients.

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