

Television Production

I. Introduction

professional television production, regardless of whether it is done in a television studio or in the field is a complex creative process in which many people and machines interact to bring a variety of messages and information to a large audience.

The entire process of creating a program may involve developing a script, creating a budget, hiring creative talent, designing a set, and rehearsing lines before filming takes place. After filming, the post-production process may include video editing and the addition of sound, music, and optical effects.

The three basic forms of television programs are fictional, nonfictional, and live television. Fictional programs include daytime soap operas; situation comedies; dramatic series; and motion pictures made for television, including the mini-series (a multiple-part movie). The basic nonfictional, or reality, programs include game shows, talk shows, news, and magazine shows (informational shows exploring a variety of news stories in an entertainment format). Live television is generally restricted to sports, awards shows, news coverage, and several network daily talk shows.

Most television programs are produced by production companies unrelated to the television networks and licensed to the networks. The network creates the financing for the production by selling commercial time to sponsors.

II. The Production Team

The personnel involved in the production of a television program include creative talent such as actors, directors, writers, and producers as well as technical crew members such as camera operators, electrical technicians, and sound technicians.

The executive producer is responsible for the complete project and is usually the person who conceives the project and sells it to the network. The executive producer bears final responsibility for the budget and all creative personnel, including the writer, line producer, director, and major cast members. The line producer reports to the executive producer and is responsible for the shooting schedule, budget, crew, and all production logistics.

The writer or writers develop the script for each show. They often work during preproduction and rehearsals to correct problems encountered by the actors or directors, or to revise for budgetary or production considerations.

Reporting to the executive producer, the director helps choose actors, locations, and the visual design of the production, such as the style of sets and wardrobe. In addition, the

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director is responsible for the performances of the actors as well as all camera movements. After filming, the director edits the videotape to create what is known as a director's cut.

Actors work under the direction of the director to portray a character. Performers include talk-show hosts, newscasters, and sports announcers. Actors and performers are chosen by the producer, and most audition to earn their part. Once they are hired, actors memorize their lines from a script and usually participate in a rehearsal before the program is filmed, or shot. Performers may provide live commentary, or in the case of newscasters, they may read their lines from cue cards or a TelePrompTer—a machine that displays words on a screen.

The production manager is responsible for all physical production elements, including equipment, crew, and location. The assistant directors report to the director and are responsible for controlling the set, managing the extras, and in general carrying out the director's needs. The cinematographer, who operates the camera, is responsible for lighting the set and the care and movement of the camera.

The production designer, also called the art director, is responsible for the design, construction, and appearance of the sets and the wardrobe. Often the makeup artists and hair stylists report to the production designer. The key grip is responsible for the camera dolly (the platform that holds and moves the camera) and all on-set logistical support, such as camera mounts, which are used to affix the camera to a car or crane.

Videotape production involves a technical director, who is responsible for video recording, and video engineers, who are responsible for the maintenance and quality of the electronic equipment and their output.

III. Producing a Program

The creation of a television show begins with an idea for a program and the development of a script. A television network may also require a commitment from one or more well-known actors before financially committing to film a show. Producing a show involves three main stages: pre-production, principle photography, and post-production.

A. Pre-production Activities

Pre-production activities involve the planning, budgeting, and preparation needed before shooting begins. The pre-production period can last as long as a month or more for a movie, or just a week for a single episode of a situation comedy. Productions of great complexity, such as a telethon or a live-awards ceremony, may take months of pre-production. Three key people involved in pre-production are the production manager, director, and casting director. The production manager's first tasks are to produce a preliminary budget, hire the location manager, and locate key crew department leaders. The first essential production decisions are the location of shooting and a start-of-production date. The director's first

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activities are to review the script for creative changes, begin the casting process, and select assistant directors and camera operators. Subsequently, every decision involving cast, creative crew, location, schedule, or visual components will require the director's consultation or approval.

The culminating activity of the pre-production process is the final production meeting, attended by all crew members, producers, director, and often, the writer. Led by the director, the pre-production team reviews the script in detail scene by scene. Each element of production is reviewed and any questions answered. This meeting can last from two hours to a full day depending on the complexity of the shoot.

B. Principle Photography

Principle photography is the period in which all the tape or film needed for the project is shot. All television programs are shot using one of two basic methods of photography: single camera film production and multiple camera tape production. The single camera method is used to produce movies for television and most dramatic series. Multiple camera tape production is used to produce most situation comedies, soap operas, talk shows, game shows, news magazines, and live programs such as sports, awards shows, and the news. Some forms of programming such as music videos or reality programs (special interest news presented in an entertaining format) employ both methods, using single camera shooting for field pieces and multiple camera for in-studio footage.

The single camera film mode of production is virtually identical to the method of making theatrical movies. The script is broken down into individual scenes. Each scene is shot from a number of angles. The widest shot, which includes all the action, is called the master. Additional shots include closer angles of the characters, sometimes in groups of two or more, and almost always at least one angle of each actor alone. That shot can be either a medium shot (from waist to head), close-up (only head and shoulders), or extreme close-up (of the face only). Many times a scene includes insert shots (such as a close-up of a clock or a gun) or cutaways (a shot of the sky or tree or other visual that relates to the scene). Scenes are scheduled to be filmed according to production efficiency, not story progression. The film is pieced together in sequential order during post-production.

The multiple camera tape method is most suitable for shooting inside a studio. Three or four videotape cameras are focused on the action taking place on the set, and scenes are shot in sequence. Each camera operator works from a list of camera positions and framing requirements for the full scene. Together the cameras cover all required camera angles.

Using headsets to communicate with the camera crew, the director asks for camera adjustments during the filming of the scene and indicates to the technical director which cameras to use at each moment. The technical director ensures the selected shot is

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recorded on a master tape. The result is a fully edited, complete show, needing only sound effects, music, optical effects, and titles to be complete.

C. Post-Production Activities

Post-production begins with the completion of filming and continues until the project is delivered to the network for airing. The two main activities of post-production are the editing, or assembling, of video footage and the creation of a complete sound track.

Editing may begin during production. In single-camera shoots, the film from each day is reviewed at a later time by the director, producer, and network in the order in which it was shot. These films, called dailies, are then broken down and assembled into scenes by the editors. The first full assemblage is shown to the director, who makes further editing changes and creates the director's cut. Thereafter, the producer and the network make changes until a final cut is created.

The final cut is given to the sound department, which is responsible for preparing the music tracks, or recordings; sound effects; and dialogue tracks for final combination into one track. The final mixing of all the sound is called dubbing. During this period, the sound engineers will spot the music—that is, select the points at which music will be inserted—and musicians will write and record the music. Sound engineers also adjust dialogue recording for production quality and record new or replacement dialogue in a process called looping. Sound effects are also added at this time. The resulting dubbing session, which can take several days for a movie or just a few hours for a multiple camera tape production, can involve the combination of 5 to 25 separate sound tracks.

The final stage of post-production is the addition of optical effects, such as scene fade-outs or dissolves, insertion of titles and credits; creation of special visual effects, such as animations; and color correction.

The post-production process can take as long as eight weeks for a movie to three days for a situation comedy. Commonly, all optical effects, titles, and music are rolled in during the production of soap operas, game shows, or talk shows—greatly reducing post-production.

IV. Technological Advances

Prior to the advent of videotape in the 1950s, original programming for television was produced live or shot on film for future airing. Variety shows, such as "The Texaco Star Theatre" (1950-1951) with Milton Berle, "Your Show of Shows," (1950-1954) and "The Ed Sullivan Show," (1948-1971) and game shows were the most popular forms. "I Love Lucy" (1951-1957) pioneered the multiple camera style of shooting comedy. But television forms were still limited by the technology. The development of videotape made most live

entertainment programming unnecessary and not worth the risk of making mistakes on the air.

The 1960s witnessed great advances in film production technology, including smaller cameras, mobile units, and low-light film. Producing quality film programming became possible, and the film studios entered television production, utilizing their own stages and equipment. The 1970s and the advent of government network regulation of production and distribution opened production possibilities to entrepreneurs and individual creative people. Television producers, including Aaron Spelling, Norman Lear, and Mary Tyler Moore, formed their own companies, and the studio control of production and programming disappeared.

The 1980s and 1990s brought cable and satellite television. As audiences became more fragmented, programming that reached special interest groups, such as community news magazine programs, became profitable. Yet, because of the small audience size, low-cost production became an absolute necessity. In the 1990s advances in technology brought the video camera out of the studio and into the field, expanding television's visual possibilities and making today's magazine show economically possible.

TELEVISION PRODUCTION PROCESS

In order to make a television programme we need various equipments and people required to operate them for the production of a specific kind of programme.

Let us now discuss the equipments required for the production process.

Machinery and Equipment required for Production

Imagine you had to paint something on a canvas. Essentially, you will need a brush, colours and a palette. Similarly, if you want to make a good programme on television, you need some essential equipment like camera, lights, sound recorder etc. We can categorise the basic production elements as follows:

Camera

The most basic equipment in any and every production is the camera. In our lives also, many of us or our friends must have used the camera for capturing various events.

If you carefully look at any camera, you will see a lens in it. This lens selects a part of the visible environment and produces a small optical image. The camera is principally designed to convert the optical image, as projected by the lens, into an electrical signal, often called the video signal.

Lights

Have you ever tried to see something in dim light? It's difficult to see. Isn't it? Now imagine seeing in the dark. You must be wondering how it is possible to see in the dark? Just like the

human eye, the camera also cannot see without a certain amount of light. There comes the role of lights in television production. Lighting any object or individual has three main purposes:

1. To provide the television camera with adequate illumination for technically acceptable pictures.
2. To show the viewers what the objects shown on screen actually look like, say, for instance, if there was no light in the room, we would not have been able to see how the chair, table or anything else for that matter would look like. Lights also help us know when the event is taking place, in terms of the season and the time of the day.
3. To establish the general mood of the event.

Microphone

You may have seen a microphone being used by people to talk on various occasions. Have you ever wondered why we actually use microphones ?

Just as you have learnt that the camera converts what it sees into electrical signals, similarly the microphone converts sound waves into electrical energy or the audio signals. But the sounds that we produce are very feeble in nature and, therefore, cannot be sent to larger distances. Therefore it is amplified and sent to the loudspeaker which reconverts them into audible sound.

There are different types of microphones available for different purposes. Picking up a news anchor's voice, capturing the sounds of a tennis match, and recording a rock concert - all these require different types of microphones or a set of microphones.

Sound Recorder

In one of your earlier lessons, you have learnt that radio is an aural medium where as print relies on visual content. However, television combines compelling visuals with the personal immediacy of the radio. This audio visual character gives it great power in conveying realism in a convincing way.

Television sound/audio not only communicates information, but also contributes greatly to the mood and atmosphere of the visuals that come along with the audio on screen. The sound recorder essentially records the sound picked up by the microphone.

With a sound recorder, you can:

1. select a specific microphone or other sound input
2. amplify a weak signal from a microphone or other audio source for further processing
3. Control the volume and ensure the quality of sound
4. mix or combine two or more incoming sound sources

Videotape recorder

As we all know that television is an audio-visual medium, we need to record both audio and visual components. While the sound i.e. audio is recorded on sound recorders, visuals are recorded on video tape in a videotape recorder.

Most of the television programmes that we see are recorded on videotape or computer disk before they are actually telecast.

Post production editing Machine

As we have discussed earlier, before we present any food item on the dining table, we need to garnish it. Likewise in television programmes also, before we actually telecast a programme on television, we need to do the post production.

In the post production stage, you select from the recorded material, those visuals which seem to be most relevant and copy them onto another videotape in a specific order. This is called editing.

The post production editing equipment/machine helps to edit the programme after it is recorded. While many of the elaborate editing systems may help you to obtain the desired results, most of them cannot make the creative decisions for you. It is therefore important for you to know the desired result and shoot accordingly.

Again, the better the pre production and production stages of the programme are, the more easier becomes the post production stage.

KEY PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED IN TELEVISION PRODUCTION

Television production is a team effort. The team consists of creative talent as core members and there are other support staff also.

The members may be required to perform more than one role and that depends on the type of organisation or a production house, and the type and scale of the production. Regardless of the specific job functions of the various members, they all have to interact as a team. Just like you know in every sport, say like cricket, each member of the team is very important; similarly in television production also, every member plays a crucial role.

Television production is a team effort.

Let us now discuss the key roles that the team members in a television production need to play.

Producer

In television programme production, the head of the production who is called a producer is in charge of the entire production. The producer manages the budget and coordinates with the advertising agencies, actors and writers. The producer is also responsible for all the people working on the production front and for coordinating technical and non technical production elements.

Director

Who is a Director? In a television production, the Director is in-charge of directing the actors and technical operations. The Director is ultimately responsible for transforming a script into effective audio and video messages. Where the camera will be placed, what type of visuals need to be taken, where the actors will stand, all these are controlled by the director.

Production Assistant

The Production Assistant facilitates all that is required for the smooth execution of the television production. Both the producer and director are assisted by the production assistant.

Script Writer

One of the basic requirements of television production is the script. The script gives all the details of the programme such as the dialogues, the list of actors, details of the costumes, the mood required to be created for each scene and their respective locations. A script writer is the person who writes the script for the programme. In smaller productions, this task is generally done by the director and script writers are hired, if required.

Actors

Actors are the personnel who perform different roles according to the requirement of the script.

Anchor

An anchor is a person who presents a programme formally on television. For example, news anchors present news on television while there are also anchors who present reality shows like Sa re Ga Ma Pa and Indian Idol.

Cameraperson

Camerapersons operate the cameras. They often do the lighting also for smaller productions. They are also called videographers.

sound Recordist

A Sound recordist records the complete sound track (dialogue and sound effects) of the programme. The sound recordist is also responsible for background music involved throughout the programme.

Art Director

The Art Director is the incharge of the creative design aspects, which includes set design, location and graphics of the show.

Property Manager

The property manager maintains and manages the use of various set and properties. It is found in large productions only, otherwise the props are managed by the floor manager only.

Floor Manager

A Floor Manager is in charge of all the activities on the studio floor. He coordinates talents, conveys the director's instructions and supervises floor personnel. He is also called floor director or stage manager.

Costume Designer

The costume designer designs and sometimes even constructs various costumes for dramas, dance numbers and children's shows.

STUDIO AND OUTDOOR RECORDING

You may have noticed that the programmes which you see on television are either shot inside the rooms i.e. closed areas, or are shot in open spaces, or as we call outdoor areas. Thus, the recording of all the programmes that we see on television can be done, in broadly two ways, either inside the studio or an outdoor location.

The recording done essentially within the four walls of the studio for the production of television programmes is known as studio recording. Whereas, any recording that involves shooting outside the studio is known as outdoor recording.

Live television programmes and Recorded Television Programmes

Have you ever seen a cricket match on television which was actually being played at the same time in some other country? Or may be the Republic Day Parade which takes place in New Delhi? All these programmes are telecast 'live' on television.

The success of a live programme entirely depends upon the performance of the talents and the crew members involved. Recorded programmes have a better chance for success as there is scope to go for retakes to get desired visuals with greater satisfaction. But on the other hand, live programmes can be made speedily. Live programmes generate a lot of excitement in the minds of viewers.

Recorded programmes have a better chance of marketing as such programmes can be polished and edited later, but they generally lack the excitement of live programmes. No matter what the programme format may be, live or recorded, the pre-production research and paper work is a must in television programme production.