

When you consider becoming a customer of any company, chances are you want to know what others are saying about them first. Companies get this, and are responding in increasing numbers to try and capture what their happy customers are saying on video for the web. The problem? Customer testimonial interviews can be very challenging to shoot, and when it comes to what people are saying about your product, the last thing you want is a dog barking during their best quotes.

In episode 103 of SparkPlug, Kelly Shores lays out ten tips in five minutes (okay, he only got through nine in the video...) on how to shoot an effective interview. Short and sweet, these tips will help you avoid some of the pitfalls and come out with a well-produced video that makes a good case for why people should use your company's services.

1 Get Their Info

Ask for a business card and ask your subject to identify themselves on camera – this allows you to match the face to the name later...especially if you are doing multiple interviews or if you won't be the one doing the final editing. If your subject's name is Xander K. Fauntleroy, Information Technology Systems Strategic Analyst for InfoTechSysStratCo, you (or your editor) will be infinitely grateful for that little 2.5x3 piece of paper. Tape the cards to the media you are shooting on (dv tape, P2 card, etc) or put them in the same case /bag as said media, to ensure that the cards make it to the cutting room along with the footage.

2 Make Them Comfortable

In a typical interview scenario, your subject tries to intelligently answer a barrage of questions while basking in hundreds of watts of toasty warm lights. Not exactly the most comfortable of situations, so try and put them at ease by offering a few amenities. Water will soothe their throat and their nerves, and will keep them cool under the hot lights.

Other amenities to consider are kleenex (not just to stop sniffing but in case they need to dab their forehead) and makeup powder (to stop glare).

3 No Rockin' Out

Put the interviewee in a chair that does not swivel, rock or otherwise move. People tend to be a bit nervous on camera and it's natural for them to fidget. A chair that they can move will only exacerbate the fidgeting! What's worse is that you might be too busy to notice during the shoot, and will get quite the surprise when your editor calls you in to let you know that your video looks like an aerobics workout routine.

So play it safe and keep them in a chair with four legs. If you are stuck using a swivel chair, plan to keep a close eye on their movements, and perhaps suggest that they cross their legs, which will reduce their ability to rock back and forth.

4 Keep the Answers in Context

Ask the person you are interviewing to repeat the question in their answer. While they don't have to repeat the question word for word, they should say enough about the question to make their answer stand alone, in case the audience does not hear the original question. So if your question is, "How does Product XYZ help your company?" Their answer should sound something like, "Product XYZ helps my company by..."



5 Control Their Sightline

When you are interviewing customers for a testimonial video, the last thing you want is for them to have shifty eyes. It will make what they're saying seem disingenuous. So when you sit down to ask them questions, let them know that they can treat it like a discussion with the interviewer, and to avoid looking at the camera. Another challenge is if other people are going to be in the room. Make sure they are out of the interviewee's line of sight before you begin.

6 Light Well

Bad lighting will ruin an otherwise perfect video. Granted, you can't always use professional grade equipment (although consider renting some if you are conducting several interviews), but you can do a lot with a little. First, use a three-point light setup (key, fill, and backlight... a quick google will tell you more). Sometimes you may have only one or two artificial lights... in that case it may be better to position your subject near a window and use the daylight as your key light. Direct sunlight will be uncomfortable, so try and find a window that has ambient sunlight (south-facing windows are particularly nice for this).

7 Get Good Audio

The only thing that will make a video seem more unprofessional than one badly lit is one with bad audio. Good audio is a MUST! If possible, use a lavalier microphone (a wireless mic that clips to the subject's lapel)... if you have no other options, use the built-in camera microphone. In that case, make sure that they are physically close to the camera, turn your input levels down, and have them speak up so that background noise is less apparent. Also try to record 10 seconds of room tone to use in editing to mask unwanted noise.

8 Turn Off All Phones!

Muting cell phones is not enough, as they may still cause interference with audio devices. The noise that they create can be subtle until you get to editing, so it's better to play offensively on this and just ask that everyone shut everything off. Also, don't forget to put any desk or office phones on "do not disturb."

9 Get It On-Site

Bring a flash drive and ask your interviewees to load it up with useful files while you are on site...it's much more difficult to get it after you leave. Things like logos, still images, company-shot video, etc. can be very useful in post production. Yes, they'll assure you that they can send whatever you need "later," and yes, more often than not you'll never see a thing.

10 Shoot B-Roll at the Location

While you are there, ask if you can get video footage of the facility. Shots of the interviewee interacting with other members of his/her team, exterior signage, warehouse/manufacturing shots, etc. help tell a more complete story about the company or organization and help add a more interesting visual dimension to the interview. The shots also help cover gaffes in the interview that you need to cut out.

So there you have it. Ten easy tips to help you get that perfect interview. If you have any have questions (like who is Xander K. Fauntleroy), please e-mail us at sparkplug@sparksight.com!

