
Video Length vs Cost: What's the Real Question?

We get lots of questions from clients about the specifics of video production, but the most common question we get is whether shorter videos are less expensive, and if the length affects the effectiveness of a video. At its root, this is a question about cost-effectiveness. Can you spend less and still get a great video? The answer to that is a little more complicated than a “yes” or a “no.” Let’s look at length first, then examine the cost.

The Long and Short of It

A video of any length is capable of being effective, provided that the content is compelling and well-crafted. As we’ve said in our blog series about return on investment, determining your audience is a hugely important factor. Sure, a five- to ten-minute video may be a better choice for explaining a more complicated concept or idea, but you’re probably going to lose some viewers along the way. The ones who will stay, though, are sure to be the ones who truly care about what it is you have to say and who are more likely to support your cause. But if you want to reach the widest audience, shorter videos have proven to be more effective at retaining an audience to the end. According to video hosting site wistia.com, 50% more people will finish a one-minute video than a two-minute video. That’s a huge difference! But, they also state that the same percentage of people will engage with a four- to five-minute video as a five- to ten-minute video. So if you’re going long, go long.

At What Cost?

Now, on to the dollars and cents of the matter. The length of a video doesn’t determine its cost, necessarily. The content of the video is a more important factor in that determination. Will your video require multiple locations, the perfect looking set, and have to accommodate work schedules and busy backgrounds? Those are all factors that increase not decrease cost. Boiling it down, the cost of the video is tied to how many crew members and hours it takes to plan and produce and edit, and longer videos may (but don’t always) require more time. That 15-second YouTube pre-roll video we create might just require two vehicles for our crew and three locations filmed across a full-day.

So, long videos or short videos? Well, the long and short of it is that the price doesn’t hinge on the length, and neither does the effectiveness, necessarily. It all depends on the purpose, audience, and distribution of the video. Although it is important to be conscious of the viewer’s attention span, there are many techniques we employ to ensure even a five minute video is watched to the end. The actual cost difference is negligible between a four-minute video and a one-minute video, but the cost-effectiveness of that footage could make all the difference. Asking who your intended audience is may be a more important question toward determining that cost-effectiveness in the end.