

Applying the 13-Minute Rule to Law Videos

A Forensic Producer's Guide to Powerful and Effective Video Exhibits

by Chris Ballard

With the implosion of cable TV, the internet and YouTube, the number of videos being watched everywhere and at anytime these days has dramatically risen. This phenomenon has resulted in shorter attention spans of the viewers of all these videos and those viewers include claims adjusters and jurors, the crucial audience that you want to make sure understand, comprehend and react to your video exhibit. You must be mindful of this fact when it comes time to editing your video exhibits for trial or mediation.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

This old axiom becomes so true when producing a powerful video exhibit. Studies have shown that jurors remember only 15 percent of what they hear, but up to 95 percent of information they



see and touch. Attorneys have been trained for years to “make a proper and complete record” and some still feel that requires both audio and video in regard to producing videotape evidence. There are many actions captured on videotape that do not need any words. In fact, in some dramatic scenes, it becomes distracting and weakens the effect of that clip of video. A paraplegic trying to get back into his wheelchair after having accidentally fallen out; a woman with severe burn injuries to

her face trying to put lipstick on; a quadriplegic father sitting in his chair on the sidelines while watching his kids play soccer, all do not need words to explain the damages that the viewer is

seeing and being asked to evaluate. Keep this in mind and highlight these sections when you log all your raw footage for your particular video exhibit.

WHEN A DAY IN THE LIFE *ISN'T*

Producing a Day in the Life trial exhibit is a perfect example of the 13-minute rule. With a catastrophically injured client undergoing therapies and full-time care, you should have a total of about 3-4 hours of raw footage. You can't show an adjuster or juror all that footage, so you instruct your video production team to edit the raw footage into a trial product. Depending on the editor, you may get a dynamic, compelling, thought provoking 13-18 minute video that knocks the socks off your jurors, or you may get a 45-minute snoozer that loses anyone's interest after 5 minutes. Which would you prefer?

FOCUS...EDIT...FOCUS...EDIT...FOCUS AGAIN

Always demand a rough edit of your video evidence from your production team then start showing it around for critique and comments. Many videos we have shown to focus groups in the past have proven the 13-minute rule over and over again. Granted a courtroom allows you a little more leeway, but don't let your video evidence run over 20 minutes long. If there is no possibility your video cannot be reduced to less than 20 minutes, then ask for a break after 10 minutes, then restart the viewing. And that break can be from the judge, a witness on the stand that the video is being introduced into evidence with or your opening or closing statement. We all live in a sound bite and snippet world. The 30-second sound bite has been dumbed down to 10 seconds thanks to our now fast-paced media world. Just look to the professionals for further proof as you watch long format news programs on TV like 60 Minutes, Dateline, 20/20 and the rest. The maximum length of just one of their stories ranges from 13-18 minutes, depending on commercial breaks, but is never longer than 18 minutes.

So next time when it comes to editing together your video evidence for trial or mediation, put a KISS on your evidence by following these time and editing considerations and you will see that your audience is more retained, more attuned to your evidence and more likely to react favorably to your client's cause.

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