

Communicating Ideas with Film, Video, and Multimedia: A Practical Guide to Information Motion-Media

Excerpt

Key Idea 1

I'm sorely disappointed at the state of our profession, the information motion media profession. We're not doing so well. Far too many of our films, videos, and multimedia shows are amateurish in concept, technically inept, and fail in their primary objective of communicating ideas to our audience. Unfortunately, many of today's films, videos, and multimedia shows sparkle with "creative" whiz-bang-and-pop multichannel surround sound, but they don't communicate much except, perhaps, "Gee, isn't technology wonderful?" Rapidly advancing technology has made it so easy to produce a film, video, or multimedia show that we no longer have to think very hard about it. We've lost track of what we're up to: we're not supposed to be producing films, videos, and multimedia shows; we're supposed to be communicating ideas to our target audiences, implanting our messages firmly in their minds so that when the lights come on, they will speak, think, or act the way we want them to.

We're in the communication business. All else is irrelevant. We use film, video, and multimedia simply as the carriers of our encoded messages. It's the message and our audience that count. That's what this book is about: how to optimize communication using motion-media (integrated sight and sound kinetic media). This book is not about technology. There's not one thought about f stops, key lights, chrominance, bit rate, gamma curves, white balance, decibels, auteur concepts, or the Strasberg acting method. If you're looking for the latest technical "how to," this tome is not it. Rather, this book takes an in depth look at just what our profession is about<-->communication. It's my perspective<-->part theory, part philosophy, analysis, history, personal opinion, and application. In this book, I'm including the entire genre of information motion media whose purpose is to inform rather than to entertain. Excluded are narrative motion-media (theatrical and television storytelling).

Key Idea 2.

All factors being equal, we optimize the power of our communication medium when the messages are contained in a relevant filmic design fashioned by carefully crafted montage editing. **Motion media is a kinetic visual medium.** Motion media is not a written-word medium or an oral medium. We use words sparingly. We use narration or dialogue only to tell the audience what it needs to know but cannot perceive from the visuals.

Key Idea 3

We need to unleash the power of our communication medium, from script to screen monitor, with creative effectiveness, competence, and understanding. We must use our sight and sound kinetic media to communicate relevant messages that stick in the minds of the target audience and cause them to achieve the goals that are set for our shows: goals that are *fitting*, *realistic*, and *worthwhile*. In other words, in order to communicate effectively, we must engender empathy in our audience. The audience needs to identify with a personal experience, either vicariously or intellectually, with the people, emotions, places, and situations that we're depicting in our show's *mise en scène*. The more empathetic

our message is, the more effective our communication. We must understand to the depth of our being that we are in the communication profession, not the film, video, or multimedia profession. **Actually, we're in the psychology profession—we manipulate the minds of our audience to achieve the show's goals.**

Key Idea 4

Viewing is the key. The human visual system is an incredibly powerful information processing device. For most of us, audible words play a strictly subordinate role in the reception of information. And audible words should play a similarly subordinate role in our films, videos, and multimedia shows. Some of the best shows I've seen over the years<-->those that engender maximum communication and win top awards in competitions<-->are those with no, or only minimal, narration or dialogue.

An extensive series of psychological studies at Pennsylvania State University have given us some empirical evidence that aural information should not exceed 20 to 30 percent of the total information content of a show. Thus, shows that encode the vast majority of their information in the kinetic visuals have the best potential to be highly effective communication tools.

Key Idea 5

Creativity is a vastly misunderstood and misused value, whose effectiveness in forwarding the show's objective often is in inverse ratio to its noticeability. *True creativity (effectiveness) is seldom tricky, bizarre, spectacular, or obviously 'clever.'* Creativity is more often basic and deliberately concealed. If our shows are to be successful communication tools, we must wholeheartedly embrace this tenet and integrate it into our shows.

Key Idea 6

To produce successful motion-media shows, it's essential that we

- have an in-depth knowledge of the medium's *language, grammar, and syntax*.
- know the history and background of our profession--learn from the masters.
- employ effective communication techniques and keen psychology manipulation.