

GEAR

# THE BIG PICTURE

## A memorable video can be the key to taking your act to the next level

Back in the day, blowing up big often began with a lucky live gig in which an A&R rep happened to be in the audience. Or having your demo land on the right record exec's desk. Today, artists from Justin Bieber and OK Go to Carly Rae Jepsen and PSY have catapulted to stardom thanks to clips on YouTube, Vimeo and other video websites. In fact, it's hard to find current artists who don't have a bounty of videos online. Even if you don't hit the big time, getting video out is a new promotional requirement. But how can musicians create videos without spending thousands on gear and production? And what are the best ways to make sure it's seen among the sea of others out there?

For help, we turned to experts Todd Cassetty and Tom Moore. Cassetty is a veteran Nashville-based filmmaker whose credits include TV movies and videos for superstar Taylor Swift and *American Idol* winner Scott McCreery. Cassetty also completed the acclaimed documentary, *5 Days in Denver*, which captures the compelling tale of protestors at 2008's DNC convention. Moore is an accomplished New York-based director whose music video production credits include indie artists Rachael Sage, Seth Glier and Amy Speace.

### When should an act get into video?

CASSETTY: It's vital to start creating video content as soon as you decide that you're

serious about becoming a successful music act. Today, when people want to find out about an artist they go online. If they can't find anything, they lose interest and may never think about you again. MOORE: People start conversations with "Hey, did you see that video?" It's got to be a first step for every serious act, right after getting a bass player.

### What if you have a limited budget?

CASSETTY: When you're talking about the traditional music video, expectations for production values are high—we've all become accustomed to a certain quality and standard. But if it's going to be a grungy, real look at what's going on in your world, people will

accept it. The barriers to entry are lower. MOORE: *The Blair Witch Project* and others like it aren't really cinematic films, but they're interesting and fun. I think audiences are forgiving that a project is not perfect and beautiful. If it's a funny idea, if it's a cool visual, then you nailed it. You see that a lot in doc-style video. The key thing is that you've got to have interesting people to make it worth watching.

### What cameras do you use?

CASSETTY: When we did Taylor Swift's Thanksgiving Day special for NBC we used extremely high-end Sony cameras. We needed to ensure it was top-of-the-line broadcast quality. But for lower-budget shoots we use a DSLR-style camera. There are a lot of DSLR cameras in the marketplace right now that are both photo- and video-capable and do a really good job with decent-quality lenses. MOORE: Smoothness is key, especially with these SLR cameras. Because they're so light they pickup almost every shake. It's a still camera so you have to build it all out. But when you have the right budget and all the right prime lenses, matte boxes and all that stuff, all of those things heighten the look of your film, big time.

### How about more affordable gear?

CASSETTY: The technology has gotten quite good. iPhones and most Sony Cybershot cameras will shoot video that's fairly decent. So if you want to just document what's going on with you as an artist, you don't need to make any major investment in gear.

MOORE: When you don't have the budget, that's when you come up with creative ideas. I remember this one project, I got dragged behind a car on a Flexible Flyer sled. We got some pretty good tracking shots like that. Not that I recommend it, but I have friends who've borrowed shopping carts and wheelchairs. If you don't have the budget, make do with what you have.

### What other options do new acts have?

CASSETTY: Consider reaching out to a local film school. Many cities have film schools with students who need to create content. Those students usually have access to pretty good gear, and they can help you create some sort of music video that can compete professionally but can be accomplished on a reasonable budget.



Rachael Sage

### What's key about making a video?

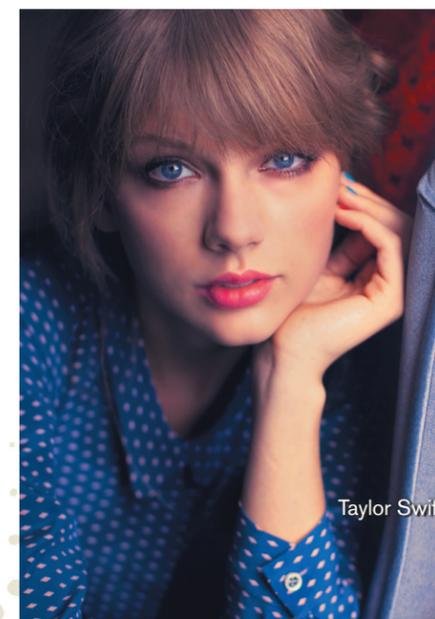
MOORE: Know your aesthetic. Sometimes you just go with the simplest thing. Like Rachael Sage's "Big Star." We wanted to keep it fun and light, so I had a prop maker create a big star that was sturdy enough to carry around

## 'It's vital to start creating video content as soon as you decide you're serious about becoming a successful music act.'

—Todd Cassetty

New York. You don't need a million bucks to do a cool thing. The cleverer, the better.

CASSETTY: In this day and age, behind-the-scenes docu-style is almost more important



Taylor Swift

### What are the best ways to use video for promotion?

MOORE: Facebook it, YouTube it, blog it, send it to music video festivals, to record labels—get it out there. The more you have your videos in different places, the more bang you get for your buck.

CASSETTY: You've got to do all the baseline social media steps. But to take it outside of your own social media, blogs are a great start. Find the blogs that specialize in your style of music. Reach out, find the names of the people who write for those blogs, and email them links to some video content. You'll be surprised at how many will email you back—bloggers need content. A lot of times, they want to spotlight new bands that turn them on. If they're passionate about your music, they'll start talking about it.

—Phil Selman

that the traditional music video. When Scotty McCreery came to Nashville after winning *American Idol*, we started documenting his whole experience post-*Idol*. We just started capturing a lot of content and some "getting to know you" kind of pieces. As it turned out, we ended up creating a couple of TV specials. I recommend filming anything that showcases the personality and vibe of an artist. Whether it's the band goofing around in the studio, on the road traveling to gigs, or performing for a small group at a house party, that content will enable the world at large to get to know you.

### Any serious video mistakes to avoid?

CASSETTY: Don't shoot a music video too early. Unless you've built a fan base or landed a major-label deal, spending a lot of money on a professional music video initially is not going to offer a good return on your investment. You're better off going for a quantity play with a lot of content than a quality play with one big music video. Keep it real, especially when creating docu-style content. Show the act doing stuff they really like. People will gravitate toward that kind of authenticity.

MOORE: If you produce something, share it among your peers and people you respect. Get a second or third opinion before releasing it. If you're not a filmmaker, don't force yourself to be one. I think musicians can stay musicians and be wonderful at their craft. Trust your filmmaker and your editor—they're giving it all their heart and soul.