

SLATEBOOK • EDITION ONE

The first five films

Every company ends up making the same five films. Most make them in the wrong order and pay for it twice. This is the right order, what each one costs, and which ones you should be making yourself.

WHY YOU'RE READING THIS

You asked us for a quote and the number was too big. That happens a lot, and it is usually the honest answer rather than a soft no — most companies don't need a production company yet, and hiring one early is an efficient way to spend a great deal of money on a film nobody watches.

But “not yet” is useless on its own. So this is what we'd tell you if we were sitting in your office: what to film and in what order, what each thing should cost, how to make the early ones yourself without them looking cheap, and how to tell when it's genuinely time to bring in a crew.

Nothing here is a teaser. If you use all of it and never hire us, it has still done its job.

01 **The five films, in the order they pay off**

And which of them you should not be paying anyone for

02 **Shooting it yourself without it looking cheap**

Sound, light, framing, camera, performance — in that order

03 **What video costs, and why**

A filming day line by line, and what the £1,500 quote leaves out

04 **Seven habits that prevent bad films**

Most bad films weren't badly shot

05 **When it's actually time to hire a crew**

Five signals for, four against, and seven questions to ask anyone

— **The one-page brief**

Fill it in before you speak to anybody

PART 01

The five films

They only pay off in one order

There’s no rule that you need all five. But this is the order in which they earn their money, and the order in which each one makes the next easier. Jumping straight to number four is the most expensive common mistake we see.

WHERE YOU ARE NOW	MAKE	WHO MAKES IT	ROUGH OUTLAY
Pre-revenue, or first few customers	The explainer	You	Under £500
You have customers who'd vouch for you	The proof film	You or a freelancer	£0–£1,500
Steady demand, an audience that listens	The content engine	In-house	£1,500–£5,000 kit
Selling cold, hiring hard, or raising	The brand film	Production company	£10,000+
More than six films a year	The system	Partner or in-house team	Retained

Indicative UK figures for 2026. Kit outlay is a one-off you keep; production figures are per film.

01

The explainer

What you do, in sixty seconds.

WHEN

From the day you have something to sell.

WHY

It isn't really a film, it's infrastructure — the deck, the homepage, the cold email, the conference stand. Most people won't read three paragraphs about you. They'll give you a minute.

WHO MAKES IT

You do. A phone, a quiet room, a decent microphone and a script you've said out loud twenty times. The value is entirely in the clarity of the words, and nobody outside your company can write those yet — you're still working out what you sell.

THE TEST

Can someone who's never heard of you repeat what you do after watching once?

The proof film

A customer saying it worked.

WHEN

The day you have one genuinely happy customer.

WHY

Pound for pound this is the highest-returning film there is, and it stays that way for the life of the company. You saying you're good is marketing. A customer saying it is evidence. At this stage one honest proof film will out-earn a beautiful brand film by a distance.

WHO MAKES IT

A competent freelancer, or you if you're careful. The hard part isn't the camera — it's the interview. Getting a real person to describe a specific change, with a number in it, instead of a paragraph of adjectives.

THE TEST

Does it contain a figure, or at least a clear before and after?

The content engine

Small films, made on a schedule, forever.

WHEN

Once you have a market that already pays you some attention.

WHY

Volume is a different job from quality and it rewards consistency over craft. The company that films something every fortnight beats the company that films something beautiful every eighteen months — not sometimes, reliably.

WHO MAKES IT

In-house, permanently. Buy the kit once, teach one person to use it properly, and protect their time. Outsourcing volume is how a content programme quietly becomes a quarterly invoice for four films.

THE TEST

Could you keep this up for a year without anyone dreading it?

The brand film

What the company is, and why it exists.

WHEN

When you're selling to people who've never heard of you, hiring people who have other options, or raising from people who see fifty decks a week.

WHY

This is the one that's actually difficult. It needs a point of view, a script that survives a boardroom, a crew who can light a face so it looks like a person rather than a hostage, and an editor who can find the film inside eight hours of rushes. There is no version of this that a phone in a meeting room does well.

WHO MAKES IT

A production company. This is the threshold — the point where what you're buying is judgement, not equipment.

THE TEST

Does it say something a competitor couldn't also say about themselves?

The system

Video as a channel, not a project.

WHEN

When you're commissioning more than about six films a year and they don't look like they came from the same company.

WHY

Past a certain volume the problem stops being “make a good film” and becomes “make forty things that share a look, on a schedule, without three people chasing files in a shared drive”. That's an operating problem wearing a creative costume.

WHO MAKES IT

A production partner on a retained programme, or a properly staffed in-house team. Both work. Continuing to do it ad hoc doesn't.

THE TEST

If your best video person left tomorrow, would the output survive the month?

PART 02

Shooting it yourself without it looking cheap

Three of the five films above are yours to make. What follows is ordered by what actually gives amateur video away — which is not the order most people worry about. Almost everyone starts with the camera. The camera is fourth.

FIRST

Sound, and it isn't close

- An audience will forgive a soft picture indefinitely. They will not forgive an echo. Bad audio reads as amateur within about four seconds, and unlike bad light there is no fixing it afterwards.
- Get the microphone off the camera and within a foot of the speaker's mouth. A £75 clip-on wireless mic beats a £2,000 camera's onboard mic every single time.
- Record somewhere soft. Carpet, curtains, sofas, bookshelves, coats, people. Not a glass meeting room and not an empty white box.
- Kill the air conditioning, the fridge, the fan and every phone in the building. You stop hearing them a minute after walking in. The microphone never does.
- Record thirty seconds of the room saying nothing before you start. Whoever edits this will thank you.
- Wear headphones while recording. Not afterwards — during. This is the single highest-value habit on the list.

SECOND

Light

- One big soft source beats three small hard ones. A north-facing window on an overcast day is free, and better than most lights people buy.
- Put it off to one side and slightly above eye level. Straight-on is flat, from below is a horror film, directly overhead is a police interview.
- Never sit someone in front of a window. The camera exposes for the window and your contributor becomes a silhouette.
- Office ceiling lights on their own make everyone look tired and slightly green. If you've got another source, turn them off.

THIRD

Framing

- Camera at the subject's eye height. Not sitting on a desk pointing up their nose.
- Eyes on the upper third of the frame, with a little space in the direction they're facing.
- Put distance behind them. A face flat against a wall is an ID photo; three metres of room behind them starts to look like a film.
- Have them talk to a person just beside the lens, not down it — unless they're addressing the audience directly, in which case straight down the lens and nowhere else. Eyes drifting between the two is the tell.

FOURTH

The camera, which matters least

- A current phone shoots a better picture than a broadcast camera did fifteen years ago. It is not your problem.
- Lock exposure and focus before you roll. The most commonly ruined take in the world is a phone quietly re-focusing halfway through a good answer.
- 4K, 25fps, in the UK. Don't zoom — move the camera, or don't move at all.
- Avoid portrait or cinematic modes on a talking head. They chew the edges of glasses and hair, and it's visible.
- Frame wide enough that a vertical crop still works, or shoot both.

FIFTH

The performance, which nobody prepares for

- Send the questions in advance. Don't send the answers, and don't let anyone write a script for a person who isn't an actor.
- Ask the question, then say nothing. The three seconds after someone thinks they've finished is where the usable line lives.
- Ask them to answer in full sentences that absorb the question, so the film works without you in it.
- Three takes, use the third. The first is nerves, the second is over-corrected.
- Tell people what to wear the day before: no thin stripes, no logos, nothing brand new and white. Have water and a mirror on hand.

LAST

Then get ten shots of anything

- Cutaways are what let you fix everything else — a fluffed line, a cough, two answers that belong together. Hands, screens, the door, the walk in, the coffee, the whiteboard, the sign outside. Ten seconds each, locked off, no zooming. You will use every one of them and wish you'd shot more.

Three kits

Approximate UK prices including VAT, September 2026. The prices move. The shape doesn't.

About £300 The phone kit - The phone you already own - A wireless clip-on mic — a Rode Wireless Micro is around £75 - A small LED panel and stand - A tripod and a phone clamp Enough for the explainer and most proof films. Genuinely enough.	About £1,500 The one-person kit - A used mirrorless body with a decent codec - One fast prime lens - A two-channel wireless mic kit - One soft light on a stand - A fluid-head tripod, fast cards, a backup drive The kit for a content engine. Buy used — two-generation-old bodies are where the value sits.	About £5,000 The in-house kit - A dedicated video body — a Sony FX30 is around £1,470 body-only - Two lenses - A two-light kit with modifiers - Proper audio and a recorder - A monitor, a real tripod, storage and a backup routine Only worth it once filming is actually somebody's job.
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The shoot-day checklist

- ☐ Batteries charged — camera, mic, phone
- ☐ Location booked, and someone can unlock it
- ☐ Questions printed, not on the phone you're filming with
- ☐ Test recording watched back on headphones before anyone arrives
- ☐ Ten cutaways shot before you pack up
- ☐ Cards formatted, drive has space
- ☐ Contributor told time, address, parking, what to wear
- ☐ Room made quiet — AC, fridge, fans, notifications
- ☐ Water, tissues, a mirror
- ☐ Footage copied twice before you leave the building

PART 03

What video costs, and why

One company quotes £14,000 and another quotes £1,500, and it's reasonable to assume somebody is taking you for a ride. Usually nobody is. They're selling two different products and only one of them has been explained to you. Here's the anatomy of a single filming day.

LINE	TYPICAL UK RANGE	WHAT IT ACTUALLY BUYS
Producing and pre-production	£1,200–£3,000	Script, schedule, location, contributors, permissions, kit list, call sheet. One to three days of work before anyone picks up a camera.
Director	£750–£1,100 / day	Someone deciding what the film is while everyone else is solving problems.
Camera — DoP and glass	£900–£1,400 / day	The person who makes it look like something, and the lenses that let them.
Sound	£600–£750 / day	The reason it doesn't sound like a webinar.
Lighting and grip	£450–£800 / day	Control. The difference between “we filmed it” and “we made it”.
Additional kit	£300–£1,200 / day	Lights, audio, monitors, a second camera so you're not shooting the same angle twice.
Travel, parking, catering	£150–£500	Unavoidable, and always missing from a DIY budget.
Edit	£450–£650 / day	Two to five days for a film of any substance. Not an afternoon.

LINE	TYPICAL UK RANGE	WHAT IT ACTUALLY BUYS
Grade, mix, subtitles, versions	£700–£1,800	The last ten per cent that viewers register as “professional” without being able to name it.
Insurance, contingency, overhead	10–20%	Public liability, kit cover, and the fact that a company continues to exist on the days it isn't shooting.

Indicative UK market ranges for 2026, not a quotation. Every line moves with scope, and a small film will not carry all of them.

The other rule of thirds

A film that goes well is roughly a third preparation, a third shooting, a third post-production. If a quote is almost entirely a shoot-day rate, the prep and the post haven't been priced — which means either you are doing them, or they are not happening. Both are legitimate. Neither is usually explained.

So why is the other quote £1,500?

It isn't a scam. It's a real product with specific things removed, and it's worth knowing which ones:

- One person doing all five jobs, which means the camera is unattended while they fix the sound.
- No pre-production, so the script gets written on the day, in the room, by you.
- One take of everything, because there is no time for a second.
- No grade, no mix, library music, one round of changes.
- No insurance, no second copy of the rushes, no backup plan.
- No producer — so when the day overruns, that is your problem.

For an internal update, a recruitment ad or a talking head for LinkedIn, that is frequently the correct purchase and we'd tell you to make it. For the film on your homepage that has to work on somebody who has never heard of you, it usually isn't. The question is never *is this expensive*. It's *what is this film's job, and what does it cost us if it doesn't do it*.

Three costs almost everyone forgets

Revisions	Two rounds is standard. “Unlimited revisions” isn't a generous supplier, it's an unpriced risk — it comes out of someone's evenings first and out of the quality second.
Versions	One film is rarely one deliverable. 16:9, 9:16, 1:1, subtitled, captioned, sixty seconds, thirty, fifteen, clean and with an endcard. Agree the list before the shoot; adding to it afterwards is where budgets go.
Music and rights	Library music is cheap. Music anyone recognises is not, and “we'll sort that later” is how a finished film sits unreleased for a month.

PART 04

Seven habits that prevent bad films

Most bad films weren't badly shot. They were badly briefed, approved by too many people, or asked to do three jobs at once. Production discipline costs almost nothing and accounts for most of the outcome. These are in order, because the order is the point.

- 01 Write the brief before the script**

One page. Who it's for, what you want them to do afterwards, where it plays, how long, when you need it, what it costs. If you can't fill in “what should they do afterwards”, stop — that's the actual problem, and a film won't solve it.
- 02 Agree the deliverables in writing**

Names, durations, aspect ratios, captions, dates. This single page prevents more arguments than any contract you will sign.

03

Lock the script before the shoot

Changing your mind in the room costs hours. Changing it in the edit costs days, and often can't be done at all — because the shot you now need doesn't exist and everyone has gone home.

04

Appoint one decision-maker

Not a committee. One person who can say yes on the day and yes again at the edit. The most expensive object on any production is a second opinion that arrives late.

05

Make a call sheet, even for two people

Time, address, parking, who's coming, what's being shot, phone numbers, what to wear. Fifteen minutes of typing, and it's the difference between a shoot and a gathering.

06

Give notes once, timecoded, from one person

“At 0:42, cut the pause” is a note. “Can it feel more us?” is a conversation that should have happened at the brief, and having it now costs a week.

07

Name and store the files as if you'll need them in two years

Because you will — for the next film, the pitch, the anniversary, the sale of the company. Date, client, project, version. Two copies, one of them somewhere else.

The five things that actually go wrong

- Nobody wrote a brief, so the film ends up being about everything.
- The contributor wasn't prepped, and spends the day reading a script badly.
- Nobody visited the location, and it turns out to be next door to a building site.
- Approval arrives from someone who was in none of the conversations.

- The film is delivered and there was never a plan for where it goes. This is the most common of the five and by far the most expensive, because it makes everything before it worth nothing.

PART 05

When it's actually time to hire a crew

Two of these signals and it's probably time. One, and it probably isn't.

HIRE SOMEONE WHEN

- The film has to work on somebody who has never met you.
- The cost of it being mediocre is higher than the cost of it being good. A recruitment film that doesn't land costs you a hire. A homepage film that doesn't land costs you every visitor.
- It has to exist on a date you can't move.
- Nobody in-house has three clear days, and pretending otherwise has already cost you a month.
- You need six things that look like each other, not one thing.

DON'T, WHEN

- What you want is volume. Buy kit and train somebody — it's cheaper and it compounds.
- You haven't decided what the film is for. No production company can decide that for you, and the good ones will say so on the call.
- It's a one-off for an internal audience. A freelancer is the right answer and roughly a fifth of the price.
- You're doing it because a competitor did. That's their brief, not yours.

What to ask before you hire anyone

1. Can I see something you made for a company my size — not your biggest client?
2. Who is actually on the shoot, and are they your people or booked in on the day?
3. What's in the quote, and what's extra?
4. How many rounds of changes, and what happens after that?
5. Who owns the footage and the final film, and from when?
6. What happens if it rains, the contributor cancels, or we overrun?
7. Can I speak to a client from about two years ago?

That last one is the good question. Anyone can produce a delighted client from last month.

APPENDIX — TAKE THIS TO ANYONE

The one-page brief

Fill this in before you speak to a freelancer, an agency or us. If three of these are blank, you aren't ready — which is worth knowing for free.

The film, in one sentence If it takes two, it's two films	Who it's for One audience — not three
What they should do afterwards The hardest field. Do it first	The one thing they must remember A week later, over coffee
Where it plays, and for how long Homepage, ads, stand, deck, pitch	Something that exists that you like — and why The “why” is the useful half
Deliverables Formats, durations, versions, captions	Deadline, and what it's tied to A launch, an event, a board meeting
Budget A range is fine. Blank is not	Who approves it One name

HOWEVER FAR OFF YOU ARE

We’ll help you plan it either way.

Thirty minutes, free, no pitch. Bring what you’re trying to make and we’ll tell you what we’d actually do — including when the honest answer is “make it yourself” or “hire a freelancer for a day”. We would rather be the company you call in three years than the one that quoted you once.

OR, IF YOU'D RATHER JUST MAKE SOMETHING

Two ways to work with us that cost less than a proper production, because they are not one.

Both are run by one person with our own kit, direct only, and priced accordingly.

£1,450

Starter film

Half a day, one operator

One film, usually the proof film — number two on the list.

- A planning call first, so the questions are agreed before we arrive
- Up to four hours on site, our camera, lights and sound
- One film up to 90 seconds, plus vertical and square cutdowns
- Subtitled, and one round of changes
- Delivered in 10 working days

£2,400

Setup day

One day, at your office

We build you a filming corner that works, and teach one person to use it.

- Morning: we solve your room — light, sound, positions, settings — and photograph it so it's repeatable
- Afternoon: we shoot your explainer and your first proof film with your person operating
- You keep both films, edited by us, plus a one-page setup card and a kit list at your budget
- Thirty days of email afterwards, for when something doesn't work

[How a starter film works](#) > [How a setup day works](#) > [Everything bigger than this](#) >

Slatebook · Edition One — Flowspire Productions, 2026. All prices are indicative UK market ranges for 2026 and are not quotations. Equipment prices were checked in September 2026 and include VAT; crew and production ranges are typical market figures rather than a rate card. Nothing here is tailored to your circumstances — the free call is.