

So You Want To Make Your Own Drum Video, Part 1

By Wes Crawford

Never mind a featured role opposite Angelina Jolie in her next film, how many of you reading this article feel that the epitome of an appearance on the big (or small) screen involves *you* starring in your own drum video? If not, then go read People magazine, but if you do feel this way (you *are* on a drumming website), and you believed the chances for either of the above scenarios were next to impossible, let me tell you how I succeeded in the second one.

The Digital Age has revolutionized the video industry similarly to the audio recording industry such that less than \$10,000 worth of gear can often accomplish today what \$100,000+ accomplished only a few short years ago. Without listing all of the camera and editing possibilities currently available (which may be obsolete by the time you read this article and are better covered by the numerous trade magazines available), I would like to recount my adventure concocting, planning, scripting, gathering resources for, filming, editing, authoring, and marketing my own commercial DVD.

The Idea

When I looked at the state of the drum video market (over 200 titles offered), I saw three categories of videos available:

1. historical/retrospective videos about famous drummers or musical periods,
2. “star” videos featuring drummers who tend to “WOW!” the viewer with awesome

displays of technique, and

3. “training” or instructional videos by both popular and lesser known drummers who explain drumming concepts in a logically sequenced manner and then visually demonstrate them.

Many videos contain elements of more than one category, but most feel like they belong to one more than another. Hence, the first question an aspiring drum video producer should ask is, “Which category is best for me?” If you are interested in documentaries, music history, biographies and the like, then the first category might be a good fit. If you are at least regionally known and believe you have some drumming techniques that are unique or possibly of Olympic quality, then the second category might be logical. Finally, if you have teaching experience and believe you have a clear manner of explaining an interesting drum subject, then you should consider the third category.

Once you have decided upon a type of drum video, it is important to formalize an idea for subject and content. The important thing is that the idea must be original, or at least expand in some important manner upon prior topics. It is also important to consider the characteristics of your target market as these may affect the feasibility of your idea.

It may be instructive to explain my video category, idea, and target market. First, I chose the instructional/training video category since I do not have a national reputation nor any truly exceptional expertise in music history or drumming technique, while I do teach drumset along with my active performance schedule. My next challenge was finding my subject idea. As I began contemplating my students’ needs, I recognized that many of them performed wonderfully in their lessons and with play-along audio recordings, but they experienced a great lack of confidence in their abilities when

jamming with their friends in the early stages. Realizing that I could create a virtual band on video for students to perform with, thus combining the decades-old, tried-and-true audio play-along concept with the power and realism of contemporary video, the next step was to research my potential target market. I learned that the largest demographic of drumset players is kids and teenagers, and that the fastest *growing* demographic of drumset buyers is adults, established in their careers, desiring to begin or rekindle a drumming hobby. These demographics, respectively, represent drummers who may not be old enough to perform in nightclubs as well as those who may not wish to perform late nights due to occupational and family demands. Since these sizable groups could reasonably enjoy and learn from an on-demand virtual band, I feel that my idea gels with its target market.

RESOURCES

A professional video might cost from \$10,000-50,000 or even higher. The more you accomplish on your own will save money down the line *if* you have competence in each task. For instance, if you rent several video cameras and take care to set up complimentary shots, then you may not need to hire a film crew. However, you may end up with bad lighting, unmatched cameras, focus problems, etc. if you are inexperienced. Similarly, don't borrow a couple of camcorders from your friends and expect your results to look like one of your favorite movies, unless that happens to be Blair Witch Project! You may also save money and work "off the clock" by buying one of the high quality computer-editing packages now available to consumers, but expect a steep learning curve.

So, how does one approach professional quality while living on a musician's

budget? If borrowing from a bank is not an option, then perhaps my solution will work for you -- look for partners. You will need a business plan detailing the general drum video market, your idea, your target market, your production needs with estimated costs, your projected reproduction costs, your marketing plans, and your best and worst case sales scenarios. The good news is that there are lots of people with professional or semi-professional video and editing gear out there looking for experience or with extra time. Ask around and network to find people with the requisite skills to fulfill your project needs. Then present your plan and see who might be interested in working within your budget, through bartering services, and/or partnering with you on financial speculation. Using this method, I found that I unexpectedly knew the creative director at a video production facility who was willing to help on "spec," as was one of my favorite audio engineers, and a fellow drummer/songwriter. I then bartered some musical services with a cameraman for some location filming. A written agreement outlining responsibilities, expectations, and profit sharing was agreed upon. In this manner I feel that we created the best possible quality video while staying within a reasonable personal budget. Still, expect cost over-runs!

THE SCRIPT

A script is absolutely necessary for smooth filming and editing. The script may be little more than an outline with lots of narrative and musical improvisation or it may be finely detailed. Consider it to be a work-in-progress up to the minute you finish the video, as circumstances may force changes and newer ideas may develop.

Remember to entertain. My guiding principle was to try and create a script that was serious in instructional content but also lighthearted and fun.

FILMING

Plan your shots with a storyboard in advance. You do not need to be an artist...my stick figures worked well enough to show the camera operators the vision inside my head. Don't assume others see your vision with merely your verbal explanation.

Make sure you create a checklist of items and responsibilities ahead of time consisting of everything necessary at the shoot. Don't forget to discuss wardrobe and lighting (which may affect each other), makeup as necessary, and most importantly, audio considerations with the appropriate experts involved. Wouldn't it be ridiculous to capture great film footage and lousy audio for a drum video? Oh, and don't forget a hairbrush- I'll probably never live down the messed up hair in my narration footage!

Editing

You have just completed filming. You're almost finished, right? Wrong! Editing can be the most time-consuming (and expensive) task pertaining to a video project. Some say a useful rule is to allow one hour of editing for every minute of final film, although this may vary depending upon your project's complexity. It may be helpful to study your favorite drum videos for their editing style. Don't be tempted to go too "MTV" and try relentless, quick, zany shots if your intent is to showcase your visual content! Consider the feasibility of "live switching" where an experienced Director basically edits as the filming occurs, much like a live TV show. This may save a lot of money during the actual editing sessions, but you're pretty much stuck with the edit you end up with. In "live switching," a Director who knows something about music and drumming is invaluable! Watch out for editors that are not very experienced with editing music videos since they

often do not sync the music to the visuals as tightly as a musician would and should demand!

Authoring To DVD

Drum videos have mimicked the larger movie video market in that virtually all new releases are in the DVD format and popular past titles are quickly being converted as well. Authoring to DVD refers to the process of mastering the edited film to the DVD format and setting up a menu system to navigate throughout the sections of the video. Depending upon the length of the edited film, the number of audio tracks, the extent of the graphic arts work, the number of video options, any Special Features, and the number of “chapters” necessary, this process may be quick and cheap or time consuming and costly. I was told that my DVD menu was the most complex the company had ever developed. It contains over twenty chapters comprised of musical and narrative sections for ten play-along songs. I also required three different audio options for each song: with drumset, without drumset for the true play-along version, and without drumset but with a click track and my coaching/commentary for the “training wheels” version.

Compression is a major issue at this point. Basically, the more content contained on the DVD, the more this information must be compressed in order to fit on the DVD disc. Too much compression detracts from the quality of the video images, while not enough can cause freezing and other problems on playback. The trick is to compress as little as possible yet stay within industry standards.

Make sure you test the authored DVD thoroughly, trying out all of the menu functions and their interactions, before committing to reproducing discs. Back up all of the edited footage in your computer to a hard drive and store it safely!

Now that you've created a master copy of your project you'll want to rightfully celebrate, but hold on! In the next issue we'll discuss options for reproducing multiple copies of your master and getting them into the hands of eager drummers.

Wes Crawford teaches privately and at Goucher College and performs throughout the Washington, DC/Baltimore region with a variety of artists, as well as tours and records with Higher Octave/Narada artists Shahin & Sepehr. For further information on Wes or his "Wes Crawford's Drumset Play-Along DVD" and other original media works, go to www.WesCrawford.com and www.MusicAndGames4U.com. Wes serves as Vice-President of his MD/DE PAS chapter.

SO YOU WANT TO MAKE A DRUM VIDEO, Part 2

by Wes Crawford

In the last issue we outlined how a would-be drum video producer might transform an idea and a vision into a DVD master. Before we decide how to reproduce copies of your master and discuss marketing strategies, let's back-track a little.

Honest Feedback

After completing the editing, but before authoring to DVD, it is a good idea to get some honest feedback from members of your target market, other drummers whom you respect, and video experts. You may still have time to address issues concerning clarity, audio mix, visual segues, titling, and the like. One criticism I took seriously is that some drummers may occasionally find it difficult to bring their drumset, television, and DVD

player together. I therefore included an audio CD of the play-along songs in the package.

Listen to negative comments and act upon them as possible!

Duplicating/Replicating

Once you have a fully edited and authored DVD in your hand you will likely choose to make copies. You have two choices: you may duplicate or replicate. When you duplicate your DVD you use DVD-R or DVD+R media which as of this time (2007) does not yet play equally well in all DVD players currently in households. I made a mistake in first ordering fifty-five DVD-Rs because their performance in peoples' players ranged from excellent, to frequent "freezing," to "skipping," to several players that would not recognize the disc! The advantage of DVD-R/+R duplication is that you can generally duplicate in any quantity desired, although the price per disc drops considerably with larger quantities. Replicating DVDs, on the other hand, often requires a higher cash outlay with an order of at least 500-1,000 discs. However, the price per disc should be reasonable and they are generally store-bought movie quality. After disposing of my DVD-Rs as demos with the qualifier that "they might not work on all players," I replicated my next order.

Art Work

From the start of the project you should begin considering the artwork for the final product. Artwork and text need to be planned for the disc face, box cover, and for any inserts you have in mind. Don't make my mistake and assume that stills from the video will make good pictures for the artwork; even though you have many to choose from (thirty for each second of video!). The low resolution of the pictures may cause them to appear grainy. Bring a photographer or a personal digital camera to your video

shoot and take pictures during filming as well as posed shots.

A professional graphics artist fluent with graphic arts computer programs is essential to acquiring a competitive, professional look for your product and may be necessary to meet the stringent requirements of a reputable printer, often found under the same roof as your DVD duplicator or replicator. Demand a “proof” or sample of the printing of your artwork before authorizing the full print run.

Be sure to include a bar code on the back of your packaging (often now obtained for free from major replicating companies). Most retailers will not carry merchandise without a bar code!

Marketing

Once you have obtained your DVD order you should understand that you are only halfway finished with your project. You need to realize that your DVD is practically useless if nobody knows that it exists, what it is about, and how to easily obtain it. Perhaps the simplest initial solution to begin marketing your DVD is to create a website containing pictures and information describing the product. Video excerpts may also be included. If you are not knowledgeable in creating websites, ask around to find out who created some sites that you are particularly impressed with, or find a college student or recent graduate looking for experience.

If you live in or near a metropolitan area, concentrate your marketing energies there initially rather than diluting them across the country. More people probably know you in your home city than elsewhere and will need less convincing to part with their money for your product. Check to see if any local newspapers or music periodicals are interested in writing about you and your creation. Make sure drum teachers, who work

with many individuals within your target market, know about or possess a copy of the DVD. Send out press releases every day at first!

Approach drum retailers and ask them about their interest in carrying your product. Don't rule out the possibility of a consignment deal initially, but make sure the retailer will accept responsibility for any unexplained loss of product due to shoplifting or otherwise. It is important to establish a retail price that is competitive with other comparable DVDs. Remember that you may not have the same celebrity status as, for instance, Dennis Chambers, but you ARE in competition with such artists! After settling on a consistent suggested retail price, come to an agreement on a wholesale price to the retailers, which may be as little as one-half the retail price. Don't forget to calculate your unit costs and expenses to assure that you are indeed making a profit, if that is a goal.

As you expand to market nationally, compare advertising value among various avenues to your target market. If you are comparing drum magazines, for instance, compare advertising costs, magazine circulation, competitors' advertising, etc. Several consecutive small ads are generally more effective than one bigger one for the same total price. Marketing studies show that consumers generally need to see a new brand or product at *least* three times before it will be noticed enough to be considered for purchase. Always keep your target market in focus so that your expanding efforts result in maximal effect.

Licensing/Distribution Options

Another approach for greatly expanding the visibility of your DVD involves securing a licensing or distribution deal with a large company. The advantages of licensing your DVD include:

1. Many more people see your video in stores and catalogues through the company's marketing machinery, thereby increasing the chances for higher sales and more exposure for you as an artist.
2. With high sales, you may have clout with the company in regards to future products or ideas, or you may better negotiate with other companies.
3. An immediate cash advance on future royalties could be negotiated. This would help pay off any credit card debt incurred during development of the video!

Disadvantages of a licensing deal include:

1. You will likely have to give up at least some artistic control of your product. This may mean you will not have much input into packaging and graphic art decisions, and it also may mean changes in the actual video content.
2. There is rarely a guarantee that the video will be promoted as heavily as you would like.
3. You may be "locked in" under contract such that you are not able to do business with other companies. Your product could essentially be shelved!
4. Your profit per sale would generally be limited to your royalty rate, which may reach 12% of *wholesale* cost at most.

A distribution deal, on the other hand, is more likely to allow retention of artistic control and may still net great exposure and sales for your video, but there are generally few advertising guarantees. The distribution company may simply list your video in their catalog and it would still be up to you to promote it. A distribution deal may be made

with a video company or with a company that carries a wide variety of percussion products. You would be responsible for supplying the company with sufficient product.

If all of this sounds very familiar and similar to a record deal, that's because it *is*! Always consult a music business lawyer before signing anything so that you may understand all of the implications regarding the points of the contract.

Initially (2003), I contacted local retailers in hopes that they would carry my product. To further convince them, I mentioned my upcoming ads in drumming magazines and I offered them free promotional posters as well as my services to demonstrate the play-along video in their stores. I have spoken with major percussion distributors and was told that, since I am "not a household name" (drummers' households, that is!), they would not distribute my product until I can generate some sales and interest on my own. I am not actively looking for a licensing deal at this time, but may do so in the future. I have found most success in online sales and sales to public libraries, and I'm presently exploring online digital downloading options.

Summary

I once thought that producing my own video would be impossible and not worth the effort. However, after sharing my idea, I was greatly encouraged by several musician friends to take action. I figured I could finish the project in three to six months... how naïve! Sixteen months later, I received my replication order! I often said, "If I had known there would be this many problems to conquer, that I would be so dependent upon others' schedules, and that I would spend so much time and money on this project, I would never have started it!" Of course, that's not true -- I'm currently writing a script for my *fourth* video! Why don't you join me in producing your own?

Wes Crawford teaches drumset privately and at Goucher College and performs throughout the Washington, DC/Baltimore region with a variety of artists, as well as tours and records with Higher Octave/Narada artists Shahin & Sepehr. For information on Wes or his “Wes Crawford’s Drumset Play-Along DVD” and other original media products, go to www.WesCrawford.com and www.MusicAndGames4U.com. Wes serves as Vice-President of his MD/DE PAS chapter.