



Showreel Essentials for Actors – what to include and what to leave out

Author: Graham Guy

www.thelacunaworks.co.uk

13th January 2008

When producing a showreel of your work as an actor there are no hard and fast rules as to what should be included and what should be left out. Some things however will make the job of the casting director that is viewing it a whole lot easier and may give you the edge in a competitive market.

“The Introduction”

Always start off the showreel with a short introduction stating your name *in your own voice*. This is important as it gives viewers of your reel a 'baseline' feel of who you are when you are not acting. The introduction shouldn't be long – five to ten seconds is perfectly adequate – but should be neutral, conversational, and friendly.

“Hi, my name is John Smith, and this is my showreel.”

This is less important if you are already an established actor with good public familiarity with your work, but when you are starting out it is essential.

“The Content”

There are many ways to display your showreel content and the method chosen will mainly fall to personal taste, but there are a number of common pitfalls that are best avoided.

1. Keep everything in the same aspect ratio
This sounds obvious, but it is amazing the number of showreels that go out with material captured from a variety of sources and all in different formats. It looks unprofessional and rushed, and will likely make the viewer switch off. Whatever the format of your material, ensure that you convert everything to the same format in your editing software before you create your reel.
2. Avoid loud music
Music on a reel is not a problem and can add presence to otherwise out-of-context film clips, but if it is too loud it can cause you problems. Firstly you must make sure that the music doesn't drown out any vocals on the clips. You are showcasing yourself, not the music, and so you need to be heard. Secondly, keep the overall level of the background music comparatively low. The viewer is expecting to see a demonstration of acting capability and not a music video. If the music is too loud the reel will be switched off.

“The Contact Details”

From time to time you see a showreel where the actor in question obviously assumes that they are so famous that you will have heard of them without their needing to tell you their name. Anonymous reels are more common than you might expect and always get consigned to the bin. Make sure that your name, contact details (agent, personal mobile number, email) are clearly displayed at the start *and* the end of the reel.

“The Closing”

Just as with the introduction it is important to finish with a short closing *in your own natural voice*. This can serve as a background or lead-in to your contact details being shown again at the end, or it can be stand-alone.

“I’m John Smith. You can contact me through XYZ Agency or by using the email or phone number below.”

It is simple, clear, and finishes the reel off nicely, and ensures that you stay in the mind of the viewer for a few more seconds.

“The Duration”

A reel should be *no longer* than five minutes, and preferably a little shorter. When a casting director or producer sits down with a reel they never sit down with just one, and so a pile of twenty minute DVDs will never get watched.

If you feel that you absolutely must include more material than that then use the features of a DVD and keep the additional material separate, accessible from the menu.

“The DVD”

The DVD should automatically start showing your reel when it is inserted into the player, and then on completion it should return to a simple menu showing a still photograph of yourself, your contact details again, and have a button to re-start the reel. If you need additional material (see above) you can link it from here.

Things to avoid:

1. Too much information

In your introduction, do not give gushing speeches about how you've always wanted to be an actor, where you trained, or any 'interesting' facts about yourself. Assume that anyone watching the reel thinks you already *are* an actor, has a copy of your CV so knows where you trained (if they are even interested), and really doesn't want to know that you breed carrier pigeons in your spare time.

2. Excessive diversity

If you are a singer, dancer, shakespearean actor, guitarist, juggler, make-up artist, unicyclist, and snake charmer then consider having more than one reel. Most people viewing a reel containing all that would pass it over as too complex and assume that you do so much you can't be that good at any of them.

3. Home movies

Sometimes you have no choice, but if you can avoid using that clip of you in the college play filmed by your sister on her mobile phone then do so. Low quality footage distracts from your performance, and the only thing you want to show your audience is that you are right for the part.

Hopefully this article will be of some use when preparing your next showreel. Good luck in your casting sessions and maybe I will see you on my screen some time soon.