

Regional

Technology no substitute for video shooting skill

It used to be that videos were shot using oftentimes clunky – always heavy – recording equipment. Not anymore. Today, whether they know it or not, almost everybody carries a video camera in the form of their mobile device. And Web sites like YouTube, Vimeo and Facebook offer users platforms to show off their work. However, just because almost anyone can take videos doesn't mean that what they shoot is very good. Someone who knows what it takes to make great videos is Cory Byers, an instructor in the department of mass communications at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

"It has allowed a lot more people access to it and there is software available that you can download, and apps for free that let you edit and create music and add effects and everything. So there are a lot more possibilities now than there used to be," said Byers about today's technologies. Yet, he added, the challenges of creating good videos are as much artistic as they are technical.

"You still have to learn to use the equipment properly," he said. "Even though everyone has a cell phone, most people don't know how to frame a shot correctly, for example. And you can't necessarily control your iris with your phone. So there is definitely that need for the technical knowhow, but there is always the need for the artistry. You need somebody who has a good idea. If you can have both good technical and artistic storytelling, then you have a winner."

A native of Effingham, Ill., Byers obtained his bachelor's and master's degrees in advertising from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign and a second master's in mass communications from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. He explained his shift in emphasis from advertising to video production as a logical evolution.

"I always liked creating things and writing ads, but also liked getting my hands into the actual production of things as well, even more so than a graphic designer, to not only to be able to write commercials but also to shoot and edit the whole process," he said. "That is why I shifted over into the production and then combined those two into what I do now."



Professor Cory Byers at work.

But why did he decide to become a college professor?

"My mom was a grade school teacher for a long time and a principal," he said. "A lot of my aunts were teachers, and the joke was that I was the first grandchild on that side to go to college, so they joked that I would be a teacher also. And I had no interest in teaching whatsoever because I had seen my mom grading papers late at night and that just didn't seem like something I was interested in."

His ideas changed first when he went into graduate school.

"When I was a teaching assistant I started teaching commercial classes, editing classes, things that I like to do, and I really enjoyed doing that," he said. "So they had an opening when I graduated and I figured I would apply and see how it went. It went really well so that is kind of how I got into it." Today, in addition to teaching classes, Byers produces his own video projects. And while he believes cre-

ativity is important, there is no substitute for good planning.

"It really depends on the project," he said. "It depends on if you are doing a documentary or a news piece or commercial, short film, or TV show. You really need to have some sort of idea to start with and have that written down." He added that a documentary might not need to be as scripted as a commercial.

"You might have an outline with a list of questions and things to shoot, but

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you always need to be flexible," he said. "When you are on location you may notice things that you had not planned on and things that could make your piece a lot better."

For shooting commercials, he said, you are always depending upon a budget. "So you are deciding, can I take the extra time to get this thing I just found or is it not feasible with my budget? But usually you want to be somewhat flexible with your script just to make your project better."

As he mentioned earlier, it is not just hardware but also software that has developed to the point that there are programs that allow video effects that were unimaginable only a few years ago. And the software programs also need to be taught.

"The problem with that is that a lot of these programs are fairly expensive so we might not necessarily have access to them," he said. "But we definitely show examples and talk about how they did what they did. We definitely like to expose our students to all of that, but there is only so much you can teach in a class, there is only so much you can cover in one class. So it can be challenging to figure out exactly what to teach them, kind of how wide to throw our net basically."

Byers is currently working on a documentary about the heroin problem in Madison County. "Heroin has become a huge problem in the last five or so years, spreading out from the city into the suburbs and the Metro East area especially," he said. "There have been quite a few deaths, so I'm working with a former student on a documentary about the issue."

Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.

Photo courtesy of Cory Byers