



HOW TO MAKE AN EFFECTIVE STORMWATER OUTREACH VIDEO

Selected entries from the 2017 StormTV video competition showcase best practices in video production. Competition judges identified the elements and factors that contributed to make these videos effective and compelling.



STORMTV 2017

For the sixth year, the Water Environment Federation (WEF) hosted the StormTV Project. This year the competition changed in scope where judges sought to identify the best elements and practices that appear in the submissions. The intention of the project has evolved to highlight the work of stormwater professionals utilizing video presentations to communicate and educate. The competition seeks to collect and share examples of best practices in action for stormwater management.

Municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s) are required to pursue public outreach and education in their communities. While there are established minimum guidelines for what must be done, this project seeks to celebrate those who turned fulfilling a requirement into the opportunity for excellence.

The tips and advice within this factsheet are drawn, in large part, from the comments and observations of the 2017 StormTV competition judges. The judges - primarily members of the Water Environment Federation Stormwater Committee - scored each video on:

- message clarity,
- visual appeal,
- audio quality,
- technically accuracy,
- originality & vision,
- length, and
- distribution methods.



MESSAGE CLARITY

To make a good video, it is essential to begin with a very clear focus on what the viewer should learn. Simple messages make the strongest videos because they can be stated upfront and repeated throughout. Careful word selection can make a message clear to a lay person, and the complexity of the message depends on the audience.

- Weak message: Roadside drains empty into the local river.
- Better message: Help protect our local river by keeping lawn trimmings out of roadside drains

Avoid clutter in messaging. All water is connected, but in effective videos – especially shorter ones – water topics should be investigated one at a time. Raingardens protect creeks, and help conserve water, and can eliminate the need for a town to rip up several streets, and so can keeping yard waste out of roadside drains, and they can be attractive, too. Just as that sentence feels long and unfocused, so would a video that tries to squeeze in too many topics.

Define all stormwater specific terms – perhaps even stormwater itself. This is especially true for public-facing videos. For a water sector audience, you can assume some knowledge of common stormwater terms but need to be very clear regarding location-specific processes and conditions. Also, define terms early. If you're creating a video about a vegetated bioswale to reduce total suspended solids entering a creek, make sure your viewer knows right away that the stream-side garden is there to filter out little pieces of dirt, sand, and other particles from the water.

Use children to help provide a lot of information quickly. Several judges remarked that videos using children could define and explain new terms for the public without seeming too basic. The way children ask many questions to learn about a topic lends itself to basic information delivery. The judges also remarked that involving children lead to engaging videos.

Do not confuse message clarity with oversimplification. A clear and simple message can present a complex topic, the elements of the topic just need to be presented carefully and in the right order. This is where knowing who the audience is can help greatly.

Provide the message visually. Several of the best StormTV videos included text of takeaway messages within the video. Others used logos or graphics to reinforce the message the viewer hears with what he or she sees.

Draft a series of important points to include; you may not need an actual script. To reinforce message clarity, it's important that it be repeated. This means planning what each speaker should cover. Fully written scripts (especially for narration) can be useful, but also run the risk of making speakers sound rehearsed. A list of the 4 or 5 main points of the video can help all participants stay on message without sounding too much the same.

VISUAL

Video lets the creator take the greatest advantage of visual techniques to provide the viewer with a lot of information quickly. The trick is to use these techniques judiciously without overwhelming the viewer.

Strive for good quality. Video production companies are a great resource, but their services can be very expensive. Video can be done in-house.

- Technology has progressed where even a recent model smartphone can record high-definition video. Dedicated video cameras or digital SLR cameras can be purchased for a few hundred dollars and provide excellent quality video.
- Steady video is very important. Practice taking video to avoid jerky or shaky footage. Even better, use a tripod (or place the camera on a table) to get very steady shots for interviews.
- Ensure good lighting. Even with the best camera, a dark room will yield poor video. Film a short test video in interior locations to ensure that it turns out well. Add more lights if needed. Shooting outdoors on sunny days can help ensure good lighting, too.



Use multiple locations and angles. Especially when it comes to a regional issue such as stormwater, shooting video in several locations and the same message from a few different angles can help keep viewer interest. Breaking interviews and explanations of projects into several different shots can help keep your subject on message and sounding more natural and comfortable.

- Draft a shot list. This list should include who or what will be filmed and what its goal is. For example, a landscape architect explaining how green infrastructure slows hydraulic loading into the combined sewer system. This sort of list will help ensure that you capture all the elements that you need.
- Film more than you think you need. It's always better to have far too much content to choose from than to realize after everyone has left that you don't have enough footage. Also experiment with improvised shots. While planning is important, trying a few unplanned shots when everyone is already gathered could lead to happy surprises.

Seek out comfortable editing software. With the footage shot, it's time to put it all together. Video editing software ranges in complexity (and price) from simple one-step fixes to full professional level control. Find a solution that matches your needs and skill-level.

- VideoPad Video Editor, VSCD Video Editor, Shotcut, and iMovie are four good beginner software packages to start with according to the article "Before You Begin Video Editing: Choose the Right Equipment and Software for Your First Movie" on Lifewire.com.
- Use restraint. Avoid using every video transition effect possible. The StormTV judges remarked the best videos used smooth and consistent transitions

Mix people, places, and graphics. Interviews, landscape videos, photographs, and animated graphics all can be combined to add variety and show the breadth of your project.

- Landscape videos and photos are a good means to setting the scene. Videos of before and after can also help show the difference a project has made.
- For interview format video, adding the speakers name and title to the screen can help viewers feel connected. Adding words to video can help reinforce messaging and help make a static photo feel more exciting.

- Add photographs in the editing process. The judges remarked that before and after photos presented this way were very effective.

AUDIO

Audio can make or break a video. Audio, more than visuals, helps set the tone and feel for a video. For the beginner, the best advice is to keep things simple.

Choose appropriate background music. The themes of 2017 StormTV videos ranges from news programs to horror movies to rap videos to personal journeys. In each case, the music helps to drive home and support that theme. If your video does not have a strong theme, ambient sounds from the area being shown can help set the scene. For example, a babbling brook while showing a peaceful stream or the clink and clatter of tools when showing the work of a community garden or construction site.

Ensure clear voices. Modulate the background music volume to ensure that speakers can be heard. Speakers and narrators should speak clearly and at a natural pace and tone. Videos with monotone speakers or extreme slow speakers received lower scores.

TECHNICAL ACCURACY

As stormwater professionals, the judges commented most actively on the technical accuracy of the entries. The highest praise received was one judge's comment that a video "explained the topic in just enough detail to make it accessible to an audience of water professionals without excluding the general public." This should be the aim for all public-facing videos.

Choose speakers carefully. Who explains a topic or introduces a project matters. It makes more sense to ask the project engineer to explain the concept of bioretention and have the chair of the city council introduce the project. The goal is to have the audience find all speakers knowledgeable, believable, and authoritative on what they say.

- Children make great question askers and can be very effective at explaining simply how a complex process works.
- Off-screen narrators have an element of authority automatically. However, this means it is vital that their messages are clear, correct, and accessible.

Know the audience. Like the discussion regarding Message Clarity above, finding the right level of technical detail depends on the intended audience.

- The judges commented that some of the StormTV entries “relates well to the sector, but would be elementary for stormwater professionals.”
- On the other hand, others failed to answer the question of why a stormwater program or project was important in its community.

Combine visuals and text. When discussing technical accuracy, the judges recalled the good uses of text to help emphasize the proper definition and explanation of key message that they also pointed out in Message Clarity. Onscreen text can define and reinforce critical concepts.



OPTIMAL LENGTH

Almost all social media resources agree that video messages retain users for far longer than photos or text. However, even with video, viewers drop off with time. Good message clarity, visual appeal, and audio quality will help retain viewers, but some decline will happen nonetheless.

The blog post, “How Long Should Your Next Video Be?” at Wistia.com, which is a video hosting company for business, says that videos shorter than 2 minutes get the most engagement. However, between 2 and 3 minutes viewership drops steeply. This decline continues to about the 6-minute mark where viewership rates stabilize. Their research shows that hardly any drop-off occurs between 6 minutes and 12 minutes.

The overall advice from Wistia is to focus entirely on the content once beyond the 2-minute mark. “If the viewer would benefit from brevity, go short. If they’d benefit from depth, don’t cut just for the sake of cutting.”

The allowed length of StormTV submissions has changed during the competition’s history. In 2017, the competition element returned as did the 5-minute limit preference. The Grand Prize winner clocks in at 5:57.

However, knowing that some users will drop off, another best practice is to place your most important takeaway messages early in your video. This tactic will ensure the maximum number of viewers see your takeaway message; this practice also is more likely to grab viewer interest and encourage them to watch more.

DISTRIBUTION METHODS

- YouTube
- Native in Facebook and Twitter



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

StormTV 2017 Playlist

bit.ly/storm-tv-2017-playlist

These videos are the entries in the 2017 StormTV Project. The first 10 entries in the playlist represent the 10 finalist videos as judged by the Public Communication & Outreach Subcommittee and other members of the Water Environment Federation Stormwater Committee.

Stormwater Phase II Final Rule: Public Education and Outreach Minimum Control Measure (EPA 833-F00-005)

www3.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/fact2-3.pdf

This U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fact sheet profiles the Public Education and Outreach minimum control measure, one of six measures an operator of a Phase II-regulated small municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) is required to include in its stormwater management program to meet the conditions of its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) stormwater permit.

How Long Should Your Next Video Be?

wistia.com/blog/optimal-video-length

This blog post from a video hosting company for businesses uses its extensive viewership statistics to provide general guidelines for what length of videos receive the most engagement from viewers.

Before You Begin Video Editing: Choose the Right Equipment and Software for Your First Movie

www.lifewire.com/introduction-to-video-editing-1081794

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