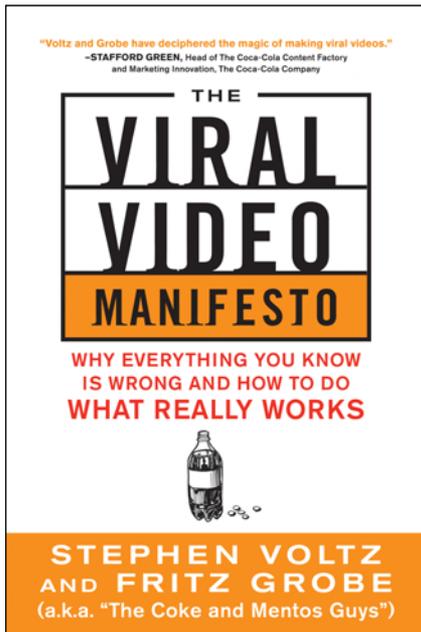


Exerpt From:



Chapter 5: I Am the Camera. Take Me There.
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VIRALVIDEOMANIFESTO.COM

CHAPTER 5

I Am the Camera. Take Me There.



LIPDUB—I Gotta Feeling (Comm-UQAM 2009)

Because viral video is about giving your audience the unfiltered experience of being right there at your sideshow, recording the action with a single, uninterrupted shot is almost always the best way to go. *David After Dentist*, *Leave Britney Alone!*, *The Sneezing Baby Panda*, and *Chocolate Rain* are just a few examples of this. On occasion, however, a single, static camera won't capture the action. In videos like our *Extreme Diet Coke & Mentos Experiments II—The Domino Effect*, where we triggered 250 Coke and Mentos geysers in one big chain reaction, or OK Go's giant Rube Goldberg machine for *This*

Links to
These
Examples



Too Shall Pass, the action can be so spread out that the camera must move to capture it.

Even so, you still want to show us something real, and you want nothing to interfere with that truth. When you have to move the camera, you can use this simple idea to shape how you do it: *I am the camera; take me there.*

To foster the direct, personal connection you have with your audience in online video, treat the camera as if it were a real person watching the action with you.

Film and television directors move their cameras all over the set, but with viral video, the camera is the viewer. Ideally, don't move it at all. Nor should you put it in places where a real person wouldn't be. Don't have it float through the scene on a crane or on a dolly because a real person watching the action as it unfolds wouldn't be able to do that. When you use those kinds of camera moves, you're telling your audience, "This isn't real."

With this metaphor, a sudden close-up can be like yanking us off our feet and dragging us toward the subject. Switching to another camera is like teleporting us across the room or up onto the roof.

Edits to new camera angles raise questions of honesty: Is this really what happened, or did you do everything all over again for a second camera? The less you mess with us and the fewer questions we ask about how you captured this on video, the better.

Just take us there.

The easiest way to do this is what we saw in the last chapter: just press record and do it. That's the cleanest way to keep it real.

But when absolutely necessary, there are a few specific kinds of edits and camera moves that can work, and they all follow the mantra: *I am the camera; take me there.*

You still want to simply press record and say "Action." And when you say "Cut," your video should be as close to ready for the Internet as possible.

Move the Camera as If It Is a Person

When the action is too big to fit in one frame and you have to move the camera, move it as if it were a person walking exactly where a real person would walk. Again, show us what it would truly be like if we were there.

Another OK Go video is a nice example of this. When the band wanted to shoot a giant Rube Goldberg machine synchronized with their song “This Too Shall Pass,” a single, fixed camera just couldn’t capture it.

The huge chain reaction, designed by the LA-based Syyn Labs, used over 700 household items along a half-mile-long course. As with *White Knuckles* with all those dogs, conventional television producers would have shot the video in pieces, with multiple cameras capturing the action in many different takes from many different angles. They would have put it all together later, in the editing room.

But OK Go stayed true.

They used a single Steadicam (a smooth, stabilized handheld camera). It moved along the course of the chain reaction to create a video that makes us feel like we are right there. It followed exactly the path we would have chosen to walk along to see the events unfold and at such a pace that we could have kept up.

It took two days of filming and about 60 takes to get it right. And we are the camera, witnessing this extraordinary feat. That’s contagious. And it has had 36 million views.

Similarly, the entire genre of lip dub videos often requires a moving camera. A *lip dub* is a single-shot video of a group of people lip-synching to a song, with the original audio of the song dubbed on top. With the people spread throughout a building or even throughout an entire town, the camera moves from person to person, as each one in turn picks up the lip-synch. One of the best examples of the genre is *LIPDUB—I Gotta Feeling (Comm-UQAM 2009)* (10 million views).



OK Go—Rube
Goldberg

Directed by Luc-Olivier Cloutier and Marie-Ève Hébert, two students at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), the video takes us through one of the campus's central buildings as 172 students—with costumes, props, and choreography—lip-synch the Black Eyed Peas' hit “I Gotta Feeling.”



LIPDUB—
I Gotta
Feeling

After extensive preparation by the organizers, they were able to get what they wanted with just two rehearsals and two takes. It was an extraordinary undertaking, and much of the video's power comes from the truth. Watching the video, you *know* the organizers had to pull off this elaborate stunt in a single shot.

As OK Go did with their Rube Goldberg machine, Cloutier and Hébert's *LIPDUB* showed us something real. They just pressed record, and they took us there. The truth of the event was supported beautifully by the way they filmed it.

So only move the camera when it is absolutely necessary, and when you must move it, remember: I am the camera.

Edit Only to Take Out the Boring Parts

Just as you must resist the temptation to move the camera, you must resist the temptation to cut from one shot to another. Any edit that changes perspective triggers our orienting response and interferes with our unfiltered experience of being there with you.

The only tolerable edits in viral video are ones that honestly move us forward in time.

Scotsman Danny MacAskill's stunt bicycle videos for Red Bull and Inspired Bicycles, *Way Back Home* (21 million views) and *Inspired Bicycles* (31 million views), both show sequences of amazing bike tricks, one after another after another. In *Inspired Bicycles*, MacAskill even attempts to ride along the top of a wrought iron fence that is nothing more than a long row of spikes. After a couple of impressive but unsuccessful tries, he finally nails it,

riding all the way across the entire 18- to 20-foot section. From there, the video goes into a mind-boggling series of stunt riding tricks performed in locations all over Edinburgh.

It's not all done in one shot. MacAskill doesn't waste our time by showing us all the times he had to get himself up and dust himself off to try again. He doesn't drag things out with shots of him riding from one stunt location to the next. In this case, one uninterrupted shot would make it a long, boring video. So he gives us just the highlights, in many pieces. But within each piece, the video follows the rules. Each individual stunt is shot with a single camera and with as little camera movement as possible. The edits he makes don't change our perspective; they just move us forward in time. They only cut out the boring parts without interfering with the truth. Most important, they don't filter our experience of the stunt and make us subconsciously question whether what we're seeing is real.



Inspired
Bicycles

Editing Diet Coke & Mentos

The core of our first Coke and Mentos video was shot in one take with a single camera out in a friend's field. In fact, what you see on the video was, at that point, the first and only time we'd ever set off so many geysers.

When we looked at the footage, there were two problems: first, we realized that for the audience to understand what we were doing, we needed to make clear that we were simply dropping Mentos candies into bottles of Coke; and second, one pair of geysers didn't go off, and we didn't have the opportunity to go back and try again to get it all perfect in one take.

To address the first problem, we added a couple of short additional shots at the beginning to show how the basic Coke and Mentos

The Extreme
Diet Coke
& Mentos
Experiments



geyser works. To address the second problem, we edited out the two geysers that didn't work. If you watch the video closely, you might notice one cut in the core of the video where we removed the footage of the two duds.

If we could have, we would've gone back and done it all in one take. We just didn't have it in us to set up another 101 bottles. As it stands, we can live with the edits because, like Danny MacAskill's bicycle videos, each part of the video follows the rules.

The edits are not the edits of television, where moving the view-point is used relentlessly to keep the viewer's attention. In our video, the content keeps the viewer's attention. The edits merely pick up the action a few seconds or a few minutes down the road. They stay true to: I am the camera; take me there. With this style of limited editing, we can still feel as though we're right there, live, at your sideshow.

Edits that stay true by removing only the boring parts are particularly useful for video blogs and online series like *My Drunk Kitchen* where the blogger can ramble on and on in front of a fixed camera and then use edits to move us from one good part to the next. The viral web series *Ask a Ninja* pioneered the use of this technique to record, then edit down improvisational comedy rants, making each episode, in essence, a highlight reel. The edits condense a long improv session into a great few minutes with tight comedic timing.



Here's the test: does your edit honestly carry us forward in time, or does it just change our perspective on the action? If it honestly carries us forward in time, it's probably still true. If it just changes our perspective, it's probably not.

► Some Videos Like the UQAM Lipdub Are Clearly Staged.
Does This Make Them Not True?

Being true doesn't mean being unplanned.

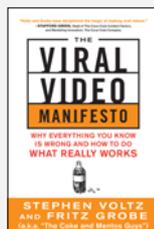
Some viral videos capture reality as it happens. A little kid biting his brother's finger in Charlie Bit My Finger—Again or the epic battle between lions, crocodiles, and water buffalo in Battle at Kruger show us amazing spontaneous events.

But like some of the elaborately staged (but real) marriage proposals we have mentioned and like OK Go's Rube Goldberg machine and UQAM's lip dub, many contagious videos are very carefully planned reality. They do more than just happening to stumble across real situations and less than just faking them. They create intriguing moments by staging interesting, real situations and then capturing what really happens when real people encounter them. The sword swallower, the fire eater, and the snake charmer at the sideshow are all real, but they also give well-planned performances.

So you can plan, even practice, for an event you're going to shoot for your video, as we do for all our videos. You can set up 100 bottles of Diet Coke in the woods and choreograph and rehearse a two-minute Coke and Mentos geyser show. Just don't fake it with hidden garden hoses or show staged audience reaction shots—stay true.

Evolution of Dance is literally staged—on an actual stage—and it's an honest documentation of a performance that really happened. It is an extremely well-rehearsed dance, and the video simply captures that dance in front of a live audience. There's nothing fake about that. The real, live energy has a contagiousness that Disneyland Musical Marriage Proposal, which is false from the beginning, can never have.

So while it's a good idea to get rid of the actors and throw away the script, you don't have to go in without a plan in order to show us something true.



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