

The Just Word Podcast

Transcript of Episode 40: Use Your Smartphone Video For More

Guest: Steve Knifton

Pat Bolland 00:00

Steve, great to see you again.

Stephen Knifton 00:02

Hi Pat How you doing?

Pat Bolland 00:03

Good, good.

Stephen Knifton 00:04

Good.

Pat Bolland 00:05

When I heard you went into education, I said, Okay, smartphone filmmaking and mobile journalism. So tell me, what are those first off, and then we'll go from there.

Stephen Knifton 00:16

Smartphone filmmaking is taking your smartphone and adding a little bit of software, an app called Filmic Pro. As a matter of fact, although there's other apps like it, that essentially take your onboard smartphone camera and elevate it up to the level of a professional film camera of a DSLR. So you can exact fantastic imagery out of it cinematic imagery out of it. So ...

Pat Bolland 00:45

the quality of that you get out of the smartphone can be increased that much.

Stephen Knifton 00:49

Yeah, it can be you can shoot in not to get overly technical, but you can shoot in 10 bit color, you can shoot in this enhanced video space. And you can get broadcast quality brand commercial level content quality out of the smartphone, you really can. You don't treat like a point and shoot. I mean, it's like any endeavor, you have to work at it a little bit and, you know, have some creative ideas and planet but it's entirely possible. It's not difficult at all to learn. So I was teaching video studies, video production, I, as you just said, migrated from TV. And working in television, as you well know, you know, as a producer, you have to sort of lead the way by motivating and influencing people that work for you. So I was told occasionally that we'd make a good teacher, so I followed them up on it. So I was teaching general video production. And at the end of the semester, in video production, I would tack on a little 20 minute, you know, Addendum and say, by the way, you can do all this on a smartphone too. And then I came to realize that, you know, smartphone, filmmaking, smartphone content production is a genre unto itself. The technology is there... There's bodies of work, Hollywood film directors, the guy that does the

Marvel films has moved over to make smartphone films and with the software enhancement you can get raising the capabilities of it, you can make great work and do brand work indie films, documentaries, all that stuff. So yes, I teach that and then an offshoot of that, it's not even an offshoot so much, I think it's the sort of the inspiration for smartphone filmmaking is mobile journalism, where journalists head out the door now, and everybody's journalistic roles sort of cross pollinated now, so you can lump in radio, with print and TV, they all sort of act the same, they head out the door. And the first thing you're doing is whipping out their smartphones and they're doing like a little stand up on the way to the fire, you know, are on the way to do a media event and feeding nap right from their smartphone to social to get you know, the audience motivated. And they feed tidbits they show behind the scenes work of how they're working well, that covered the story. You know, it's kind of a, it's an extension of news brand. So, you know, they show the characteristics of the news brand, they show how they work behind the scenes, what they stand for. So those two things are related. It's using your smartphone to the fullest. Learning how to turn stuff around real quick. Creating it and designing it and formatting it specifically for different social media platforms and getting it out there.

Pat Bolland 03:45

Okay, so where do you teach that? Do you teach that in newsrooms? Or do you teach it at universities or colleges...

Stephen Knifton 03:52

All of the above? I started out with when COVID hits so I was teaching it all over the place via zoom. I've taught at UCLA Duke Hunter College, Clemson tufts, I'm not kidding, all over the place. And then here in Toronto at Centennial, Sheridan, Seneca. So I'm going back in the fall more and more to in person, but I teach it both online and in person.

Pat Bolland 04:19

And what kind of students are enrolled ... are they journalism students or ...

Stephen Knifton 04:24

There's there's some journalism students, there's a lot of I find PR students and when I say students that can come from any age, it can be young adults, it can be adults, it can be, you know, teens, they can be aspiring filmmakers. And so there's a lot of them that want are aspiring filmmakers who want to learn the social story want to learn the smartphone, filmmaking side. There's a lot of creative entrepreneurs. There's a lot of brands there's a lot of small business who understand the importance of marketing themselves on social. So they want to know how to do it themselves with a smartphone as opposed to hiring a, you know, a freelance videographer. So, you know, it comes from across the board across the gamut. And some of them have experience in filmmaking and photography, some don't. And I tend to start from square one. So everybody's on the same page and then proceed from there.

Pat Bolland 05:20

What is the biggest challenge? Because a lot of these students walk into the classroom with a smartphone, and they've been using it for a while, right?

Stephen Knifton 05:28

Yeah, exactly. You know, it's funny, I'll say, what isn't the biggest challenge first, some people might think that the remote learning part is a bit of a pain, which not, because I teach everything, obviously, through the smartphone, and I have some good mirroring software. So I teach it virtually the same way, no pun intended as I would in person. So you know, I fire up the smartphone, and I'm shooting all around my studio and saying, you know, here's how to manage white balance, and exposure and frame rate and all this stuff. And I mirror my phone screen right into zoom. So they're at home seeing exactly what I see on my phone. So what I'm pointing and showing them the interface and all that stuff. So it works that way, effectively. You know, there's a slight disadvantage. You can't lean over their shoulder and, you know, help them out if they have...

Pat Bolland 06:20

press the button for them.

Stephen Knifton 06:22

Yeah, press the buttons for them. Yeah. It's a little bit of a challenge, sometimes sharing work, you know, in class labs, and quick, you know, on the spot exercises, go shoot this and come back in 20 minutes and show me what you got. So that's a little bit of a different call to because then they have to, you know, upload it to the drive cloud or something, but other not no complaints.

Pat Bolland 06:45

Okay, but I wasn't thinking so much about the challenges you faced. In teaching, I was thinking about the challenge the student faces in learning. Like, what's the hard part? Is it? Is it framing or is it technology, or what?

Stephen Knifton 07:02

I don't know, if it's a difficulty, I try to make it approachable. I guess every teacher does that. There's when you when you are getting the most out of your smartphone camera, which as I explained a minute ago, you completely able to create brand film quality content. It's not overly technical, but it's a little bit not complicated, but it's a little bit nuanced, you know, you have to get into frame rates and bit rates and color space a little bit, no more or less than you would have to do with a regular film camera if you're trying to get the best out of a regular film camera. So you have to do it. With the smartphone, you have to get involved and understand it somewhat. But it's just like anything else, I tried to make it clear that this isn't a magic bullet, it's not a point and shoot, and it makes great content for you, you have to work at it and learn it and study it. But the advantage is everybody has one of these cameras, and you don't have to go out and be jealous of the next guy's film camera or save up for one. Everybody has one. So you know, the difficulty is maybe if you want to call it that, or the challenge is telling everybody or making it clear to everyone that it's not, you know, it's not a magic bullet. It's not point and shoot, and it does the work for you. It's like any other creative endeavor, you have to get involved in it, roll up your sleeves and work at it and get better at it.

Pat Bolland 08:29

Okay, let's break it down a little bit in terms of filmmaking versus mobile journalism, and I will get to the mobile journalism. But let's start with filmmaking. Because it seems to me, I wonder if it's used

currently, and you made reference to that gentleman who was using it, but how extensive that is, and whether there's money in it.

Stephen Knifton 08:47

There's money, I don't know if their return on investment might be monetary, but it's certainly you leverage value out of it, in my opinion, in that, you know, as we know, this is no longer open for debate, every last brand on Earth, big small individual has to market themselves on social. So you know, you have to do it. And you have to have a, you know, a well thought out continual, reliable, interesting and engaging social media campaign, you have to do it, you have to find the time to do it. You know, whether you hire somebody else to do it, whether you get the office intern to do it, whether you do it yourself, you have to do it. And you have to make it good. You have to create good content. So you can you know, with this thing, you can do it yourself. And there's other apps that help you format the stuff and create preset and templated designs to make the content you're creating specific for all these channels. So you get a payoff that way. It's interesting that you should say that though, because I'm sort of in this endeavor and putting myself out of business. Because I used to be one of those guys, who was a freelance videographer who would go around and do brand work for clients, I spent 10 years doing that,

Pat Bolland 10:07

right.

Stephen Knifton 10:07

So now I'm trying to convince these brands that they shouldn't hire people like me, and they should do it themselves. The funny part is, the funny part is, you can go out and get hired to do brand work. And I've done this, and you know, this thing is just as good as the, you know, the \$5,000, Panasonic DSLR used to have, but I would pull this out and start shooting, and I could see the client looking at me going, that's all well and good, where's the real camera, you know, you could shoot on this, and then sometimes you pull out the big camera just to keep them and you don't worry, I got a real camera here, you know, but they could never tell the difference. But there's money in it. As sure as there's money in freelancers getting hired to create content, you know, there really is,

Pat Bolland 10:55

well, okay, let's talk about social media, because it's ubiquitous, and it you know, gives unlimited access to so many different things. But it also has been proven to be a bit of a source of fake news. So I'd love your opinion on social media.

Stephen Knifton 11:15

I've, I've incorporated that, as an integral part of what I teach, you know, it'd be crazy not to. And the thing that I've discovered, I had a few classes and courses that were specific to music and entertainment industry. And it's so vital for them. Because musicians and artists and entertainment companies and all kinds of creative businesses, they start building an audience, you know, before their product is ready to roll out. And you know, you can this is entertainment specific, but you can apply this to just about anything, any growing business. And there's communities out there on social media that have interests in just about everything in anything. So smart entrepreneurs creative or not

entertainment, or not go out and find these communities and engage with them. Well, they're building and developing their business, and they show the development of their business as a work in progress. They make and create social media about it. Post that. And by the time they hit the ground running, they have an audience built in, or a community based around them. So it's, you know, it's not a cold start, they've developed an interest around what they do, while they're doing it. People love backstage, people love, you know, access people like behind the scenes and lift up the hood and see how things work. It's not for everybody, but you know, you can always find a specific and interesting community out there.

Pat Bolland 12:46

Yeah, it's, you know, Elon Musk, and Tesla must use that, because they always have leaks out there, the next design, and then I guess they balloon it and see who likes this thing.

Stephen Knifton 12:55

With a grain of salt. I mean, it's not some sort of answer. To answer the rest of your question. I mean, it's, yeah, fake news is one thing, you always have to consider the source, and not believe everything you read or hear. And when you do contribute to social media, it's always important to maintain it, you know, your engagement, don't just post something and go away. So you have to stay there sometimes to defend your opinion if you're unfairly portrayed, or sometimes to counter arguments. But as long as people see you're involved, that's part of the deal. But yeah, again, you're gonna ask me about mobile journalism and social media. That's right. Yeah. That's, that's an interesting story. Again, there's so much of an audience out there that likes to understand a brand, I guess, particularly a news brand, by seeing how they tick and understand what goes on behind the scenes and understanding the process. So as I was saying, before, so many journalists will be heading to a story and they'll be shooting what they do while they're doing it. You know, there's a, there's a station, a TV station in San Diego that gets fantastic ratings and these anchors, you know, they come on at six o'clock, they read the news, they throw to all these package stories, and then when they hit a commercial break, they both turn to the side and they have a live Facebook feed going and they start talking to their live Facebook audience going like you know, the cameraman is you know, didn't tuck his pants in tonight or about that last story or it's hot in here. What are we going to have after the show to eat you know, let's stop and then boom back to the show. So you know, that's not earth shattering but it's just an example of the kind of slice of life thing that's the social media people like to like to get.

Pat Bolland 14:48

Yeah, I can see. I can see that happening at you know, football sideline to it, like, it could be huge.

Stephen Knifton 14:57

Exactly. But yeah, exactly. But in going back to the journalism, it's some of the older folks, not like us older than us, you know.

Pat Bolland 15:08

We're getting up there.

Stephen Knifton 15:10

No, don't tell anybody that we're on camera. Still. Some of the older journalists, you know, the veteran journalists who are used to filing, you know, one story a day if that, and then they're happy. But with social media, you have to file perpetually. So that gets a little getting used to. But again, the tools that you have in here, it's not just an enhanced camera. There's all kinds of these little apps, as I said, that can take your story and have apply a template to it design. It adds sort of creative bells and whistles and text and all that stuff, and makes it really easy to make specific content for Instagram, let's say, when you're out at a breaking story or product launch and just got done. You know, it's off posted on Instagram before the event is barely over. So it influences media journalism, in that it speeds everything up. Now, with that, yeah. This fact checking go out the window, maybe a little bit. Does, you know, is it an unimpeachable source for news? Probably not, you know, social media. I mean, it's like anything, I don't know how unimpeachable newspapers and TV as either. So you know,

Pat Bolland 16:27

yeah, good point. And the other thing that can happen I know what happens on Twitter for instances, they see what's trending in any particular geography. Do you have a ... I hate to use the word but favorite social media, whether it's Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn. LinkedIn is business one, for instance.

Stephen Knifton 16:45

Yeah. I like LinkedIn. I do. You know, I I'm so deep into the minutes I almost categorize them according to how good they are and their strengths and all that stuff. I kind of liked them all in their way. I'm starting to come around to Twitter. I've been really late to the game and Twitter, you know, because I'm which time do you have, you know, but I'm, I'm sort of enjoying Twitter now more. But one thing I will say is tick tock is not to be ignored. Tic Tok is an absolute juggernaut. It's, it's crazy. The, you know, every time I start a new course, I have to write a new kind of bio about myself, and I write a little bit of background about tic tock and I look to see what the latest subscriber numbers are. And they've gone up by a quarter of a billion every quarter, you know, or a quarter million every quarter. It's insane. There's not a brand, you know, corporate global brands down to a musician who doesn't pay a lot of attention to what tick tock does, and the potential behind tick tock, their, that algorithm, that platform is just crazy.

Pat Bolland 17:55

Why why do you think that is? It's, it's more entertainment based, isn't it?

Stephen Knifton 18:00

It is. And it's it's, you wouldn't put all your your social media marketing eggs in that basket in one basket, particularly that basket. But it's the demo is not, you know, 14 year old goofballs, like everybody might think it's not just doing pranks, like everybody might think. It's just another way to look at your brand. You know, whatever your brand is, whether you're a huge brand, whether you're, you know, just in soul creative entrepreneur, people will look at you from different perspectives, and having people look at you from the TikTok perspective is definitely valuable. It shows your, the content you're going to make on there is a little bit lighter, but it's not frivolous. You know, there's serious stuff on there. It's just kind of more short form, for sure. It's more punchy, it's irreverent, but not, not brainless, you know. So there's room for clauses on there, there's room for nonprofits to, you know, spout their ideas, and you

know, there's room for everybody on there. It just has a certain kind of tone to it, you know? And what happens with TikTok is everybody, there's trends on TikTok, so everybody copies these trends, and then builds off these trends. And you have to spend some time following it. But it's not just the kids who are doing it. It's all these brands do it and they don't get old guys like us, they get young guys to say, Okay, here's our brand, be careful with it, go take it into TikTok world and, you know, create a Tic Tac version of the brand. And there's usually great results in great ROI when they do that. I mean, like Washington Post, as a guy, Dave, forget his last name right now. He's a legend on TikTok. Anybody who teaches mobile journalism always points to this guy who used to be a newsroom intern. And then he wrote for Comedy Central, and he does nothing but repurpose Washington Post content through the prism of TikTok like creates Tiktok content out of Washington post content and it's hilarious and it's relevant and it gets you right in the wheelhouse and he's telling great stories in 30 seconds snippets, but you're laughing you're are so often, you know, at the same time, and that he's a poster boy for, you know how to do it. Right. And I mean, he's not the only one.

Pat Bolland 20:23

And that's what you teach Steve. Great to chat man

Stephen Knifton 20:26

Absolutely Pat! My pleasure.

Pat Bolland 20:28

All right. See you again soon.

Stephen Knifton 20:29

We'll see you around the corner.

Pat Bolland 20:30

Okay, buddy, Steve Kinifton... educator