

Rick Smith
and Kim Miller

Shoot



TO

SELL

Make Money
Producing
Special Interest
Videos



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Rick Smith and Kim Miller

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Disclaimer

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This text should be used only as a general guide and not as the definitive source of information on producing special interest videos. It is not the purpose of this book to provide all the information on every conceivable business and marketing method that is available to readers, but to explain how the authors organize and run their video publishing business. It is up to the reader to supplement this information with other texts and resources. Available materials may be found on the web, in libraries, bookstores, and from other sources. Some are listed in the Resources section of this book. The fact that an organization or website is referred to in this work as a citation and/or a potential source of further information does not mean the authors or the publisher endorses the information the organization or website may provide or recommendations it may make. Further, readers should be aware the internet websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written, and when it is read.

Preface

Welcome to the world of video publishing and the special interest video (SIV) industry. This book is for anyone interested in producing and selling their own videos. Whether you're an experienced filmmaker or simply someone with a desire to produce a video, you've come to the right place.

One of the first things you should do is get a notebook. We'll be asking you to think about and write down a lot of ideas. Keep your notebook handy and as you're reading this book, take the time to write down questions, ideas, and processes that occur to you. You also should have on hand manila file folders because as you go through the processes we recommend, you'll be collecting a lot of written material to use for inspiration and marketing ideas.

We applaud your enthusiasm but want to stress that this is not a "get rich quick" scheme. It is a business and like any business you will have to put work into it, plan well and have the determination to succeed. Everyone we know who has been successful in this industry has worked hard at it, occasionally taken their lumps, learned from their mistakes and continued to improve. While it is work, it's creatively and financially rewarding. We wouldn't trade it for anything.

We'll share with you the things we've learned that work and help you avoid the mistakes we've made. You'll read case studies of people we know who are successfully selling SIVs. For some of them it's a full-time business; for others it is an important additional source of income but it's not the only thing they do. That's a message we want you to get. You can start out producing one video, learn the ropes, and decide if this is for you. Later you may decide to make it a career or just keep it as a supplement to something else you are doing.

This is not meant to be a course in video production, although we will cover the basics of equipment and enough production techniques to give you a good start. There are lots of books, videos, and resources available for learning video production and we encourage you to seek them out if you want to dig deeper into that topic. We're going to focus more on a vital part of the business that you won't find a lot of resources on—producing and marketing a special interest video.

If you want to make money then you need to start with a good marketing plan because SIV success is about producing what you *can* sell, rather than attempting to sell what you can produce. Marketing decisions need to be made at *each* step of the product development process *before* you have a finished video for sale because marketing is much more than figuring out a way to promote your video once it is complete.

You should be thinking about marketing from idea conception to delivering your video into the hands of your customer. Some of the activities that we will be covering and questions you will be answering throughout this book include:

Business Development—How you'll structure your business, how you'll fund your video, what your budget will be, etc.

Product Development—What you will produce, what it will look like, who will be involved, are you the expert on the topic, and will you have partners?

Market Research—Is it a viable topic? Who will buy it, where are the buyers, and how can you reach them profitably?

Competitor Analysis—What other videos and programs are you competing against?

How are they priced, how are they promoted, and can you find your own unique niche?

Production Strategies—What style of production will it be and how will you approach production efficiently and professionally?

Pricing Strategy—How will you price it?

Distribution and eCommerce Strategies—How will you get it to your customers? How will you get paid?

Marketing Strategies—What are the best ways of letting your potential customers know about your video and how to create desire to purchase it?

WHY ALL THE TALK ABOUT MARKETING?

Can you shoot a video before you have a marketing plan? Of course you can, but then you may find out too late that your market was too small, your cost of production too high, your price was wrong, or your market too difficult and expensive to reach. Trust us ... this we have learned from personal experience! You'll be more successful if you plan and research each one of these activities before producing your video and we'll show you how to do that.

On the other hand, we don't want you to have paralysis of analysis either. Just follow the steps we lay out for you, do due diligence with an objective eye, and then take your best shot. If you miss the mark a bit you can sharpen your axe and go at it again next time with renewed energy and new skills. If you hit it out of the ballpark the first time, and it does happen, we want to know about it.

Our approach to our video publishing business is to create multiple streams of income. We don't count on a single video to retire on. Rather, we want to have a lot of products on the market at different stages in the sales cycle, each one adding to our overall income. That's the model we're suggesting you follow, too.

DON'T GO IT ALONE

Very few people who read this book will have all the skills needed to go it alone so don't worry about that. You don't want to do everything yourself anyway. That's not running a business, that's just creating a job for yourself. You want to leverage your time and talents by surrounding yourself with people who can boost you up the ladder of success.

We tell you about seeking partners who are the experts in your video topic, or if you're the subject expert we talk about hiring a production company. We talk a lot about marketing but if copywriting and web design are not your thing, by all means get some help. We tell you how to do that inexpensively, too.

One of our concerns while writing this is that the pace of change is so rapid that the specific equipment, software, or websites we mention today may not exist in a few years. That's bound to happen, so we've built a companion website at www.shoot-to-sell.com where we'll keep you current on the latest trends, make specific recommendations, offer equipment reviews, and do everything we can to provide the information you need to succeed.

Rick Smith and Kim Miller

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We have a lot of people to thank for helping us make this book a reality. Ron Dexter (www.rondexter.com), a friend and mentor of mine, helped by allowing us to draw from his decades of film production experience. We want to also thank Joe Clokey, Rich Ferguson, Dave Sheahan, Jessica Swanson, Alan Berg, Gail Bottomley, and Mike Deiure for allowing us to interview them for our case studies.

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A Few Housekeeping Notes before We Start

First and foremost, this book was written by two people: Rick Smith and Kim Miller. We discovered that it was too confusing to write it in both our voices even though we did both write it, so it is written from my perspective (Rick). However, there is no way this book could have or would have been written without Kim's knowledge, motivation, and determination to see it through. In fact, if it wasn't for her astute use of Twitter the connections would have never been made for us to write this in the first place. So, a huge thank you and acknowledgment is due to Kim.

You will see us use the word camera and camcorder interchangeably. Since this book is about shooting videos, if you see the word "camera" just assume we are talking about a video camera, and that includes a digital SLR, your smartphone, pocket camera, basically anything that records video.

We alternately use the terms shooting, taping, and filming. They mean the same thing—recording to video.

We refer to search engines often. We may say Google since it is the largest search engine but unless we're specifically referencing a Google tool, if you prefer Yahoo, Bing, Ask, AOL Search, AltaVista, Gigablast, or other search engines, feel free to substitute those.

When talking about how well a website shows up in search engines you'll see me use the term page rank a lot in this book. I use it for the sake of simplicity. This phrase is used almost universally but in fact Google owns the trademark and patent for the word PageRank®. Technically, other search engines use a different phrase. For example, Yahoo's official word for it is Yahoo! Web Rank®.

You will see us use the words online and offline in this book. When we use them we are referencing marketing activities that happen on and off of the internet. Those terms can mean something different in the world of high-end editing.

Also when we talk about studio, we're referring to an indoor environment set up for filming that is relatively sound proof. It can be in your home or a rented space. Unless we're specifically talking about making a feature-length film, we don't mean a movie studio company.

Lastly, because we live and work in the United States of America, when we refer to laws and regulations in this book, we are talking about those in the U.S. If you live in another country, they may not be the same. You have to research the laws where you live and how they apply in your situation.

Video Publishing Business

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Introduction

I used to have a “real job.” I was head of a university media production department. Like many people, I got up early, dressed for work, put in my time, came home, and did it again the next day. And the next ... for 22 years. In that job I had a lot of friends, made good money, won a bunch of national awards, and supported my family. I enjoyed the work and the steady paycheck, but I longed to be my own boss. For some reason, I always felt that my life was not really mine. As it turned out, neither was that job.

My wife Kim was also good at her job, but she was unhappy. She had to get up so early to commute 45 minutes to be at work at 7:30 a.m., and then process paperwork all day. She used to get so blue on Sunday nights that just thinking about going to work the next day would make her sick. She’s a creative person and her job in human resources was stifling her spirit. She was a square peg in a round hole, a bad fit and a waste of talent.

Now we get up when we feel like it, usually by 6:00 a.m. or earlier *by choice* because we’re so excited to get back to our work. We set our own schedules, pursue creative projects of our choosing, are constantly learning, travel a lot, and have an incredible amount of freedom to live our lives the way we want to. Our work is stimulating, challenging, and rewarding. It feels more like play than work. I’ve never been happier.

The thing that allows us to do this now is our home business producing and marketing special interest videos (I’m generally going to refer to them in this book as “SIVs”). Our commute consists of going upstairs to make coffee and turn on the computer, often to find that we’ve made sales while we slept. Our business never closes and our “store” is worldwide.

Does this sound like something you’ve been dreaming of? If so, then this book is for you. If you yearn for the freedom I just described, if you’re an entrepreneurial person just waiting for an outlet for your creativity, or if you’re an expert on a topic and you want to share your knowledge with a wider audience, you will love what this book is going to teach you.

Did you notice that in the previous sentence I didn’t specifically say if you’re a filmmaker or videographer? I did that for a reason.

Having a background in video or filmmaking is an asset in the SIV business but it is not a requirement, as you’ll see when you read further.

Here’s how I, Rick Smith, got into this business. I started working at Visual Education Productions (VEP) at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California, way back in 1976, right out of college. VEP was a unique quasi-commercial operation that produced and sold classroom educational materials to agriculture teachers all around the United States.

I had just graduated from the University of Central Florida with a degree in photography and so started out as a photographer. I loved shooting slides to a script, editing them, recording a narrator, mixing sound and adding music, then marketing them and seeing the final product sell over and over, all around the country, for years.

This was prior to the first consumer VHS machines and the technology of the day was films and sound filmstrips. By 1980 VHS machines were beginning to show up in classrooms and so we began producing videos, which was even more fun. I was hooked.

I enjoyed several years doing every possible production role and soon became director of the program. “Director” was an administrative title and I actually spent most of my time budgeting, planning, reporting, and managing personnel. Direct mail marketing of

our products became the focus of my job and I discovered that I was quite adept at it; I liked copywriting, design, list selection, analysis ... pretty much all of it. I missed being involved in the creative side of production but I learned a lot of sound business and marketing principles that help me today.

In 1997 the university suddenly closed the program. Bang, gone! My entire career had been spent in VEP so my work experience was quite specific: I knew how to produce and market educational videos. There were no similar job opportunities available to me in that area and I really had to think about what to do next with my life.

One of the key lessons I took away from that job was that you can package visual information and people will pay you for it, and pay pretty good prices, too. Another lesson was that I never again wanted to work for an organization that could chop my job on a whim. I saw how vulnerable you are when you work for someone else.

I took stock of my situation and realized that I was itching to get behind the camera again. I also knew that I had the business skills to run a successful business and that's when I started my own video production company. Because the loss of my job came on the heels of a divorce (I've since married Kim, my business partner and co-author of this book), I had practically no financial resources to start with but I didn't let that stop me. In my mind, I burned the bridge behind me. There was no way but forward.

At first I did work for clients because I needed to pay the bills, and that was good experience, but I always had plans to get back into video publishing. I started slowly switching from client work to producing videos to sell and today it is rare that I do any client work, and that's the way I like it.

Over time I saw that this business was perfect for many people but they just didn't even know that it existed. I see opportunities everywhere; in fact there are far more today than ever before and there will be even more in the future. This is an industry just beginning a huge growth phase that will last for decades and now is the perfect time to get on board.

The more we meet and talk with authors, entrepreneurs, coaches, video and film producers, and experts on any subject, the more Kim and I feel the need to take the lead and show others how they can be successful SIV producers.

Teaching others how to create and market special interest videos has become a driving passion for us and we've taken steps to put that passion into action. We blog extensively on the subject at www.howtosellyourvideos.com and produced two videos on this topic, *Make Money Selling Your Videos* and *My Secrets Of Producing Special Interest Videos*, which you'll find at that website. We have formed the Special Interest Video Organization (www.specialinterest-video.org) and the Special Interest Video Academy (www.sivacademy.com). You are invited to visit us at all of those sites, plus the free companion site to this book at www.shoot-to-sell.com.

A WORD TO FILMMAKERS

The affordability of digital cameras and editing systems has spawned a generation of independent filmmakers. Our hats are off to these creative artists. They are producing some great entertainment. Most don't have a chance of getting picked up by big distributors, but here's the good news. The marketing techniques we'll cover in this book also apply to independent films. You can take the reins and market and distribute your films yourself. There are many cases of filmmakers producing good movies on budgets under \$10,000 who are making profits by selling their films using the strategies and tactics we'll cover.

Ready to get started? Let's begin with an introduction to what SIVs are and who buys them.

Special Interest Videos and the World of Video Publishing

Chapter Objectives

- Understand what special interest videos (SIVs) are.
- Learn who produces SIVs.
- Get a better idea of who buys SIVs.
- See the financial potential of producing SIVs.

What do exercise videos, documentaries, and computer tutorials have in common? They are all special interest videos!

I personally don't care for the term "special interest videos," but I've struggled to find a better way to describe them and I always come back to that. Take the phrase apart and it is actually an accurate description. They are simply videos that appeal to a special interest. In fact, that's the name Amazon and Netflix use to describe this broad category.

SIVs are usually differentiated from the movie and pure entertainment category like the book publishing industry differentiates non-fiction books from novels. Other terms you will see used to describe these types of programs include educational, instructional, non-fiction, or how-to videos. Call them what you like, for the sake of brevity we'll stick with SIVs.

SIV topics can include histories, documentaries, nature programs, "kidvid," safety, health, tutorials, travel, cooking, training, biographies, and much, much more. If there is something someone wants to know about a specific topic and the best way of explaining or showing it is through a video, that's a special interest video.

WHO PRODUCES SPECIAL INTEREST VIDEOS?

I want to stress again that this is not a get rich quick business. If that's what you're looking for then you're going to be disappointed. This is a real business and it's going to take work and dedication, just like any other business.

That said, it is something that people of even quite modest means can get into. It isn't just large production companies with big budgets making these types of videos. For every large company, there are thousands of regular people like you and me, with small budgets and simple gear, producing profitable videos on all types of topics. In fact, many people are making and selling videos they produced without a camera, using only their computer. We introduce you to a couple of them in this book.

SIVs present a huge opportunity for coaches, speakers, or experts in a subject who want to take their special skill or knowledge, turn it into a video, and sell it. Making a video is easier and faster for most people than writing a book and can have more impact. Instead of training one-on-one, you could reach thousands of people around the world! Imagine how many people's lives you can influence and change in this manner.

There are many examples of people making fortunes in SIVs. Jane Fonda and Suzanne Somers blazed a trail in the home exercise video market, a path taken up by their contemporary counterparts like Jillian Michaels and Tracy Anderson. The late Stephen Covey, Tony Robbins, Robert Kiyosaki, Brian Tracy, and scores of famous trainers and coaches have produced videos that are viewed millions of times all around the world. This business model is still highly profitable today with people like Suze Orman not only making a mark on television but selling SIVs as well.

But don't think you need to be famous or a celebrity to make a successful special interest video.

Cole Mathews is the son of my former office manager. He took an early interest in video production and extreme sports, skateboarding competitions specifically, and he now travels the world producing videos on these events. He gets to indulge in his favorite activities and make a good living while he's doing it. There are some teenage video entrepreneurs making successful SIVs by taping skateboarding, surfing, and BMX events, activities they love. Age is no barrier. Not having millions to invest isn't either.

We have other filmmaker and non-videographer friends and associates successfully making and selling videos on diving, ocean kayaking, horse training, internet marketing, exercise, magic, dating, poker, real estate, and more.

My point is that almost any topic is fair game and almost everyone has the potential to produce one. If you have a hobby or burning interest in a subject, chances are there are other people who share your interest and they are your potential customers.

So you see, what falls under the category of "special interest videos" is almost limitless. The ability to produce one, no matter your age, financial situation, or lack of video knowledge, is within your reach.

Of course not everyone will be as financially successful as Jane Fonda or Tony Robbins, making millions off of their videos. However, what would an additional \$500, \$1,000, or more per month mean in your life? That could buy you a new car, cover your mortgage payment, fund your children's college accounts, pay for that trip of a lifetime, or build up your retirement savings.

If you turn what you know into a video that sells moderately well, it is quite possible to make that much or far more. For us, sales of our SIVs allow us to say no to client work we don't want, get our weekends back, focus on higher paying corporate clients, and of course, produce and sell more of our own video titles!

How would that additional income change your life?

WHAT IS THE MARKET FOR SPECIAL INTEREST VIDEOS?

Before we talk about who buys SIVs, you need to understand the concept of a niche because determining what niche you intend to sell in plays a large part in determining how much money you'll make. One of my favorite sayings is, "there are riches in niches." It comes down to knowing your market and going after it with laser focus.

In the marketing world and as defined in www.thefreedictionary.com, a niche is a special area of demand for a product or service.

For example, golf is such a broad topic that I wouldn't call it a niche. Whereas "female golfers over age 50" is much more narrowly defined, and that is a niche. Can you see how much easier it would be to produce a video that appealed to that specific target market?

When I say there are "riches in niches," what I mean is you need to produce your video with the needs of a specific market in mind. The more targeted your video is to a particular group of people (niche audience), the better your chances of reaching and selling to them. This is an important point that we will again discuss in the chapter on choosing a topic to produce.

For example, the videos I produced about producing and marketing special interest videos are in themselves special interest videos targeted to a fairly narrow niche: people who want to produce and sell special interest videos. *You* are obviously interested in this topic or you wouldn't be reading this book, but this is a subject that will fly under the radar of most people. "Special interest video producers" is a niche.

The niches in which Stephen Covey, Wayne Dyer, and Jillian Michaels produced their videos are some of the most commercially successful special interest video categories: self-help and fitness. In fact they are so large, I would use the word *genre* to describe them rather than niche. Other top-selling genres are sports and children's video (also called "kidvid"); dance, business, and sex videos are close behind. Your best bet is to choose a topic that appeals to a niche within these large genres so that you are more clearly targeting a specific interest.

However, SIVs don't have to be big, exciting topics in these genres to be successful. You don't have to stoop to producing pornography either. (Personally I wouldn't recommend that if you want to keep your reputation.)

In fact, all of the aforementioned multi-million dollar areas are also highly saturated and fiercely competitive. If you are a small producer on a limited budget, it will be much harder to be seen in these markets and convince people to buy your video over the well-known brands that are so established. Focusing on a more specific niche is a much better way to start out. "Niche it down," we say.

The first video we produced at VEP, around 1981, was *The Elements of Pruning*. It was a simple program about why and how to prune shrubs and trees. Now that doesn't sound very exciting, does it? And it wasn't, unless you happened to want to learn how to prune trees and shrubs. Then it was the perfect product to satisfy your special interest! In fact, we sold thousands of them at an average cost of \$100 each.

It pleases me to know that that video is still selling today for the company that now owns that title, over 30 years later, at a now *reduced* price of \$80 per copy. That simple video production has earned hundreds of thousands of dollars over its lifetime and it's still going strong. Pruning practices aren't likely to change much, so it'll probably sell for many more years.

My close friend and fellow filmmaker, Joe Clokey, is passionate about horticulture and environmental concerns. He has created scores of videos on those topics. He sells these 20–25-minute videos through his company, San Luis Video Publishing, to schools and universities worldwide at a typical price of \$120 each. These aren't Hollywood-quality productions but they are well made and are appropriate for the market they are intended for, which is primarily horticulture and agriculture teachers.

Joe's videos are relatively inexpensive to produce and most will have a sales life of more than ten years. They sell for premium prices because they are so specific and because there is little competition in that niche. Schools are used to paying higher prices for instructional videos because of the nature of how they are shown, i.e., in a classroom to a group of students. This is another important difference in producing special interest video titles as opposed to mass market movie titles that you see at discount stores for under \$10; they can sell for higher prices due to the nature and market for which they are made.

Aside from making a good income from his videos, Joe is doing something with his skills that he feels is important. His business earns over \$300,000 per year from titles that are mostly 10 years old or older, with relatively little effort on his part. He started working for me on a student video project almost 25 years ago and loved the work so much he made it a career. You'll meet him later.

Another friend, Jim Harrigan, also started his SIV publishing career as a student at the university. He produced a video for our department as his senior project. In fact, he's the on-camera host in that video I told you about, *The Elements of Pruning*. He followed that up with a bunch of horticulture videos before getting into producing medical training videos over 20 years ago and has made an excellent income from them. His titles sell for \$300 to \$400 each!

Don't fall into the following trap though ...

Let's take a moment to look at the other side of the coin. I have seen enthusiastic entrepreneurs lose their shirts by producing a video that they could not sell or that cost them so much that they never had a chance of breaking even. They didn't do their homework before starting. They let their enthusiasm for a subject take control before they did their research. This is a hard lesson to learn, believe me, but it is very important for you to get this point. I have seen people make some very expensive mistakes because they didn't do their research. I've been one of these guilty people.

We're going to discuss how to choose topics with a high chance of financial success and how to research your potential market and their willingness to buy your video in the following chapters.

WHO BUYS SPECIAL INTEREST VIDEOS?

A logical question you may have about now is who buys SIVs? Who would be your likely customers?

Customers come in all types, from schools, organizations, and companies that buy them for training, to individuals buying them to learn something new or polish a skill. Keep in mind, no matter how big the purchasing organization is, a *person* will be making the decision to purchase your video. That knowledge comes in very handy in your marketing efforts as I will explain.

Here are some samples of the types of customers to whom I have personally sold SIVs:

Armed Forces	Junior High Schools
Assisted Living Centers	Long-Term Care Facilities
Bookstores	Museums
Clubs	Non-Profit Organizations
Community Colleges	Pre-Schools
Disneyland	Prisons (they use them for job training)
Elementary Schools	Public Libraries
Gift Shops	School Libraries
High Schools	Sea World
Historical Societies	Small Business Owners
Hobby Shops	Specialty High Schools
Hobbyists in All Areas	Specialty Libraries (e.g., medical, agricultural, law)
Homeschoolers	The Capitol Mall
Hospitals	Trade Schools
Individuals	Training Departments for Corporations
Insurance Companies	Universities (both private and public)

These customers came from over 25 different countries. This list isn't complete and it doesn't include distributors who buy from us and then resell to even wider markets. We'll come back to this list later when we talk about doing research and marketing your videos.

I personally buy SIVs all the time. When I need to learn something about a video post-production topic I'm not familiar with I turn to www.larryjordan.biz, www.lynda.com or any number of specialty video publishers. I've also spent lots of money on tutorials to improve my guitar playing. I used to fly airplanes but it has been a number of years since I was pilot in command, so now I'm looking at pilot training videos to refresh my skills and knowledge. Kim and I also like to rent or check out videos on history, travel, and cooking from the library. And remember, the library has to buy these videos from someone, so why not you?

I'll bet you've bought SIVs too, although you may not have realized it or called them by that name. Did your teacher use videos to teach a subject? Have you downloaded cooking videos, software tutorials, or videos from live or taped events? Those are all SIVs too.

With the arrival of technology that can provide high quality video online to the rapidly expanding base of mobile users with smartphones and tablets, in addition to computers and TVs, the demand for content is growing exponentially. This is an excellent time for creative videographers, filmmakers, experts, and entrepreneurs to enter the special interest video production business to feed this hungry market.

OUR BUSINESS MODEL—"SHOOT IT ONCE, SELL IT FOR YEARS"™

Our business model is simple: you keep producing a stream of programs that have a long potential shelf life, sometimes as long as 15 to 20 years or more. We call these "evergreen" because they don't change or become obsolete quickly. The goal is to produce a body of programs that all contribute to your gross income. All of these streams of income feed into a flowing river. By producing multiple titles you even out the ups and downs of individual sales cycles, particularly if some of your titles sell more during one time of year, such as the Christmas gift season, than others.

The potential long shelf life of SIVs is a key benefit of the business. With a carefully chosen topic you can enjoy residual income from your work for many years, even decades. Imagine spending as little as a week or two producing a video that sells for 20 years. As I mentioned earlier, my first instructional video, *The Elements of Pruning*, produced in 1981, is still selling today at \$80 to the school market.

We like to use the term "shoot it once, sell it for years"™ to describe this aspect of producing SIVs.

Kim left her secure university position in human resources to join me in my video business in 2003, producing her first video on—drum roll please—*The Properties of Soil*. Yep, that's right, it was about soil, how it's formed and how its properties are evaluated. The market was high school agriculture and horticulture classes, as well as beginning soil science classes. This is a very narrow niche and you probably think that's about as boring a topic as you could pick, right?

Here's what Kim has to say about that:

"I absolutely loved the process of creating it! It brought together all my creative and intellectual sides; researching, conceptualizing, scripting, storyboarding, working with people (the advisor, narrator, on-camera talent, etc.), shooting and editing. I'm also pleased to say that it started selling well as soon as it came out!"

Now, if a former human resources specialist with no previous video production experience can produce a profitable program like this her first time out, what's stopping you?

Kim and I are both creative types with degrees in art and we used our skills to take something as mundane as *The Properties of Soil* and turn it into a Telly Award winning video. I hired a composer to write an original soundtrack, we shot beautiful footage and it came out great. It was produced on a budget of \$7,000 and to date the client we produced it for has sold over \$100,000 of that video and it will continue to sell for years to come. Insight Media, one of their distributors, marks it up to \$179 each, and they sell a lot of them.

When you think about it, how much competition do you think that video has? Probably none. How soon will it become outdated? Soil science doesn't change fast so the content will be relevant for decades to come. A long shelf life is guaranteed! That's a perfect example of an evergreen product and a brilliantly chosen niche video topic.

Our objective in choosing videos to produce is simple: choose a topic that will have a high chance of success and which will produce income for many years. Repeat the process over and over again.

HOW MUCH MONEY CAN YOU MAKE WITH SPECIAL INTEREST VIDEOS?

Let's get down to the dollars and cents of this business. The selling price of SIVs varies wildly, depending on the market.

I caution first-time producers to stay away from titles where you have to compete with Walmart prices. You don't want to be selling \$10 DVDs because you'll never sell enough to make much money, especially if you are going through distributors who take 50 percent or more of the sales price. Take out your cost of goods and you're left with almost nothing.

Remember this is a business and you have to run it that way.

I produced a video with an expert car detailer a few years back. He kept insisting we try to get this video into Walmart, then we could just sit back and watch the money flow in. I explained to him that to compete we'd have to probably sell it for \$3 to \$4 to Walmart if their retail price will be \$8.95 to \$9.95, maybe even less. After taking out the cost of duplicating and packaging (approximately \$1.25), and if I pay him a 20 percent royalty (which is very generous; in the book publishing industry, it averages 10 to 12 percent), he would be looking at making around \$0.35 to \$0.55 per DVD.

Now, you may say, if you sell millions of them, then that would be very profitable. True, but you probably wouldn't sell millions, and when you deal with large discount stores you encounter a different set of problems that may end up costing *you* thousands of dollars instead of making any money. Later on, you'll meet one of my friends and hear why he no longer sells to discount outlets.

There are cases where selling through a large retail outlet would be very profitable and I don't want to dissuade you from trying that, it's just not an easy route nor always the best choice. It's hard to get your video in front of a buyer and onto store shelves, and they'll take a huge discount for doing so. That's one way to go. We prefer hands-on involvement in the marketing process, not handing it over to someone to whom your product is just one more item to sell. We're all about internet sales and a large portion of this book is dedicated to that subject.

Now let's take a look at the income potential for SIVs.

Like I shared earlier when I talked about the school market, a typical SIV price is \$100 to \$150. A two-DVD set comprised of four 20-minute programs may sell for \$350 to \$400 on the high end. An average price in a specialty consumer market may be \$29 to \$49. Many more sell for \$19.95 to the home market. These markets are much easier for the independent producer to get into and tap than national discount stores.

Let's do some math so you can see the potential.

Assume you have produced just one title and you sell one copy per day at \$20 each. In one month that's 30 copies, earning \$600. (There's that car payment.) In one year that's \$7,200. In five years that adds up to \$36,000.00.

$$\begin{aligned}30 \times \$20 &= \$600/\text{month} \\12 \times \$600 &= \$7,200/\text{yr} \\(5 \times 12) \times \$600 &= \$36,000\end{aligned}$$

That's not a lot yet, but hold on. What if over time you produced 10 titles and each one sells just one copy per day. At \$20 each, that's \$200 a day. In one month, \$6,000. In one year, \$72,000. Over five years those 10 videos selling one copy a day would net you \$360,000. Now we're talking!

Just for fun let's boost that to \$50 per title, selling one per day of 10 titles. Your annual income would be \$182,500. That's pretty exciting to think about, isn't it?

$$\begin{aligned}(10 \times \$50) \times 30 &= \$15,000/\text{month} \\12 \times \$15,000 &= \$180,000/\text{yr} \\(5 \times 12) \times \$15,000 &= \$900,000\end{aligned}$$

Now, are those kind of sales really possible? Yes, but in all honesty you'll have to work for it.

Although there are producers who have met the right person at the right time and sold millions, for most of us, you can't expect that to happen. There's much more to it than sending it to Amazon or calling a few stores, sending out a few emails to other distributors or retail store buyers and expecting checks to come pouring in. Nor can you put up a website and expect people you think would want it to find it, then click on the Buy Button the minute they see what you have to offer.

I wish it was that easy, but it isn't. But what you will probably find, if you are passionate about making money with your videos, is that you will find it fun. Heck, you may discover a whole new talent or skill you didn't know you had and you'll meet some incredible people and future business partners along the way. That's what happened to us and how we came to be writing this book.

We are lucky in that we not only love video production, we also love marketing. For Kim, her passion for marketing wasn't there in the beginning. Now she's not only passionate about it, you could almost say she's obsessed with marketing, especially online marketing. We have found that, like anything else, if you put your shoulder into it you'll learn more, it'll get easier as you get better at it, and you'll make more money.

Our philosophy is that you have to be hands-on with marketing your products. Even if you turn it over to Amazon or a distributor, you're just one of many titles they have and you probably won't get the kind of sales you'd like (unless of course you're Al Gore). That's why we spend so much time in this book focusing on marketing.

If that causes you to groan, all I ask is that you stick with me. I'm not talking about door-to-door selling, or making cold calls, or spending thousands of dollars on advertising. I'm talking about direct marketing with a very big emphasis on using all the incredible and affordable internet and social media marketing tools at our disposal.

Like I said previously, Kim hated marketing. She somehow equated online marketing to scammy tactics. Once she saw that it was about building relationships and how people were really excited about and happy to buy the videos we produced, she got it. She really became thrilled when she saw her efforts turn into repeat customers and money in our bank account!

Now that you know what special interest videos are and the financial opportunities that are available to you, it's time to dig in and figure out what you want to produce. The first step in doing this is to pick your topic, research it, and then define and research your market and competition.

Action Steps

- Look back at the types of SIVs you have watched, purchased, or checked out at the library.
- Review the list of people and places that I've sold SIVs to and see if you can add more to the list.
- Run your own mathematical scenarios of your income potential.

Types of Special Interest Videos

Chapter Objectives

- Understand the various types of SIVs that you can produce.
- Choose which type you'd like to pursue first.

If you have never operated a video camera or written a script, the thought of producing a special interest video can be bewildering. Don't let that discourage you from getting started. When you break it down into logical steps it becomes quite manageable.

We're going to explore the basic formats you can choose for your SIV, from the simplest possible approach to a fully scripted movie-style production.

You may be the hands-on, roll up your sleeves and get behind the camera type or maybe your goal is to just get it done quickly, in which case it may be wiser for you to hire a professional video production crew to shoot and edit your video.

Whatever you decide to do, you have a lot of choices about the format or style that will be best suited to your topic.

SPECIAL INTEREST VIDEO FORMATS

Let's review some of the options you have for producing your SIV. We'll start with the simplest approaches and work up to the more challenging formats.

You are There

This is as simple as it gets. I worked with a man a few years ago who was making a very good living selling videos of flowers. That was it, no story, just close-ups of beautiful flowers with relaxing music behind it. He also did one on streams; it was simply beautiful shots of water running in streams, again with a relaxing soundtrack. It was hypnotic to watch. Last I heard from him he was continuing to expand his titles and was doing very well.

Similarly, we met a man recently who has produced a video of wild birds in Florida. It's nicely edited footage of birds, mostly in flocks, feeding in natural settings. It has soothing music in the background. Bird watching is his hobby and he leads groups of people on cruises and arranges excursion tours to go bird watching. Talk about living your passion!