SCRIPT TO SCREEN
Paerangi | Video 7a – Being a Producer

[intro music]

What is the role of the producer?

[0:00:11 Alex Lovell, Producer] The role of a producer. I think the role of a producer changes a little bit from when you're emerging to when you're a little bit further on in your career. I think when you're an emerging producer, the main thing is to find a piece of creative that you love, that you want to turn into a film, and then your job really is around setting it up so you're protecting that project, protecting yourself, managing the project from the conception of that creative, right through to the distribution and marketing of the finished project. I think it's really important to note there, too, find a piece of creative that you love. Sometimes when you're emerging, don't just take a role as a producer because it's a chance to be a producer; really find a piece of creative you love, because that's the thing that will drive you and get you jumping out of bed in the morning to make it. That's really important to know because some of these projects can take up quite a large portion of your life, and sometimes producing can feel like a really thankless task, but at the end when you have that finished product and it goes to a festival and you get to see audiences react to it, it's also a really satisfying thing. It's really great.

[0:01:22 Morgan Leigh Stewart, Producer] In my opinion, the role of a producer is essentially the manager, the heart, the engine of a production. I've heard it described as the financial, practical, and creative heart of a film, and I see that as quite a realistic description in a nutshell.

[0:01:44 Jaimee Poipoi, Producer] The role of the producer, I think they are the bridge that brings the art and the business together, so they take the idea and they're going to find a way to try and make it. I think that they are the voice between whoever's giving the funding and the team that is creating it, so I just feel like we kind of oversee the entire project, make sure everyone has what they need, and make sure that we just make the best thing we can with what we've got.

[0:02:15 Alex Lovell, Producer] When you're an emerging producer you're also kind of a line producer, so as a producer you oversee a project from start to finish, and when you're emerging you're focused on one project, so you become your own line producer as well, and a line producer focuses more microscopically on a project and the day to day running of that project—and, as the name suggests, making sure that every line item of that budget in the project stays on track.

[0:02:41 Morgan Leigh Stewart] Some of the parts of a producer's role that I see, are creative guidance and support, and that's a really big one from my point of view. I consider myself a creative producer and I'm really involved in story and development with my writers and directors. Resourcing, and that includes anything from development funding, through to making sure the writers have the right information to continue developing their projects. Obviously funding and finance is a huge part of a producer's role as well, and whether or not that's from a funding body, private investment, crowd funding, self-funding, that's a position where the producer will guide and make sure that that's happening.

[0:03:30 Alex Lovell, Producer] So, I think part of it is we are all human and sometimes we will make mistakes, but when you're emerging, really celebrate those mistakes and try and learn from them, and really use this time to prep for that future career. Later in your career as you start emerging, the goal of any producer is to kind of produce multiple projects, and you can't be everywhere at once so you do have to understand the processes and learn how to predict what heads of departments and things might need later for your career. But later on your role transforms a wee bit into slightly more sales, and it's a really authentic type of sales—you're not a used car or vacuum cleaner salesperson, but you really do have to sell someone that you're the best producer to make this creative piece of work into a reality, sell in the finance and sell in the investors to give you that money. Sell it to the heads of departments that you really want to make this vision come true and then sell it into a festival, sell it

to a distributor; so it does become slightly more sales driven, but it's a really nice, authentic, comfortable type of sales.

IP and contracts

[0:04:40 Alex Lovell, Producer] Contracts are a really important part of filmmaking as well, it's an agreement between two parties that basically outlines what someone is going to do, when, and for how much. It's really important to have these agreements in place because, as filmmakers, we really are creative entrepreneurs, and it's important to have contracts because when you're emerging, often you might find that you're perhaps working with friends and people you trust, and usually that's fine and things might go amicably even if there's a creative different, but again contracts are all about protecting you against the worst case scenario. If there is a creative difference (even with your friends and people you trust) it's really important to have that contract to fall back on so that people know who's responsible for what.

Contracts are also great too because it outlines a clarity of understanding, and, when you produce a contract, you're doing it ahead of time, so if there are any misalignments with expectations or understanding, you'll address them earlier rather than later and having to solve them without a contract, because a contract will be prepared earlier. You present it to the person who's going to sign that contract and deliver what they say they're going to deliver, and anything that they don't agree with, any expectations that are misaligned and any misunderstandings, you can resolve them then before you get too deep into the project.

Locations

[0:06:15 Morgan Leigh Stewart, Producer] Locations are a key element to your story, they can be a short hand to help get your viewers into a world and the characters within like a very small amount of time, so they're a key story element. They can be a make or break part of your shoot, practically but also story wise, so it's really important to spend a good amount of time thinking about what your location is going to be and how you're going to manage it. When you're scouting for locations it's quite important to know if it's feasible to actually shoot there *before* you present it as an idea. A lot of locations can be quite sensitive and most short films might not have the resource to be able to actually manage shooting on specific locations, so it's important to understand what your responsibilities are when shooting at a location. I mean, these locations could be people's homes, and so understanding that you have to return it to exactly the way it was before, and making sure that you're taking extremely good care of everything and that your crew understand that as well.

A simple location agreement should outline the time it takes to do the shoot and also the expectations around how you're going to return that to how it was before. This is for both you as filmmakers and the location holders so that you both are on the same page about what's happening and how it's going to end up. Permits for filming on public open space will vary from council to council so it's always worth checking in with your local film office or council. They tend to be very friendly so you can always get a lot of information from them as well. Even if you're a very, very small crew, it's worth touching base because you never know what cultural or environmental considerations there are in an environment, so do just check in, and there could also be alternatives that make your life a lot easier.

Permits can cost so it's worth investigating quite well in advance of your shoot, just to make sure that you have budgeted and factored in the time and cost it will take to film in your preferred location, but they do vary from place to place and there's often different levels of permit cost. Consultation is key. Even if you're filming in your own house, it's worth just letting your neighbours know. Filming and 20 people parking their cars on your street can be quite disruptive to a lot of people, so it's very much worth doing a letter drop or door knocking just to let people know what you're up to. One of the biggest things as well is being very clear about where your location is, where your crew are parking, and how they get into a place; having that information will make sure that your time is very well managed.

[music]

Breaking down a script and scheduling

[0:09:19 Alex Lovell, Producer] So, how do we break down a budget? Well, essentially it starts with a shooting script, and the main things we want to pull out of that script are duration, so we would have gone through that script and timed out every single scene and then have a total duration to make sure also that that total duration is aligned with the audience we intend it for. Some festivals won't accept films over a certain length so we just want to make sure that that duration is aligned with our end goal and end audience. Then we'd also pull out all the locations and then we would also pull out all of the characters, and usually we would rank those with numbers from key location to not so important locations, and from lead character right through to extras. The reason we rank them with numbers is because that's actually how most of the software works, and when you're looking at call sheets and things like that, we refer to those things as numbers.

The next thing we want to do is break that script down by scene, so what we would normally do is take each scene, know what the duration of that scene is, and we would go through and look for all of the cuts from an edit point of view that we need to make this scene happen. We're also pulling out of each scene details that we need to know about the characters, about their hair and makeup builds and their costuming, about the locations, what time of day are we filming this, which location is it and what type of crew we might need for the location. So, we're pulling out all these basic notes and really breaking down each scene in that way, and then we are communicating and collaborating with the director to really get a sense of how they intend to shoot it—because what we also need to do is try and draw out of that script, and out of each scene, what type of camera are we intending, what type of equipment do we need, do we need a techno crane, do we need a dolly?; all of these types of things so we know what's required for each scene.

We then, from breaking down each scene, want to start creating a preliminary shot list, and this is usually done by the director and the DOP. They will probably come back to you with their intended shot list and it's a really good way to then, as a producer, align and see what they're thinking and how they want to shoot it, and align that with the way that you've broken down that script and scene from an edit point of view, and make sure that everything is covered and we've got everything as it should be. All of that information is really important because, from there, we also need to build out a schedule, so we need to know how much time we need to get these types of shots at each location. Are these scenes particularly emotional? Do we need to allow a little bit more time for the actors to get to that emotional place? What actors do we need on set at which location at which time, and how are we going to bundle that together on our schedule? Are we shooting locations out or are we shooting actors out based on their availability? So, it's all a game of communication and collaboration to really gather what you need, and then with all that information you can start to pull together the quotes and the estimates that you need to then enter into the budget.

The actual entering into the budget is probably the easy bit. The easiest way to do this is to start with a template. There's a really good template on the New Zealand Film Commission site for short films and it's good for two reasons: (1) it's a really easy format that you can simply find out those numbers and the information you need and enter it in; but (2) it might prompt you to think about things, some of these 'if you don't know, you don't know' bits that you need to add into your budget and account for. So, it's really good to start with quite an elaborate template of a budget and work backwards and eliminate some of the items that you know you don't need, and if there's an item in there that you're not sure about, again, communication, collaboration, talk to your HODs and really get the information. Hunt and gather and get all the information that you need to pull together the meaningful numbers that you can put into a budget that is feasible and that, when you have to submit it to people like the Film Commission, it shows that this project is well considered and a viable project.

One other point is, at the bottom of your budget there will usually be an element of contingency, and it's usually a percentage of the overall budget. It's really important to think about those contingencies and what's going on around the time that you're planning to shoot. A prime example of this has been Covid—and, if you are going for funding, it's really important to show in your budget that you are aware of things that may affect the cost. Show those that are going to give you funding hopefully, that you are aware of these things and you have a viable and

feasible budget. It might mean in some cases that you are increasing the cost of some of your health and safety and things like that, with an explanation that this is for things like Covid. But overall it's just a case of really knowing what's going on around the locations and with the timeframe that you plan to shoot, and allowing for any of those things in your budget as well.

[0:15:05 Jaimee Poipoi, Producer] When it comes to creating a schedule the way I work is, I like to start at the end: what is the end goal? And then work backwards. Usually that's looking at a festival that I'd like to get the film into, and from there I can work back: when do we need to deliver to that festival, so then when do we need to do this part, this part ...? So, I kind of go that way. Once I've got a rough schedule, I will take our script and I start to break down the physical things that are needed to make that script and the emotional things that are needed. When we get shooting I think it's really important to start off with something that eases the crew in and that just gets the actors warmed up, that gets the team warmed up with all the equipment, and from there we can get momentum, but just to kind of ease everyone in.

When it comes to animation I like to have a tech meeting and then we look at things like a title sequence that we can test our pipeline and see if everything's working, so if anything breaks we have time to fix it before we move onto the actual show. So, I think it's good to look from the end: what's your end goal, move forward, and then break down the emotional, the physical, and then tackle it from there. When I'm looking at an emotional part of a script and how I'm going to schedule that out, I would usually look at the most difficult part of a scene or the part of the script that's the most dramatic and that's because the actor may need a lot of time to build up to that moment. So, I think the script would need a lot more time to build into that and we might need to schedule some time around it. Also I have to look at the scenes around that one, you know, what are the actors doing before we get to that really dramatic part? What are they doing afterwards? So, I'll look at that scene first and then kind of build out from there. We don't want to do that one first because it's going to be hard to get into that mindset sometimes, so it's good to have it in the middle.

For physical breakdowns I'll look at the scene that requires the most set design, the most props. Sometimes they take a lot of money and time to build and so we would have to balance that out in the schedule, put it towards the end, and start off with something quite simple that we can set up in advance. That's what I mean by breaking down into the physical and the emotional.

[music]

Budget overview

[0:17:34 Alex Lovell, Producer] Budgets, why are budgets so important? What is a budget? Basically a budget is a giant spreadsheet that itemises everything that you need and everything that you need to spend money on to make your film a reality. You also would highlight on the budget what funds you've got and where the money is coming from that you have to spend to afford all these things to make your film a reality. I liken budgets to a giant grand piano, where all the strings are linked and, if you pull on one and spend more money here, something has to tighten and give somewhere else, because the objective is to plan what you need to spend to make the film a reality, then raise the money for that, and inevitably what happens is things change, you need to be a little bit flexible as you're going through your production, some costs are more and some costs are less, and it's all a big balancing act.

[00:18:33 Jaimee Poipoi, Producer] When it comes to doing budgets I think it's really important to, ah, even though you can't pay your crew usually what they're worth and their fee, it's still important to know so that, in the future, when you're scheduling and budgeting for a show, you know what that figure is and you know the worth of your show. When I do a budget I usually have a column where I would have what their actual fee is, and then I count it as their 'in-kind', which is them sponsoring the project, which would be their discount, and then what we're *going* to pay them. So, I used to have three columns, and that just lets me know in future, when I do get all that money, I know exactly how much I need to pay the team. I think that's really important.

I've got an example here that I can share with you and it breaks down the different departments. I think at the top it's good to have a summary and that's just so, when you give it out to people like funders, or if you're looking for sponsorship, they can look at your budget, they can see an overview of what you're wanting and what you're asking for. Also, if you have that total fee of what it actually costs and then you have the sponsorship of what they've donated, then it looks like to other people, they're like, 'oh they've gotten this much already, they just need a little bit to get it over the line', so that's really helpful when you go to sponsors. Then, if they want, they can look through and it gives more detail of all the departments, and then at the end just have a little summary again, but the idea is try and get a value of your project. You might only have $1,000 but your film might be worth $10,000 and so a sponsor or a funder will look at it and say, 'hey they've already raised $9,000, they just need that $1,000 and we can help them with that'. So, I think that's really important with this budget and seeing those three different columns.

[0:20:29 Alex Lovell, Producer] The main area where I see budgets go wrong, and I speak from personal experience, so usually with a budget you'll have things that you know you know: I know I can get this creative work and make this film for $300 from the writer, and I can write that into my budget; and then there's always things that you know you don't know: I know I'm going to need equipment but at this stage I haven't spoken to my director or DOP and I don't really know how they're planning on shooting that, so I don't know what equipment I need just yet, but I know that when the time comes I'll find that out and I'll be able to get that number. The part where I see budgets fall over the most is probably on these things that I like to call (and we're getting clichéd here) 'the things you don't know you don't know', and there's always something when approaching production that you have forgotten to put in your budget (well, from my experience anyway), and these are the things that can really throw you because now you have to add a new line item close to production and try and afford it somehow.

So, how do we mitigate this and how do we try to have this not happen? The ideal way to do that is to use your time as an emerging producer to really understand the whole process of filmmaking and really get to a point when you can predict and know what things you're gonna need on productions. But also, the other really important thing about budgets is to understand the importance of communication and collaboration, and this is a really intrinsic part of a budget because we've all heard that phrase 'filmmaking is a collaborative process', and what that means to a lot of people is, I need someone to hold a camera, I need actors, I need someone to write it. But actually I think what that means is that there are areas where roles overlap: as producer you might be involved in the writing process, the DOP and director might overlap a wee bit too with the DOP giving some really good thoughts on how you can enhance an emotional state in a scene.

So, setting up a framework for collaboration and communication is vital, it's all about talking to the people that are your heads of department and the people that are involved with this project, and gathering all the information you need so that you can find out a really meaningful number and not just a guess, to then put into your budget at the appropriate line item. The other thing that will help you understand and pull together a budget is understanding why budgets are important. First and foremost, and it's an obvious one, budgets are your financial roadmap, it pretty much is a list of everything you need to spend on your production to make it a reality. The second thing is that it gives you a very clear itemised list of everything you need but perhaps not what you have to pay for.

One of the things I would urge you to remember as you're emerging, is that you're a filmmaker and you have unique skills. I would suggest that there's not a business out there right now that isn't thinking about or currently using video in some way, shape, or form, and you might be able to trade those skills for things you need in your budget or for sponsorship and fundraising. A clear example of this is actually on our last short film we had a location that we were wanting to film in for five days and there was a person living at that location who had really nowhere else to go, so part of our production cost was going to be putting that person into a hotel. We could have easily added the cost of that to our budget, but what we thought we would do is call a couple of local hotels and offer them photos and some small room review that they could use on Trip Advisor and social media, and in return they would give us the room we need for five days while we shoot. That worked really well, so that's what we did and it allowed us to eliminate that cost from our budget.

The other thing that a budget does and why it's important, is it really highlights the gap between the money you have secured and what you still need to fundraise or raise. The two ways that you might think of fundraising are crowd sourcing and doing a fundraising campaign through something like Boosted or corporate sponsorship. One of the tips I could probably suggest here is that, because you have that itemised list of everything you need, it is easier for people to understand tangible things. Giving money to the concept of a film might sometimes be a big ask, but if you can break that down and really give them something tangible that they understand like, we would love this money that you're about to sponsor us with so we can afford a cinematic camera to make this world stage worthy, then it's much easier for someone to understand that sometimes. So, even with your crowd funding, look for things that you can mention that this money is going towards and make it the things that people can understand and get behind and want to support.

When it comes to budgets I think the keys are, understand why they're important and really create a framework of collaboration and communication, because the basic goal is that you want to be able to hunt and gather and get all the information you need so that you can get the quotes you need and meaningful numbers to go in that budget. That clarity is vital, you need to know how much things are going to cost, you need to know what track you need the production to stay on while you're making the film, and you also need to know how much you need to fundraise to close the gap between what you have and what you need.

[music]

Finding heads of department (HODs) and crew

[0:26:22 Jaimee Poipoi, Producer] When I'm looking for crew and HODs the first thing I look at is the project: what type of project is it? That establishes how big the crew needs to be and what kind of experience it needs to be at. Then I look at our director: what kind of personality are they, because I'll try and surround them with people who compliment their personality to make it easier on set, to make them feel in a safe space to tell the story they're going to tell. From there I see if they're available, what the schedule is. A lot of times with short films they're making this around fulltime work, and so it's kind of balancing the schedule with the project but also their schedules, so those are the three main elements that I would look at.

When it comes to HODs you have to look at the different departments, and there's quite a few of them so we would start off with the ones close to the director, which you have a first AD, they control the entire set, and then they have a ADs like a second, who controls the schedule, and a third that controls the actors and the extras. Then we would have our crew members, so we'd have our DOP, director of photography, they work directly beside the director, and then we would have the art director who controls the set and the props and everything that's in it, we have wardrobe and costume, that's another department, we also have sound, so we have an HOD for that. We have our unit people, and unit is really important, I think that all crews are happy if they have a good unit person; they get to be on set, they get to see everyone, and they always make sure there's a unit person close to the director to make sure they have tea and coffee—so, think that's a really great way to get into filmmaker, it's a good entry point. We have our post production, so we have our editors, we have a sound designer, we have our grade and we have our production team, and I think that's kind of like a rough, small film team.

On an animation project you have a different pipeline and a different team, so you still have your director, you would have your art director who controls the look of the story, you would have your v. effects supervisor, you would have your concept artist who designed the characters, you would have your background artist who designs all the backgrounds that your characters go against. You would also have your story boards, so the story boards draw out the scene, so they're the ones that create the emotions of an animation, and then you have your artists, like your illustrators and your animators, and they're the ones that take the story boards and then create the actual, ah they call them the assets that you put into a scene when it comes to animation. So, they put the emotion from the story boards and then practically put it into a scene with the props. From there you have your editor, you have your sound design, your composers, and of course you have the production team that runs everything.

That might sound like a lot of people you need to make a film, but sometimes you can just have a smaller crew and you can take on multiple roles. *Forty-Eight Hours* is a really great film competition where you get to do that because you have such a short amount of time, so a lot of people try out multiple roles. I personally – I have, ah, my friend told me about this and I actually do this, I have a physical hat, so when I have it on I'm in a directing role, and when I take it off I'm in a producer role. That just helps me stay in focus on the task that I need to do. I don't know if that's something you want to try but, yeah, sometimes you have to do a couple of different things and that's a great way to try and stay in the mindset so people know when to ask you specific questions about what role you're doing.

[music]

Marketing

[0:30:40 Jaimee Poipoi, Producer] Cool, so when it comes to marketing I like to use apps like Canva or Photoshop. I'm a big user of Photoshop and I like to set up templates that I can just drop in photos and just tweak the writing on it, so that's something that I like to have, is set up some templates so it's easy to do. I think when you're on set it's really good to schedule in time to take a photo that you want to use for your social media, for your posters, so actually plan that. Sometimes you can take like a two-hour window, schedule it into your schedule, that you can have all the actors in their costumes in a really cool place and you can get some really good photos. One thing that when it comes to animation, it's good to look at the story boards and figure out which frames you want to use. I think it's really helpful to have three key images and one really good poster image. Usually for posters they like to see the face. I've been told that the face, they want to read the eyes, it's really important and that usually helps to connect with people when they're looking at it.

When it comes to social media, a couple of things that you can do is you can take really cool lines that are in your script and then you can take a key image, just post it with the lines, and that's one way that people can stay engaged without giving away the whole film. You can set up a Facebook page for your film. I think it's really important to think about all the different films you're making because you don't want to keep taking your audience to different pages, so sometimes just having one page that shows all of your work can be helpful—it depends what you're wanting to do. But to keep momentum, because once you've made your film it usually a long time once it goes through festivals before people can see it, so I think it's really good to have key images, some funny dialogue from your films, some interviews from your actors, that you can keep the momentum up, keep the engagement up, so people are getting excited for your film when it finally is released.

So, when you've made your film, now the goal is to try and get lots of people to go see it. One great way is through festivals. I have a festival strategy that I'm happy to share with you and over the years I've taken a lot of my submissions and just done up a document of all the different festivals, so any project that I work on now I just adapt that document to whatever suits the film. I think the best idea that I found, and some of my friends do as well, is we look at tiering them—so, what's the main priority? For example, if you're doing an animation short film, then you would look at the top animation festivals, that's your number one. Your number two could be, is your film for children? Maybe that's your second tier, you look at all the children's festivals. Then third one could be things like, are there local festivals so your family and friends can go see them? So, I like to put them in a priority order and I've also put some of the costs, which can change depending on the year, but I think you get a rough idea of the amount so that way you can budget in your budget how much you need to spend to submit your films.

[music]

Homework

The homework for this video tutorial is to breakdown the script of 'Ross and Beth'. The link for the script is available in the attached documents. Here are some considerations: How many characters are there? How many locations are needed? Which scenes are demanding physically? Do they include animals or children which have special

considerations? Which scenes are demanding emotionally? Rank the scenes in order of importance. Based on the number scenes and the number of locations, how many shoot days do you think would be needed? Download the budget template and have a go at filling it out. How much money do you think you'd need to make this film?