

## DV or Film? Don't let budget be the deciding factor

A director with a great project shouldn't be limited in his choice of formats because of budget...and you don't have to be. This feature story will discuss several ways you can shoot on film for the same budget as DV, and remain true to your vision.

Having just directed my first 35mm short film, I have recently put these tips to the test. My original plan was to shoot on DV, but in my heart was the dream of film...a dream that was not as far off as I thought...

When I finished the script that I planned to make, I started looking into the ways I could make the project look like it was shot on film. I researched cameras like the Panasonic DVX-100, I looked at video lighting tips, and learned sandbagging tricks that make your camera moves feel heavier and more film-like. (Which we can discuss in another article!) The thought of actually shooting on film never crossed my mind, as I simply assumed it was out of my reach. But I believed very strongly in this project, and knew that its true medium was film...even if it meant I had to sell my first-born.



With a passionate plea, I finally convinced my co-producer Bill Ross to help me look into the cost of shooting on film. Our findings were absolutely shocking. There was a way. There were actually several possibilities available, and none required the sale of my yet-to-be-conceived child.


First off, let's talk equipment. There are many people that purchase camera packages for their own projects, and are happy to let you use them for a few hundred bucks. This can be a great deal, since \$100 looks pretty good to someone who would otherwise let their camera sit on a shelf. And normally, people who own cameras can also operate them, and might want to work with you for free if they believe in your project.

Camera rental houses have their set prices, but they are always willing to deal with rising artists. They know that if they treat you well while you are struggling, they will benefit when you hit the big times. In my case, Panavision was the hero that gave me the best deal in town. Free.

Big houses like Panavision have "experimental filmmaker" programs which allow you to get on a waiting list for use of free equipment. The list can be quite long, but they will notify you with enough time to get your production up and running. I suggest calling right now and getting on the list. If you aren't ready when they call, they will offer you the next available slot.

If you can't wait for the list to come around, you can always get a DP with a relationship to a rental house. When they call and plead about how good your script is, you are guaranteed a better deal, if not a free package.

Another possibility is to look into the 8mm format which has gained so much popularity in the anti-digital community. The quality of the film makes for an interesting style, something that could work well with a dramatic piece. And the price is actually less than most digital camera rentals. [\(continued\)](#) [read more](#)



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(back) If you do use a rental house, they will want proof of production insurance before they let you use their equipment, whether you are paying for it or not. You can call around to find the best rate, just make sure you have the amount of coverage that the rental house requires. One interesting way to get inexpensive insurance is to sub-lease it..

Online communities like [craigslist.org](http://craigslist.org) are great places to find crew, people with equipment, and production companies with long-term



Don Michael Brown, Director of Photography

insurance to cover several projects throughout the year, but have down times that they still have to pay for. These companies sometimes look for small productions that can sub-lease their insurance...and since they've already paid for it, the deal you get is as good as your finagling skills.

Now on to film stock. Everyone has heard of places like Dr Raw Stock and Short Enz, who sell re-cans and unused studio film that has been bought up by these companies at a great low rate. There are other alternatives. Along the same line as Panavision's experimental film maker program is that of Kodak. The prices are about the same as re-cans, but you are getting brand newfilm.

If you aren't a part of any film artist networks, you should look into them. Getting together with other film makers and discussing the tips and tricks that they use is the best resource you will ever have. Often times, you will find a friend amongst your group that will give you their leftover film, or sell it to you for less than you can purchase it anywhere. Just make sure you take it to a lab and get it snip-tested to ensure it is usable.

Once again, I found an ally in Fuji. They are struggling to survive with the development of digital movie making, and being in the wake of Kodak who owns the corner on the market. Many film makers will tell you that Kodak has far better color, but that is simply untrue. We tested a 500ASA Kodak against the Fujifilm rival, and were astounded at the difference in quality. Fujifilm makes a fantastic product, and will do whatever they can to meet your budgetary needs. We were able to get the film half-off, by buying 2000 ft rolls, used in special sitcom cameras. The film is rarely ever purchased, so Fuji has a lot of it sitting around. All you have to do is go and have it cut to fit your camera magazines, for about \$3 per cut.

The studios always order more film than they need, and then sell off the excess every few months. If you are a part of a film artist network, you might want to pool your money and put in a bid for the studio's leftovers. That can be a great deal for everyone involved.

The decision you need to make is this: Is film what you REALLY want? In many cases, such as the television pilot I co-wrote and directed, digital was the way to go. But use it because it looks right for your project. Blair Witch wouldn't have worked if it was shot on film. Just be true to your vision. Don't compromise on issues of format because it looks impossible on paper. Use your passion for your project as a catalyst for allies. Everyone wants to work with someone who has a strong creative vision and a deserving project.

Next time we'll look at ways you can save money during the production phase, in part two of this three part series.

-A.J. Wedding