

My First Time: The Making of a Visual Pitch

by
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Mike Scherer came to My Visual Pitch .com by way of The Unknown Screenwriter's blog (<http://www.unknownscreenwriter.com>) over the summer, and was quick to enter our Pitch Your Niche! contest. Because he didn't have a Visual Pitch for his project, Mike asked us to create one for him. The resulting Visual Pitch for "Turnabout" went on to win First Place in the contest, which brought Mike full circle, back to Unk's site, where he would receive a free script and career consultation.

After the contest, Mike went on to create two Visual Pitches on his own, using software on his PC and free resources from the Internet. The following documents his adventures turning a logline into a living, breathing, and oh-so-compelling Visual Pitch.

Okay. Your script is finished after six or eight months of work, maybe more. You slit a wrist and bled on the page and poured out your heart and soul. And, it's pretty damn good. Now what?

In old Hollywood you were usually told, Get an agent, get a manager, send queries to production companies. Take your pick. But folks in the industry think in pictures (or at least they should), which means you as a screenwriter better think in pictures. So why do we consistently send out our queries in text format?

The new Hollywood is all about user-generated content.

Because you, as a writer, think in pictures, you should be creating your log line in pictures. You should be pitching your screenplay in pictures. And you do that by creating a Visual Pitch. Don't know how, you say? Did you know how to write a screenplay before you sat your rump in the chair and started banging away at the keyboard? I didn't think so. Actually, creating a Visual Pitch is easier than you might think (I've even done it), it will get your creative juices flowing, and it will improve your understanding of your story.

By the way, the tools needed to create your Visual Pitch are, for the most part, free. If you are in the PC world and run Microsoft Windows XP or Vista you have Movie Maker already installed on your machine. Movie Maker 2 is the application I used to create my Visual Pitch along with photos and music from other sites. See

<http://myvisualpitch.com/how#artist> for more info on other sites and applications.

Here's how I did it. I started with my log line:

A homicide detective struggles to solve a series of murders while pursuing his high school sweetheart, but ends up falling in love with her identical twin only to discover that love and murder don't mix.

To write my 'shooting script,' I developed a kind of shorthand to identify the different elements in the script. For example:

- [] brackets for verbiage on title cards.
- () parenthesis for sound effects, voiceovers.
- ** asterisks for title card effects.
- <> for photo ideas.

Back to the shooting script.

I decided my first title card would simply state, "Detective Mark Carson has some problems," and then followed up with a number of other cards that illustrated the log line. When I was finished, and using my shorthand notation, I had a 'shooting script' that looked something like this:

Sequence #1 [Detective Mark Carson has problems.]
Sequence #2 [A Series of Murders...]
Sequence #3 [Dumped by his girlfriend...]
Sequence #4 [A fateful decision.]...

I won't bore you by going through the whole pitch, but I think you get the idea.

So, what's next? Pictures. I didn't want my pitch to look like a PowerPoint presentation, so I brainstormed photo ideas that I thought would help tell the story. When I was done, I used the '<>' tags to note the photo needed and updated my 'shooting script'.

Sequence #1 [Detective Mark Carson has problems.]
Sequence #2 [A Series of Murders...]
<crime scene body_outline>
Sequence #3 [Dumped by his girlfriend...]
<bouquet of dead roses>
Sequence #4 [A fateful decision.]...

Next, I decided to add some visual effects to my individual title cards and photos. Things like 'fade in,' 'fade out,' 'fade to black,' etc. Movie Maker 2 offers dozens of effects. I selected the effect I wanted, then used the '**'

tag to symbolize the effect I had in mind. My 'shooting script' now looked something like this:

```
Sequence #1      [Detective Mark Carson has problems.]
Sequence #2      [A Series of Murders...]
                 *fade in from black, fade out*
                 <<crime scene body_outline>
                 *fade in from black, fade out*
Sequence #3      [Dumped by his girlfriend...]
                 *banner*
                 <bouquet of dead roses>
                 *fade out*
Sequence #4      [ A fateful decision.]...
```

Did I need sound effects? Yeah, I did, for one particular sequence. I went out on the web and downloaded what I needed: a phone ringing. I also decided on narrating the first title card, so I added that as well to my 'shooting script' using the '()' tag to symbolize any voice over or sound effects. My 'shooting script' now looked like this:

```
Sequence #1      [Detective Mark Carson has problems.]
                 (voice over narration)
Sequence #2      [A Series of Murders...]
                 *fade in from black, fade out*
                 <crime scene body_outline>
                 *fade in from black, fade out*
Sequence #3      [Dumped by his girlfriend...]
                 *banner*
                 <bouquet of dead roses>
                 *fade out*
Sequence #4      [ A fateful decision.]...
                 (a phone rings)
```

There you have it.

But now the real work begins — creating the actual pitch. I created my title cards and inserted them into my project's timeline. I know. What's a timeline? The scope of this article doesn't allow for me to explain every detail, but there are plenty of websites and books available to give you the professional tutorial you deserve. For Movie Maker 2 you can type "Microsoft Movie Maker tutorial" into your favorite search engine and find the web page that suits you.

Next, I added the photos and narration and sound effects to the timeline. Once everything was in place, I ran my pitch. And ran it again and again to get a feel for the flow. If there was something I didn't like or thought

could be improved, I did it. While I was watching my silent pitch over and over I made it a point to think about the music I wanted playing in the background. Beat. Tempo. Instruments. Then created my soundtrack.

For my musical effects I used Acoustica Mixcraft (you can find a demo version at: <http://www.acoustica.com/mixcraft/>). It's fun and easy. I used Mixcraft's timeline to match my sound track with my pitch on Movie Maker. If things didn't match up exactly right, I compressed or expanded the accordingly. Again, I ran the pitch over and over to insure it was exactly what I wanted and told the story I wanted told.

The final step was to create my account at My Visual Pitch .com and let those good folks get my pitch in front of the industry professionals. They do the work so I can get back to what I do best: writing.

Good luck.