



## EP WHAT? ICG MEMBER BRIAN DZYAK CHRONICLES THE LIFE OF AN EPK CAMERAPERSON

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### What the heck is an EPK Cameraman?

EPK is short for "Electronic Press Kit." As part of the marketing for a new film, a studio will give media outlets a package of promotional materials, including a videotape with behind-the-scenes footage and interviews with cast and crew. The EPK Cameraman shoots all of that material.

### That, and what else?

It isn't as easy as just showing up and shooting the actors doing their scenes and goofing off in between takes. Often, one or more of the actors on set are distracted by your video camera and ask that you only shoot rehearsals. Some actors only let you shoot takes. Some actors don't want you to shoot either. On occasion, none of the actors on set have a problem with you so you are allowed to do the job you were hired for, but that situation is more rare than it should be.

### I must be making really good money then, right?

Studios typically hire out EPK and DVD "vendors" who complete all the marketing and DVD Extras material. Those companies hire freelance crews who show up on set to shoot. As a freelance EPK/DVD Videographer, expect to earn between \$500 and \$700 for 10 hours. That's all without union hours being credited if you happen to be a member of Local 600 as there currently is no contract in place to cover marketing work.

And while a typical movie production schedule is roughly 12 weeks, you can expect to only shoot between 7 to 15 days total in that time, non-consecutively. You'll be filling the in between days with other behind-the-scenes work, the usual assortment of industrial and corporate shoots, or other random days shooting network or cable programming.

### What I really need to know... What else is there to know?

Besides just knowing how to frame up a basic shot as any cameraman should, you have to know the best way to shoot what's happening in front of you, from where to stand, how high or low to be, when to make an on-camera move or not, to anticipating what's going to happen before it happens. It doesn't do you any good to see something interesting going on next to video village or on the set and then decide to shoot. By then, it's too late.

You also need to gauge the "mood" of the set, the way the director works, how friendly a crew is, and how the actors react to everyone else, including you and your camera. Knowing what to shoot is of course important, but perhaps even more so is knowing when to stop. You're not there for "dirt." You are there to help promote the project positively.

Usually out of sight and sound, the EPK unit will set up and shoot interviews with principal cast and crew. These interviews provide the soundtrack over which the footage you've been shooting will be laid. So in addition to bringing a video camera along, you will fill your personal vehicle with lights, electric and grip equipment that are necessary to shoot a "talking head" interview. In a perfect world, you'd be given an attractive and quiet room to shoot in. The reality is that you'll get shoved into a corner of the location that is less than ideal in almost every way. The challenge faced by most videographers is to make something of nothing. You work with what you've been given and provide your producer with the very best images possible within the parameters. The important thing is that most interviews are not the result of the cameraman just firing up a sungun and shooting what was in front of him. A considerable amount of energy goes into designing and lighting the backgrounds and lighting the talent.

### So how do I get work?

Most cameraman who shoot EPK and DVD material have spent many years working in other areas, such as corporate or network video and some have even risen from the ranks of the production crew itself. Through your contacts in those other areas you will be recommended to EPK/DVD producers.

### What I really need to have ... Do I need to buy my own camera package? Isn't that expensive?

Yep. It's expensive. The good news is that you don't have to buy anything at all. Not really. Many of the EPK/DVD vendors in Los Angeles own full camera packages. Eventually, you might consider purchasing a camera and other equipment for yourself, but it isn't a necessity to get started.

More and more, marketing departments want the EPK and DVD material to be shot in HD-CAM though some still ask for Digibeta or BetaSP. On rare occasion, the studio will want an EPK camera shooting every day just like the Unit Still Photographer. In that case, the Videographer will use something smaller and less expensive, like Sony's HDV for day-to-day work and an F900 for special days and interviews.

Your lighting package will be relatively small. Generally, you will key with a 650W Chimera and hang a 300W or smaller unit from a C-stand for a backlight. One or two additional units like another 650W or a 1K will suffice to light the background elements. It isn't out of the ordinary to find yourself in a small space, so two or three additional C-stands plus an assortment of flags to control the light are necessary. Add in a few stingers, cube taps, dimmers, mafer clamps, and any other "toys" that you might like to use.

If you haven't figured it out yet, you'll need to do more than just blast the talent with a top mounted sungun. That's for the news



guys and tabloid shows. You're there for studio marketing and DVD content, so far more is expected.

#### What am I getting myself into?

##### 6:45 a.m. — GETTING TO SET

Your primary mission is to shoot the principal actors as they rehearse with the director and do the actual takes; therefore, you won't have to arrive on set until just before the first rehearsal. If there are any questions as to your purpose, you'll want the Unit Publicist with you to head off any trouble.

##### 7:05 a.m. — REHEARSAL

Before you show up, the Unit Publicist should have already had a discussion with the actors, the director, and the First AD regarding when you are allowed to shoot. When you've gotten the okay, find a spot that isn't in a shot and isn't in an actor's eyeline. If at any point you sense that things are getting tense between the actors and the director or anyone else, it behooves you to back off and stop shooting. The more they recognize that you are just there for the good stuff, the more you'll be allowed to shoot without too many limits.

##### 7:15 a.m. — CAMERA SETUP

Unless there is something extra special going on that your producer wants to cover, this is your time to step away while the crew lights and sets cameras. On occasion, you may be there to specifically cover a stunt or some other out of the ordinary set-up in which case you'd jump in there and shoot anything and everything pertinent. But in general, just stay out of the way as much as possible. On occasion, there simply isn't anywhere to shoot from. Often there is just one good place to be and the Unit Still Photographer already has it. The Still Photographer has a certain unstated priority over you mostly because he or she is there every day and you're not. If you establish a good relationship with the photographer, you'll find that you can work in tandem, trading off good shooting spots and trading important information.

##### 7:30 a.m. — ROLL CAMERA

Roll your camera when you hear the First AD call for "Last looks." Your shots will range from including the behind-the-scenes "stuff" like cameras and people to tighter shots that have only the actors. Shoot what you need while being completely quiet and as invisible

as possible. Any excuse you give to get kicked off set is one they'll take.

##### 7:33 a.m. — CUT, LET'S GO AGAIN

Shoot wider or tighter or find another position to cover the action. If the actors and/or director are prone to goofing off in between takes, keep rolling. You're there to capture the process, which means that, if allowed, you could be rolling several hours of tape per day.

##### 7:55 a.m. — CUT, MOVIN' ON

Again, if anything remotely interesting happens after the film cameras cut, keep rolling on it as permitted.

##### 1:00 p.m. — LUNCH

There is nothing happening on set, so in most cases, you will go to lunch with the rest of the crew. On occasion, if there is an interview to do and there will be absolutely no time to do it during the course of the shooting day, the Unit Publicist may ask you to shoot during this time. In that case, you will have gotten some warning and a place to preset and light your shot.

##### 2:00 p.m. — BACK TO WORK

More of the same on set, unless you have interviews to do.

##### 4:45 p.m. — WRAP

What's this? Wrapping early? The rest of the crew is still shooting and will probably go at least until 9 p.m. You come in late and leave early because you're on a 10-hour day. Your producer should arrange an appropriate call time for tomorrow and send you off. You might stay longer if the scenes being shot justify the overtime, such as an impressive stunt or if you absolutely have to get an interview done.

#### What I really want to do is move up...

Working as a freelance Videographer is a career unto itself. You ARE several film-style departments all in one. With that in mind, there is no direct path to go from here. As you grow older and your shoulder begins to hurt from so many years of carrying the camera around, a natural path to travel is to become a freelance entertainment director or producer. You've likely spent many years working with experienced and inexperienced producer/directors or you've been sent out on your own. It shouldn't be too big of a leap to segue into a less physically strenuous career.

You can read the full chapter in Brian's upcoming book, *What I Really Want To Do On Set In Hollywood*.

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