



SHOOTING OUTSIDE THE BOX

WORDS: SALLY GARRETT
PICTURES: MALCOLM EDMONDS

A while ago the GTC held their workshops, courtesy of Visual Impact at their Teddington base, where PSC (portable single camera) cameramen and women, plus a number of budding studio camera operators, were able to get a flavour of what it takes to control a 'ped' and work in a live TV studio.

It seemed only fair that we should then try and fit the boot on the other foot and give the studio and OB guys a look at life on the road with a PSC camera. This workshop was aimed principally at them rather than the many 'studio-ops' who have plenty of experience in both genres. It was also aimed at assistants, students and anyone who wanted a heads-up on the world of PSC. The workshops were held at three venues across the UK - Salford, Bristol and Teddington.

The tutors were two very experienced cameramen: Alan Duxbury is well known for his 25 years as a freelance cameraman working all over the world with household names such as Stephen Fry and Ray Mears. His filming career has slowed since a serious helicopter crash in the US while filming for the BBC and he now supports the GTC Council and gives lectures and talks on his work to charities and groups.

James French, GTC Advertising and Sponsorship Manager, trained in multi-camera at Pebble Mill and went on to do OBs, PSC and news-gathering. Since turning freelance in 2001, he has continued with a varied career in drama, documentary, music and sport and has done a considerable amount of training on camera, studio and ped skills.

To be honest, I have only ever been to one GTC workshop before and it was so technical that I walked out at lunchtime so I really didn't know what to expect from this one.

I got to the reception of Visual Impact a few minutes early to find that I was the only woman sitting next to a group of technical-speaking cameramen and the panic started setting in. By the time we started there were two other ladies in a room of about 20 men, nothing new there then!

James French and Alan Duxbury introduced themselves and I soon relaxed. James I have worked with on various OBs and Alan was a PSC cameraman I had heard of. They explained that they both started off as studio-ops at Pebble Mill before going on their separate PSC routes; Alan full time PSC and James mainly studios and OBs, with some PSC.

My background is 14 years studios, 12 years BBC and the last two as a freelancer. Since becoming freelance I have turned down a few jobs because they are PSC. Put me in a studio and I know I can

operate on all genres – music, drama, LE – but the thought of a PSC shoot scares the living daylight out of me!

I like studios; in fact, I love studios. I love being part of the team that makes a programme. I have the security that someone else is lighting it, someone else is looking after the sound and that I am in charge of making the best pictures that I can. But I have never been technical, if you were to ask me how a studio camera works, I would look at you blankly.

My biggest PSC fear is the camera, which is a huge problem when your job is a camera operator! There are so many different cameras, all with different names and numbers and each taking their turn at being flavour of the month. I even use my DSLR on automatic (I can hear all the gasps from my colleagues). For me, the only reason for shooting PSC would be to pay the bills.

The morning session talked about whether to buy or not. Both James and Alan agreed that in this day and age with the ever-changing cameras, needs and fashions, that hiring

could well be the best option. The only downside being that sometimes you don't have enough time to familiarise yourself with the particular model you are using on any given day.

They went on to tell us what we would need in our hire kits; tripods, lenses, media, gaffer tape etc. They told us what to expect from sound and lighting kits but the best thing was to ask for a soundie and/or spark, if the budget permits because, at the end of the day, we are camera operators – 'jack of all trades, master of none' springs to mind.

James and Alan went on to describe how to basically light and monitor sound in case the budget didn't stretch that far. They talked about 3 point lighting and gave us a basic safety lesson when using lights in a domestic situation. Also running through the various lights and microphones and what where better for different situations, inside, outside etc.

I noticed that the rest of the attendees seemed to fall into three categories: operators that already did PSC, students



The day's tutors Alan Duxbury (above) and James French (below)



and a few people like me that are purely studio-ops.

James and Alan somehow managed to make things understandable to all of us, without being patronising. As James said, "not teaching your Grandma to suck eggs" or to be baffling with too much technical jargon. If there were bits we didn't understand they stopped and explained them to us.

Alan explained that people fall into four groups: **Practical** – learns by doing **Detail** – handles data well **Social** – needs others **Conceptual** – imaginative thinkers.

I am practical social, I learn by other people showing me what to do.

If we had had more time I would have liked to have been shown the things that were talked about e.g. where the white balance button is or what menu buttons to press. In a perfect world I would love a follow-up course, to put into practice what I have learnt.

The afternoon session talked about dealing with production, directors and presenters and to think about what shots were needed. This is something I have learnt from 14 years in studios but I could see others in the room were hearing this for the first time.

All in all, 'Shooting Outside The Box' was very helpful. I came away with more passion about being a studio operator knowing that I have chosen the right path for me.

I love my job.

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