It has never been easier to record compelling video footage with a smart phone or a digital camera and broadcast it to anyone. Simply pull the smart phone from your pocket, click record, and you have footage you can quickly edit using an App and distribute instantly. However, even with these technological tools, it can still be a challenge to get the professional-looking results you desire. Here are some best practices that IFMA members and partners can use to make their video projects come to life. These tips and tricks are brought to you by IFMA’s Videographer, Yonas Woldetsadik, and focuses on actions you and your team can take when using a smart phone (or other hand held device) and other equipment you may already have.

**FILM HORIZONTALLY**

First and foremost, always shoot video holding your phone or camera horizontally. Many videographers hold their phone vertically, exactly as they would when shooting a still photograph. It’s important to remember that computer monitors, televisions, even websites, all have landscape-oriented displays. Your finished video will look amazing when it’s shape and orientation match that of the screen it is viewed upon.

**USE A TRIPOD**

For stable shots, use a tripod. The slightest hand movements can impact the professionalism of your video. Most digital cameras can be used with a basic tripod, and adapter clips available on the market to help smart phones work well with tripods. With a simple and inexpensive tripod set up, you’ll never have unstable footage again.
CONSIDER LIGHTING

The best lighting source to use is free and accessible for almost everyone: the sun. Natural lighting looks great in almost every instance. Face your subject toward a window for great natural light. Never have the window behind the subject because they will look like a silhouette in your video. You can always invest on a small lighting kit for as little as $50 or build your own out of supplies from your local hardware store.

Professional light kits under $100 (click on the link):
- Neewer 2 x 160 Led Dimmable
- SAMTIAN 2-Pack Dimmable

AUDIO RECORDING

Most of the time, recording audio directly from the camera’s built-in microphone will suffice, however, the built-in microphone in your smart phone is very sensitive and picks up all kinds of noises from your surroundings. If you plan to use your phone's built-in microphone, find a relatively quiet, indoor location to do the filming.

Shooting in the great outdoors, however, can be challenging due to unwanted background noises mainly from wind. But some preparation and practice will have you ready to tackle those projects, and you’ll have some impressive audio to show for your efforts.

When shooting outdoors, use external microphones such as a lapel, a hand held or a shotgun microphone to get a professional quality audio. Even with the use of these types of microphones, using natural barriers such as buildings, rocks and trees greatly helps to block out the noise even more. Simply position the subject with his/her back to the noise and that way his/her body will block a great deal of noise and can make an impractical setup feasible. See examples below:

- BOYA by M1 Lavaliere Microphone
  - Price: $20
- Rode VideoMicro
  - A directional microphone, the VideoMicro reduces distracting peripheral sounds and focuses on the audio in front of the camera
  - Price: $60
EXPOSURE & FOCUS

Smart phones and digital cameras will automatically detect and adjust exposure and focus accordingly. Auto-focus is great for taking quick snapshots, but while recording video, you’ll want to have more manual control and lock these down so they don’t adjust and leave your footage over-exposed and out of focus.

To focus your video, most smart phones allow you to simply tap on your subject using the default app to manually lock exposure and focus on your subject. This can be adjusted whilst filming if necessary.

USE MAXIMUM RESOLUTION – PHONE SETTING

Most smart phone video capture apps are easy to use, but unless you specifically select it, they probably won’t capture video at maximum resolution. The reason is that the more pixels or the more detail you capture, the harder the phone’s processor chip has to work and draw on the battery. As a result, many phones will choose a ‘medium’ detail by default and leave you to set the ‘fine’ or ‘high’ detail mode yourself. But make no mistake – you want that ‘fine’ detail mode to capture the best quality your phone can give you. Some Android phone apps will give you the actual video resolution options in the app’s video settings; for example, 2160p, 1080p or 720p video. Always go for the highest quality available and make sure your phone is properly charged before filming.

RULE OF THIRDS

While there are plenty of technical aspects to video, don’t forget the creative side as well. One simple rule for achieving artistic results is the ‘rule of thirds’ – imagine dividing the video frame (LCD screen) into a 3 x 3 grid. Ideally, you want to frame different aspects of the video image so that they fit loosely within this 3 x 3 grid of squares.

One method that always works well is setting your subject in an outer square facing towards the center. It also allows you to later overlay text on the opposite side if required.
CLEAN THE LENS

Here is one last tip for the road. Although it seems obvious and something you’d think to do on a DSLR camera, we often forget to clean the camera lens on our smart phones. Unless you’re aiming for that soft-focus look, you can’t expect to get the best quality your phone has to offer if you’ve got dumpling-sauce all over the lens. It happens to the best of us! Next time you clean your phone’s touchscreen panel, remember to give the lens on the back the once-over as well.

Using these best practices, the tools that are available to you and your own ingenuity, you can create a terrific video. Remember to do a few takes, trying new ideas as you go, to help you learn what works to create the video that works best for your media goals. The best thing about digital video, is that it requires no film, so you can just delete mistakes and try again.