

I'M A VIDEO AND PHOTO BUSINESS...

SHOULD I HIRE CREW I DON'T KNOW?



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A Shootzu Tale (based on a true story)



Do you have time for a cautionary tale? It involves a busy schedule, some irate customers, mediation, ruined footage, and ultimately court proceedings. Sit back... here goes. And stay with us ... as there is a lesson or two in the end.

In 2014, it was time for our successful video production company to take the next step, but working non-stop with no breaks was problematic. Firstly, there were only so many days you could start at 8am, finish at midnight, and then roll to the next venue. Secondly, my wife and I were expecting our first child. Conceptually, we believed people when they said our life was about to turn upside down. In reality, we had NO idea what was around the corner. And Murphy's Law seemed to continue to repeat... if I was booked on a

shoot, 5 more couples wanted me on that same day.

We had a few contractors on our books who we could trust, and then the unthinkable happened... Two days prior to a bumper start to wedding season, our main contractor tore his achilles and all wedding for at least 6 months had to be reassigned.

The day prior to wedding weekend, I came down with gastro.

And, due to the hectic schedule we realised one wedding was unassigned.

In this industry, 'cancelling a shoot' is not an option, especially if it's a wedding or a corporate event. So I scoured my networks...

That week, I met three contractors:

1. A newly established company with two videographers, who were just breaking out. For the purposes of this tale, they have been renamed Annie and Sarah.
2. A young contractor, let's call him Ned, who had a car full of kit, and seemed to know the technology.
3. A successful company (pseudonym Detail Detail Detail) that did both weddings and corporate shoots and hired 4-5 employees.

On Paper, Ned and Detail Detail Detail were excellent. They showed finished products that seemed to have clear footage and audio; they had a knowledge of equipment required; and they were keen for the work.

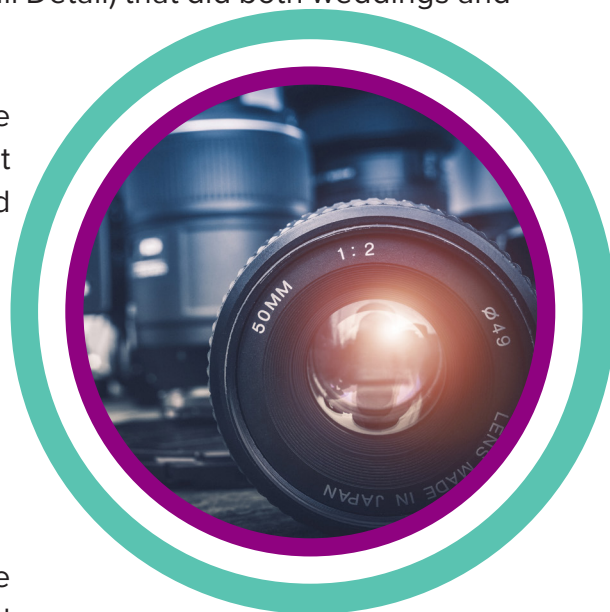
In my rush, I hired Ned without a contract and without checking his reviews or raw files. I paid him on completion of the job, when he handed over the footage for editing.

Detail Detail Detail was given a comprehensive brief, including everything expected. I checked the footage before making payment.

And Annie and Sarah were given a brief, as well as asking them to second shoot while I was present.

I am sure you don't need to guess what came next....

Ned was misrepresenting himself. He had 'won' the job by using footage that wasn't his. He had the equipment but didn't know how to use it, and in the end, a wedding day was ruined by shaky footage, missing footage, images with sunflare masking the bride and groom, and no audio. Family traditions were missed, the first dance was missed, and the speeches couldn't be heard. He went onto "advertise" these clients as his own on his website. He became defiant in our mediation process and he ultimately refused to pay back any of his pay, even though he knew we had refunded the client in full and that he was misleading and deceptive in his service proposal, even admitting the footage was substandard.



Detail Detail Detail captured the footage well enough, but they didn't use an audio device so the audio clarity by which our company was renowned was missing. When questioned they threatened legal action if they weren't paid. In the end, they did the bare minimum but didn't treat the client as their own.

And Annie and Sarah, the newest, least experienced, turned out to have a truly creative eye. Their footage was beautiful. Their footage was steady and focused. Audio was crisp (and captured). They followed their schedule. Their sequencing told a story, and everything was crisp and clear. They went above and beyond in capturing the footage and even proposed to edit the footage (at an additional cost) which again showcased their craft.

When it came to Ned and Detail Detail Detail, we went into damage control ... right until the day before the birth of our first child. We refunded all of the money to the brides and grooms in question and tried to salvage as much as possible. We edited and re-edited. We gave them a highlights video but couldn't do much more. They were understandably heartbroken and angry and we took this complaint with a similar level of gravity. It wasn't just our business, but our livelihood and our name.

We took a pragmatic approach to dealing with these break downs in service.

First and foremost we focused on the end customer.

- We tried to resurrect all feasible footage.
- In the case of Detail Detail Detail, the client was very complementary of the end product. Regardless, we provided them with additional segments as we felt our brand's quality had been compromised.
- In the case of the ruined wedding, there was little to salvage. We refunded the money fully, and spent over 2 months going through the raw footage with the end customer. They were assigned a Customer Complaints manager who called them on a regular basis to keep them updated. We ended up being able to provide them with a highlights video but we felt resolution was far from over, as our brand's reputation had taken a beating.
- Ned was asked to repay his fees. When he refused to, we took it to a tribunal and successfully proved the verbal contract and expectations made in both messages and emails were clear and that he had been negligent in his services.
- After a payment plan over 2 years, he ceased paying back. So it went to the courts and when he failed to pay back the court order *Well the story continues.*

This isn't supposed to dissuade you from hiring crew you don't know, but to do so with a strong level of oversight. With the majority of Video and Photo companies being owner/operator or 1-2 employee businesses, contractors are necessary in our field.

When your company is your brand, and your brand is an extension of your blood, sweat and tears, relinquishing control is sometimes difficult, especially when you don't know the person.

Lessons learnt:

Shootzu has designed its platform with the below safeguards at its core so that you have access to pre-vetted freelancers who have established, quality portfolios. [See more.](#)

- **Check the shooter thoroughly.** See their work in raw; request independent reviews; understand what footage they have and if you have the chance, get them to second shoot for you before you plunge into hiring them to represent your company as a solo shooter.
- **Check their style.** Does it match your style? Does it complement?
- **Use your networks** to get them to recommend shooters they have previously used. It helps remove some of the unknown.
- **Confirm there is mutual understanding** of the requirements of the job, including whether there are any specific equipment requirements or venue nuances that the shooter needs to cater to (ie lighting required, audio recorders, which angles to take)
- **Check their work ethos.** Even if they are an established company, make sure they go above and beyond for the end client even if the end client doesn't belong to them.
- **Have a clause in your contract** that ensures payment isn't released until you have the footage and you have checked its quality. This is to protect your company. We are not suggesting delaying unnecessarily, but make sure you have checked their deliverables.
- **Ensure the company has suitable levels of insurance.** Public liability and indemnity insurance that you have may not extend to contractors. Know what your company is covered for, and make sure any gaps of coverage are addressed.
- **Ensure IP** and who owns the client has been documented and understood before the shoot. This includes ensuring the shooter has back to back clauses if the client disallows use of their brand on vendors' website.



And while we are at it, there are some other elements to establishing a successful business to business relationship:

- **Pay them equitably**, even if the shoot is cancelled at the eleventh hour. Just as you are relying on a contractor to represent your brand, you are also dealing with a professional who has rights to pay, fair treatment, and no discrimination at the workplace.
- **Give them adequate breaks**, or if that isn't possible, highlight this in advance so that the shooter knows what to expect and can either accept or decline the job in full knowledge
- **Give them a schedule in advance** of the shoot so that they know what to expect
- Make sure their style complements yours, especially if you are creating a story with two sets of images, or footage
- **Make sure they have a backup plan** for when things go wrong with equipment (adequate batteries, audio devices, SD cards)
- **Choose your contractor to suit your event**: some cultures have specific customs that need to be captured (and therefore hiring someone with prior experience may be what you need)

When things go wrong, know where to turn:

- As we are not lawyers, we aren't going to go into any depth and we urge you to seek legal advice.
- From our experience, in Australia, even without a physical written contract, a verbal contract could adequately establish your professional expectations. A written contract tightens up the expectations and agreement.
- Understand your rights. Dispute resolution should always be your first port of call directly with the contractor. If this fails, consider there are companies that specialise in mediation.
- In Victoria, Australia, VCAT is a tribunal which can be used to gain rulings between disputing companies. And then there is always the court system.

Your key takeaways...

To recap, hiring contractors can be a good way to grow your business or supplement you in the case of an unplanned event.

Just as the shooter is entitled to be paid for a good job, you as the hiring business are entitled to trust that your shooter will deliver great quality images, footage and audio to provide to your clients.

Check their portfolio and testimonials extensively.

Before the event, make sure they know what is expected of them.

If in doubt, or your gut says the shooter isn't a right fit... Then keep searching, as a contractor's work is an extension of your brand.

And remember there will be gems like Annie and Sarah ... don't be scared off by the Neds of the world while you are trying to find them...