

Producing Rough-Cut Video for Pretesting/Theater Testing

The three most commonly produced forms of rough messages for pretesting are:

1. **Animatics**—Simple line drawings are videotaped in sequence to depict your message
2. **Photomatics**—Photographs are videotaped in sequence to depict your message
3. **Rough live action**—An actual run-through of the script is videotaped using simplified sets, live actors, easily accessible locations, or simulated backgrounds (e.g., rear screen projection of the set)

All three of the above types of messages include an audiotaped delivery of the script.

The following table lists some advantages and disadvantages of each type of rough message.

Type of Rough Message	Advantages	Disadvantages
<i>Animatic</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less expensive than others Fewer logistical arrangements No props required No location settings Easiest to produce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May not approximate script Needs artist who can render clear line drawings
<i>Photomatic</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More realistic than animatic Can be inexpensive and easy to produce if location, props, and actors are available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More costly than animatic More logistical arrangements than animatic
<i>Rough live action</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More realistic than animatic or photomatic Can be inexpensive if location, props, and actors are readily available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many logistical arrangements and rehearsals required May be more difficult to make changes

The closer the rough message approximates final production quality, the more likely the pretest results will predict audience response accurately. The illustrations should be realistic, the characters should look like those you plan to use in the final spot, facial expressions should reflect the mood and tone of the script, and the settings should be sketched in detail. If photographs are used, the pictures of people and places should be clear and should resemble those to be used in the final message. Pay attention to the setting, wardrobe, props, camera angle, and perspective. Review the processed photographs and select the clearest ones for producing the rough message.

When producing animatics or photomatics, the illustrations or photographs must be large enough and clear enough for videotaping. Each illustration or photograph should be at least 9" x 12" so that the camera can capture sufficient detail. Larger sizes also permit camera movement (e.g., moving from left to right) within the frame to create a sense of motion or action. If you produce a photomatic, using slides projected on a screen allows you to create whatever size scene you want.

The video portion of an animatic or a photomatic is produced by videotaping each scene, frame by frame. Simulate motion by moving the camera in or out (zooming), left to right (panning), or up and down. Record the audio portion of the rough message and then edit to exactly the right length.

Finally, edit the videotape "to time" (30 or 60 seconds), using the soundtrack as a guide. The video and audio tracks are then mixed together to produce the rough message.

If you decide to use live action instead of pictures, use nonprofessional actors (e.g., friends or coworkers) to enact the script in a setting that closely approximates that to be used in final production. The visuals and the sound should be recorded at the same time. To minimize the number of times the live action must be taped, the actors should rehearse and the production crew should be briefed ahead of time.

Minimizing Production Costs

Animatics, photomatics, and rough live action PSAs can be produced with the help of a professional production company, your agency's audiovisual staff, a local television station, or a local college or university. A professional production company will be the most expensive option; the latter three options will be less expensive. For example, a local television station may donate its services for producing your spot, or a television production instructor may assist you at no charge (except for the cost of the videotape) by making the production of your rough message a student assignment.

There are several ways to help control the costs and the production quality of your rough ad:

1. Create a detailed production plan that addresses the following questions:

- What scenes will appear on the screen and in what order?
- How long will each scene be on the screen?
- What camera movements will be needed in each scene?
- How will scenes be edited together (e.g., fades, dissolves, or direct cuts)?
- What portions of the soundtrack go with each scene?

2. Send your production plan in advance to the person who will be helping you, and have extra copies on hand at the production session.

3. Make sure your script and production plan for the rough message are complete and timed in advance.
4. Prerecord the audio track before the visuals are shot.
5. Make sure your illustrations, photographs, and/or slides are in the right order when you arrive for the production session.
6. Finally, remember that you are producing a *rough* message. Save perfection for final production!

Rough message production costs may be further reduced by using amateur talent (e.g., friends or coworkers) who can do a respectable job recording the script. These same people may be used for photographs or in a rough live action spot. Shooting the visuals and recording the soundtrack on the same day may also save time and money. Finally, consider contacting a local radio station for recording the soundtrack. The station may provide its facilities free of charge or at a lower rate than a recording studio.

Animatics may be less expensive and faster to produce than photomatics because they are composed of artists' renditions. While you may have to buy the artwork, you eliminate costs for talent (actors), location setting (i.e., obtaining clearance to rent or use property), props, and travel. However, drawings may not communicate the realities or subtleties of the visual portion of the message as well as photographs or rough live action. These drawbacks can be minimized by using a good illustrator and a good, clear soundtrack.

Photomatics may be more expensive than animatics, depending upon the cost of the photography. The availability of people who can represent the characters, the accessibility of an appropriate location, and the rate your photographer charges are the major factors that affect costs. These costs can be kept down by working with people who are readily available and by arranging all the details in advance. The major advantage of producing a photomatic over an animatic is that you can produce a more realistic and believable rendition of the final message. Compare the costs of an illustrator versus those of a photographer and factor in the logistics involved when deciding whether you should produce an animatic or a photomatic.

A rough live action message can be the least expensive way to produce your message in rough form if:

- You are using amateur talent who can do a respectable run-through of the script
- Your script can be produced in a readily accessible location that does not require a lot of set-up time
- Your production crew can videotape the run-through with a minimum number of takes

We recommend that you videotape rather than film the rough message for pretesting because editing and processing are usually less expensive. Home or studio video equipment can be used to produce any of the three rough message forms.