

BRANDED DOCUMENTARY TOOLKIT

AMA CONFERENCE 2021



INTRODUCING THE TOOLKIT



Welcome to the real world!

That's the tagline we've chosen for our business, Happenstance Films - a video production company driven by the wild and wonderful world of documentary film.

We are Dan and Julia, two 'doc' fanatics who were convinced that brands, organisations and non-profits should produce more great branded documentary content. With authentic storytelling at its heart, it just has so much to offer.

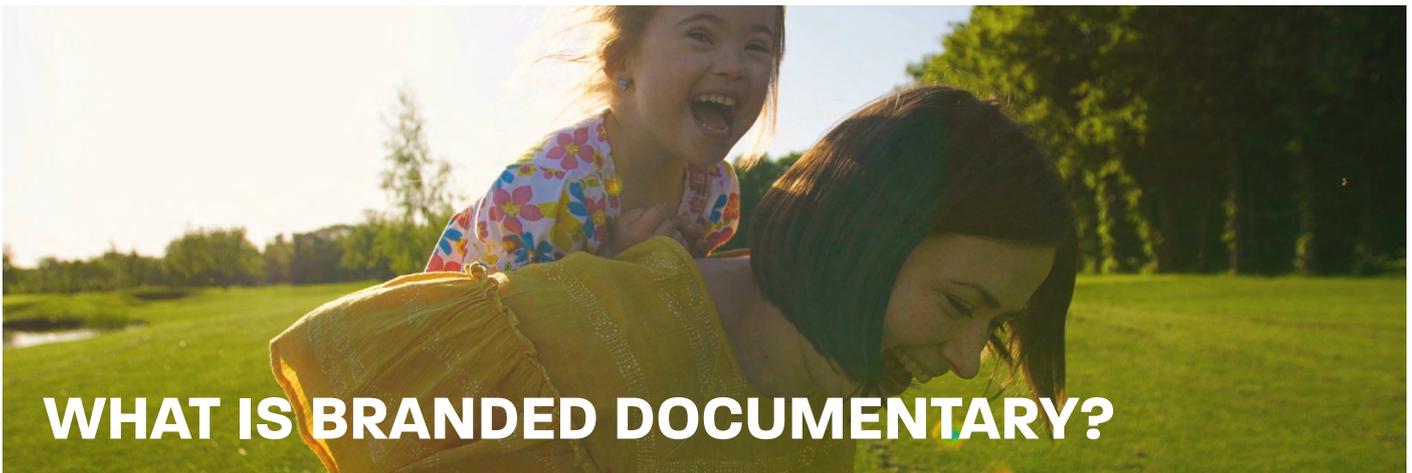
This toolkit has been designed to give an introduction to those who are unfamiliar with branded documentary, offering a variety of examples chosen from multiple industries and platforms. We want to encourage you to use them as a source of inspiration, even if the connection to what you're working on now might not always be obvious.

And if you have any feedback or would love some advice, get in touch! hello@happenstancefilms.com.

Julia & Dan

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Let's start with a definition: *"Branded documentary is a unique videography approach that is designed to build awareness of a brand or non-profit by associating it with a documentary story that shares its values."* Note that it's not about selling particular products or services but rather about the awareness-building capabilities of your marketing strategy.

Creative Strategist Ben Mason says, "To do documentaries, you have to say things that genuinely matter." This is where the arts industry has such an advantage. Your purpose, passions, and the value you give to your audience is naturally strong. Use that to your advantage when thinking about the video content you want to make.

Key Details

Branded documentary can be defined as:

- Documentary entertainment produced by organisations. This means getting rid of the idea of video content as advertisement.
- Content you don't want to skip.
- Marketing made to be sought and not designed to interrupt - this means giving video content purpose and value, and not just making the logo bigger.
- Content that is both a good financial investment for you and a good investment of time for audiences - what do you want to be watching from your favourite brands?
- Content that attracts its own audience instead of buying time to be watched or played.

Examples



The Pioneers of Women's Rugby, Guinness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VIXvowvjY8>

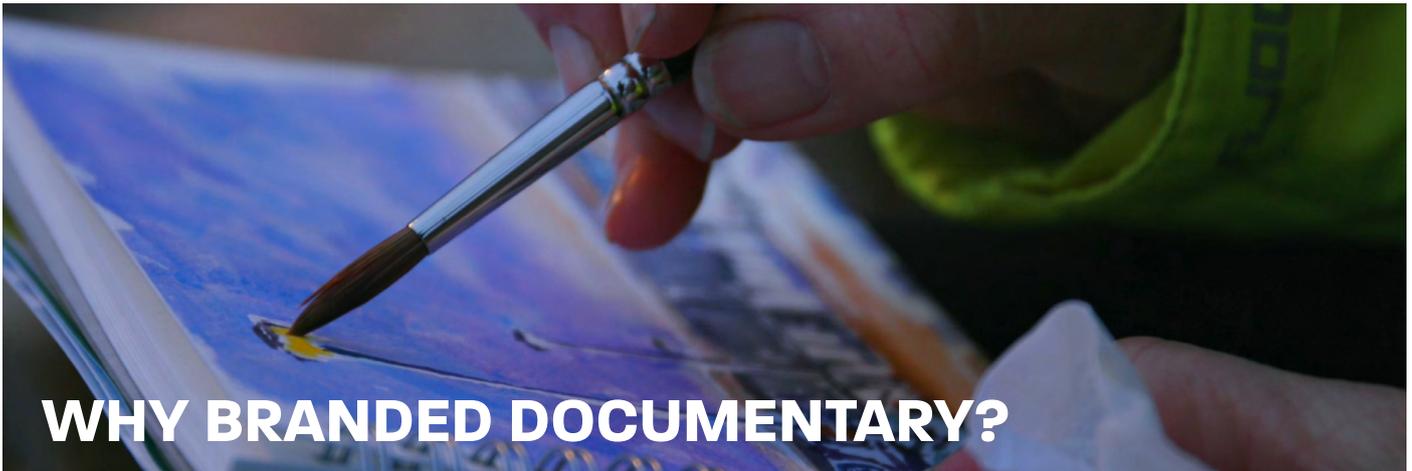
Sticking to what you know best but never compromising on story & cultural relevance.



The Adventure Effect, YHA England and Wales

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tqw5YfGD-4g>

Exploring an important issue in the real world: children who have never experienced the outdoors.



The importance of video marketing has grown enormously over the last decade and has become a vital part of every marketer's arsenal. The Covid-19 pandemic has made video production difficult, but it has by no means tamed the audiences appetite for more authentic content. See the Key Facts box below for the staggering stats.

Branded documentary is a genre that thrives off the drama we find in the real world. We love it because its DNA is so rich. Real people drive the stories, the films tackle real issues and with increasingly sophisticated technology, we no longer need to compromise on image quality. You can create gorgeous branded documentary with comparatively small budgets.

What the Data Says

- In 2021, 93% of marketers put videography front and centre of their marketing strategy, up from 74% in 2015.
- Charity Comms survey 2019: Marketers continue to feel more positive about return on investment offered by video than other formats.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the volume of online video people watch.
- Nearly 9/10 people report wanting to see more videos from brands in 2021.
- 2012-17 spending on factual TV doubled, making it one of the most popular genres on TV.
- In 2020, Sky launches a separate "Documentaries" channel alongside its "Arts" channel.

Examples



Hearing Colors, Samsung

<https://vimeo.com/118166526>

Samsung asks: how do we coexist with tech?



Up there, Stella Artois

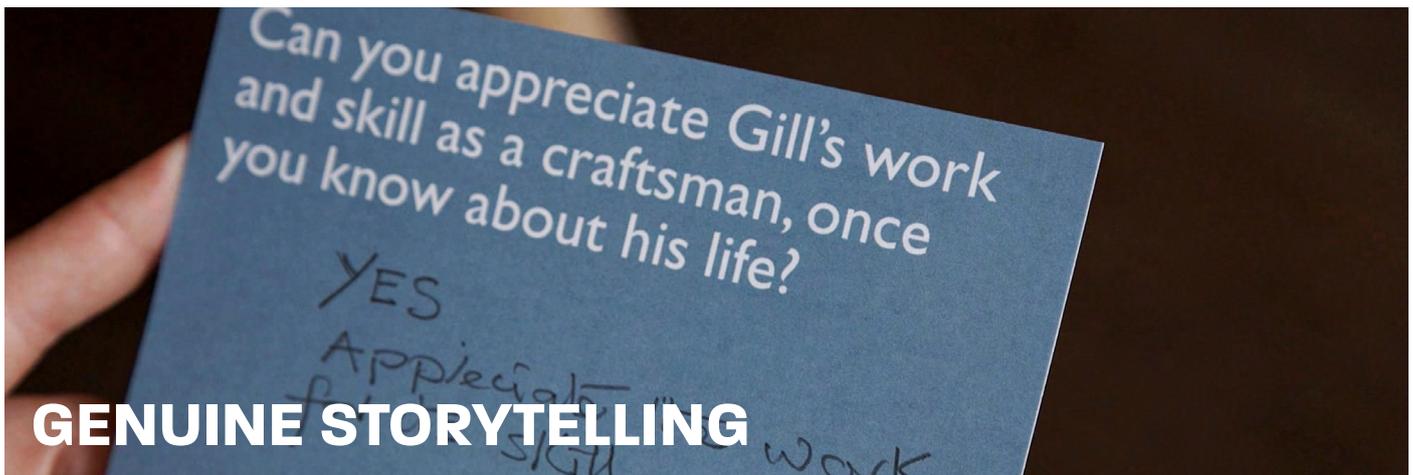
<https://vimeo.com/11175747>

On the disappearing art of painted commercials.



3 GOOD REASONS TO GET STARTED

In the following pages, we introduce you to three great reasons to make a branded documentary. We hope it gives you a stronger flavour of the potential of the genre.



Andrew Essex, in his hilarious book *The End of Advertising*, reminds us that telling good stories is a survival strategy. It serves as such because stories make others care. They grab the attention of those who never knew they were interested. Making your audience care through genuine storytelling is the first good reason to try branded documentary.

Touching the audience is so important in the media landscape we work in today. It means producing more *"stories that can't be contained,"* as a Google campaign put it. It means *"shifting from product placement to idea placement,"* as Peter Sjoenell and Jason Xenopoulos say, where the story communicates your values, beliefs or viewpoints.

Key Details

- Genuine storytelling allows us to make audiences care.
- Embracing story allows us to shift from product placement in our video marketing to idea placement.
- Inserting your values, beliefs and point of views in your video marketing can help you build stronger stories.
- Don't be afraid of conflict, it's the driver of a good story.
- Don't be afraid of this conflict:
- As marketing strategist Tracey Arrington says: *"If you're being truthful, it will feel risky."*

Examples



Year of the robot, Upian + Zorabots

www.upian.com/en/project/l-annee-du-robot

Laugh-out-loud, heart-wrenching, tear-jerker; a film that makes us care and listen.



Sounds of Tehran, WeTransfer

www.werepresent.wetransfer.com/story/sounds-of-tehran/

Adjusting your style to suit your main character.



ALIGN YOUR WHY

Branded documentary is a great way of presenting your purpose as an organisation in conversation with what's culturally relevant. It allows you to align your why. Simon Sinek, in his seminal piece *Start with Why*, defines the 'why' as, "What's your purpose, what's your cause, what's your belief?" It's the starting point for creating connections with your audience, much stronger than your 'what' or 'how'.

And it becomes even more powerful when you synchronise with what other people are talking about, such as racial politics, recovering from the pandemic or tackling the climate crisis. By using documentary - focusing on real people and real stories - this becomes easy.

Key Details

- Branded documentary allows you to align your why with the cultural conversation.
- It does this by tapping into the now: through unfolding stories and authentic characters
- In 'Portrait of an Artist' (right), the films are about one subject - portrait painting and beauty - but they touch on so much more in their storyline.
- They ask deeper philosophical questions: who is responsible for the well-being of a portrait sitter? How has the selfie culture changed our understanding of beauty?
- Be brave and open in your choice of subjects

Examples



Portrait of an Artist, Amazon

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Portrait-artist-Aleah-Chaplin/dp/B07V7Z5JHC>

Going back in time to discover what it means for artist and sitter to be a BP Portrait Award winner.



Redefining Beauty One Photo At A Time, Dove

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFkmiHg4dTI>

Dove's takes a stance on the selfie craze - in 2014!



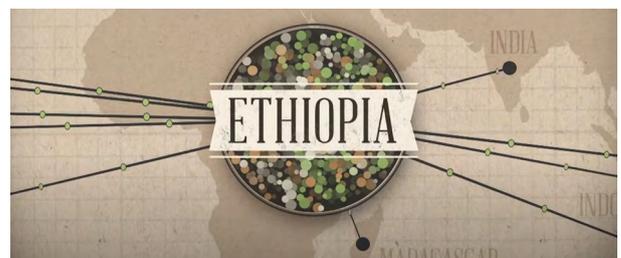
The third reason to make a branded documentary is probably the one we most associate with the genre in general: Sharing knowledge. But sometimes, the hardest thing to do is realise the depth of the knowledge you have to share. It takes a bit of what Tim and David Kelley call “*creative confidence*”: In the book of the same title, they ask:

“*Are you thinking like a traveller?*” Because, “*Too often, we go through day-to-day life on cruise control, oblivious to the huge swaths of our surroundings. Rediscovering the familiar is a powerful example of how looking at something closer can affect what you see.*” A few things to remember when sharing knowledge through branded doc below.

Key Details

- The example by Kew on the right shows that sometimes the every-day things can become fascinating starting points for our films: An average cup of Joe turns into a story of plant genealogy.
- When considering what knowledge to share, explore your archives: What do you already have that you could re-invent?
- The example from MoMA on the right does this beautifully: using pre-existing visual footage and recording an audio-only discussion between the choreographer and dancers.

Examples



The Forgotten Home of Coffee, Kew
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uDtytKMkpA>
Kew Gardens sharing knowledge on the most every-day thing ever: your daily cup of coffee.



The Work Is Never Done, MoMA
<https://youtu.be/AH14ebqez-l>
A simple video using archive material and an audio recording to create a perfect piece for art nerds.



PRACTICAL TIPS & TRICKS

If you're unfamiliar with what it means to produce a branded documentary, the prospect of making one can be daunting. That's why we've put together some practical guidance on things to watch out for, to consider and be aware of when you go into your first production. We hope it makes you more confident in choosing the right format and working with collaborators, whatever form the project demands.



Sourcing the right story is probably the biggest challenge on the way to making a great branded documentary. Fundamentally, you want your story to hit three main targets:

1. Be 'on-brand' for your organisation. 2. Serve the audience. 3. Be culturally relevant.

It's crucial that you take your time with this first step, and we ourselves love working with the client early on to ensure we have the best team conducting the research. As Pixar's founder Ed Catmull says, *"For all the care you put into artistry, visual polish frequently doesn't matter if you are getting the story right."* If there is one thing you take away today: don't underestimate the power of good research.

DOs:

- **Build a storytelling culture.** Encourage teams across the organisation to share the people and stories they are coming across. This will make it a lot easier build a strong portfolio of possible stories for your content.
- **Start early.** Finding the right story for your current marketing agenda takes time. Sometimes, gaining access takes time. Be prepared and start earlier rather than later.
- **Embrace your archive.** An archive isn't just the pieces of film or photographs that look 'old.' Your archive might be rich, even if you've only existed for five years. Sometimes, going back into what you've already done allows you to build stronger stories moving forward. An archive can give depth and story-arc to your video content.

Examples



Railroad Ties, Ancestry & Sundance TV

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MdupcscFI0>

Extraordinary research led to this fascinating bringing together of people.



Is This the Dream?, Vinyl Factory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTSWR7YVS70>

Joining fascinating characters with archive footage and split screen technique to great effect.



CASTING

Part of sourcing stories, is finding the right characters. While films and commercials have historically relied on celebrities, actors, and constructed narratives to connect with audiences, a central component of documentaries is the use of real people in real life situations to tell a story.

The real people we feature in branded documentaries have to be a carefully chosen as an actor would be. This doesn't mean they have to be great performers but they do have to show qualities that will ensure your audience can connect, empathise, and identify with your film. A few tips on how to nail your casting below.

Casting Correctly:

- Working closely with the videographer or production company you hire to cast means there will be fewer surprises down the line. Together, you will have greater success for finding the right character.
- Your character will set the tone for your film. Having time to get to know them in advance of filming can help create a complimentary creative vision.
- Scheduling "casting calls" are really helpful in getting to know your contributors.
- Sometimes the best characters are already part of your organisation, so be open to exploring the personal side of your staff.

Examples



A new Moment, MoMA

https://youtu.be/p-_LdWlquyk

What does your museum mean to you?



The Unseen Ocean, Volvo Car UK

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVgA_Y4Dt7M

A central character that drives the story.



Finally, a word on budgets. We have a rule of thumb with branded documentary: There is a film for every budget. See the box on the left for things to consider when commissioning a branded documentary.

One thing we'd recommend to consider - when making the decisions on how much you are willing to spend on one versus many videos - is James Larman's call-to-action: *"In a world where everyone is shouting it is those who whisper that will be heard. The brands that engineer scarcity in their communication making less content but of a higher quality, level of originality and relevance culturally will create signals, not noise."*

Finding the right budget:

- Use your own archive - this will reduce shooting days and licensing fees.
- Think about how you might include self-shot elements - this keeps down location hire and larger crew costs
- Consider whether one longer piece will have a longer shelf-life
- Being able to reuse content by producing a longer, more complex piece that can be re-edited into several shorter pieces can be a great way of ensuring your investment has a long shelf-life.

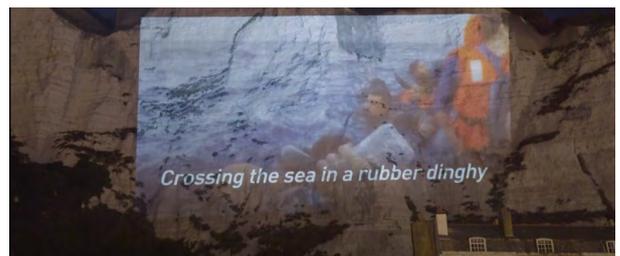
Examples



#BestManProject Goes Royal, CALM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGZqwIDoToY>

Not much budget is needed to bring an important conversation to your audience.



White Cliffs of Dover,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwt7ODBwhcQ>

Simplicity over budget: Identifying a simple but impactful scene can make a film.

HAPPY HUNTING!



We hope you've found this little toolkit useful, interesting, and- most importantly - inspiring. We hope it has sewed the seed for branded documentary love and gotten you excited about producing authentic video content.

If you have any questions on the material covered in this toolkit or want to simply have a conversation about how you might use branded documentary in your own marketing, please do get in touch. We'd love to chat!

Email us on hello@happenstancefilms.com.

We wish you all happy hunting for great stories and (re)discovering awe for the real world. It is, after all, the only place to be.