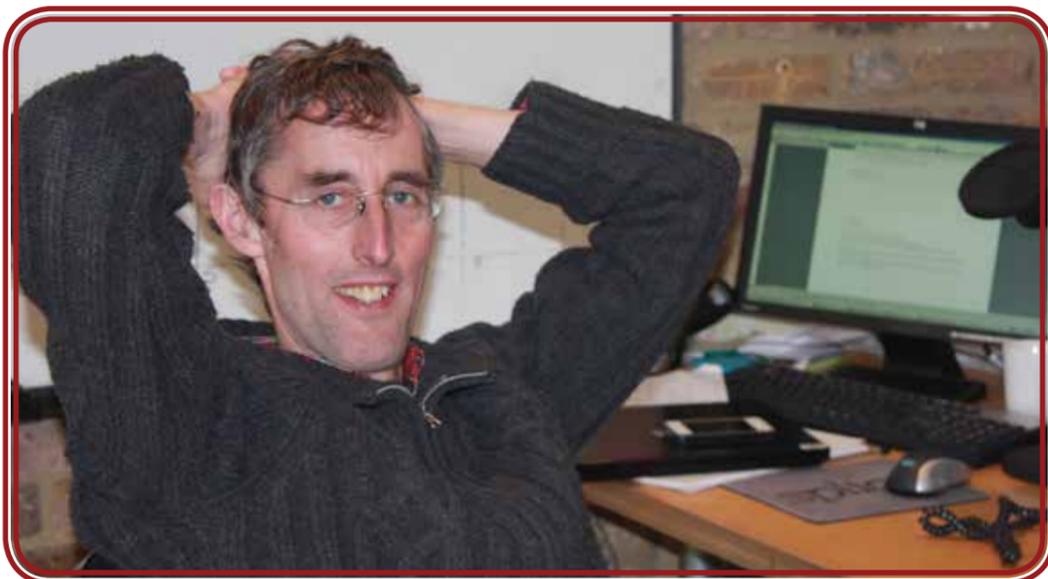


How to cut a 60 Minute Documentary in just 3 weeks and still get home in time to bath the baby!

by
Francis Buchanan



Are you an editor who is also a family person, perhaps with small children who need to be taken on the school run in the morning and read to at bedtime? Or maybe you have elderly parents who need looking after in their dotage? Or could it be that you try to enjoy an active social life? I've gone for the lifestyle triple-top by juggling all three scenarios at once, while at the same time

trying to stick television programmes together for a living. Yet how often do I arrange to go for a drink with a colleague, only to hear the dread words "sorry, I can't come. I'm stuck in the edit!". There seems to be an unspoken assumption in the post-production world that we editors were somehow reared in Petri dishes, that we would prefer to lead lifestyles that are more Sister Wendy than Hunter Thompson, (such is our dedication to our craft), and that human reproduction is the last thing on our minds. Perhaps I'm a freak of nature, but somehow on life's sweet journey I've acquired parents, friends and children, and pursuing a long-hours work culture is simply not an option. So with budgets and schedules being ever more squeezed, how can we adapt our working methods so as to get the job done, yet still have what I laughingly refer to as "a life"?

Having spent decades trying to figure this out, I thought it might be interesting to share the fruits of my experience with fellow Guild members. Like many of us perhaps, the bulk of my work is cutting television documentaries, mainly for the BBC and Channel 4. At present, a typical schedule would be 6 weeks for an hour long film. However, I also have a sideline editing on a high-end but low budget travel series called "Globetrekker", which is currently celebrating its 20th anniversary of being beamed around the world to some 25 million viewers in 40 different countries. The format is a simple 60' travelogue, following a back-packing presenter around a country, often going off the beaten track, while they immerse themselves in the authentic culture of the place. Recently I've done Peru, The French Riviera, Antarctica, Colonial Australia, Ukraine... you get the picture. I think it's a great programme, which is just as well because the budget only allows a schedule of... 3 weeks! I often find colleagues on the show have spent the night sleeping on the cutting room floor in order to keep the edit on track. Personally, I aim to be in work by 10.00, and be away by 19.00 at the very latest, having also enjoyed a reasonable lunch break (remember, we are not bionic: it's often forgotten that we need to eat). Here are a few tips on how to do it (those of a more squeamish or old-school frame of mind may wish to skip to the next article).

1) Have breakfast BEFORE you go to work. Why is it people who work in TV come to work, then spend hours faffing around preparing elaborate muesli concoctions? Perhaps they enjoy demonstrating their louche, bohemian mindsets, but it eats up time before you've even started.

2) Make sure your director/producer is switched on enough to be able to tell you what's happening next as you start assembling the programme. The likelihood of this is about 30%. Pepper them with questions until you've squeezed some sense out of them.

3) A "Globetrekker" will normally have 12-15 set-ups, or sequences, per show, so you need to be at least cutting 2-3 sequences per day. This will keep you on track for a typical 1st viewing at the beginning of Week 3. Aim to cut 1 setup before lunch and get the next one rolling before you break, and then cut the rest in the afternoon. Try and fine cut as you go: you won't have much time to revisit sequences, so craft it as if you're on air imminently (it helps if you have a background in TV news here!). At this point the composer won't have written anything, so that makes controlling the audio a bit easier.

4) Don't bother with sync-pulls. Stringing together endless takes of a piece-to-camera on a timeline wastes hours and will only confuse you. Here's how I do it: go to the last PTC first and lay it down. It's probably the best one, but not necessarily. The presenter may well be getting bored by Take 15 and showing it. Now work your way backwards, auditioning one by one. If by doing so you find one that's even better, great! Use it. Then move on. It makes you look thorough, as if your director cares, but also allows you to be decisive, and therefore quick.

5) Learn shorthand, or develop your own version. Nearly all TV docs consist of pieces-to-camera and interview/conversation sequences, with GV's, graphics and bits of commentary in between. As you're hitting the rushes for your next sequence, you will quickly come across a load of chitchat. It

might seem counter-productive time-wise, but you need to log it with timecode. (I'm assuming the budget doesn't run to a transcription service). I do a longhand scribble in an A4 notebook that only I can decipher, with timings in the margin. With practice, you can almost do it in real time. Most of the chitchat will be irrelevant bollocks or make no sense. Anything that holds together as an argument, or that makes you stop for a moment because it's interesting – put an asterisk next to. The same if there is emotion or humour. As you're listening and writing, your brain should be figuring out a beginning, middle and end for the sequence. With your notes under your nose, it's much quicker and easier to fling a sequence together than if you're floundering helplessly without. Again, don't muck around with sync-pulls. Keep your sequence assembly tight, 3-4 minutes maximum. If you lose something that turns out later to be important (and you will), you've now got your log to tell you where it is! Drop cutaways in as you go. Remember, you won't have a lot of time to revisit, so if not now, when?

6) Develop an ability to write commentary yourself. This should be a core task of your director, but most can't write their way out of a paper bag. You haven't got time to waste while they stare into space seeking inspiration. Feed them lines, at the same time as pretending it's all their own work. Record and drop in as you go along. It doesn't matter if it's all a bit 'boilerplate': it least it gives you something, anything, to work with later, and viewings go a lot easier if there's commentary. Also, commentary within sequences will help you cut them down.

7) Bully your director into commissioning graphics, rostrum and music as early as possible. You don't want it all turning up on the last day of your edit.

8) On the subject of music, it helps enormously if your show stretches to having a composer on board. If not, avoid at all costs wasting hours while the director favours you with the contents of his i-Pod, all of which is utterly unsuitable. Just wear a fixed grin and carry on working on your sequences while Dizzee Rascal or Wagner bumbles away in the background. Don't spend time fine-cutting music

sequences 'to the beat'. You can bet the track will be changed at the last moment, usually because it's unclearable.

9) Have a proper lunch break. If you have children, this may well involve strolling down to Sainsbury's to pick up lunchbox supplies. Make time to sit down, preferably elsewhere, to eat and read the paper. Reception areas are often good for this (one Australian exec used to say "I kinda like the way you're always hanging around the entrance reading the Guardian, Francis. It sorta raises the tone of the place!"). Having a break helps distance the job, allows you to refocus, and mentally plan what you're going to do next. Elevenses and tea breaks serve the same function. In the long run, it makes you more productive.

10) Resign yourself to the fact that the first time you see the fruit of your labours will also be your First Viewing. A "Globetrekker" first cut will probably be about 75 minutes long and you just won't have time to put your feet up and watch it on your own, let alone start mucking around with it. So as you're putting the programme together try to avoid mistakes, such as having unintended black holes or dodgy jump-cuts that'll cause embarrassment later in front of your exec and director!

11) On "Globetrekker", viewings usually start at the beginning of Week 3. If you've got your sequences broadly working, viewing notes usually consist of structural changes. Moving blocks around is obviously quick: it's always the bits between blocks that are fiddly and time-consuming. This is where your commentary-writing skills will really come into play. Make sure at viewings you really listen, and be able to rapidly figure out how to do what is required. Don't waste too much time arguing – alas, most TV execs regard us editors as useful idiots (!) and really aren't that interested in our objections to their mad ideas. It's usually quicker just to do what they want pronto, and annoyingly they often turn out to be right.

12) Keep your timeline simple. You really only need two video layers and seven, or possibly nine audio tracks. How many times have I taken over someone

else's film only to find 14 video layers and up to twenty audio tracks, for a simple doc. Untangling that lot is such a waste of time!

13) "Globetrekker" is lucky to attract a stable of fantastic film composers. From Week 3 music starts turning up so from now on recutting will involve rewriting commentary, losing time, pacing and adding music, graphics and so on. I think this is my favourite part of the job as the assembly really begins to turn into a film. As long as notes are clear and helpful, and your sequences are more or less working, it's not difficult to do a recut and have a viewing every day and a half from now on. If you really play your cards right, you can even have a long lunch and an easy afternoon on your last day!

That in a nutshell is how I go about a "Globetrekker", and the result is usually a pretty glossy looking show. Eagle-eyed readers may have noticed one big absence in this procedure: we don't have channel viewings. That's because the exec front-finances the programmes, makes them, and then flogs them to PBS, Discovery, ABC etc. This highly fortunate state of affairs obviously helps on a 3 week turnaround – once the commissioner/channel controllers start sticking their oar in you can obviously reckon on adding another 2-3 weeks (or months) on the end of the schedule, but at least if you follow the regime outlined above your work/life balance shouldn't be too hopelessly compromised. Meanwhile, spare a thought for our colleagues who work in current affairs, who might have less than a week to sling out a "Panorama"! Now, anyone for a beer?



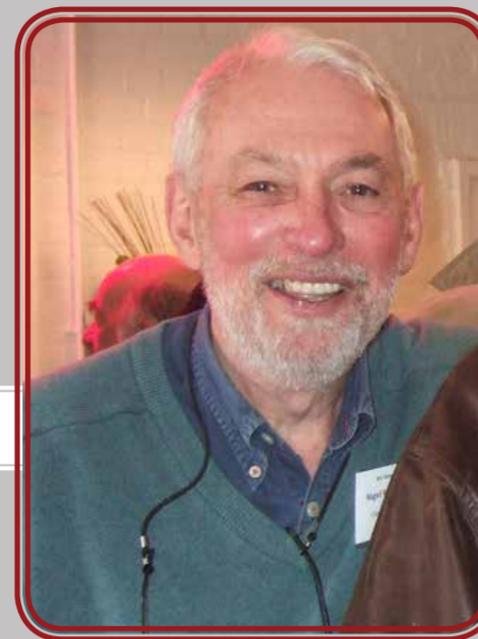
Determination and good fortune by Nigel Walters BSC

Determination and good fortune have resulted in Screen Craft Rights amassing over £ 1.7 million in three years for distribution to the crafts of cinematography, editing, and film design in the United Kingdom. A determination that solidarity might produce results united the BSC, the Editors (the GBFTE), and the GBCT into joining forces to create a new Collecting Society in 2012. This would be possible only with the full support of BECTU.

The good fortune came by persuading Suzan Dormer to undertake the onerous task of running the new Collecting Society, SCR. Suzan had previously been responsible for the establishing and running the highly efficient Directors' & Producers' Rights Society (now Directors UK). Her knowledge of the workings of the European Collecting Societies is second to none and has proven priceless.

A key link in the vision that collaboration was the way to success was that of Martin Spence, the BECTU Assistant General Secretary. Without his conviction that resulted in the backing of BECTU, the other crafts involved would not have had the financial ability or credibility to launch Screen Craft Rights. Today SCR comprises over 650 members and estates. Any qualifying EU craft rights holder has the right to benefit from the royalty systems that exist in some European countries. Sadly this does not include all European countries – and not the UK. For SCR to receive and distribute this income, the production involved should be British and have been shown on a relevant channel in the countries that recognise the rights of SCR members.

Royalties apply to feature films, television dramas, documentaries, children's programming etc. This includes BBC and ITV programmes transmitted in the relevant countries. Usually a points system allocates the royalties dependant on the genre, (Feature, TV Feature, Documentary, Children's programmes etc.), the length of the transmission and then, as a further complication, the time of day of showing and which channel, cable or terrestrial. The complexity of arranging distribution fairly is enormous.



"The early days were nervous days," recalls Martin Spence. "We wondered whether £40,000 a year was an overambitious target for annual income." In fact the past twelve months SCR has received £577,000 thanks to agreements with collecting Societies in Germany, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Austria! Current estimates are for a continuing distribution of up to £400,000 a year.

The involvement of BECTU was of crucial importance in giving International credibility to SCR and securing payment. Martin Spence has recently retired. He is owed a huge debt of gratitude for his pioneering work in establishing SCR. The Union involvement has resulted in royalties being available from some countries for such crafts as Costume Designers. He will be greatly missed by all the film workers he has served so faithfully and well, including many producers.

The early success of establishing SCR quickly resulted in the full support of the British Film Designers Guild, BFDG. Each of the founding institutions of the BSC, GBFTE, GBCT and BECTU are joined by the BFDG in each contributing two board members. The last AGM forewarned that the time has arrived for board membership to be appointed from the members, not selected by the partners.