

Sorry, Our Show Has No Budget For Video Assist
a.k.a., Our Director Never Uses Video Assist

Before you totally dismiss the idea of using record and playback video assist on your upcoming feature production or television show, here is something to consider. The lower the budget for your show, the more important it is that you do use video assist. If you read on, you will see that there are numerous reasons why video assist is low cost insurance for both your budget and for maintaining the vision of the filmmakers. Here's why:

* The myth. Video assist slows down production. NOT SO! The continued shooting of takes, just to be certain there are two good ones in the can, is what slows down production. Video assist is best used as a verification tool. In general, most directors will only ask for playback to confirm that they do have two good takes, and then move on. The time used for this playback is minimal, as compared to the time wasted on unnecessary takes. Ultimately, video assist will save time and your budget by allowing for more set-ups in a given day.

* Quality. The use of "monitors only" does not provide quality assurance. Only record and playback video assist can confirm that selected takes are in line with the director's vision, and removes the compromise that they would have to make later on when inferior takes or un-noticed mistakes are discovered. Additionally, by recording rehearsals, video assist promotes positive discussion for tweaking complicated, critical or expensive set-ups, such as with "one take only" stunt sequences.

* Re-shoots. The expense involved to bring the cast and crew back for even a single, unscheduled set-up, so as not to compromise the director's vision, is likely to cost more than what the entire line item budget would have been for a video assist department in the first place.

* Continuity. Video assist is not just a director's tool. Script supervisors, set dressers, props, wardrobe and hair/make-up technicians often use playback to verify continuity. In my own experience, they have never let playback impede the progress of the next take. Cinematographers, steadicam operators and 1st AC's also benefit from playback by assuring the quality of the take.

* Film stock and printing costs. Since video assist allows you move on to the next set-up sooner, you are saving on the expense of film stock by not using it on unnecessary takes, as well as saving on the expense of printing those unnecessary takes.

* Editing. Whenever a director would like to get a better sense of how a particular scene is coming together, digital video assist allows for the operator to perform on-set editing. So that it does not interfere with the pace of the shooting day, on-set editing is usually done only when time permits, such as during a major set-up or scene change. Additionally, if the key editor determines a need to print additional takes, he or she can refer back to the tape archive to see which un-printed takes, if any, meets the needs of the edit. This ability to review the material on tape first, is a cost savings, over the cost of printing unnecessary takes for further review.

* 24p and other video formats. While not generally made public, horror stories have been circulating among technicians of disasters occurring when the "master" tape on a 24p system or other video format is rewind for playback. One of two problems are usually blamed, namely, the tape is not properly re-cued for continued recording, and/or the tape is damaged in some way when played back in the camera. It is imperative that a master record tape never be rewind until it reaches the hands of the editor. Using record/playback video assist provides all of the advantages listed above without any of the risk to the master tape.

In reality, your show cannot afford to pass on video assist. Since it is always the intention to make every shot count, especially when working with a low or medium budget, the recording and playback of rehearsals and takes will not only assure the quality of your project, but will ultimately have the added advantage of moving the production process along. That saves money! As your video assist vendor, VAIdigital LLC is committed to this philosophy.