

Nikon Critical Reflection

I was recently given a Creative Brief By Nikon to create a 1 minute promotional film for them celebrating “over 100 years of Japanese heritage”. I found the whole experience incredibly fun and beneficial to my career as an adventure filmmaker going forward. This document will serve as a critical reflection on my experience working with Nikon as well as an internal review on my first experience as a freelance filmmaker creating work for real world clients.

Outcome of the Project

Forming the promotional film I found to be incredibly intuitive and natural, something I think is indicative of my preparation skills and a cumulation of the last 3 years I have spent at university. Pitching to Nikon gave me lots of confidence to move forward with my idea and I feel my passion for the project seeps through into the film.

It was really important to me that the brief was met as closely as possible; so that meant that the film had to be exactly 1 minute or less and even though my film was shot in Wales, I needed to evoke Japanese principles throughout. I felt that I achieved this through my meticulous plans, shooting scripts and shot lists to portray the narrative in exactly 1 minute and my language evoking Japanese Craftsmanship. I also chose to shoot the film in a public garden setting, evoking connotations of Japanese lifestyle and values, which I find to be a nice subtle detail.

I couldn't have asked for better weather on my shooting days. I was able to capture a consistent “golden hour” across 2 days which as a result provides really colourful, warm and cinematic footage that I was really pleased with. I originally planned to shoot with a 50mm prime lens, however I underestimated how bright the UV and natural sunlight would impact the footage. Without this I opted to change to an 18-45mm Kit lens that I did have an ND filter for. The change of lens did impact my original planned shots negatively, however, I felt I did my absolute best to adapt to my contingency lens (18-45mm) and plan.

Due to the sunlight glare on the lens from the lack of a lens hood on day 1, I did have to reshoot some footage from my first filming day, such as the opening match cut. Following the reshoots, I achieved a spectacular final shot in a new background which I love, where I am backlit and raise the Nikon Z6III up to my face. This led to further freedom in the edit to overlay past family photos onto the shot, reinforcing the heritage theme and family values often found in Japanese culture. Unfortunately some shots with sunlight glare are found in the final film that I do think I could've shot better upon reflection, they were just the best shots available that served the narrative.

The sound in the film I am mostly satisfied with, save for one shot in the film. This I later found out is because I recorded all of the sound in stereo with the exception of said shot. Due to my inexperience with the microphones I was using, I didn't notice this issue while filming or in the editing suite and I don't feel it impacts the film in a truly detrimental way. When watching the film on a smaller mobile device, the issue is more noticeable once you are aware of it, this is my main personal critique of the final film but forgivable to me at this stage in my career with still much to learn.

Experience Gained

Tackling this project I feel I have learnt a lot about the creative process as a freelance filmmaker as well as other revelations about myself as a creative. I found myself to be very tense while planning and filming-unnecessarily. After relaxing more on the second day it was clear my process was

streamlined and the outcome was superior. In the editing room I was pleased to find that I had an abundance of really quality shots, something I'm not usually used to. I had so much that I had to learn to leave some really amazing shots on the cutting room floor, a process I found to be humbling and cathartic at the same time.

I have also learnt to reach out to others for help. On this occasion I had delayed filming this project for so long that I had to rush into it much faster than I would have liked; completing the pre-production, filming and editing in just 4 days. This intense experience however has given me a renewed drive, passion and confidence for filmmaking that I briefly felt I had lost and resulted in one of my favourite film projects to date. I have also gained general experience with new cameras and equipment, building my confidence with tripod and static filmmaking as well as confidence in regulating sound and managing my footage in the editing room.

As a freelancer, leasing with Nikon has been an exciting challenge that has built up my confidence as a communicator. This whole project has helped me specifically with managing my Emails in other areas of my life outside of filmmaking.

Finally, I feel my post-production skills are reaching a standard I am really proud of. I feel the vision in my head is accurately articulated on screen and I have the confidence to chop, change and experiment with new ideas and general flow of the narrative and pace of the film. During the editing of this project, I played around with opacity and blending of footage to create a layered viewing experience, with speed ramping and emotive music, which I found creates a lasting impression on the viewer in the end.

Response

I am really thankful to have received some amazing quality feedback from Maja and the team at Nikon, something I was very anxious to learn, some of the personal critiques I was worried about, such as the sound issue proved to be insignificant and not picked up on. Some other criticism was given though.

Most of the criticism was specific and focused on some of the shots and framing - positive and negative. It was mentioned that due to the sunlight and my colour grade, there was high contrast. It was also mentioned that I was squinting in one of the shots and that my black shirt sometimes made it difficult to view the product on screen. It was also mentioned that some transitions were viewed as unneeded and I should keep the edit as simple as possible.

I received so many positive comments too, about my framing and attention to detail, as well as “brand recognition. Maja and the team really connected with the emotional angle of the story, and the language and delivery of my shooting script, which I was really happy about.

To conclude, I have really enjoyed this project and it has made me “see differently” which is a tagline frequently used by Nikon. Another classic advertising phrase used by Nikon is “nobody worries about your image more than Nikon”, however on this occasion I definitely did. If I was to tackle this again, I would have more faith in my own vision and try to spend more time focusing on broader themes and go back to the principles. I would ensure that I had more shots of the Z6III itself, and I would try and spend longer with the newer equipment I hadn't used before, such as the microphones to avoid simple technical mistakes. I also wish I could've spent a little bit more time in the edit room to polish up a few shots that I feel don't linger for slightly long enough.

I'm very thankful for the opportunity for this project and in Nikon's own words I will continue to "Keep Inspiring".

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