

THE REALLY HARD WORK OF MAKING A BUDGET IS GETTING THE RIGHT INFORMATION FOR EVERY SEPARATE AMOUNT IN THE BUDGET.

Before anything can be done I need a script. Then I need some shooting guidelines such as type (feature, MOW, Pilot, Docudrama, etc), format (35mm. 16mm. HD, etc.), budget framework (\$500,000 or \$100,000,000), shooting timetable (18 days or 70 days), union or non union (and if it's union, which ones - IA, DGA, SAG, WGA...), proposed shooting locations (Canada, Eastern Europe, L.A., Mexico) and proposed above-the-line cast and personnel. (If John Travolta is being considered for the cast, than the budget needs 8 Winnebago's & drivers, 12 star cars & drivers and an extra \$100,000 per week for incidentals. If Clint Eastwood is directing, then the work day will be limited to only 8 hours.)

The next step is to do a script breakdown. That gives me the number of shooting days, actor DOOD's and some of the more expensive items like camera car days, crane days, Steadicam days and stunt days...

THE REST IS RESEARCH, RESEARCH AND MORE RESEARCH.

The only way I've learned to do a budget properly is to take each scene and imagine that I am the director. I list all the elements that are needed for each scene. I figure out how the scenes will be shot. Then I fill out the breakdown sheet with every possible item I'll need. These items are then transferred to the budget program and an amount is determined for each.

If I know that an item is going to be donated or there may be a comp deal in place, I still have to put a dollar figure in for that line item - it can be offset by a matching negative amount later. (If the deal goes south, then it's a simple matter of removing the negative amount to keep the budget accurate.) The worst thing is to forget an item - that error lives with the project forever.

I believe in overestimating every budget on my first pass. I put in the maximum on all costs and take the worst-case scenarios. Then I go through it again and start to remove and reduce items on a case-by-case basis. When I actually get to shoot the project and some department head asks why they're limited to only X dollars, I can tell them the reasons I've set the amount the way I did. And I can tell them how I expect them to accomplish their task.

Budgeting is never simply a matter of allocating, say, \$2000 a week for grip department rentals. There are few flat across-the-board rates in a budget. What if you're shooting with 2 cameras on some of the days? And the director expects both cameras to be on dollies? And the DP likes to gel and trace all the windows.

The budget shouldn't hamstring anyone or prevent them from doing their jobs. I may not be able to give everyone everything they want, but to make my budget, I must know they can do what is required of them with the resources I've provided.

Budgeting isn't magic. It's hard work and knowledge of every department and every aspect of filmmaking. For that reason I have never felt that budgeting should be done by anyone other than an expert. Mistakes made here will live with the project forever.

STEWART YOUNG