



ONE-MAN BAND

THE ART OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

An increasing number of filmmakers are looking at the run-and-gun method. It can be an opportunity to be totally in control and flexible enough to work anywhere in the world

WORDS TERRY HOPE

While filmmaking has traditionally involved a team, in recent years there has been a move towards highly flexible, one person run-and-gun style operations. Typically this could see a camera, microphone, lights and monitor all mounted on a rig or tripod with the operator able to carry everything single-handedly and even completing the edit to deliver a finished production to the client.

Although it feels like a brand-new phenomenon, single-person operators have been around for years, but the whole process has come of age as products such as mics and lights have become more compact and easier to carry. The art lies in piecing together a kit to cover all the bases and deliver the required quality while still fitting into just one or two cases. And there's no such thing as an off-the-shelf kit: rather it's down to the individual to decide which pieces of gear will make up the various parts of the jigsaw.

“The art lies in piecing together a kit to cover all the bases and deliver the required quality”

Producing professional results can be quite a challenge for the run-and-gun novice, and for those used to working in a team environment going solo for the first time can be nerve-racking. There's no one to help you carry or set up your gear, you're on your own when it comes to working out the running order and you'll need to master the dark arts of lighting and audio, areas that those involved on a larger production might never have to touch.

If you can get your head around all this and make it work you've opened the door to a remarkably flexible way of working, one in which you'll be fully in control and potentially able to react to a commission at a moment's notice. You won't need to split your fee and

you'll have a handle on every aspect of the production and will understand exactly what you need to achieve to bring everything together.

For those who are well organised, have a hunger for a challenge and can learn quickly and on their feet the run-and-gun approach can pay big dividends. The experience you'll gain will enable you to understand the roles of others, which can only be a good thing for the next job as part of a team.

Could run-and-gun be for you? Well, turn over to read about three filmmakers, who work for all or part of the time as lone operators, as they discuss their motivation and their preferred gear. Then check out our suggestions for run-and-gun kit. →

ABOVE James Bayliss-Smith on location: shoots in hard to reach parts of the world can often intensify the need for a flexible approach from a cut down crew.

CASE STUDY 1

JOE CANEEN

While appreciating the control and flexibility aspects of run-and-gun, Joe still employs traditional filmmaking skills

Joe Caneen is acknowledged as an expert on the whole business of run-and-gun filmmaking, due in no small part to his widely read blog on the subject and his book, *Run 'n Gun Videography – the Lone Shooter's Survival Guide* (an Amazon Kindle download, priced at £6.92/\$9.86).

Starting off in the US film industry, Joe went through classic apprenticeship-based training and then worked as a cameraman for many years, followed by another lengthy period as a cameraman/director for small films. Finally he worked as a video director with a small team that travelled the world producing short documentaries.

"I decided to go solo as a videographer in 2008," says Joe, "specialising in business and corporate videos. SEO experts at the time were predicting that video would play the most important role in the World Wide Web and that it wouldn't be long before online businesses would be left behind if they didn't have video content. That

prediction has finally begun to realise itself, and the expectation now is that video will ultimately be driving 90% of consumer business on the Internet."

By choosing to work predominantly on his own Joe vastly simplified his work process, and he enjoys the fact that he's able to pack all the kit he needs for a job into two sturdy military-style bags that he can carry himself if necessary. He's chosen his kit carefully to ensure it covers all the bases and gives him backup in the event of equipment failure. Given that weight is such an issue for the single person operator, everything has to justify its place.

"My cameras are all Sonys," he says, "and the two that usually travel with me are the PXW-X70 and the HXR-NX30. Both are fully featured HD compact camcorders and perfectly capable of giving me the quality I need for commercial filmmaking. I also have a smaller DSLR-style camera in my case, the Sony RX10, and I pack this because it has a similar zoom range to the

"You don't need fancy equipment in order to be a successful run-and-gun filmmaker"

PXW-X70 and the same size one-inch Exmor R CMOS sensor. This means that the footage from the different cameras will all have the same look, making it easier to grade in post.

"Another big advantage of the RX10 is its constant f/2.8 aperture throughout its zoom range, which can be really useful since it means I won't be acquiring depth-of-field that I don't want if I'm looking to set up a longer shot."

Joe is also insistent that the run-and-gun filmmaker should travel with lights, since these make it possible to control the situation if what's available needs a little help. "I've got two flexible Flexlite 120W LED light panels," he says, "and these are not only really portable and lightweight – I can roll them up to put them in my bag – but I can set them up in moments, and they are fully controllable with a dimmer and can also be set to work in natural and artificial light conditions. I do have light stands but am just as likely to Velcro them to a wall or tape them to a Coke bottle."



JOE'S KIT 1 Lightware Multi Format 1015 Case 2 Audio Technica 8031 and 875R microphones, Sony radio transmitter for XLR microphones, dead cat and XLR cables 3 Sony PXW X70 4 Sony HXR NX30 5 GoPro Hero 3 Black Edition 6 Sony radio mic transmitter and receiver 7 Sony lav omni-directional mic 8 Zoom H2 Digital Audio Recorder 9 ROKO NP-FV100 3900 mAh batteries for Sony cameras 10 GoPro batteries 11 X-Rite Colour Chart for video (works with Color Finale in FCPX) 12 Beyer Dynamic over-ear headphones



ABOVE Packing is an art form when you're a run-and-gun operator. Joe Caneen uses all the available space in his two bags, often dedicating one to stands.

Quality sound

Audio is another major consideration, and Joe packs two Audio Technica directional mics, preferring them to lavalier models that have the potential to pick up unwanted crackle from clothing. The AT8031 is a cardioid condenser handheld mic that, if held close to the lips, will allow clear vocal to be recorded, even in the noisy industrial situations that Joe is regularly working in, and this

records a high-quality audio track direct to the camera via an XLR socket.

Joe started his Run-and-gun Videography blog as an additional resource to his ebook, and it followed the creation of his Video Whisperer blog in 2011. The site is a valuable melting pot of information relating to the single operator and it ties in to Joe's belief that too many people are moving into this area without the necessary experience.

"The book and the blog were set up to help those that might be a little more serious about learning some basics," says Joe, "and disabusing themselves of the idea that the size and amount of equipment you carry makes much difference in the production of a memorable or effective end product. These days the quality and ease of use of cameras and editing programs is so high, with prices that are so affordable, that many people are tempted to jump into the field despite the fact they have no training or understanding of the fundamentals of filmmaking."

"You don't need fancy equipment in order to be a successful run-and-gun operator. The fact is that the client won't care what you're working with providing that the quality of the films you're making is good enough. People are missing the point that you should be there to get a message across for the client, and it's important to be thinking

about such things as the lighting you're shooting under and how good the audio track is.

"You also need to be using the latest technology to your advantage, and not closing your mind to what it can do for you. In-camera image stabilisation, for example, has now reached the point where it can really do a good job for you, enabling you to hand-hold your camera and still achieve a result that you would once have had to rely on a Steadicam for. I still carry a tripod with me, but these days I mainly use this when I'm setting up interviews."

"Being mobile is crucial, because if you're setting up and putting down a shoulder rig all the time you're going to be missing things. If you're filming a wedding, for example, your job is supposed to involve you sniffing around and looking for those special family moments that people would otherwise never have known had happened, and you can't do that if you're focusing on working in the traditional way. In short, you don't need to be working with one of these 'Frankenstein rigs', pictures of which you see posted up all the time on forums." →

» More information

video-whisperer.com
www.runandgunvideography.com



ABOVE When necessary, Joe Caneen can carry all his kit in two bags – and everything in those bags has to justify its place. There's no room for kit that 'might' come in useful.

CASE STUDY 2

JAMES BAYLISS-SMITH

Enjoying the best of both worlds, James Bayliss-Smith works as a self-directing filmmaker and a documentary cameraman alongside a director

In the modern world of filmmaking it pays to be flexible, and James Bayliss-Smith is certainly that. He has the ability and the set-up to work on an individual basis while also regularly working in a team as a documentary cameraman. “I learned how to be a filmmaker by working as a self-shooter,” he says, “and my personal camera kit is designed so that I can be self-sufficient.”

For James the secret of becoming a good self-shooting director is having complete mastery of your kit so that you don’t have to think too much about the technical aspects of filming. “This enables you to keep your mind on the story you’re trying to tell,” he says. “Audio is very important in documentary work and if you’re having to adjust this on the fly when you’re filming with characters it can be very challenging. Lighting is another area that you need to think about carefully: I tend not to work with lights unless I really am in the dark and the shoot is lending itself to working with a camera-mounted top light.”

At the heart of James’s run-and-gun kit is the compact-sized Sony FS5.

“It ticks all the boxes as a great HD documentary camera with the added bonus of limited 4K abilities.” It also initially appealed for its slow-motion capabilities, variable ND filter, the clear image zoom and “the prospect of getting an extra stop of light from all my Canon lenses using the Metabones Speedbooster Ultra”.

One of the key considerations with run-and-gun shooting is the weight and size of the kit, and if needs be James can fit everything bar a tripod into a carry-on bag. Much of his overseas work involves teaming up with reporters/hosts, with James as cameraman. “Working with reporters but no director gives a nice balance between self-shooting and working with a full team,” he says. “As the cameraman you direct them on location but they direct the story. It’s a nice collaborative way to work.”

The self-shooter has to plan a project carefully to ensure none of the essential shots are missed. “Not necessarily down to individual shot level,” says James, “but definitely from the point of view of what type of ‘scenes’ you want to capture. As an experienced cameraman



ABOVE Working as a self-directing filmmaker and as a documentary cameraman, James Bayliss-Smith knows his kit inside out leaving him free to concentrate on the story.

“As an experienced cameraman I know what shots I need”

I know what shots I need to make a sequence work in the edit, but without proper planning from a director’s point of view you may not focus on the right scene. You need to know in advance what you want, then at least you have a plan. If it doesn’t pan out as you envisaged then fine, but without a plan you’ll end up with a load of material that might not necessarily help you tell your story.”

James confirms there is a vibrant market for self-made films, but “you need to be able to hustle to get the deals. That said, if you can do a successful crowdfunding campaign before you start shooting this can be a good indicator as to how well the film might do commercially and it can also cover the production costs. However, my number one tip if you want to be a self-shooting independent documentary director is: early on get a good producer for your project. If you’re set on doing it all on your own then be prepared for it to take a long time and for it to be a lonely process that can often fail.” →

» More information

www.jamesbaylissmith.com
www.vimeo.com/jamesbs
jamesbaylissmith.com/film/tailfin-kickstarter-campaign-video



JAMES’S KIT 1 Sony FS5 2 Canon 5D Mark II 3 16-35mm, 50mm, 24-70mm and 70-200mm 4 Sennheiser HD-25 1 Headphones 5 Zacuto EVF 6 Satchler tripod 7 Litepanel LED 8 Sennheiser ME-66 Shotgun mic

CASE STUDY 3

PHIL COATES

As a filmmaker Phil Coates is often working in extreme conditions where a conventional team is impractical so he's become a single shooter

As an adventure filmmaker, Phil Coates specialises in location directing and shooting in challenging environments across the world, working for Discovery International, BBC2, Channel 5 and Channel 4. He's also a respected expedition leader and polar guide and has led more than 30 international expeditions, through jungle, arid desert, mountains and ice.

"I started my career at the BBC with the intention of getting into filming," says Phil, "but the BBC was disbanding its film unit so it was extremely challenging to start a career as a director/cameraman in the early 90s. I worked in production and learned the skills of a producer and a narrative storyteller. I then brought my skills as a photojournalist to the table and, using affordable mini DV cameras, I filmed expeditions and location assignments. From that point on I never looked back."

These days Phil works with a Canon EOS C100 Mark II cinema camera and a selection of three EF lenses, all packed into a Manfrotto Bumblebee backpack.

"I work with the C100 Mark II for a number of reasons," he says. "For a start its AF system is remarkably fast and accurate, especially if you lock

on to a subject so that it tracks them. I'm fully aware that AF is anathema to many filmmakers but it has evolved substantially over the years and it's so much better than it used to be. There's none of the telltale 'popping' that you used to see and it's now a really useful tool for the run-and-gun filmmaker.

"It's also a very adaptable camera. On one of my latest films, *Iron Heart* – a documentary about triathlete Elmar Sprink, in conjunction with DoP David Newton – I recorded internally onto the SanDisk Extreme Pro SD cards in the C100 Mark II while simultaneously recording in Apple Pro Res 422 onto the Atomos Ninja II/Atomos Ninja Star with SanDisk SSDs and CFast cards. Working this way significantly reduced the footprint of the camera and improved the ergonomics of the rig, and it meant that I could shoot both 50fps internally and 25fps externally while recording a simultaneous backup at full ten-bit 4:2:2 colour space – something of a game changer for a documentary such as this."

Phil regularly works off a tripod but also has a set-up with a Blackrapid sport strap and a Zacuto chest rig. "The rig presses against you," he says, "and gives you an extra point of contact, and it's really simple to shoot stable footage



that way. However, while I think there are times where it might be possible to live with slightly soft footage, audio is another matter altogether: poor quality audio is a killer and it's crucial that the run-and-gun filmmaker is on top of this. Ask questions and learn as much as you can from sound recordists and then apply this to a single shooter operation. Ensure that you always mike up properly and use a windshield."

Finally, Phil has crucial advice for run-and-gun novices. "Plan your production and always think about the narrative," he says, "so that you're telling a story. Once you know what your story is, work out how you're going to shoot it and then consider what tools you need for the job. Finding the story is of overriding importance and if you can do this from the outset it's a huge help." **MM**

» More information

www.philcoates.tv

"Plan your production and always think about the narrative"



ABOVE Working with DoP David Newton, Phil Coates filmed triathlete Elmar Sprink with his Canon EOS C100 Mark II, recording to SanDisk cards and SSDs, and Atomos Ninjas.



PHIL'S KIT 1 Canon C100 Mark II 2 Atomos Ninja Blade 3 Rycote Super-Softee Windshield 4 Sennheiser headphones 5 Manfrotto 509HD Head 6 Cokin Z-Pro filter 7 G-Technology G-Drive 8 Atomos Ninja Star

RUN-AND-GUN KIT

If you're building a flexible run-and-gun outfit to cover most filming eventualities certain key accessories need to be on your shopping list. Here are some suggestions...

CAMERA

From compact and versatile DSLRs such as the Sony A7s Mark II through to larger ENG models like the JVC GY-HM660, there are plenty of options. What you choose will reflect the kind of jobs you're taking on, but a good all-rounder would be the Canon EOS C100. The Mark I version can be picked up second-hand for as little as £1600/\$2118, while the recently upgraded Mark II model will set you back around £3229/\$3999.



LIGHT

You need to travel with a suitable light to kill shadows in interview situations, and the Rotolight NEO (£249/\$396) is an excellent choice. It's round for a start so creates natural looking catchlights, and it's also incredibly lightweight and totally portable, being powered by six AA batteries as well as AC or DC power. The fixture features bicolour LEDs with a colour rendering index (CRI) of 95 and a skin tone index of 99 for great quality light.



RIG

Again there are some good choices out there, including the Zacuto Run n Gun bundle featuring the Marauder rig and Z-Finder Pro for £977/\$975, but if you're going for the C100 then it could make sense to go for the SHAPE Canon C100/300/500 Offset rig. Costing £538/\$849, it features a pair of 10in 15mm rods and a pair of 12in 15mm rods through the length of the baseplate. It attaches underneath the camera with four M4 screws, while a push-button 360° Quick Handle Rod Bloc enables you to make fast set-up adjustments.



OFF-CAMERA MIC

If you're looking for simplicity and accuracy then the Sennheiser AVX takes some beating. Costing £509/\$699, the mic offers fully self-configuring digital operation, with the receiver plugging directly into your camera's XLR input, from where it connects wirelessly to either a lavalier microphone (ME2 or MKE 2) or a handheld mic (835) that can be held up to your subject to record the audio. There's even a kit available (AVX Combo) with one of each mic type.



ON-CAMERA MIC

If you want to be truly self-contained, an on-camera mic is the way to go, and one of the best around for the run-and-gun filmmaker is the RODE Videomic X. Costing £599/\$799, it features a matched pair of 1/2in true-condenser capsules, configured in a stacked X-Y set-up, providing a highly immersive soundscape. Digital switching allows you to control the level adjustment, high-pass filter and an innovative high-frequency boost designed to improve the intelligibility of dialogue.



CARRYING CASE

Once you've acquired all your kit you need a convenient case to carry it all in, and look no further than the camRade run&gun bag (medium version £125/\$159). The soft-padded interior includes removable dividers, which make it easy to arrange the main compartment into sections to fit your kit. You can carry the bag with the included padded shoulder strap or soft handles, or transport it on a trolley.

