

BASTIAN CLEVÉ

# FILM

## PRODUCTION FOURTH EDITION MANAGEMENT

HOW TO BUDGET,  
ORGANIZE, AND  
SUCCESSFULLY SHOOT  
YOUR **FILM**

A Focal Press Book

ROUTLEDGE

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# Film Production Management

This new and updated fourth edition of *Film Production Management* provides a step-by-step guide on how to budget, organize, and successfully shoot a film and how to get it onto the big screen. Whether you are a film student or film production professional just getting started in the industry, this book is an indispensable resource for day-to-day business on the set.

Written by veteran filmmaker Bastian Clevé, this book will teach you how to:

- ▶ Break down a screenplay
- ▶ Organize a shooting schedule
- ▶ Create a realistic budget
- ▶ Find and secure locations
- ▶ Network with agents to find actors
- ▶ Hire a crew and communicate effectively with unions

The new edition features updated information on contracts, permits, and insurance; special tips for low-budget filmmaking; new information on digital workflows and production software; advice on green production practices; and expanded coverage of the role of the line producer.

**Bastian Clevé** has produced more than 80 full-length and short films in the United States and Germany and has won numerous awards for his work. He was previously Professor at the Film Production Studies Department at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg near Stuttgart, and he has lectured on filmmaking throughout North America, Europe, Southern Asia, and Australia.



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# Film Production Management

How to Budget, Organize, and  
Successfully Shoot your Film

Fourth Edition

**Bastian Clevé**

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# The Production Manager

Movies are make-believe. They are designed to portray reality to such an authentic degree that even stories taking place millennia ago in faraway galaxies look true and convincing. In historic movies or science fiction films, this becomes obvious as there is no any such “reality” that might be used to film in—but of course, this is true for any story set in everyday life—and even for documentaries to a certain degree. Considering that it takes a small “army” of technicians, actors, and other personnel to create this illusion, it becomes obvious that there is no “let’s just go ahead and shoot” without meticulous preparation, planning, and legal work far prior to any first day of cameras rolling (however, there are no cameras “rolling” anymore as there is no “film” anymore—digital data are being “stored” instead). This book will try to offer an insight into the mechanics of organizing for and accomplishing shooting of motion pictures, especially from the viewpoint of a production manager and a line producer.

Few people grow up with the goal of becoming a motion picture production manager or a line producer. Everyone knows what a director does and what producers do. Everyone can identify with an actor or a star. Even director of photography is a generally known profession. But who knows what production managers or line producers do?

Admittedly, it sounds boring. Yet this field of work is one of the most complex, responsible, and diverse in the whole process of motion picture production. It poses challenges in vastly different areas and requires legal, technical, organizational, and psychological expertise. These professions demand the very best from those

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who pursue them—it is a job that starts first thing in the morning and closes late at night—production managers usually make themselves available at all times during day and night, they act as emergency help and should be relied on at any time during pre-production, shooting, and post-production. It is normal to expect competent and up-to-date answers to all and every question however strange or far-off from the production manager—he or she is the one person who embodies the complete production and has a clear overview of what has happened, what is happening, and what is going to happen. The production manager sets the mood of the overall production and often serves as a go-between to restore balance and common sense if necessary. This business being what it is, this personal quality might be called upon more often than can be imagined. The production manager's work gives a production the necessary structure within which the director and other artists and craftsmen can create their visions.

If your ultimate goal is to become a producer—for theatrical motion pictures, commercials, music videos, corporate image films, documentaries, or TV—you will probably proceed through the levels of production management, from assistant director to production manager, line producer to independent producer. To do a thorough and creative job as a producer, it is wise to get as much experience as possible guiding a production from conception through final screening. The best way to do this is through hands-on, detail-oriented, nitty-gritty production work on the set and in the production office. The production manager and line producer are some of the few people working on a production who are involved from beginning to end. Few others know and are responsible for as many details about the production. The knowledge you gain as a production manager will be invaluable when you achieve the title of producer. It will give you the power and authority to seize control of the production; through personal experience, you will know the limits of what can be done. As a producer, your creative ambitions will be set free. You will decide on story ideas, developments, and creative aspects of the screenplay; you will make choices in casting and all other artistic aspects of production; and in a collaborative process, you will be fully responsible for making your vision a reality.

### ► THE PRODUCTION MANAGER'S JOB

The Directors Guild of America (DGA) has a very precise job description for the position of production manager. In reality, though, the areas of authority often become hazy, particularly in the field of independent nonunion production. The job titles, also, may become indistinct. Virtually the same position might carry the title production manager (PM), unit production manager (UPM), line producer, or producer. The title depends on the size of the production, the staffing of the production department, and the relationship of the position to the producer and executive producer.

Here is how the DGA describes the production manager's role:

### Unit Production Manager

A Unit Production Manager is one who is assigned by the Employer as a Unit Production Manager of one or more motion pictures, as the term "Unit Production Manager" is customarily used and understood in the motion picture industry. Subject to the provisions of Paragraph 13–202, a Unit Production Manager (hereinafter referred to as "UPM" and collectively referred to as "UPMs") may be assigned to work concurrently on one or more productions, whether theatrical and/or television. No UPM need be employed in those instances specifically set forth in Paragraph 13–202.

After a picture is approved for production, there shall be no delegating to other employees (except First Assistant Directors when no UPM is assigned to the production involved) the duties of UPMs. It is an element of good faith of, and part of the consideration for, this BA that no Employer will make a general rearrangement of duties among such categories, change classifications of employment for such categories, employ persons not covered by this BA or delegate the duties ordinarily performed by UPMs to persons other than First Assistant Directors acting in the dual capacity of UPMs or to bona fide Producers for the purpose of eliminating UPMs who otherwise would have been employed hereunder. There shall be no restriction on delegation of duties ordinarily performed by UPMs when a UPM and a First Assistant Director both are assigned to the production.

The UPM, under the supervision of the Employer, is required to coordinate, facilitate and oversee the preparation of the production unit or units (to the extent herein provided) assigned to him or her, all off-set logistics, day-to-day production decisions, locations, budget schedules and personnel. Without limitation, among the duties which the Employer must assign to the UPM or First Assistant are the supervision of or participation in the following:

1. Prepare breakdown and preliminary shooting schedule.
2. Prepare or coordinate the budget.
3. Oversee preliminary search and survey of all locations and the completion of business arrangements for the same.
4. Assist in the preparation of the production to insure continuing efficiency.
5. Supervise completion of the Production Report for each day's work, showing work covered and the status of the production, and arrange for the distribution of that report in line with the company's requirement.
6. Coordinate arrangements for the transportation and housing of cast, crew and staff.
7. Oversee the securing of releases and negotiate for locations and personnel.
8. Maintain a liaison with local authorities regarding locations and the operation of the company.

Subject to the following paragraph, the foregoing description of the UPM's duties is not intended, nor shall it be construed, either to enlarge or diminish the duties of UPMs, First

#### **4 The Production Manager**

and Second Assistant Directors or other personnel as such duties are presently and were heretofore customarily performed in the motion picture industry. Notwithstanding any other provision of this Paragraph 1–302, an Employer may not assign the duties of a Unit Production Manager to

Extra Player Coordinators, Production Assistants, or persons in positions in which the assigned duty has not been customarily performed in the motion picture industry. There shall be no alteration of job titles to evade or subvert the provisions of this Paragraph.

(from Directors Guild of America, Inc., Basic Agreement of 2011–2014)

# 2

## The Business of Film

Next to the producer or executive producer, the production manager (and line producer—if there is one—which is not always necessary or the case) is one of the few people on a production team who stay with the project from beginning to end. The four distinctive phases in any production are development, pre-production, production (principal photography), and post-production. This chapter looks at the role of the production manager (PM) at each phase.

### ► DEVELOPMENT

The PM is usually spared the most nerve-racking and frustrating phase of all: development. In this phase, the producer conceives an idea for a movie, develops it into a presentable package, and tries to raise production funds to get the project into pre-production. To put it bluntly, filmmaking is all about business and earning potentially vast amounts of money. This statement might sound harsh and cynical to a beginning filmmaker, but it accurately reflects the dealings and philosophy of the entertainment business (it's called business for a justifiable reason—if this aspect does not work out, then there will be no “next movie”).

The development process sounds simple, but let's take a closer look. First, the producer searches for material that can be turned into a successful (that is, *financially* successful) motion picture. Inspiration might come from an original screenplay, novel, stage play, short story, book, periodical, real-life story, pop song, or another motion picture. Regardless of its source, the producer must acquire or option all the exploitation rights

to it before making the movie. If an intellectual property is being optioned, it means that there is usually a certain time-limit (mostly one year with the possibility of a prolongation for another 12 months) during which time the producer must be ready to pay the full amount of the previously agreed-upon full price. This does not necessarily mean he or she must get shooting, but it means the producer has to purchase the property completely.

Buying the exploitation rights to an existing screenplay can involve a considerable amount of money. It all depends on the market value of the script, whether it is brand new or has been shopped around for a while, and the “name value” of the screenwriter. In any case, the producer must consult (and pay) a lawyer to ensure that exploitation rights are cleared and obtained. The lawyer must also make sure the story of the screenplay does not violate other rights, such as the right to privacy. Even if the producer believes the screenplay must be rewritten, either by the original author or by another writer, buying an existing screenplay still is the easiest and quickest way to obtain a property ready for “pitching”—that is, for presenting, packaging, and trying to sell it to the parties who are interested in exploiting the finished movie. To obtain the rights, the producer must have up-front money. If the producer does not have a development deal with a studio or a production company, he or she personally must advance the money. Of course, an author may grant the producer the right, without financial compensation, to try to sell the project and agree to get paid once the production is secured and green-lighted. There are no hard-and-fast rules in this regard, so whatever deals can be made, will be.

If the screenplay will be based on an existing novel, play, short story, or book, the producer first must obtain the rights to have the screenplay written (assuming the property is not in the public domain). The time needed to negotiate adaptation rights and then to obtain a finished, presentable screenplay, including rewrites and the like, can be considerable—several months to a year or two. The process is similar if the producer wants to base the film on an article from a periodical. The rights must be cleared, and the screenwriter found, motivated, and paid. Once again, rewrites by other authors might be required—contractual provisions for such a case must have been previously implemented

The process is slightly different with a real-life story. If the story is “hot,” there will be fierce competition for the right to create a film about it. This means that cash is likely necessary to secure the rights. In any case, the producer must obtain the rights from those involved. In addition, of course, a screenwriter must be found, and the screenplay must be written. Lawyers must be involved in negotiating any agreements. The rights of those who might be affected by the story must be cleared. All this can be quite an exhausting enterprise.

If an existing motion picture is involved, the original producers or holders of the copyright will probably want to retain their rights for a sequel if they can. Otherwise, the

author must be contacted, and the rights purchased as described earlier. If you plan to make a sequel to your own movie and you retained the right to do so, the process is somewhat easier. If you want to use the original cast, negotiations might prove to be expensive unless a provision was made in the original contract for a sequel.

Finally, if the movie is to be based on the plot or lyrics of a song, the producer must obtain the adaptation rights. Besides the songwriter and singer, a record company might be involved. Whoever owns the copyright must participate in the negotiations. It is easy to see why a seasoned entertainment-lawyer should be at the producer's side at this early but essential phase of any production: exploitation rights that have not been obtained from the very beginning—and this list must be complete, exclusive, worldwide, and for all media—are very difficult to clear at a later stage.

Next, to raise money for production, the producer must find a production company or studio willing to provide financing. This is where the process of packaging begins. The producer must create an attractive overall package. "Name" actors who will guarantee—in a tentative sense, as there are no sure-fire guarantees—the film's success must be found. The producer might also seek a well-known director to guarantee the financiers that a professional and superior product will be created. However, "name" actors and directors will only agree to be in a movie if distribution is guaranteed, and to get a distribution contract, commitments are required from the actors and director. It is a vicious circle.

When dealing with "name" talent (in reality, this means dealing with their agents, managers, personal advisers, sometimes even astrologers, friends, and trustees), the producer must accept their "right" to creative participation. In the end, it is the talent's face and name that are remembered with the screenplay. As a result, the screenplay must often go through new rounds of rewrites to accommodate the wishes of the talent. All this takes time—and money. The process is successfully concluded when the producer has all the names he or she wants—or is satisfied with—and has obtained their written consent to be part of the production. At this point, the package is presentable, and the producer will pitch it again to studios, networks, financiers, and distributors.

Clearly, film is a product, and entertainment is a business. Everything and everyone involved in the business is judged by a simple criterion: Will the involvement of this thing or this person improve the product's chances of being sold, being seen, and turning a profit—a huge profit, if possible? In the entertainment industry, everything and everyone has a value. Disturbingly, these values can go up or down dramatically within a day, even due to events that may not be related to a past movie or the business itself (contributing further to the exhaustion occurring during the development phase). For example, an unknown actor becomes a sought-after star if his movie turns out to be a surprise hit; the same is true of the unknown director, the unknown studio executive, and the unknown writer. By the same token, if a star has one or more box office flops,



he or she will become undesirable, and his or her participation in a project will virtually destroy all chances the screenplay may have had with another performer. This, of course, is true regarding known directors, established studio executives, and expensive writers. Everyone must be very successful all the time—and success in the end always means financial success.

Let's return to the development process. After the producer has found inspiration for a film, has cleared the rights to the screenplay or other material on which the film will be based, and has obtained commitments from actors and a director, he or she is ready to pitch again. This is the point at which a PM might sign on. The producer must have a budget to know the amount of money to request. Producers who cannot or do not want to break down the screenplay or work out the budget themselves hire a PM to do this.

Independent nonunion production being what it is, producers usually try to find a PM who will do this free, in exchange for a guarantee that he or she will be hired as PM on the production once it has been green-lighted. PMs who accept this deal should be sure to get it in writing. The agreement should spell out the amount of money owed to the PM for work on speculation. Without an agreement, no producer can actually guarantee that the PM will be hired. The financier to be might want to install a friend or relative in an important career position. The financier's nephew, for example, would love to have the PM credit, despite having neither the qualifications nor the desire to do the nitty-gritty work. Under such circumstances, the nephew might easily be made an associate producer, a credit typically given out for favors.

Assume a happy end: The producer has all the talent desired, a final screenplay, and financial backing. A substantial amount of money has been advanced and is in the account of the producer's bank and ready to be drawn. The producer might even have distribution. In other words, it's a go! The production is now ready to move into pre-production.

### ► PRE-PRODUCTION

Much of this book deals with work the PM must accomplish during pre-production. This includes screenplay breakdown, shooting schedule, location scouting, budget, casting and unions, permits, hiring staff and crew, unit supervision, permit clearance, equipment rental and stock, lab supervision, payroll service, insurance, post-production preparation, and so on. Because these subjects are treated in greater detail later in the book, this section is quite brief. Figure 2.1 illustrates how the production team is organized and where the PM fits. The lines of authority and chain of command are indicated. For detailed job descriptions of director, union production manager (UPM), and assistant director (AD), please see Chapter 7 "Cast and Crew".

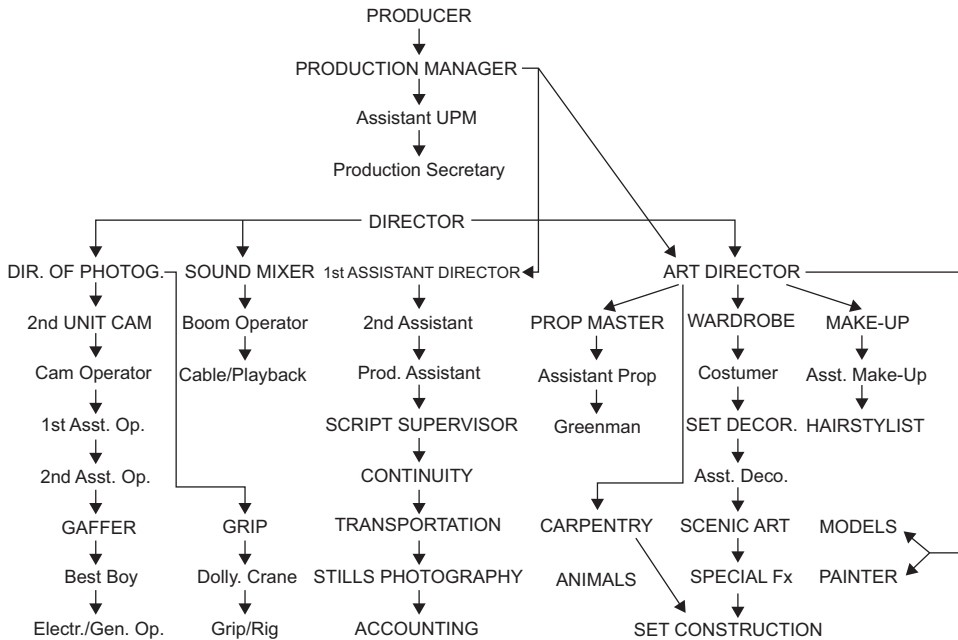


FIGURE 2.1

### ► PRODUCTION (PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY)

Once all the pre-production tasks are complete, the film enters the production phase, during which the film is actually shot. The PM is responsible for a glitch-free shoot and must handle both logistics and overall organization. If editing has already begun, the PM’s responsibilities might include some post-production work, such as dealing with digital-special-effects houses, the film lab, watching dailies, and possibly starting work on the soundtrack. The budget must be monitored according to the cash-flow chart; preliminary press work and public relations must be started. Together, the PM, in the production office, and the assistant director, on the set, are responsible for the flow of information. They must ensure that everyone involved with the production—staff, crew, and cast—knows what is going on, when, and where. The PM again coordinates and supervises the cooperation of the various units, as depicted in Figure 2.1.

The main action has shifted from the production office to the set or location. The assistant director is responsible for the flow and continuity of activities on the set. He or she keeps the PM informed on the status of the production and is responsible for the observance of union regulations, including timely lunch breaks and correctly completed paperwork. The AD alerts the PM to any difficulties that arise. What happens on the set? The four distinctive phases of set operations are blocking, lighting, final rehearsals, and shooting. Let’s take a closer look at what happens during each phase.

## Blocking

During blocking, the director together with the director of photography (DP) sets up the shot, determining the look of the scene and the film. This is the time for creative decisions and work with actors. Cast members must repeat their actions several times until perfect compositions and movements are found. Actors do not actually perform during this phase. Instead, they walk through the scenes to determine positions.

During blocking, conversation between crew members and working actors is prohibited. If the director and talent are permitted to work without interruption, the production will progress smoothly and quickly. Nothing is deadlier on a shoot than the slow pacing caused by disturbances and lack of concentration.

Only the following personnel are required on the set for blocking:

- ▶ Actors in the scene and being blocked
- ▶ Director
- ▶ Director of photography
- ▶ Special effects supervisors—if required
- ▶ Assistant director
- ▶ Script supervisor
- ▶ Gaffer

Everyone else must stay off the set and be quiet. The AD must make sure that these rules are not violated and that the work advances at a good pace.

## Lighting

During this phase, the DP, gaffers and grips, and electrical and camera crews begin to establish the technical structure within which the scene will be shot. This is possible only after blocking has been completed, positions have been marked, and the DP understands what the director wants. Stand-ins, usually extras, may take the actors' places during lighting. They should have the same height as the actors they are replacing, otherwise precise lighting cannot be accomplished. No one else is required on the set, with the possible exception of set dresser and prop master. Everyone else should not disturb the work of the technical crews. With ever more complicated post-production special-effects-work to be done, VFX-personnel frequently works on the set to make sure that principal photography incorporates all necessary aspects for a later problem-free workflow. During this time, the actors are in wardrobe, hair, and makeup, getting ready for final rehearsals and the shoot. They may go over their lines or just

relax. The DP estimates when the set will be ready, and the AD communicates this information to wardrobe and makeup so that the actors will be available when needed. The AD must know the whereabouts of the actors at all times. He or she cannot permit the talent to leave the location, even if they are done with wardrobe and makeup. When the DP declares the set ready, no further changes should be made. It is highly disturbing when the DP starts to make changes in lighting once the director and the actors are back. The AD must make certain this does not occur.

## Final Rehearsals

The extent of the final rehearsals varies from scene to scene, from director to director, from actor to actor. These rehearsals involve all units working on the scene. Actor–camera–sound relations are fine-tuned to perfection. The actors must be completely ready to perform before final rehearsals begin. No further wardrobe or makeup alterations—except slight touch-ups—are permitted. Members of props, wardrobe, and makeup crews must stand by to be instantly available if needed. The AD must make sure that no one who might be requested on the set is permitted to leave. The DP and gaffers should not be allowed to change lighting. The AD is responsible for ensuring that no delays occur.

## Shooting

Shooting commences immediately after final rehearsals, when everyone is ready and knows exactly what to do. Absolute silence is mandatory once these commands are given: “Sound rolling. Camera rolling. Slate number x. Action.” Crew members not directly involved should remain absolutely still to avoid making disturbing background noises. The shooting stops when the director calls “Cut.” If additional takes are necessary, wardrobe, hair, and makeup people check on the actors, and the props crew replaces items if necessary. Once the scene is completed and in the can, the director says “Print,” and the still photographer may take pictures as long as the set is lit.

After the first scene is completed, the next one goes through the same cycle of blocking, lighting, rehearsal, and shooting. The AD already should have the next scene prepared. The location should be readied as much as possible, the needed actors should be standing by, and everyone should know where the next set is and which scene to prepare. When this structure is followed and a quick pace is maintained, the production likely will run efficiently and smoothly. Otherwise, the production will sink into chaos and frustration, and is likely to go over budget and fall behind schedule. Any questions of overtime should be passed on to the production office, where the PM or the producer decides whether the extra expense is warranted. Neither the director nor anyone else on the set can authorize overtime; this is the producer’s prerogative. At the end of each shooting day, the AD, together with the PM and possibly the director, details the next day’s schedule and draws up the appropriate call sheets. The call sheets describe the next day’s work and indicate who will be required and when. The shooting schedule is drawn up during the pre-production phase, but frequently minor changes





