

TMU: An unfair advantage in winning TVC work

By Mike Seymour
July 6, 2015



After all the years the founders of fxguide/fxphd spent in TVC / Commercials - actually finishing making the spots - we were curious about the current state of the art in pitching for those sort of spots. Just how do some directors manage to win agency and client support in this day and age of internet pitches and rapidly changing tech?

You might think that a TVC is fully developed by an agency and then given to three directors to pitch and it is the best price that wins, and that may happen...but not for the A list clients and the A list directors. The production cost of a spot is one thing, but the media buy swamps everything, and with the right director a spot can go viral earning many times the media buy in free downloads and YouTube views. While it is possible to be awarded a spot just on one's showreel and reputation, more often than not the actual client still wants to see a treatment. What was once a single page written text document is now a virtual color brochure with impactful graphics, cool visual reference and an enormous amount of confidence-building production value.

But just how does a leading director compete? We asked a selection of extremely successful directors for their advice and an unusual name surfaced: The Moon Unit. This team of creative writers and designers are a secret weapon in the agency - director - client war to win work and secure that award winning campaign.

The Moon Unit help directors produce incredible presentations from anywhere in the world, in record time. More than a design company, they are a new creative partner that joins the director in developing the idea and landing the campaign.

As most agency and commercial client meetings are naturally confidential, we

decided to invent our own.

fxguide/fxphd invented a fake project and worked with The Moon Unit to produce a standard 'exceptional' pitch document. Moreover, one of our fxphd Profs is now even going to be previs'ing the spot from The Moon Unit document this term inside fxphd.com.

Our primary question - is it worth it to outsource a pitch or could you just as easily do the same thing yourself with a bit of Googling and Photoshop? The answer was simple - companies like The Moon Unit are succeeding for a reason - in short: they took very little and made something really impressive in just 4 days.

Day 1: *Could you have a look at this?*

The process starts with the director normally recording the initial call with the agency so they can later share the vision and central themes with their pitch partners. We did not have an agency so we made one up. We didn't have a spot either - so we invented an ad for a mythical Nike Instagram 15sec and 30sec commercial campaign. The idea was simple enough - a cool skateboarding spot, very cool, very real and accessible - but with high speed photography - a killer soundtrack and a simple Nike graphic at the end.

We choose this as we wanted something that needed a director's input. We invented something that actually needed an actual treatment and was not carried on the weight of either a name personality- celebrity endorsement, or such a brilliant idea that it would work no matter who shot it.

With our rough - very rough - idea of a spot, on Day 1, we emailed The Moon Unit via their Web site.

The response was swift and somewhat unexpected:





We were contacted by Alpha or Alf who suggested he and Gamma (based in LA) could help. The Moon Unit or TMU do over 400 treatments a year via a team of 15 in multiple time zones and in 33 countries. (This was clearly not their first rodeo!)

Day 2: send us what you have

The process starts by you sending them what you have - normally agency notes, a recording of the initial briefing and any reference you have. We did this and immediately arranged a phone call.

Alf and Gamma then sought to understand the brief but also our directorial style - our approach and "what would make your version of this spot unique or different." We had a simple hand drawn storyboard and not much else - which frankly is often times all a creative department may offer. We sent what we had and waited to see what would happen next - frankly it was not much to work with - since we were not the 'highly successful' director we were playing the role to be!

With a lot of help from DOP Matt Workman, we drafted this "fake Ad":

This spot is going to be very graphic and take place in a dark environment with stylized "street" elements. We will photograph the majority of this commercial in HIGH SPEED so we can slow down the action and speed it back up in post. The shoe is hero of the whole spot so will focus on several beauty slow mo shots of the shoe resting and in action. For casting we want a young male that can pass for 15-20 years old, which is our core demographic. We will create a :30 for air on TV and a :15 cut down for Nike's Instagram account.



SHOT 01:
Skater top lit, eyes hidden



SHOT 02:
Hero shot of shoes



SHOT 03:
Skater begins to run



SHOT 04:
Close up of shoe in slow motion running



SHOT 05:
Overhead shot skater



SHOT 06:
Side tracking shot of skater with stylized foreground elements



SHOT 07:
Wide shot of skater jumping on ledge



SHOT 08:
Slow motion shot of grind on ledge. Show shoe flexing



SHOT 09:
Overhead shot of skater grinding





Key words for the pitch were authenticity, relevance and accessible. The spot needs to be real but very very graphic. (A classic advertising type requirement that seems to be a contradiction!)

Day 3: What about this?

One of the huge advantages we had not foreseen with using TMU was the sheer connectiveness of the group to what is hip, current and fashionable amongst the sort of A grade directors - *just like the ones we wanted to be thought of as being!*

With only some three way - three country - Skype calls, we discussed ideas, referenced looks and expanded on the written notes.

TMU suggested a series of ideas and looks - as part of understanding the mechanics of the cinematic hardware we were thinking of using in each frame of the storyboard. This is a key point - TMU speak agency but they also speak DOP, they bridge the two worlds just as any director must and thus while we expected and got agency pitch language - we also got a lot of really helpful production level filming input.

Here is a sample of one of many emails that the team responded to day and night...

Further to our chat a few things - here are some nice emerging trends we're seeing that you might like to consider, they seem in line with your thinking...

Off-centre framing:

Sped up edit towards denouement:

Using unusual in/out points in edit to draw viewer in/ create mystery:

Any Spike rig? i.e. grinding of a rail/drop/ollie landings etc.:

Their process dictates that you select images you want included from a substantial initial research/image pull prior to getting to the design stage, and give them feedback on the written element. Often times the director can draw the creative process time significantly with research depending on a number of factors but in our case we were not requesting multiple-territory, multi-ethnic shoots with significant additional media-platform bolt-ons or complex additional research in moving image and/or stock footage.

It's standard practice for TMU to ask the director for a brief shotlist to be included in the treatment so the producer, TMU and the agency creatives etc can get a full understanding of dynamics and implications.

We agreed with some of their ideas - rejected others (such as off-centre framing - good just not preference) and TMU happily worked with us to refine the pitch, for example we decided on wide lenses, close and moving with action.

Late in Day 3 we got the first draft of the text and an impressive set of images and video references and examples. These ranged from style references to editorial references. They were remarkably on brief, weirdly, oddly surprisingly perfectly on brief. How TMU came up with so many matching references so fast was never revealed but we thought it was impressive.

At this stage after reading through text of the final document the director might ask for tweaks, give feedback or sometimes ask for additional material - it's entirely open to the personality of the director. Occasionally we understood from TMU that the director may want to make small edits to the doc themselves to add their own words to make it more in their own 'voice'. There are no hard and fast rules of course but once words are approved, the final document is then laid up with selected images and designed into the PDF presentation document so words and images combine into one powerful vision.

Day 4 : *How's this?*

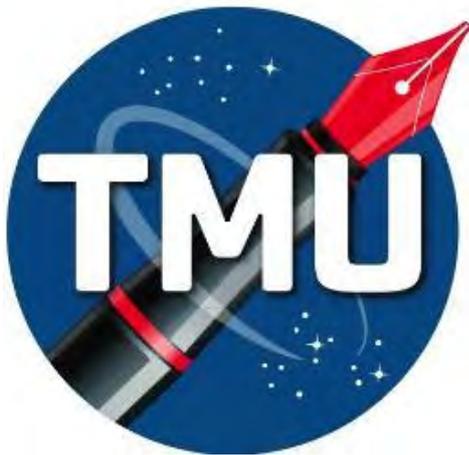
After providing our feedback and



notes on the some of the language in the original text (we removed a slang word offensive on our side of the world or at least not to our taste), the final PDF arrived ready for presentation.

TMU's web site is [The Moon Unit](http://www.themoonunit.net) (www.themoonunit.net)

The final deliverable from the process for our particular TVC was very a cool 17 page PDF along with a



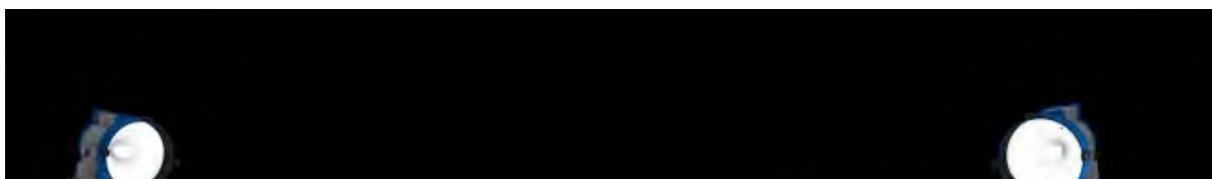
dozen reference clips provided for a client pre-production meeting or in a final agency meeting reference.

"We do what it takes for the best possible pitch," and then "it's your job to win," explained Alf from TMU.

It is hard to imagine that we did not write or provide more, but based just on the phone call, notes and quite a few emails - you have a pitch document that is so impressive. You can judge for yourself our chances of winning the spot - should Nike's real agency (who were not involved at all in our mythical spot) ever decide to make a Nike Instagram TVC!

Click here to download the final 17 page draft: [NIKE-FXGUIDE-WIP05](#) (7 Megabyte PDF file)

If you want to see how the idea might be visualized further check out our [PreViz course over at fxphd.com](#) with Previz artist and Cinematographer Matt Workman. You can check out Matt's work at his site at www.cinematographydb.com





Thanks so much for reading our article.

We've been a free service since 1999 and now rely on the generous contributions of readers like you. If you'd like to help support our work, please join the hundreds of others and [become an fxinsider member](#).

2 Responses to *TMU: An unfair advantage in winning TVC work*

1. As much as I Love Fxguide, this feels like Native Advertising...

Posted by [Nathaniel Westveer](#) on July 7, 2015 at 8:08 am

[Log in to Reply](#)

2. Great, this is really cool topic that does not have that much info about online.

Posted by Kerry on July 10, 2015 at 6:35 am

[Log in to Reply](#)

All logos and trademarks in this site are property of their respective owner. The comments are property of their posters,
all the rest ©fxguide.com, LLC