Video Journalism : Equipment Decisions

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POCKET	KIT	PACK	FILMMAKER
With you at all times, built-in audio (for breaking news)	Removable storage, external audio options, video zoom (for breaking news and short news packages)	Backpack, low-light capable, tripod, LED light, XLR cables, mics, audio monitoring (for broadcast quality video packages)	Changeable lenses, lighting kits, high-end audio recording (for documentary-style videos and longform projects)
USD 500 or less	USD 1000 or less	USD 4000 or less	More than USD 4000
Smartphone or basic point-shoot (P&S) camera	Consumer camcorder Lavalier microphone Extra storage card	Pro camcorder A/V backpack Wireless and shotgun mics Extra storage card/tape Tripod	Digital SLR or Camcorders with 2-3 lenses LCD viewfinder Wireless and shotgun mics Rigid tripod
Video with you at all times. Decent quality and apps allow for basic mobile editing, though footage transfer needs work	All standard video capabilites, and ability to use external microphones.	Low light capabilities, rugged XLR audio connectors, stabilized with tripod	Exceptional low light ability, making art with SLR lenses, but non-ideal for focus, zoom and audio w/o lots of practice
iPhone 4 or 5, Samsung Galaxy Panasonic Lumix Series Canon S Series VideoPro app (video) Hindenburg app (sound) ProCamera app (photos)	Sony CX580V Canon HF G20 Sony HDR-PJ710V (make sure external mic an option!)	Canon XA10 Panasonic AG-AC90 AVCCAM Sony 96GB	Canon 7D, 5D Canon EOS C100 or C300 Nikon D800 Panasonic GH2

Things you might want to think about when buying (in order of priority):

1.) **Microphone input**: Sound is everything; if there's crappy sound on a video the viewer is more likely to stop watching than when there's crappy video footage. Look for a way to plug in external microphones which are usually better than the built-in microphones.

2.) **Sound output**: Ideally you would have a camera with an audio output so you can monitor your sound while someone is talking. You will immediately detect little disturbances, like someone muttering in the background or even yourself saying "yes, uh-huh." And the rule of thumb is: what you hear is what you get.

3.) **Manual focus and exposure if possible**: Sometimes in tricky light situations small cameras with auto focus settings will search for a focus or exposure. The reason for that is that light conditions change. Sometimes the sun will wander and your camera will suddenly panic, constantly refocuse and try to adjust to a minimal change of light. Manual focus and exposure give you control over those issues.

4.) **Codecs and recoding formats**: When purchasing a camera make sure you talk to folks about the system you'll be using to edit your video. Get some advice on whether your computer system at home (from hardware to software) can handle the format that your future camera records.

Extra equipment you might consider:

1.) **External microphone**: A little lavalier microphone and/or a good shotgun microphone can make a huge difference when shooting interviews and vox pops.

2.) **Keep it steady/small tripods**: The worst thing that happens with small cameras is that the image is not steady because it's harder to keep it still. The solution is a small tripod. When you buy one make sure it supports your equipment in its 'heaviest state,' that means the tripod should support your camera when you've attached all your lights, lenses, microphones, etc. on it and not collapse. Alternatively, there are also good stabilizers and shoulder rigs you can use for phones, consumer and pro gear.

3.) **A small mountable LED light**: If you have a camcorder you can mount an LED on it. Light can be key when dealing with inexpensive equipment and you sometimes need it in darker situations. It's not the most aesthetic solution at times but at least you know you can make sure your subject is visible.

4.) **Hot Shoe Extensions:** Now that you have your microphones and LED lights you need to find a way to attach them to your camera. The solution: a hot shoe extension which can help you mount your external equipment on your camera.