

How to: produce video on your mobile phone

Advice on how to film and edit videos on your smartphone

Posted: 28 August 2013 By: **By Charlotte Latimer** (</searchblox/servlet/SearchServlet?query=%22By%20Charlotte%20Latimer%22&filter=&sort=date&col=6&col=5&startdate=0&enddate=0&page=1&xsl=default.xml>)

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Whether you are reporting on breaking news, working on features or taking vox pops, being able to produce videos on your mobile phone is an important skill to develop as a digital journalist.

In the past buying the right camera equipment and learning how to use software to edit videos was time consuming and expensive, but technological innovations now let you do it all on your smartphone and this has opened up a world of new possibilities for journalists.

Almost exactly a year ago, for example, [the Wall Street Journal announced WorldStream](/news/how-wall-street-journal-reporters-are-sharing-mobile-phone-videos-to-worldstream/s2/a550221/) (</news/how-wall-street-journal-reporters-are-sharing-mobile-phone-videos-to-worldstream/s2/a550221/>), a place where it publishes "mobile video updates from WSJ journalists around the world".

Speaking to Journalism.co.uk last week, deputy editor of video at the WSJ Mark Scheffler explained that this style of reporting gives "an immediate and really visceral sense of what the reporter is experiencing on the ground". It "takes you places that you couldn't go yourself and it also adds a dimension to the story that's unfolding," he added.

To help journalists in their quest to provide this extra "dimension" to their reporting, we have pulled together some practical tips from those experienced in mobile reporting as well as their recommended apps and techniques for producing video on smartphones.

Finding the right apps

Choosing the right apps will depend on what kind of videos you want to create and what software and hardware your phone has already.

Guardian reporter Adam Gabbatt, who is based in New York and uses an iPhone 5, said the iMovie app "really changed mobile video for me". (Gabbatt's mobile reports include [this on cicada insects](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/video/2013/jun/07/cicadas-emerge-staten-island-video) (<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/video/2013/jun/07/cicadas-emerge-staten-island-video>), [this one on auditions for the role of Spiderman](http://www.theguardian.com/stage/video/2013/aug/20/spider-man-turn-off-the-dark-auditions-in-new-york-video) (<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/video/2013/aug/20/spider-man-turn-off-the-dark-auditions-in-new-york-video>) on Broadway, and [this video taken of those in support of and opposition to same-sex marriage in the US](http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2013/mar/26/gay-marriage-us-supreme-court-video) (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2013/mar/26/gay-marriage-us-supreme-court-video>)).

"Before that my mobile videos were very rough and just consisted of single clips being uploaded to YouTube," explaining how [iMovie](https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/imovie/id377298193?mt=8) (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/imovie/id377298193?mt=8>) allows you to edit different clips together, play with the sound, put captions or text on the screen, and add music, add sound effects.

Marc Settle, who trains BBC journalists on how to use their smartphones for newsgathering, said the built-in cameras on phones have certain "limitations".

"Particularly that you can't set the white balance, while the focus and exposure can only be adjusted to the same point," he explained. Therefore he recommends using [FilmicPro](https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/filmic-pro/id436577167?mt=8) (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/filmic-pro/id436577167?mt=8>), [Videon](https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/videon-video-camera-zoom-filters/id648862644?mt=8) (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/videon-video-camera-zoom-filters/id648862644?mt=8>), [VideoPro Camera](https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/video-pro-camera/id598364177?mt=8) (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/video-pro-camera/id598364177?mt=8>) (which is called [@VideoProApp](#) on Twitter) and [Voddio](https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/voddio-video-audio-editor/id472769922?mt=8) (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/voddio-video-audio-editor/id472769922?mt=8>) to enhance its capabilities.

Independent digital producer and publisher Adam Westbrook, also spoke favourably of VideoPro Camera, which he argued is a step up in terms of what is available for journalists.

"It has a lot more manual controls – for example, exposure and audio monitoring – which until now others have been missing."

Choosing the right length of video

One of the key distinguishing features between video apps is length. [Vine](https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/vine/id592447445?mt=8) (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/vine/id592447445?mt=8>) only lets you create six-second clips, but if you're live streaming on [Bambuser](http://bambuser.com/) (<http://bambuser.com/>) you can keep going until your battery dies.

Earlier this year, for example, columnist for Al-Monitor and New York Times contributor Tulin Daloglu [reported on protests in Turkey using Vine](http://www.fastcompany.com/3005630/fast-feed/using-vine-cover-breaking-news) (<http://www.fastcompany.com/3005630/fast-feed/using-vine-cover-breaking-news>).

Gabbatt, who thinks three minutes should be the maximum length for a mobile video, said that while "video can definitely be too long", he does not believe they "can be too short".

For those who disagree however, and feel six seconds is too short for their purposes, mobile video publishing platform [Tout](http://www.tout.com/) (<http://www.tout.com/>), an adapted version of which is used by the Wall Street Journal, lets users publish longer videos of 15 to 45 seconds long, while [Vizibee](http://www.vizibee.com/) (<http://www.vizibee.com/>), a video network designed for journalists, lets you shoot videos up to 75 seconds long.

"If you're talking about video watched on a smartphone, then 45 to 90 seconds feels about right," BBC trainer Marc Settle said. "But there are no hard and fast rules. The suitable length of a piece can be determined to an extent by the content of the story, how engaging it is, how visually interesting it is etc.

"People will watch for longer on TV than on a tablet, and longer on a tablet than on a smartphone."

Streaming content live

Livestream apps like Qik and Bambuser are a great option for journalists in the heart of the action to get their stories out. Hans Eriksson, Bambuser's executive chairman, told Journalism.co.uk that connectivity is key when broadcasting live from your mobile.

"Try to move to an area where you have the best possible 3G or 4G connection and try to do some test broadcast," he said. "If you have a very good connection you could go for a higher resolution, if your connection is less good go for a lower resolution.

"There are always small tweaks here or there you can make to improve things, just moving three, four metres can change the quality dramatically in terms of what kind of connectivity you get.

"Always check with your operator if they're offering the biggest possible upload speed from your mobile."

In order to find out the speed you are working with, journalists can use an app like [Speedtest.net](http://www.speedtest.net/) (<http://www.speedtest.net/>), as recommended to Journalism.co.uk by BBC 5 Live's Nick Garnett and a [previous app of the week](http://www.speedtest.net/). ([news/app-for-journalists-speedtest-net/s2/a553263/](http://www.speedtest.net/))

Shooting techniques

• Preparation and planning

Where possible, planning is key. Before you start shooting you should think about what you want the end product to look like, rather than waiting until you get to the editing process.

Settle advises that journalists film more footage than they will need. "You can never have too much, but you often regret having too little," he said.

In terms of preparation, he also highlighted the importance of turning on airplane mode before filming. "If not, and you receive a phone call, it will interrupt what you're recording and you might not be able to get that killer piece of footage," he explained.

Andy Dickinson, who teaches digital and online journalism at the University of Central Lancashire, also said that journalists should not be afraid to use traditional techniques to get off the starting blocks with mobile video.

"The online medium is driving some of the old tropes of video away, like the standard idea that a contributor should not be framed in the middle of the screen looking in to the camera," he said. "But the shots you see in TV news are there for a reason – they make the process of gathering what you need for a story quick and error free when turn around times are tight. Start there and then experiment."

Westbrook added that mobile video does have its own advantages, such as "flexibility, intimacy, the ability to film covertly, speed", all of which can be harnessed through such experimentation.

"Rather than seeing mobile phones journalists make stuff that looks more like TV, I'd like to see a new army of sleuths, hacks and investigative journalists armed with their smartphones."

• The shooting stance

When it comes to putting the theory into practice, a simple, but important starting point from Dickinson is to make sure you are holding the phone "the right way up".

"It sounds daft but the number of videos I see with black bars down the side," he said.

And if you forget this tip, Gabbatt has found a solution to the problem in [Video Rotate](https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/video-rotate-flip/id554533692?mt=8) (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/video-rotate-flip/id554533692?mt=8>). This "does exactly as it sounds", he said, and can be "useful if you cock up and have filmed in profile but need it in landscape".

Another simple but vitally important tip, is to keep the phone as still as possible while shooting, Dickinson said.

"If you can, always try and get two hands on your camera. Better still get two hands on and lean against something. A lot of the new kit has in-built image stabilisation but it's still not great and software takes time to render that out. Even better get a tripod and adapter."

WSJ's Scheffler said that "getting stillness" by using a tripod and mic, ensuring strong audio quality and creating "nice compositions" are key considerations.

"Be focused on stillness, because a lot of times the device is so small and it picks up any jerky motion that you make that it really gets accentuated with every little movement," he said. "I always say 'think of a deer hunter, like you're hunting'. Just stay calm and stay focused."

But, Dickinson warned, "getting a good grip on your camera often means you can cover the mic by mistake". Therefore to avoid this, or simply just to improve sound quality, it might be worth investing in a plug-in microphone.

And when collecting video, Dickinson also advises gathering clips of around 20 seconds of each scene, and then "hunting for detail".

"Shoot close ups of things in and around you. Use them to build up a picture for the viewer."

Editing your film

Making sure the end video lets the viewer dive straight into the most interesting content is key, Gabbatt added, and as such he prefers not to "set up" the video.

"If people are watching video on the web, the title and standfirst provide that context, and you're competing with people's attention against pictures of cats and David Cameron topless on a beach," he explained. "Every second should be valuable – no waffle."

Gabbatt does not think journalists should be expected to edit mobile video to the same sophisticated level as they would for television. He does not, for example, use cutaways.

"If someone starts waffling, I will just cut them and jump to when they start being interesting again," he said. "People understand what's happening, and it just serves to keep the video tight and watchable."

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Videolicious (<https://videolicious.com/>), an app designed for journalists, lets users select clips for their video reports while recording a voice over (an [online demonstration is available here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xaxfhcUbKE) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xaxfhcUbKE>)).

interesting again. People understand what's happening, and it just serves to keep the video tight and watchable

Adam Gabbatt, the Guardian

When it comes to working with interview-focused videos, chief executive and co-founder Matt Singer suggests that performing an interview "off-camera" first, before asking the interviewee to discuss the most interesting points of the interview again on camera, will help secure "one or two of the best quotes" on film.

In terms of journalists being able to quickly produce edited video packages, Scheffler says this is something he hopes to see more of, as most reporters currently submit raw footage.

"Reporters will send their footage in and we'll edit it and they love how it looks because when it's all stitched together it ends up looking pretty slick, but what would be great to see is that they start to do those things themselves."

"The new **MixBit app** (<https://mixbit.com/>) from the guys who started YouTube is a really interesting development in terms of doing quick edits on your phone, so that's something that we're looking into for sure."

Settle also recommends Voddio, iMovie, **Splice** (<http://spliceapp.com/>) and **Cute CUT** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/cute-cut-full-featured-video/id583555212?mt=8>) for editing.

The possible technology of the future

Google Glass (<http://www.google.com/glass/start/>) is not yet available, but testers in the US are already exploring how the technology can be used within the journalism world. In June, for example, journalist and mobile and technology specialist Tim Pool [live-streamed protests from Turkey onto Vice's website](http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/jul/30/google-glass-istanbul-protests-vice) (<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/jul/30/google-glass-istanbul-protests-vice>). This [podcast on MediaShift](http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2013/08/mediatwits-89-google-glass-revolutionizing-news-or-public-annoyance) (<http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2013/08/mediatwits-89-google-glass-revolutionizing-news-or-public-annoyance>) also addresses the idea of journalists using Google Glass.

Settle said Google Glass could either be "the future", or could prove to be "the **Segway**" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Segway_PT) of personal transport".

"GG will need better battery life and an easy way to record good audio of guests as at the moment the sound capture is quite poor," he explained, but added that for live-streaming purposes it "could be a game-changer".

Westbrook added that Google Glass could become a key source for user-generated content and "may well spark a sub-genre of eye-witness journalism".

"Once the quality improves they could be incredibly useful for on the spot reporting," Gabbatt said, but added that "if you are doing mobile video you're probably still going to be pulling out a different device and holding it in your hands."

Scheffler said he thought Google Glass had "a lot of interesting potential", along with the use of drones in journalism to collect "amazing aerial shots". Journalism.co.uk recently produced [this podcast on drone journalism](http://blogs.journalism.co.uk/2013/08/09/podcast-drone-journalism-a-look-at-flying-cameras/) (<http://blogs.journalism.co.uk/2013/08/09/podcast-drone-journalism-a-look-at-flying-cameras/>) as well as [this feature which highlights some of the challenges and opportunities](/news/drone-journalism-the-opportunities-risks-and-challenges/s2/a553322/) (</news/drone-journalism-the-opportunities-risks-and-challenges/s2/a553322/>) in the area of drone journalism.

But Settle warned that in terms of video technology, the smartphone still has some way to go.

"Smartphones aren't ready to replace proper craft video cameras yet, but they do have a place: as a second camera to give another view; as a back-up if the main camera can't be there; as a less-obtrusive, less intimidating camera; and of course it's the device that a journalist will always have on them."

Here is a list of all the video apps mentioned in this feature with links to iTunes (and Google Play where applicable):

- **iMovie** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/imovie/id377298193?mt=8>)
- **FilmicPro** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/filmic-pro/id436577167?mt=8>)
- **Videon** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/videon-video-camera-zoom-filters/id648862644?mt=8>)
- **VideoPro Camera** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/video-pro-camera/id598364177?mt=8>)






- **Voddio** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/voddio-video-audio-editor/id472769922?mt=8>)
- **Vine** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/vine/id592447445?mt=8>) (also available via **Google Play** (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=co.vine.android>))
- **Bambuser** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/bambuser/id344600665?mt=8>) (also available on **Google Play** (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.bambuser.broadcaster&hl=en>))
- **Tout** (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/tout/id426281232?mt=8>) (also available on **Google Play** (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.tout&hl=en>))
- **Vizibee** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/vizibee/id589649030?mt=8>)
- **Video Rotate** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/video-rotate-flip/id554533692?mt=8>) (also available on **Google Play** (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.gadgetjuice.videorotate&hl=en>))
- **Videolicious** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/videolicious/id400853498?mt=8>)
- **MixBit** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/mixbit/id672949706?mt=8>) (MixBit says it is launching an Android app "soon")
- **Splice** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/splice-video-editor-free/id409838725?mt=8>)
- **Cute CUT** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/cute-cut-full-featured-video/id583555212?mt=8>)

NB: Journalists wanting to own the rights to their own films should check the app's T&Cs first.

Please use the comments section below to share your advice for creating mobile video, as well as any apps you find useful to shoot or edit footage

Update: This article was updated to correct references to VideoProApp to VideoPro Camera

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Michal • 21 hours ago

Just remember one thing - landscape, not portrait. Always.

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Robb Montgomery • a day ago

Great article!

I recently developed and train RFE/RL and Styria Media reporters in field video and multimedia production techniques in Zagreb, Moscow, Tbilisi, Prague, and Bishkek. Some takeaways about the gear, workflow, training and apps can be seen here.

<http://j.mp/SMART-stories>

<http://j.mp/Smart-train>

There is still no killer cross-platform app to create news video packages at the level I would expect. But I have been using that void to provide precise App direction to developers to build a great tool for this.

On the hardware side microphone manufacturers have been lending me kit for field trials.

You can see what external gear I have been testing with here:

<http://www.thinglink.com/scene...>

^ | v Reply Share ›



jerrylazar • a day ago

You missed VIDEO PRO CAMERA, the best iPhone app for shooting professional-quality video with easy-to-use controls and features (including unprecedented ability to monitor audio with headphones AND a remote mic) , designed and developed by professional videojournalism guru Ken Kobre, and field-tested by top pros for more than a year ... Please check it out here:

<http://www.VideoProCamera.com> ...

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jerrylazar → jerrylazar • 8 hours ago

Many thanks for correcting and updating!... Glad to see VideoPro Camera app now included (as it had indeed been touted, but inadvertently by wrong name)... Much appreciated!... Keep up the great work!...

^ | v Reply Share ›



rachelmcathy Mod → jerrylazar • 8 hours ago

No problem, and apologies for the confusion in the first place.

Rachel

^ | v Reply Share ›



DomBrady • a day ago

Indicating platform/OS specific apps would be awesome.

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