

Tips and Tricks From: Dick Reizner

<http://www.eyeconvideo.com>

Connected to Cable According to a recent study, the problem with 90 percent of equipment sent for repair can be traced to the cable. This validates the box of spare cables I keep in my production van.

Unsticking the Stuck An old roll of masking tape that has become hard and difficult to peel can be softened by microwaving it for about 20 seconds. Just remember not to leave the microwave unattended while your tape is softening.

Low-cost Battery Sentinel Many batteries are easily damaged by overcharging, and unfortunately many battery chargers let out a slow trickle of electricity even after charging is completed. To solve the problem, use a lighting timer. This device, designed to turn your lights on and off while you're away on vacation, can be set to shut off the current feeding into the charger after a specified amount of time. I purchased one at a discount department store for \$4.99.

Label Loosening Although they frequently need to be removed, cassette labels seem to be attached with a glue backing that could be used to keep a space shuttle together. Bill Stephens, a producer in Reno, Nevada, breaks the iron grip by heating the label with a hair dryer, then slowly peeling it off. Any remaining residue can be removed with rubber-cement thinner or Goo Gone.

Tripod Carrier A tripod is perhaps the most awkward piece of equipment we normally carry. Hal Donovan, video communication specialist for the Hazelwood School District, made his tripod easier to transport by adding a handle to the balance point on one of the legs. The handle is actually a door pull which is attached by two worm clamps. All the parts come from the local hardware store. Hal said he cut the excess strapping from the worm clamps with a hack saw then filed down the rough edges. If your tripod needs something to hold the feet together, a small dog or cat collar may fill the bill.

Inexpensive, Fancy Looking Sets When I shoot video projects that require a set located in a fancy or "rich" environment, I've found that furniture stores are the perfect answer. They offer expensive new furniture, often arranged into a living room scene, kitchen scene, etc. Talk to the manager at the store and ask if you can shoot after hours. Keep your time on the premises to a minimum and arrange it so that the store's name gets listed in the credits of your video. It's a great, inexpensive way to get fancy-looking sets for your production needs.

Cuculoris on the Cheap Here's an inexpensive way to create your own custom-designed Cuculoris. (A Cuculoris is a device, usually a piece of board with random holes cut in it, that is placed in front of a lighting instrument to make a patterned shadow on the background.) John Beebee, a producer at Public Television Services in Mobile, Alabama, splatters and splashes rubber cement on a common household window screen. You can make any pattern imaginable, he says, for a total cost of about \$5.

Bald Head Shine You are all set to photograph the company boss but the shine from the backlight on his balding head is brighter than your key light. Here are several possible cures (for the shine, not the balding):

- 1) Move or defuse the backlight.
- 2) Apply translucent powder makeup. This type of makeup basically has no color of its own and can be used on a wide range of skin tones. I carry "dark", "medium" and "light" shades to cover all the bases. Avoid contamination by applying the makeup with a disposable cotton ball, which is never dipped back into the powder after it has touched the talent's skin.
- 3) If there's no time for other cures, you may be able to save the day by putting a polarizing filter on the camera. This will cost you about two stops, but it will sometimes cut enough glare to make an acceptable picture

If you know in advance that this problem may come up, try "four-point" instead of "three-point" lighting. Use two backlights, each at about 45 degrees off to the side. That way their bounces miss the camera.

Humming with the Speaker We are often asked to videotape a meeting where a public address system is in use. If we must attach our microphone to the PA mic or stand we wrap tape around our mic to prevent direct metal-to-metal contact between the two systems. That could cause a ground loop hum. Be careful not to tape over any side ports on either microphone.

Pixel Resurrection Is a dead pixel raising its white head in the pictures created by your JVC GV-D500 camera? Here is an easy cure from Doug Mullin, regional sales engineer at JVC Professional. To access the error detection circuit, power the camera up while holding up the white balance switch on the front of the camera. This will bring up a menu in the viewfinder. Allow the camera to warm up for a couple hours. Use the shutter wheel to move to the second menu item ERROR DETECT. Push the wheel in to select the item. The circuit will automatically detect the pixels and mask them. (From Eyecon Video Productions: We have a Sony D30 camera that had a couple pixel problems. Our service technician told us to Black Balance the camera 10-20 times in a row. This should take care of some minor pixel problems. It took care of our problem right away.)

Temporary Tripod Plate I knew it would happen sooner or later - I arrived for a shoot without a tripod quick release plate! I created my own plate using a rigid plastic VHS tape box, a screw with nut, and electrical tape. It worked perfectly.

Here is how to do it:

- 1) Cut one panel from the tape box and punch a small hole in the center with a knife or scissors.
- 2) Insert a screw that is of the same diameter through the hole and into the bottom of the camcorder. If the screw is too long to fit snugly up to the tape box panel, attach the nut onto the screw before attaching the panel. Use the nut to create the exact length necessary.
- 3) Carefully place the camcorder/panel on to the tripod. If the tripod head does not have a level surface, use doubled-up tape to create shims.
- 4) Tape the camcorder/panel to the tripod until it is securely attached to the tripod.

I attached a lens controller to the tripod arm for zooming and focusing. I was also careful

to use only the tripod arm for panning and tilting. Applying pressure to the camcorder when panning, tilting and zooming may cause slight unwanted camera movement.

Who's Who? A common problem with shooting panel discussions is remembering the names of the participants. Instead of using names, one director I work with assigns letters to the speakers, from left to right. The directors' call might be, "Camera two, give me A and B, " or "Camera one, close up on C." He doesn't assign numbers to the panel because they might be confuse with camera numbers or terms like "two shot." When I'm doing a shoot and the director doesn't have a system, I use a 3x5 card to make a seating chart that I tape near my viewfinder.

Adding Heat to the Scene Wanna add some heat to your scene? If either for a desert effect or just to for the sake of effect, place a Tota or Omni light directly beneath and in front of your camera lens. The heat vapors will create a rippling effect within the air. This is great for adding a little stress to your action. Be sure that the light is safely away from your plastic shade box!

Key to Chroma Key A tip for folks shooting chroma key backgrounds without the aid of a waveform monitor comes to us from Michael Goldberg of International Videoworks in Tokyo. To get the necessary even lighting on the backdrop, Michael turns on his camera's "zebra," stops down the lens, and then slowly opens the iris. The zebra should appear in the viewfinder fairly evenly across the entire backdrop. You can even tell if the lighting is stronger on the top or bottom, which can be difficult with the waveform monitor.

Free Production Music! If you desire an easily recognizable song for your video, but you don't have a budget for using copyrighted music, you might want to consider music from the public domain. For more information about the public domain, a list of songs in the public domain, and links to other related sights, go to: <http://www.bright.net> on the web. The site contains a wealth of information. If you still have questions after reading all the information available, you can always leave questions via e-mail.

Lavaliere Logic Does the cable of the lavaliere microphone that you have clipped to your subject's tie keep popping out from behind the tie? Try running the cable through the loop formed by the label that is sewn onto the back of the tie.

Leaving mics open When we record panels, we don't close mics because we don't want to miss the first word of a speaker who suddenly decides to chime in. But, as at least one former President can attest, there is nothing worse than having an under-the-breath comment heard by the world. To help prevent embarrassment, Richard Johns, a freelance producer in Chicago, puts a note in front of each participant that says, "Mics are live at all times."

Golden Hour Lighting The "golden hour" makes such pretty pictures, and you want to get started as early as possible. But, exactly when will the sun rise and set on the day of your shoot? <http://www.jabberwocky.com/photo/suntimes.html> provides sunrise and sunset times for any town in the United States and even some of its territories.