

How to get yourself shot: the dos and don'ts for chief executives on film

A consultant has set her sights on good – and bad – CEO videos, says Haig Simonian

For Susanne Müller-Zantop, office life is spent in a way few of us would envy: watching videos of chief executives extolling the merits of themselves and their companies.

Ms Müller-Zantop, a 54-year-old former communications head of Adecco, the temporary employment business, is a consultant and coach to CEOs hoping to shine on electronic media.

In the four years since setting up her own company to produce such offerings, Ms Müller-Zantop has spent much of her

time studying the use of web-based videos by Europe's top 100 companies by sales. She has now turned her research into a handbook, which not only lists exhaustively what companies do but also offers advice for aspiring topshots.

She says executives who are willing to be filmed are more likely to be good communicators. "We find the use of video is roughly equivalent to being open to communications."

Body language, she adds, is more revealing and authentic than spoken language. "A CEO's text can be written by a speechwriter. A CEO video cannot be done by a stunt person."

What is clear is that many top European companies are putting bosses on screen. Declining

costs may have played as big a part as growing familiarity with the genre: prices for shooting a two-to-four-minute video have plummeted as technology has improved and the number of suppliers has risen. "The end-to-end video production process has never been easier, cheaper or faster. Prices have fallen to SF15,000-SF30,000 (\$15,000-\$30,000), compared with 10 times that much a few years ago," says Ms Müller-Zantop.

She speaks with some experience. In a former job, she once found herself in the unenviable position of signing off on an exceptionally expensive video approved by a predecessor during a crisis. The product, commissioned through a leading PR agency, was lamentable

and never used.

Some of Ms Müller-Zantop's "dos" and "don'ts" are blindingly obvious – yet often ignored. Shooting a corporate talking head against a bland background, for example, is an instant turn-off. Similarly, a surprising number of videos provide just one shot, rather than periodically alternating camera angles or panning in and out for variety.

Even dress code and language are not always considered. While suits and ties predominate, choosing clothes that match a CEO's complexion, or even details like ties that reflect the colour of his eyes, are not self-evident.

Hans Vestberg, chief executive of Ericsson, the telecommunications company, is Ms Müller-



Film star: Ericsson's Hans Vestberg excels on video © Bloomberg

Zantop's current favourite. In his corporate video, he talks convincingly about himself and his company. Credibility is enhanced by the setting, and by having the boss in an open-necked shirt. To stimulate viewer interest, all the production equipment is exposed.

Shell's Peter Voser, Joe Jimenez of drugs company Novartis and Justin King of retailer J Sainsbury are three others on Ms Müller-Zantop's current top 10, based on natural personal styles, clear and uncomplicated delivery and production values.

"The key for CEOs is to make themselves the subjects, not the objects," she says. "That doesn't mean ego-tripping. But it does involve taking charge of the situation."

Executives less comfortable with the

camera could consider doing the video as an interview. The (almost invariably female) foil can make presentations more lively. But interviews can also be artificial and too rehearsed or deferential, demonstrated by a recent offering on Roche's website with chief executive Severin Schwan.

For those CEOs still reluctant to take the plunge, one of Ms Müller-Zantop's competitors offers the answer. The website of UK-based Rossiter & Co promises not only mouth-wateringly cheap prices, but adds: "Dull teeth can be whitened, jowls slimmed down, wrinkles smoothed. Generally we can take 10 years off someone's age."

How could any self-respecting chief executive say no?