

How to make Better Slideshow Videos

By Larry Kilgore

Introduction

The goal of this workshop is to discuss techniques for building better slide show videos. This will not be a technical discussion of software and presentation media. Just a discussion, with examples, of fundamental techniques common to video editing for slides shows.

This presentation will be available on the club website in PDF format. I would just pay attention and take few notes. You'll probably absorb it better, generate your own strategies, and have more fun!

The Truth Is...

There's always been that joke: "And then he pulled out a slide show of his vacation, and everyone fell asleep". Folks usually love to see a few of your very best shots, but they weren't there on your vacation, and many of your shots are probably more meaningful to you than them. (so give'm a break!)

Let's face it, most vacation shots are boring and not very fun to look at. That is...unless they are **ASTONISHING**. That must be your mission, that whenever you show your images, whether for a slide show or not:

- Be concise, keep it short
- Have a point to make and tell a story
- Present only your highest quality images
- A lot less is always much better than more
- If you're lucky, and do it right, you'll knock their socks off!

Guidelines for Good Image Selection

- **Never repeat the same shot** - Only show a single image per subject and then only the very best. If you have 10 shots of a beach sunset, and your last one is your very best, get rid of the other nine. No one wants to watch a bunch of average shots, hoping a “good one” is coming up. They want to see **ONLY** the good ones.
- **Your audience wasn't there** with you and they probably aren't married to you either. They have no idea what your emotions were, surrounding an image. Step back and think about how each image might appear to a stranger.
- **Limit What you Show** Would you rather have a 20 minute slide show that puts people to asleep, or would you rather have 180 seconds of absolute breath taking, awesome, thrilling photography. Make them say “I wanted MORE!” Get the idea?

Things to Avoid

- **Know your audience and avoid topical themes,** instead, draw them in with your images and not some subject that they may, or may not be as passionate about as you.
- **Avoid images on screen for more than 4-6 seconds;** people get bored fast. Grab ahold of them and never let go.
- **Avoid subtitles or any text,** they are for documentaries and are VERY distracting to your art. It's OK to put a title between sections, especially in longer videos, and you may also want to change the pace of the music and image transitions between sections to keep things interesting. But you see? Now your slide show is getting TOO LONG! 😊

Image Transition is a Science

Transitions are the way you go from one image to the next. Avoid fancy effects; it distracts your audience from your beautiful photography, and looks amateurish. If you still want some fancy transitions, put them at the start or the end, in the intro titles and end credits.

Stick to Just Two Types of Transitions

Fades and Cuts. They are the best for still images.

Fade – a transition where an image either fades in or fades out slowly to or from a title, solid color, or another image. Fades provide soft, beautiful transitions that minimize distractions away from your art. Restrict yourself to two types of fades:

- A cross-dissolve, fades slowly from the prior image while the next image slowly fades in
- Fade-in/Fade-out, typically used at the start and end of your video, or between sections.

Examples of Fades

[Fade-Out](#)

[Fade-In](#)

[Cross Dissolve](#)

Cuts – This is simply a transition between images where the next image appears abruptly. You can make a slightly softer cut by adding a very small cross dissolve that’s hardly detectable or you can use no cross dissolve at all. This is called a “Hard Cut”, where the next image appears in its entirety on the very next frame.

When to Use Cuts - for more rapid transitions between images, to pick-up the pace, match music tracks, and for extra emphasis and emotion.

Examples of Cuts

[Soft Cuts](#)

[Hard Cuts](#)

[Fast Hard Cuts](#)

[Crazy Fast Hard Cuts](#)

Music

Music is absolutely critical; you must select music that matches your images and also draws in your audience. (Heavy Metal “Death Rock” may not be conducive to beautiful mountain vistas).

- Music must be synchronized with the transition between images (your fades and cuts)
- Start noticing music while watching TV, film, or radio.
- Be alert for music that works well with a slide show video.
- Classical music is a tremendous source of majestic music.

The following example is perfect for a mountain vista slide show.

[Using Cool Music](#)

Tips for Selecting Music

- 1. Image Duration** - Decide how long, on average each image should be on the screen. You don't want images more than about 4-7 seconds, so decide what pace supports the subject matter.
- 2. Fit the Duration to the Subject** - A snappy mountain slide show or a foot race may support 4-5 second image durations, but weddings or memorial videos perhaps 5-7 seconds
- 3. Analyze Song Candidates** - Pick music that supports the average image duration you need. Count the number of beats you get per verse and see if it allows for a smooth switch within the pace you want. Then decide if the music fits. Some music screams for a slide show.

Music Copyright Issues

If you are using music in a slide show that you plan to only show to friends and never sell or put on the Internet, you can use whatever you want.

Once you publish a video, almost ALL music is off-limits to you (at least for free). The prior video used a track called “Jupiter” from Holst’s “The Planets”. Some of you may recognize it as the music in the film “The Right Stuff” during John Glenn’s orbital flight. The film maker has EXACTLY the same problem I have: he wants to make a bunch of images seem dramatic.

He had the money to hire an orchestra and record it. Unfortunately, it then became copyrighted material. I’m violating the law if I try to resell it. Even placing the video on YouTube is against the copyright of the music. YouTube has music filters and they check your videos. Some of my YouTube videos have been challenged electronically and I had to prove I had the copyright.

Open Source Music

There are organizations such as MusOpen (www.musopen.org) that lets you join for a nominal annual fee (\$50/year). You can download any of their music and legally put it in your videos, and sell them and distribute them on the Internet. In fact, you can copyright your videos and enforce your copyright on your video (but not their music).

You will also quickly find out why the expensive Copyrighted music in the world costs so much. Not everything on MusOpen is “great”. ☹

Tips for Synchronizing Your Images to the Music

- 1. Cue Points**, these are precise time locations you can bookmark where image transitions occur. Some software (like Adobe Premier) lets you tap a key while you listen to a song. A “cue point” is recorded with every tap of your finger.

- 2. Cue Point tuning,** once you select your music, the cue points keep in time with the beat of your song. They can also be deleted, added or adjusted later for minor timing errors.
- 3. Mass Add Images in Seconds,** some video editing software can then mass add your images and put their transitions automatically at each cue point. You can often add a default cross fade transition automatically as well. It depends on what you use.

Using software to record transition cues, then adding images automatically can dramatically reduce the time required to prepare your base video. The savings can be dramatic where days become minutes. This frees you up for other important tasks.

Special Effects

I mentioned earlier to keep your special effects up front or at the end so as not to detract from your images.

Intros and Endings

For Intros, this is anything you want to put up front before the video slide show starts, such as credits or a title plates. Keep intros to a minimum and get folks looking at you art. When it's over, you can add full credits. Intros and Endings are where you can have some fun.

1. **Copyright or Company Logo Intro**, this could be a special effect you build or your actual copyright. If you're legal, put a copyright somewhere.
2. **Static Intro**, this can just be a single image with writing on it that's held on screen for a number of seconds. You've seen some already.
3. **Scrolling Credits**, this is simply a very long static ending that scrolls up the screen.

Examples of Intros and Endings

[Volcano West Twist](#) – A title that’s a graphic company logo for me! I started out with just a static name, then developed a series of them of different colors, that twist and do weird stuff. Music “borrowed” from George Lucas.

[Scrolling End Titles](#) – Faster music picks up the pace of end credits and slower music is more respectful.

Adding Video to Still Images

If you have enough energy, when you shoot still images, you can also carry a video camera, and essentially document the setting in that way, then merge the two. You can also simply take a theme and mix moving images and stills. For example, pick a theme such as “Spring”, and mix video and images to support that.

Add Drama

The standard outline of any good drama has been defined long ago. It holds true with a slide show video too. Try to create a story that includes and 1) An Introduction, 2) slowly build drama to high point, 3) provide “cool down” resolution and closing.

Example

Here’s a video that combines all the topics we’ve discussed so far. What to notice:

- A simple image/graphic intro
- Listen to how the music supports the topic
- A spring day starts with a bee (listen for a mix of music and real background sounds).
- The transition to a slide show starts a brief Hummingbird “drama” hunting for pollen.
- Notice the first still image supports the last video pose of the Hummingbird (done on purpose)
- Notice how the music changes dramatically when the slide show starts

- Notice the tight synchronized cuts in time with the music and how that adds to the excitement.
- It ends with a fanciful Hummingbird clock that swirls away (holding special effects to the end)
- Scrolling credits, serious, and correctly researched are respectful and professional.

[The Birds and the Bees](#)

Time Lapse

This is a combination of static still photography on a tripod, with a shot taken every few seconds or every few minutes over a long period of time, then all added to a video editor, and compiled into a motion video.

The following time lapse video was done with an old Coolpix Camera on a tripod, torqued down as tight as possible, then duct taped to the window frame (Lissa didn't like that). It was tethered to A/C and

used a “shutter trigger timer” to shoot 1 shot per minute over a month. The video editor lets you assemble all the images sequentially and helps you decide how long each image is on the screen. This speeds up and slows down the results.

Example of Time Lapse

1. In the video, notice the tremendous impact of the music. If you watched the sequence silent, it would lean toward “boring”.
2. The music is from “A Beautiful Mind” with music meant to seem like amazing “discoveries” of the mind. With this video, you feel you are in on some “amazing secret” in nature.
3. Notice how I synchronized the “repeating” chorus with the rapidly moving “tree shadows”, as the sun races across the sky. This was very difficult since I had to cut and rearrange large numbers of images before and after “cue points”.

4. The music builds to around 40 seconds, where the “choir like” singing changes to an even more compelling verse. That was where I dropped the accidental late snow fall (and melting). It’s pretty amazing and matches the music.
5. During those 35 days of taking individual snapshots, I inadvertently took shots of my wife and myself. It was funny and unexpected, so I hold those frames for a second or two so you don’t miss it.
6. Notice the trees start off bare and end with leaves.

[Time Lapse](#)

Motion Effects (the “Ken Burns” effect)

In a nutshell, the classic example of a Motion effect is a sentimental family slide show video, where you slowly zoom in on your mother’s face, as the music tugs at your heart strings. Here’s short clip of a slide show exactly like that.

[Little Girl](#)

Once again you can grab the emotions of your audience, yet here’s another example of “you weren’t there”. It means more to her family than to “strangers”.

Effects While the Image is “On Screen”

Earlier, I mentioned no “special effects” except at the start or end of your slide show. Motion Effects are not included in that restriction. They emphasize elements within an image and make it feel like motion video.

Types of Motion Effects

There are 4 basic types of Motion effects

1. **Position** (independent left/right up/down control)
2. **Scale** (shrink or enlarge)
3. **Rotation** (360 degrees or more, or tilting)
4. **Anchor Points** (pin the image any point, then rotate around that, or rotate + tilt)

This can get pretty complex to deal with. You are also telling the motion effects control panel where each of those values are from, the start of the image to the end of it (for the number of seconds the image is visible). The software can assist you in getting it the way you want.

There are dozens of other effects not discussed.

Examples of Motion Effects

The next video uses each of the different Motion Effects and comes full circle, adding all the elements we've discussed in this Workshop.

Things to notice

1. We've grown used to motion effects on still images over the years. It's so prevalent now it's easy to not be very aware of it. Some folks look at a still image in motion, and think it's actually motion video. It seems to make "the still images seem more dramatic". That's why you use Motion Effects.
2. The video is actually two slide shows combined into one, with a fade-in/fade-out title plate between.
3. The music for the Into © Logo is from one of those bookstore stands that sell "Nature / Classical" CDs. They combine natural nature sounds with music. This one starts with a Thunderstorm and Elk Bugles.

4. Watch each motion effect on the animals in the first segment. Sometimes they seem to fly and other times you feel the drama of a sudden encounter in the woods via zoom-in and zoom-out effects.
5. The last segment uses some anchor points and slow rotation to give flying birds the illusion of circling in the air.
6. Notice the drama in the last segment built up by the music and the hard cuts. I found that music watching “Lord of the Rings: Return of the King”. The segment where they are “Lighting the Signal Torches” in the mountains is perfect for mountain landscapes.
7. The Opening Segment with music by Enya, is almost “Church Choir” reverent for the images.
8. Notice how I deliberately bring the Enya music in during the titles, but synchronize the first slide (a swan) with the first words sang by Enya.
9. Notice the 3 close-ups of the face of a Hawk. There’s a smooth cross dissolve between the first

and second image making its head appear to turn, then there's a sudden hard cut with the Hawk looking right at out. It can startle some people. (that's the idea 😊)

10. Read the funny end credits. End your videos with either a smile or respect. Make it fit the show.

11. Notice how the final © ends perfectly to the end of "The Blue Danube"? The trick to doing that, is to position the song you want at the end, then shorten the front of it and slowly fade it in (no one will ever notice).

[Nature Calls](#)