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Lights... Camera... Engineering!

BY JOHN R. PLATT

Students, warm up your video cameras! It's almost time to enter IEEE-USA's second annual "How Engineers Make a World of Difference" online video competition for the chance to win thousands of dollars in college scholarships.

The competition goals are simple: create 90-second YouTube videos illustrating how "cool" engineering is to an audience of "tweeners" (11-to-13-year-olds).

This year's top entrant or team will receive a $2,000 scholarship. Second place will receive $1,500, third place $1,000, and one honorable mention will receive $500.

The winners will be announced during the next National Engineers Week, 15-21 February 2009. In addition to then being posted online at the official IEEE-USA YouTube channel, the winning videos will be used on IEEE Web sites and shown in IEEE outreaches and pre-college activities.

Reaching the Tween

"Basically, we want to debunk the engineering stereotype," says Pender M. McCarter, Senior Public Relations Counselor, IEEE-USA, who is helping to organize this year's competition. "We're looking for videos that reinforce the contributions engineers make to certain areas of society. Things like improving the quality of life, involvement in community activities, support for a diverse range of professions."

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"Concentrate on your content, delivery and creativity," says former IEEE-USA WISE Intern and recent University of South Florida graduate Andrew Quecan, who is returning to the competition as this year's chief judge. "Last year, the content was especially important. We wanted to see how the videos connected with middle and high school students. After that, the judges looked at the involvement of IEEE students in the video itself, seeing how they were involved. Finally, we looked at artistic and creative delivery."

Trying to identify with the "tweener" audience is critical, says McCarter. "Get input from your target audience. Consult with your younger brothers or sisters. They're a cynical group, who's bombarded with more messages than ever. It's tough to cut through the clutter. A sense of humor works well for this audience."

Contest judge Nate Bell, the host of PBS's *Design Squad* TV show, agrees. "If used well, humor can really draw attention and make the video memorable. For the videos to have a good impact, they probably have to have a rather significant humor aspect (not through the whole thing, but probably a couple of good hits), have a good 'wow' factor, or present content that really connects the viewers to the subject matter."

Humor isn't necessarily everything, agrees another contest judge, Suzette Presas: "If participants are able to use humor to deliver the intended message of 'how engineers make a world of difference,' the judges encourage it. However, a video may win even though it does not make use of humor but is still able to effectively combine the criteria of content, creativity and delivery."

Lights, Camera, ACTION!

This year's contest opens to submissions in September, and runs through 16 January 2009, but students interested in entering might want to start thinking about their videos now.

"You need to give yourself time to create a good video," says Quecan. "Planning the whole thing in advance is important. Think creatively. Give yourself time for outtakes, reshoots and the editing process."

"Teams should prepare a timeline that will help them complete the video before the submission deadline," says Presas. "They should allow sufficient time for the different stages of the video production such as brainstorming ideas, script writing, actual video shooting, editing, etc. Every team might achieve results in different ways, and the actual time they spend in developing their videos may vary. The key is to prepare well in advance of the deadline so that this reflects on the quality of their submission."

"The most important tool is to have a good plan and a detailed script," says C. Sundiata Cowels, CTS, an award-winning video maker and the publisher of the new-media webzine, *Future iNCITE*. "Ask yourself, what do you intend to shoot, when will you shoot it, how much time and how many people will you need?

"Scenes with lots of dialogue will require more shooting time than silent action scenes," says Cowels. "Depending on how you wish to express your project idea, a single scene could take an afternoon or an entire day to shoot, so good planning is the key."

Don't get too hung up on your camera skills, advises Bell. "Professional-level video production is by no means needed to make a video with great impact. But editing carefully can make the difference between an okay video and a great one.

"Think about commercials," says Bell, "which are edited for maximum impact in a

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minimum amount of time. They're very carefully cut with only the most punchy, attention-grabbing content, and often manage to convey a tremendous amount of information quickly just by how they show things. It's the content and the editing that matter, not necessarily the professional-looking quality."

As for equipment, Cowels advises having a tripod, external microphone (the microphones built in to most cameras tend to pick up too much background noise), a capable computer with video-editing software, and, of course, the biggest necessity: "lunch for your team."

Get Started!

For more information about this year's video scholarship competition, and to view last year's winning entries, visit www.ieeeusa.org/communications/video_competition

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