

Trish Dalton Films: Juggling for Position

Navigating the right mix of projects for growth in capabilities and profits



CREDIT: Photographer - John Sears

Film director-producer Trish Dalton knows her limits; she just doesn't always stay within them. In part, that's a reality of her job description, which can include directing, producing, writing, shooting, and editing for her companies, Trish Dalton Films and Lucky Cat Pictures.

To complicate matters further, she usually has at least two projects on her production calendar. But a few years ago, after deciding to focus exclusively on completing her first feature, she went off-script after being commissioned for projects by both an individual and a corporation. And then a grant application that she'd filed six months earlier was approved. "There wasn't a lot of personal down time during that time," she says of the year she spent juggling those projects.

The experience taught her the importance of delegating responsibility. "Hiring people who can share the load with me is a huge step in the right direction—not trying to do everything yourself, which is easy to do as a small business owner," she says. "As much as you can plan for things, you never know what opportunities are going to come up. It's a constant challenge of a growing business to be honest with yourself and to know how to navigate the challenges."

She's also learned the value of developing a network of advisors who can offer their perspective on business matters when she doesn't "have time to sit on the mountain and meditate. I'm generally a person who always has a full plate. Having good advisors is important when I'm asking myself how to navigate."

Building Balance In

Developing a strategy for balancing corporate assignments, work for individuals, and her personal filmmaking projects has helped Dalton to grow as a filmmaker and a business owner. "My bigger commercial or corporate work has really helped me to be a better storyteller and a better filmmaker," she says. "It has given me the resources to work with better gear or bigger crews, and it helps me to expand my vision, expand how big I think." That's a key measure of her company's growth: the increasing size of the budgets allocated to the films she makes.

Dalton's projects this year have included traveling cross-country to film small businesses throughout the U.S. and create videos that share their stories in short documentary format. The videos run on the website I Am Small Business Proud, sponsored by Capital One's Spark Business. In addition, she has been negotiating distribution contracts for her latest documentary, which has been on the film festival circuit this year.

"Every time someone hires me to help them tell their story or help them promote what they're doing, it's a real opportunity for me to grow my own knowledge and experience," Dalton says. "So every job I've ever had has expanded my storytelling ability, helped me to be a better filmmaker and a better storyteller." As she continues to scale those skills, she unlocks her potential for long-term business growth.

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