

A grayscale background image showing a man on the left talking on a mobile phone, and a hand on the right pointing at a computer monitor. The monitor displays a software interface with various charts and graphs. The overall scene is a professional office environment.

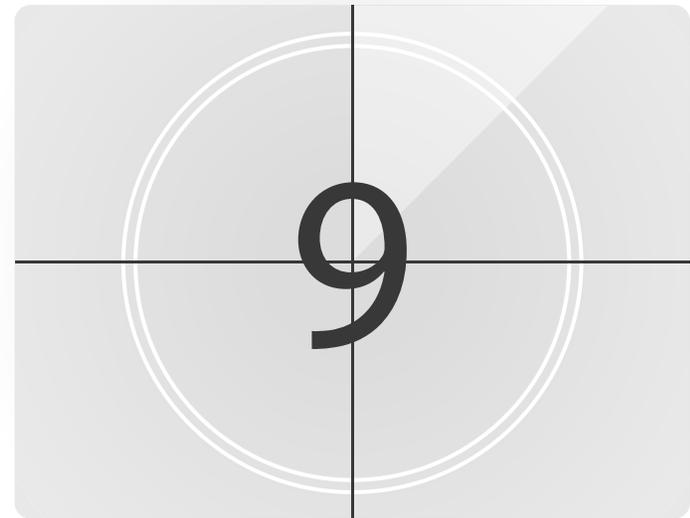
A Connect Marketing™ eBook

Creating an Animated Explainer Video

Animated explainers are the most common “first video” companies produce today. They tell your prospect everything they need to know about your company, service or product in 2-3 minutes. A great explainer serves as an excellent top of funnel asset.

But how do you create a great explainer?

Over the past several decades, Connect Marketing has created hundreds of explainers for companies ranging from brand-new start-ups to industry leaders like Symantec, Riverbed and F5 Networks. This eBook presents what we’ve learned about creating compelling explainers in **nine easy steps**.

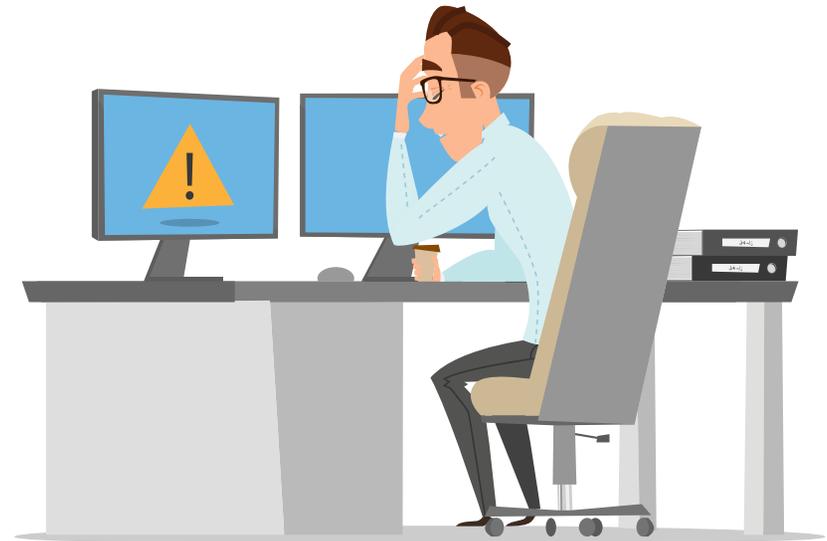


Step One: Story

Never start a video without knowing what you want to say! In an explainer, here are the typical points you'll make:

- **What's the problem?** Explain the problem your viewer likely has. This motivates them to watch the rest of the video.
- **Why existing solutions fall short.** Here's a secret: If their current favorite vendor already fixes this problem, they don't want to hear how you fix it. Explain why existing solutions fall short. This keeps the viewer interested.
- **How you help.** Now you have their attention. Tell them what your solution is, how it works, why it's better, and the benefits they'll enjoy using your solution.

Your story may vary slightly from this, but 90% of explainers follow this basic structure.



Over the past 30 years, we've created hundreds of both animated explainers and live-action videos for clients. We'd love to create one for you!

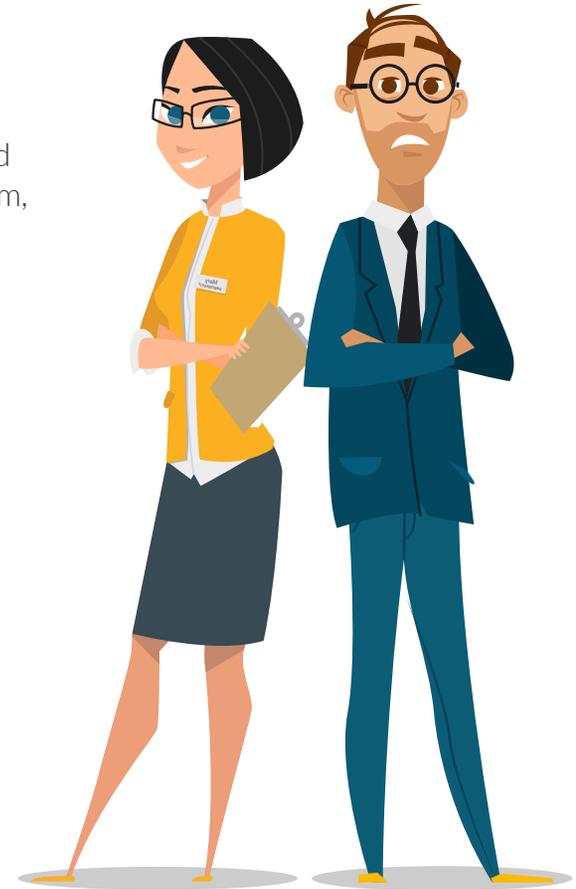
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Step Two: How will you tell your story?

The key word here is “story.” Make it interesting! Most explainers follow a straight-forward expository style. They “tell you” or “illustrate” each of the story points. To show the problem, maybe you show a character (remarkably similar to the viewer) experiencing the problem. To show how existing solutions fall short, show those solutions having trouble.

But this isn’t the only style. Another popular storyline is the day-in-the-life. This is where you show two personas, maybe “Mary” and “Joe.” Mary is the smart, successful persona who is (of course) using your product. Joe is the hapless sap who is using a competitor’s product. This story follows Mary and Joe through a “typical” day and illustrates how different their experiences are. Mary has a happy boss and leaves work early, Joe’s boss is mad, and Joe works all night fixing things. You get the idea.

There are many other styles you can follow. The key is to decide which style you’ll use before you start the next step, writing the script.



Step Three: Script

Clients are often eager to get to the visuals right away. But resist that temptation until you have a script everyone likes. Otherwise, you're setting yourself up for an endless loop of difficult re-dos on the storyboard.

Before we talk about writing the words, let's explain an interesting dynamic having to do with timing. Let's start with the time required to make a point – i.e., getting the viewer to:

- **Understand something they don't yet understand**
- **Believe something they don't yet believe**
- **Do something they weren't yet planning to do**

In our experience, making such a point seems to take about 15 to 20 seconds. If you take longer, you bore the viewer and they click out. Take less and they are frustrated. They may rewind once or twice, but then they just click out.

So, in a 2.5-minute video, after the opening and closing bumpers you have about 135 seconds. That leaves time for about seven to nine points. Write these down—these are your **major beats**.

Furthermore, viewers are impatient these days. They want to see something wiggle, bounce, burst into flames every 3 to 5 seconds. If you don't oblige them, they get bored and click out. Think of these as subpoints to the main points (or, sub-bullets). In a 15-20 second "point" you'll need 3 or 4 subpoints. Write these down as well; these are your **minor beats**.

Once you have your major and minor beats what you have, essentially, is the outline to your script. Now all you have to do is write the script! It's pretty easy, but keep two things in mind:



Step Three: Script (cont.)



Use “spoken” voice.

Have you ever read a transcript of someone speaking? In some ways it seems awkward and almost illiterate. But it isn’t—it is just how we’ve learned to communicate when speaking. It is different than how we communicate when we write. And guess what—just like spoken voice seems awkward when we read a transcript, written voice seems stiff and ineffective when we speak it.

So, throw away your AP Style Guide and script using your “spoken” voice.

Use verbal punctuation.

You are asking your viewer to pay attention for 2.5 minutes. Here is another dirty little secret, they probably won’t! So, throw them some verbal punctuation to make it easy to reacquire their bearings.

For example, after you’ve spent 40 seconds explaining why other solutions fall short, summarize quickly. Or, when it’s time to introduce your company, put an obvious bridge sentence in “Acme can help!”

Remember, if they stay lost for more than 5 seconds, they’ll click out.

Step Four: Storyboard

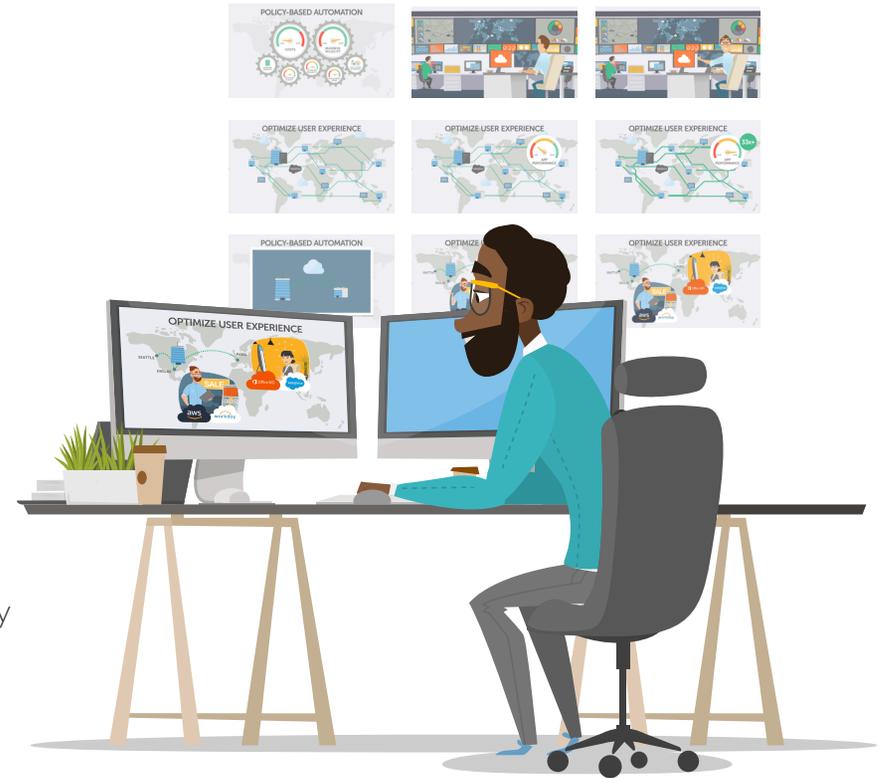
A script is the “verbal” story—the words. A storyboard is the “visual story,” the images. Most people get the “visual” part, but forget the “story” part. Always start with deciding on how you’ll tell the story visually.

This, by the way, requires a storyteller, not an artist. Keep your illustrator on the bench at first. Start with what we call a “functional storyboard.” This is where your chief storyteller (who probably wrote the script) writes down what the visual story is. Maybe this storyteller will include some clip art, or examples from other videos to help convey what the visual story is, but no fine art is done at this stage.

The idea is don’t waste time on professional artwork until you have locked down what the visual story is. Use stick figures, clip art and Google images to describe what you want the visual story to be.

One common mistake we see is to just mimic the script with pictures. The voice over says “We are faster,” and the storyboard shows a road-runner. Why do that? Are you afraid the viewer doesn’t understand the word “faster?”

Better is to use words for SOME of the story, and visuals for OTHER PARTS of the story. Maybe the voice over says, “We are fundamentally better,” and the visual story “shows” faster, more scalable and more powerful. That technique is faster (because the voice didn’t have to say everything and it is more impactful because the viewer is using all of their senses).



See examples of our videos

[View our portfolio](#)

Step Four: Storyboard (cont.)

A good functional storyboard only takes 3 to 4 hours to create. Iterate back and forth on this until everyone is happy with how you'll tell the story visually. Now you can bring your professional illustrators in. The idea is that it is much faster to iterate on what is, essentially, an outline than on fully executed artwork.

Here are some best practices for creating a full illustrated storyboard:

1

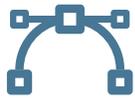
Adhere to your style guide.



Adhere to your creative team's style guide, their official colors and fonts. This is not the time to break out the Comic Sans font style.

2

Use vector art.



This allows for the highest resolution, even when the animator eventually zooms in for a close-up.

3

Make sure you "layer" the illustrations to make them easier to animate.



Here is the rule: If it is independently animated, it belongs on its own layer. By the way, After Effects cannot see sub-layers, so just one-tier.

4

Embed any images so they are available to the animator.



This is a small thing, but your animator will thank you for this!

5

Make it SIMPLE!



Simple looks better, and complexity causes problems down the road.

Step Five: Create an animatic

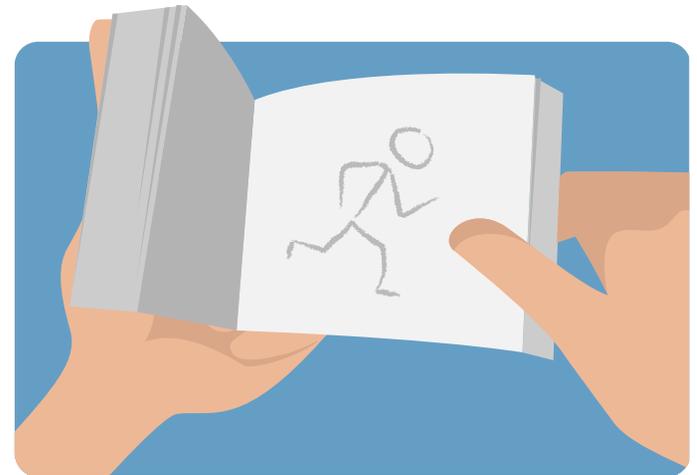
Remember as a kid when you would draw stick figures on a pad of paper, and then flick through them to create your own cartoons? Those are animatics—a collection of still images that form a rudimentary animation when played at pace in sequence. So far you’ve never seen your story “at pace.” Even when you reviewed the final illustrated storyboard, it probably took 3 to 5 times as long to review as it will eventually take in the final video. Now it’s time to create your first full-speed animatic.

When you watch, you’ll notice things. Is it too fast, too slow? Is it confusing? It is better to find out now and fix it, before you do final animation!

You’ll need a voice over, but resist the urge to hire that professional voice just yet. I guarantee somebody will be changing at least SOME of the words in the script before you’re done. You don’t want to incur change fees, so have someone on your team do a “proxy” voice over. It may not sound perfect, but it will do.

You’ll also need music ... see step six for how to select music.

Remember, there is no actual animation at this stage—just lay down the illustrations in time with the voice over. Be sure to explain this to your executives when showing them the animatic! Most people think the animatic is the final, and it will seem a little “wooden” to them. Of course it is—there is no animation yet! That said, most animatics are reasonably good proxies for the final animation.



Hopefully we’ve inspired some good ideas. Not sure you want to spend the time and effort?

We’re here to help!

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Step Six: Music

Yes, you need music. It is crucial. Music adds momentum and energy. It also adds emotion; music tells the viewer how to feel.

That said, have a light touch with your music. Don't use a densely orchestrated piece. Think about the pitch (from low to high) that the music uses. Leave space for the pitch voices occupy—use music with pitches below and/or above that. Fewer instruments are better so as not to compete with the voice. A light, “tumbling forward” piece gives the animation energy and momentum, without taking over.



Try to use music with a clear, strong “stinger” at the end. A stinger is that big finish at the end of the music where the instruments and percussion hit a climax so you know the music is done. This is as opposed to music that just fades out. Use that to time the last syllable of your voice over to the punch at the end of the song. Best is to also have a decay after the stinger to let the viewer down softly.

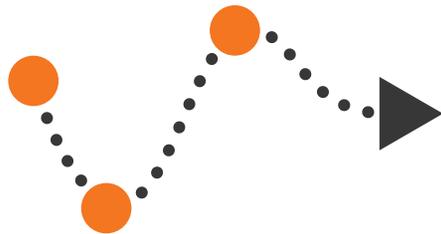
Don't try to find music that is the precise time of your voice over. First, the voice over is going to change anyway, remember? But, second, it is easy to splice music to make it longer or shorter. Just choose a section where the voice is especially strong to mask the splice. And, match a part of the music where the two parts you are splicing are both downbeats of the same part of the measure.

Step Seven: Animation

Finally—the magic! This is where your visual story comes alive. Most professionals opt for Adobe After-Effects to do their animation, assuming you are doing 2D animation. 3D is a different story, rarely used these days, and beyond the scope of this eBook.

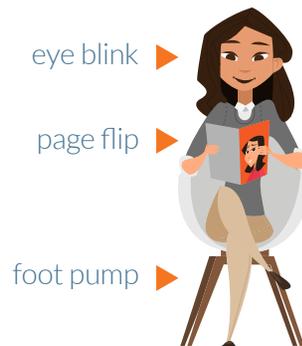
We could write a 300-page book on how to effectively perform 2D animation, but also beyond this eBook’s scope.

Let’s, however, give you just a couple of best-practices to consider:



Lead the eye.

Consider where the viewer’s eye was in the previous scene, and try to start there with the new scene. Same thing at the end of the scene—end up where you’re starting the next scene. The idea is to be proactive about guiding the viewer’s eye so the final product is seamless and fun to watch.



Secondary animation.

Your primary animation is how you tell your visual story. Secondary animation is doing things like making sure your characters occasionally blink, or moving the hands on a clock, or having the wind move the fronds on a palm tree. It doesn’t tell a story, but without it the scene will appear dead.



Exaggeration.

Make things bigger, or faster, or more alarming than normal to accentuate your point. The animation goes by quickly—give the viewer clues about what to see.

Step Eight: Voice

Okay, while your team is getting comments on the animatic and fixing stuff, it's time to select that perfect voice. Just remember that "perfect" is decided by your prospect, not by you! Things to match to what your prospect wants to hear:

- Age (young or old)
- Gender
- Formal or informal delivery
- Dramatic or matter-of-fact



Where do you find voice over artists? The internet is full of sites that have hundreds of voice over artists for remarkably cheap fees. We've had some luck with these, but sometimes some spectacular fails as well. This is not where the pros hang out.

Better is to find experienced, reputable artists that have their own sites. These artists will record in a home studio, and they do a solid, professional job. They are still pretty reasonably priced—between \$200 and \$450 per script.

Stay away from voice over pros who require a professional studio. This can double or triple the cost, with no added value.

Step Nine: Mastering your animation

Finally, you're done. Everyone loves the script, the animation, the voice and the music. The only thing left to do is to render the video and upload it to all your video sites.

As a final note, please don't short-change yourself at this step. Do NOT upload a 480p or 720p master. Upload a 4K master. Your viewer will select the resolution that plays best on his or her viewer. Give them the option of the best version you can!



ABOUT CONNECT MARKETING™

We've created hundreds of both animated explainers and live-action videos for clients over the past 30 years. Hopefully this eBook gives you some good ideas. Not sure you want to spend the time and effort? Contact Connect and see how we can help you produce impactful animated explainers that will boost your lead-generation efforts.

[Let's discuss your project](#)