

# An Ideal Marriage:

## How to build a kit hire relationship that lasts



Most GTC members will either regularly or occasionally need to hire items of camera equipment, whether it be a full kit for a long, ongoing shoot, or a one-off lens or other small item for a day or two. So how can you be sure to get the best advice and service from your chosen kit hire company? We gave all the GTC sponsor companies for whom kit hire is a major part of their business, the chance to respond to a questionnaire delving into how to foster a great relationship with them. What helps them to help you? And what really annoys them or will make working with you difficult from their side? Like any relationship, this is a two-way thing and both parties will benefit proportionately to the effort they put into making it work. We are very grateful to the eight sponsor companies who sent in their views to help us compile this guide to a match made in heaven!

We asked the companies nine questions, each relating to an aspect of the kit hire process. All eight respondents were kind enough to take the time to answer all the questions. For space reasons here we have had to summarise the answers and use representative quotes to illustrate the key points. Many answers were in agreement and in this case we have selected one or two quotes that are in tune across the board or neatly sum up the consensus; this does not mean that the other companies had nothing to say on the subject, just sadly that we don't have room to include all the answers in full!

### What are the key things to tell you on first approach in order to make planning for the project go smoothly?

There was clear consensus on this, with all the companies having the same main requirements. Most important is to present as accurate a picture of the production as possible from the outset and to be straightforward about the budget; this enables the hire company to ask you the right questions and offer the best solutions. The more information they have from the start, the smoother the process will be. **Mike Ransome of Presteigne Broadcast Hire** explains: "We just need to know, up front, the kind of job it is. If you paint us an accurate picture, we can ask the right questions and confirm answers that will ensure both sides get it right the first time. It's all part of establishing a close, collaborative and lasting relationship with our clients, which we value above all else."

Be sure to include everything on the kit list, especially when hiring from a company for the first time, as kit houses differ in what they include as standard. **Paula Connor at Electra** says: "Every kit house will have varying things included as 'standard', particularly things like cards and lens adapters. There are so many variations of lens adapter, manufacturers are continually replacing them with newer models. Similarly with cards; some kits will include more cards but smaller

capacity, while others include fewer but of higher capacity. It may be important to you to have lots of cards in order to turn them around, or fewer high-capacity ones if you're turning over for longer periods and want fewer interruptions."

After receiving the full kit list and some idea of budget, what the companies all like to have is as many production details as possible, including, for example, exact dates, shooting locations (and if these are interior or exterior, which may affect power requirements), weather forecasts, whether the kit will be flying, what genre of shoot it is (news, drama, documentary, etc.) and transmission dates.

Another important factor is the ideal collection/return date and time. Most kit suppliers offer reduced rates for longer hires and may be able to offer further reduced rates for travel days. Many suppliers are also able to accommodate early collections/late returns, so it's definitely worth mentioning if this would be preferable.

**Brad Day at New Day Pictures** recommended browsing the company's website first to see that they stock what you're after. If you've not used a company before, it's also a good idea to check how their process works (most require ID, proof of address, references etc.) and try not to leave it until the day before your hire to make contact – it will go more smoothly on both sides if your account is already set up, with the relevant documents on file. You should also let them know your reasons for contacting them, as a couple of companies mentioned that they may be suspicious if a new client calls out of the blue, especially if there are no common connections (so do mention any mutual contacts you have).

Clarity is king, and the more details the better. The more they know, the more effectively they will be able to chip in with potential solutions you may not have considered. The chances are that they've done something similar in the past and will be aware of snags that can crop up. If you have any questions or doubts at all, speak to them.

## Are there any common misconceptions about hiring kit?

Paula at Electra and **Rob Newton at Visual Impact** both replied that arrangements around insurance provision are the most common misconception, with many assuming that “production will cover the insurance”. Electra explains that “in almost every instance an insurance company will require the hire invoice and the policy under which a claim is lodged to be made out to the same company or individual. Therefore, any invoice for kit hire always needs to be in the same name as the policy under which it’s covered; if you’re hiring the kit, then you need to be covering the insurance.”

**Mel Lamont at Procaml**’s main suggestion for potential misunderstanding is in knowing what is or isn’t included in a package (length of prep/delivery times, missing/damaged kit, media/card returns, etc.), while **Barry Bassett (VMI)** is amused that people often come to them assuming kit is just “sitting around” waiting to be hired (Could you do me a deal on a set of Cooke S4s if you have them sitting on your shelves?). “We are commercial companies who have to make our gear work to be able to charge the rates we do and still make money!”

**David Fader at TCS** contributed that “it’s surprising how many new customers call for same or next day jobs and then complain when we ask for upfront payment. We will always try to help with last-minute jobs, but we do have some basic requirements before we can release valuable equipment: valid insurance, a payment which might include a refundable deposit, and assurances that they have competent crew who understand how to use the kit.” Visual Impact also mentioned new clients turning up with no trading history and expecting to take equipment away immediately. They also said that it’s common for clients to “expect hire companies to deliver anywhere in the country, door to door, with 12 hours’ notice” – which just isn’t always possible.

**Martyn Pryke at S+O Media** added the frequent misconception that the first price given is set in stone – talk to the supplier about your budget and they will try to adjust pricing or suggest cheaper alternatives where possible.

Mike at Presteigne’s answer related more to choice of company than the hire process: “In my view there’s only one misconception – and that’s that all hire companies are the same... We often find that, due to our experience, there are little tweaks we can suggest that less experienced suppliers wouldn’t think of (or bother to mention). Ask yourself if the hire company you plan to use is rooted in deep engineering experience, intimate product knowledge, and awareness of emerging trends.” New Day Pictures also followed the choice of company line, mentioning that clients often expect they will have to leave a big deposit but this isn’t the way New Day works and a big deposit isn’t always required.

## Are there any common mistakes to avoid that particularly annoy kit suppliers?

A general consensus for this question was that being flexible is really helpful to both parties. S+O point out that, while they may not be able to offer the exact items on your list, they will often have alternatives that do the same job or maybe even better. Electra added that there is often a “compromise, some middle ground, whereby the budget remains healthy and everyone gets what they want/need”. Similarly, Procaml replied that: “Flexibility on kit options assists us in making

informed decisions. However, not having a firm list to start with can make the quoting process time-consuming. Being upfront as to whether or not it is for budget purposes vs actual hire, or simply a quote comparison, is appreciated.” New Day Pictures advised that “booking desks are generally very busy, so if you’re finding it difficult to identify the exact kit you want, you should ask for advice, especially before getting the quote. Too many quotes for the same job can cause unnecessary extra work.” VMI agrees: “Having to quote multiple options where clients are vague costs a lot of time/effort and the client is unlikely to get the best deal.”

Common annoyances for TCS include: last-minute cancellations of confirmed jobs or a big reduction in the order just prior to delivery; attempting to renegotiate the price after they’ve invoiced; and late returns without telling them first.

Electra noted that such misunderstandings can be avoided “by a simple and honest conversation”; you should “take the time to build a relationship with your chosen kit provider(s), be honest and tell them exactly what you’d like in an ideal world, as well as what the budget constraints are and any items that simply can’t be compromised on”. More importantly, “don’t try to play one supplier against another; it’s a very small community and it’s likely the two will talk!”

Summing up well the frustrations of others, Rob at Visual Impact says: “The most common ones are clients who ask for a quote for a camera kit ASAP, with no explanation which camera or format, or list five cameras ranging from entry-level DSLRs to the top-end ALEXA Mini and ask us to pull a kit list together for each one.”

## Does your kit hire cover insurance – if not, what does the hirer need to know in order to arrange cover?

**Electra:** No. Electra ask you to provide a copy of your insurance certificate, which will be followed up by a call to the provider/broker for independent verification.

**New Day:** Insurance isn’t included as standard, however it’s sometimes possible to include a loss/damage waiver on the hire, which is charged for (dependent on the value of the kit/type of shoot). If you’re getting your own hired equipment insurance, speak to them first before purchasing a policy as you’ll need to know the full value of the kit.

**Presteigne:** No. However, they keep comprehensive insurance records for all their customers, meaning they can remind you when the insurance you’ve registered with them will lapse. Also, this is another reason they will ask questions about the production: “There are some territories in the world where it is impossible to get equipment insured. Will the kit end up there, or even pass through such a territory on its way somewhere else? In either case, the bottom line is that the responsibility for insurance is borne by the hirer.”

**Procaml:** If the crew is provided through Procaml (wet hire), the kit is covered by Procaml insurance. If not, they can offer recommendations of preferred insurance providers. They require proof of insurance to cover the equipment and will ask for the expiry date and value of hire. The company name covered must be the same as the client account and they need permission to contact the broker for verification. For short-term insurance, make sure you cover yourself for all the days the kit will be in your possession, not just the hire dates.

**S+O:** No. They expect you to have hire-in insurance, and you need to know the total value of the kit being hired so that the insurer can cover up to that sum. They have a link through to

Performance on their website to make the process easy.

**TCS:** Once the equipment leaves their premises or vehicle, insurance becomes the hirer's responsibility. They ask for evidence that you've set up appropriate cover for all hired kit and that it's up to the correct value.

**Visual Impact:** No. They advise that it's best to get this sorted before you make the initial enquiry. Also, having an account with the hire company already set up helps speed up the process (this can be done well in advance of the first hire).

**VMI:** No. They do offer short-term damage waiver cover, but it's fairly limited and covers a maximum of £5000. VMI lists recommended companies on their website (<https://vmi.tv/about/insurance>) and ask that new clients book their own insurance prior to hiring. Barry adds: "Often clients don't realise that an annual multi-production policy is frequently not much more than the cost of a short-term policy. So if you're planning to shoot at least three times a year, or perhaps even twice, then enquire about the cost of an annual policy, or even whether they'd accept the first short-term policy as a part-payment on an annual policy."

Electra provided these useful points on **setting up insurance:**

- You'll need to know the replacement value of the kit you're hiring and your kit supplier should be able to supply this (itemised if required).
- Usually the kit is insured for the cost to replace it new, along with up to 13 weeks' loss of hire.
- It's advisable to get your insurance through a recognised provider, as an insurance document from a provider who is unknown, or rarely seen, will not carry as much gravitas as one of the main providers.
- Your insurance must start from the moment you collect the kit and cover until the day you return it.
- Costs can be contained if you adhere to the 'Collect after 12pm and return before 12pm' rule as insurers usually start/close a policy at midday/midnight."
- Most reputable insurance providers can quote for either a 12-month or short-term policy. It's also usually possible to add an extra cover amount for a short term to cover higher value kit you may need for a short while.

## Are there any things operators should be particularly aware of when hiring kit?

Procam, S+O and New Day Pictures all mentioned checking that the hired-in kit is compatible with other kit you want to use it with. S+O explained that operators often pair their own kit with hired kit – in which case, let them know first so that they can advise on any obvious issues. Most hire companies publish lists of all accessories included on their website, so make sure you check this too.

Electra suggested unpacking the cases and taking photos of everything first. This will "not only help you return everything complete, but also help you to identify if anything is missing before it's too late. Those uncomfortable conversations can be avoided if you tell the hire company immediately that you are missing that cable/instruction booklet etc. before the hire kit is returned."

Both TCS and Visual Impact stressed that other productions will be using the kit after you, so treat it with respect and return it on time – or, if the shoot is going to run over, let them know so that they can make suitable arrangements for both you and the next client. Short and sweet from TCS: "Look after it and make sure all the bits go back in the box!"

VMI noted that "rental companies have to cope with a lot of damage to equipment", so you should always check the lenses/LCD panels/filters, as "only by making a concerted effort to ensure that optical elements are clean upon delivery of the equipment, can you be sure that any damage didn't happen on your hire."

Presteigne advise always considering the reputation of who you are hiring from and also their level of stock so that, in the unlikely event something goes wrong, they will be able to replace the kit swiftly.

S+O added a reminder to think about data transfer options and your DIT/data-wrangling process, as this will change how much media is required.

## If kit is damaged while on loan, what's the best way to deal with this?

There was complete agreement on this that being upfront and honest about any damage, however minor, and notifying the kit hire company straight away is always best. Call and/or email immediately, ideally quoting the item's identifying number. Paula at Electra explains: "If you can provide the serial number, or identifying 'kit number' etc., then it will help the techs find it when the kit returns. This is of course even more useful for multicamera shoots where there may be more than one of any particular item. An identifying label or piece of camera tape is also very much appreciated. Often kit is due to be turned around and re-hired within a short period of time, so being able to quickly resolve any broken or damaged items is crucial." Knowing before the kit comes



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back through the doors really helps the kit hire companies as the kit will most likely be due out for another production soon. Don't forget to notify the insurance company straight away as well. Try to gather as much photographic evidence as possible.

Barry at VMI advises you to be "pragmatic and recognise that it is possible a crew member has inadvertently caused some damage, without even being aware of it, but they may swear to you that it wasn't them!"

### Are there any special deals or other useful facilities you can offer and how is it best to tap into these?

**VMI:** "Always ensure you book a camera test prior to hiring equipment – this is always free of charge and allows you to learn how the gear works, check it's complete and fit for purpose, and accessorised accurately. Otherwise, the first two hours of any shoot may be fraught with arranging emergency deliveries of bits which have been forgotten, which you are likely to have to pay for."

**Visual Impact:** "We offer one-on-one training in our test rooms and make on-site visits to ensure the kit is performing as it should be. If the hire is over a long period, during any downtime we'll test, clean and re-present it in time for the shoot to restart."

**TCS:** "As a niche business, we do have very thorough knowledge of the 'TV grip' world, so we're always happy to offer advice or find solutions for camera positions in awkward places. We also have a number of bespoke adaptors to make sure that different brand products will fit together."

**S+O:** "We're always happy to show people through kit, whether it's learning something new or recapping. Not all kit is very well thought through menu-wise and often the team in-house will be able to point out manufacturing nuances and easily avoidable glitches that may otherwise impact on the day of the shoot. If you want to be shown something, just speak to your contact in bookings and we'll be more than happy to schedule a time when the kit (and you) are free."

**Procam:** "We have state-of-the-art test bay facilities for clients to come in and use to determine what kit best suits their requirements. They're also ideal to prep and spec for a

wide range of shooting possibilities. This is a useful option for crew members to assess their kit, especially for those looking to pack to fly. Our team of engineers are always on hand to help with any technical advice our clients require and we also have a training room, which is used for a variety of in-house training and client workshops."

**Presteigne:** "We're always open to providing training, testing, proof of concept... whatever, in close collaboration with customers; typically, the customer has to ask for this, but they'll find a very receptive ear. The customer can also come to us to inspect equipment, talk to the engineer who prepped it, or provide further input into how it should be prepped."

**New Day:** "We regularly run special offers on kit throughout the year, so make sure you sign up to our newsletters and follow us on social media platforms. Bank holidays are a good time to get kit for numerous days and only pay for one. We also run open days, which allow our clients to come in and get hands-on with the kit, and if there's a piece of kit you'd like training/practice with before hiring, just let us know."

**Electra:** "We always make kit available prior to a shoot for crews to prep and familiarise. This is a free service, but we do ask that it's immediately adjacent to the start of the hire, i.e. the day before. Technicians are always on hand to answer any questions and we'd happily accommodate anyone wanting to learn more about kit they intend to hire. Crews are welcome to spend as much time as they need at no cost. Special deals are always available and the best way to obtain one is to be upfront and flexible. We often quote to a budget – if you only have a small budget, but large budget aspirations, we still may be able to help. Be honest, be flexible and communicate in a personal manner; anonymous emails are never as well received as a phone call and frank chat."

### How important is building a long-term relationship with your clients and what is the best way to enable this to happen?

All the companies agreed that building a lasting relationship with your hire company is vital. Brad at New Day says: "Building long-term relationships is vital in this (and most other) industries. A good relationship with a hire company is beneficial to both you and the company... We have built



relationships with many clients going back 20 years." David at TCS agrees: "It's vital. We have a small but loyal customer base; trust and reliability are the key elements which build over time... with trust comes the ability to work with clients to keep within budgets." Visual Impact build on this by "visiting clients on a regular basis. This deeper understanding helps us when recommending alternative kit, new technology or different workflows, which can save clients time and money." For Mike at Presteigne, the relationship is "paramount", adding "we are 26 years old and have many customers who have been with us that long."

They all recommend replying promptly, keeping them informed, visiting face to face and generally building up confidence and respect in one another. It also helps to chat about your upcoming projects, not just for possible business but because it gives their bookers a taste of what you're doing and where their kit is going; take five minutes to pop into the hire office next time you return kit. It will be beneficial for you too, as having a trusted and reliable facility house on your side at the end of a phone can help so much on a production.

### Are there any other aspects that you consider particularly important to a smooth and successful hire and good ongoing relationship with the client?

For Barry at VMI, it all "hinges on relationship and trust. When a client has built up a rapport with a rental house winning their trust, it is a two-way street where both parties gain." Procam, S+O and Visual Impact all mentioned the importance

of feedback and open communication, with Martyn at S+O summarising: "We find the key is always an open channel of communication. The more we know, the easier it is to try and cover the job as best we can."

If they can improve on a service, let them know. Likewise, if they have done something particularly well, tell them that too. Mel at Procam says that knowing "where we can improve on our service and where we did well is very important to us".

Many kit hire facilities work with a select pool of crew and have a circular relationship which is self-supporting – the best relationships result in you providing each other with work on an ongoing basis. Don't hesitate to call for advice and always make sure you check everything before the shoot to avoid any last-minute issues. As Rob at Visual impact says: "Our rental team have a wealth of technical and operational experience, so if you have any questions, don't hesitate to call for advice." Also, be honest – if you've left a battery or damaged something, tell them; if you're going to be delayed, tell them. Don't try and hide anything!

The majority also mentioned that the best clients have an understanding of the pressures on both sides of the business. David at TCS says: "As a supplier we need to see a reasonable return on our capex, customers want to pay as little as possible. If we can hit the sweet spot somewhere in the middle most of the time, then we're going to get on just fine!" Barry at VMI adds that if you constantly plead poverty, expect the rental house to lose interest at some point as everyone needs to make a profit to keep their business going.

And make sure you pay on time!



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