



Are you ready for your close-up?

By Kate Hilpern

If you want a job abroad, it's worth brushing up your screen style, even if some recruiters still need convincing on video CVs

Recruiters, get your popcorn. The video CV is taking off in the US, and many believe it's only a matter of time before jobseekers in the UK find themselves flossing their teeth and gelling their hair in an attempt to land their dream job.

But will the trend hit the spot within the architectural sector? And if you produce a video resumé yourself, will you be seen as pioneering or bothersome?

It seems a perfect fit — few careers are as visual as architecture. What's more, most architectural practices are no stranger to video, with many regularly filming past projects to impress new clients. Then there is the economic climate, which is forcing more architects to look for work overseas, where video seems the ideal solution to wowing an employer from a distance. But architecture is notoriously conservative, and there are plenty of arguments against video CVs.

Like all architectural recruiters we spoke to, Eden Brown has so far received a grand total of zero video CVs, but sales director Andrew Thorpe believes they have mileage in bringing skills and experience to life. "Thirty per cent more of our work is with overseas clients than last year. The more adventurous architects are in seeking work, the better," he says.

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But won't his recruiters feel like X Factor judges as they trawl through poor, gimmicky examples? "A lot of architects are also filmmakers and animators, so I don't see why they couldn't make professional, artistic films showing off examples of their buildings and work," he remarks.

Trevor Colman, director of Colman Architects, is equally keen. "I think there's no harm at all in jobseekers seeing themselves as the new Kevin McCloud. We'd take a look at a video CV, for sure. Architects need to be good not only at design but also at selling themselves, and we're always looking out for novel techniques of doing this. Video CVs show a certain amount of enterprise."

The big sell

Colman sees the video CV as an opportunity for architects to walk around a building they've worked on talking about themselves and their work. "It's a chance to do a really honest critique — not just a case of showing off what they did well, but what they've learned."

Like many practices, Colman uses video daily. "We do a lot of refurbishments of shopping centres. We often video a new site so that we can walk people round it back at the office."

Colman adds that it's looking for people with the "right fit". "We want people who will be sociable and help sell the office and what we do. So once we've done the formal interview, we go to the pub for a chat. A video CV would help give us an impression of a person on that level at an earlier stage."

Peter Griffin, managing director of Talking CV, thinks video CVs can help people "up their game" for interview preparation. But those with a fear of film need not worry. "With our system we structure the questions so you have some idea of what to say and in what order," he says.

In the US, 89% of employers are receptive to video resumé according to research for careers website www.vault.com, although only 17% have received one.

Mind you, Alesey Vaynor has unwittingly provided a lesson in how not to make one. The Yale student became a laughing stock after an unintentionally hilarious video CV he sent to a prospective employer wound on up YouTube. The seven-minute video sees Vaynor describing himself as "a model of success and development to everybody", and goes on to show him seemingly lift a 495lb weight, serve a tennis ball at 140mph, explain his powers of healing and break six bricks with one blow.

Nevertheless, Jonathan Glas, co-founder of Jobs2View, says there are plenty of great examples which help speed up recruitment. "Employers who receive video CVs are able to make more informed decisions, and this often results in a one-stage interview process," he says.

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Not buying

But Frances Wilson, international manager for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, isn't convinced. "Take-up is very small. It's time-consuming looking at videos. Many recruiters also feel they're being sold a line rather than being given evidence of the competencies they're interested in."

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Some US attorneys have even told employers that if a video CV comes their way, hit delete. They fear video CVs will cause an onslaught of discrimination claims because they reveal information about race, disability, age and looks. "Cynical as it may seem, who would not prefer a beautiful, glamorous, well dressed and slim person around the office to a less attractive, less well dressed, geeky-looking larger woman or man? But what if the latter applicant is the one with the requisite skills and qualifications?" says Anita Rai, who specialises in discrimination, employment and partnership law at City law firm Fox.

She believes video CVs can be misleading. "A recent episode of Big Brother saw one of the housemates' video CV, in which she appears bubbly, risqué, full of character, opinionated and excitable. In fact, this particular housemate has done little more than sit quietly. [She] appears to be incapable of forming an opinion and [is] utterly boring."

Secrets and ties

Then there's the fact that architectural recruitment is, according to some, fairly old-fashioned and video CVs are a step too far.

"Traditionally, architects have based their selection on looking at a person's portfolio and seeing if they feel right for their company culture. You'll get ones who aren't prepared to budge on that," says Uta Werner, who runs Working Visions, an HR company directed at architectural businesses.

Video CVs also risk clogging up computer systems which is no way to win over potential employers, says Jonathan Dunning of Hunter Dunning. And while many people store them on central systems such as YouTube, which boasts over 1,500 entries listed under "resumé", Dunning suspects many architects won't want their trade secrets stored in such a public domain.

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“You can make the best video footage, but if you can’t edit and produce well, you can wind up with a shabby, shaky video which will look far from professional,” Dunning says. “There’s also a potential ‘cheese factor’. There’s a whole raft of skills in terms of public presentation that need to be done well.”

Dunning believes you can present your work perfectly well with 2D and 3D images. “The reality is that if you’re a decent architect, your designs will do the talking for you.”

Lindsay Urquhart, managing director of Bespoke, does not rule out film, particularly for overseas recruitment. “We often set up remote interviewing, using video-conferencing for our overseas clients. The architect will come in at 8.30am and be interviewed by an Australian employer, and offers will be made on that basis.”

Meanwhile, Lewis Hickey’s India offices have used Skype to interview someone from the UK. “I wouldn’t hesitate to use it again,” says Dipak Kotecha, managing director, India. “It’s never the same as looking someone in the eye in person, though, and the lady had already been interviewed face-to-face by other group executives in London.”

Some employers will only settle for face-to-face interviews, and will either fly interviewees to them or fly the candidates over here.

Tim Askey, managing director for Atkins, Middle East and India, explains: “An interview is a much more intuitive thing than you might imagine. You need to get a feel for the person. In video links, as a recruiter, you don’t trust your judgement so much. Recruitment is a costly business anyway, so flights aren’t that much of a big deal in the scheme of things.”

Remote benefits

Diane Townson, manager at Hays, is certain remote interviews will become more common, “particularly as the technology continues to improve. They can prevent both parties from wasting time and money in the initial stages of a job search,” she says.

Other architectural recruiters believe that as the YouTube generation increasingly makes its mark on the workplace, video CVs will become the norm. So while we may not be there yet, it seems you can at least dream of a day when you’ll hear the words, “It’s a wrap — you’re hired!”

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DOS AND DON'TS FOR VIDEO CVS

Do:

- Check that the recruiters you're planning to send your video CV to will actually be willing — and preferably keen — to view it.
- By all means use one of the growing number of services offering free video CVs to jobseekers, but beware it will be futile to simply sit in front of a webcam and speak. You're an architect — think creatively and visually, and don't forget to film actual examples of your work.
- Speak in soundbites and intersperse clips of you talking with breakout shots.

Don't:

- Send your video CV as a large file that could block an email system. If you don't take time to get this right, you could wind up being remembered not as a potential candidate but as a potential pain.
- Make a video CV longer than two minutes — three minutes at most.
- Compromise on quality. If you don't have editing and production expertise, call in the experts. You want to inspire, not amuse.