

My Pocket Production Studio

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Nikon DSLR with a backpack full of accessories - check. JVC video camera - check. H4n digital audio recorder - check. External wireless microphone - check. Laptop loaded with Reaper and Adobe editing software suites - check. Memory cards - check. Four different kinds of batteries - check. Flatbed truck to carry it all - check.

OK, so I have my tongue firmly planted in my cheek with that last paragraph, but only partially so. Other than the truck there have been many times I've gone out to collect stories with just about that much gear loaded into a 70-pound backpack. And while I still do go into the field on a regular basis for specific projects heavily loaded with gear, more and more I'm finding that my iPhone suffices for most field work. In fact, I'll go so far as to say that, thanks to a little bit of research and some judicious "test-apping," my smartphone is now a full-featured audio, video and still image collection and editing suite. So in this post I'm going to talk about the apps that I use in my work. Please note that these are the apps that work for me - others may be more to your liking. But this will serve as a good start. After all, most of these apps cost a dollar; you can't very well go wrong. Also, I happen to use an iPhone. Most of the apps I describe here will also work well in Windows and Android devices, and if these specific apps aren't available for your particular device, I guarantee that something similar will be. So let's get started.

The Elements of Story Collecting

Story collection is an exercise of the senses. If someone is telling you a story you will listen to them carefully, but you will also want to take note of their body language and demeanor. When I'm in storytelling collection mode I try to pay attention not only to the person telling me the story but also to the environment around them, to the kinds of things that distract them, and to the sights, smells and sounds that enrich the story. I create a mental image of the moment and, if the situation lends itself to it, I may take a picture. Just remember that mental images are just. Powerful for the listener, sometimes more so. However, if you need an image for the final published product, don't be afraid to capture an image or two.

You will also want to capture what is known as ambient sound, which is just the "background noise" without the interviewee's voice. Ambient sound is important for filling in gaps between pieces of the recorded interview so that the listener doesn't hear a sudden drop to no sound at all when the speaker pauses. For example, speakers will often use run-on sentences when they get excited. It sounds fine in conversation, but in an interview it sounds rushed and unprofessional. Editors will sometimes break up the run-on sentence, inserting a gap between the pieces and "spackling" the gap with ambient background noise to make the transition sound

natural. It's required audio editing software; I use a laptop application for large and complex editing jobs that is shareware and therefore very inexpensive, but on my iPhone and iPad I use an app that does a very good job of quick editing in the field.

By now you've probably noticed that everything I've mentioned lives in either my smartphone or my tablet, and that's the point: I carry an entire editing suite in my pocket, ready at a moment's notice to capture audio, video and still images. So let's take a look at the actual apps and accessories that I carry with me on storytelling jaunts.

Audio Capture and Editing

For recording interviews I use two applications: the native Voice Memos application that comes with the iPhone and iPad, and a more capable (but easy to use) application called [Hokusai](#) which allows me to edit as well as capture. I tend to use it more on my iPad than on my iPhone because it's an easier (and larger) interface to work with. For more sophisticated multi-track editing I use a program on my laptop called [Reaper](#); it allows for *very* complex audio editing and may be overkill for most applications. However, it is a shareware program and is excellent.



The microphone that's built into Apple devices is extremely – and surprisingly – good. On occasion, however, I use an external microphone plugged into my IOS device to ensure high-quality capture. If I intend to use the audio for a Podcast rather than just for my own “audio note-taking,” I sometimes use a [multi-directional microphone from Rode](#) (That's it at left). It's a bit pricey, but for capturing high-quality sound with ambient sound it's excellent.

Please note that the current model has the original 30-pin Apple connector on it; if you're using a new version of the iPad or an iPhone 5, you'll want to either buy an adapter for converting to the new smaller connector or wait for the new model to come out – which I understand will be soon.

For photography I use an app called [ProCamera](#). As a professional photographer I like the fact that this app works more like a real camera than any other that I've tried. Not only does it allow me to see a histogram, it also allows me to have full control over a wide range of settings including white balance, burst mode, and so on. It also allows me to switch easily between still, video and QR code imaging options.

This is just a quick overview of my “pocket studio;” if you have specific questions please contact me and I'll be happy to share more details with you.

Thanks for reading.