

When Preservation Isn't the Priority

A Weekly Sunday Newsletter from Stilson Video Services



The Priorities of Video Transfer Companies Can be Very Different

Lately, there are questions that keep bouncing around in my brain. What is the point of working in the video transfer industry if helping customers preserve their family memories isn't a priority? And how can companies that have made the conscious decision **not** to act in their customers' best interest become some of the largest and best-known brands in the world? Sometimes I can't help but wonder.

My staff and I take our work very seriously. We are passionate about the customers we serve. Simply put, we care deeply about every single piece of media we're trusted with. That's how we're wired, and it's not going to change.

If someone walked into my office tomorrow and promised me a pile of money to cut corners and enrich myself at the expense of my customers, I could never be swayed. Let's be honest — I didn't get into this business for the money.

Unfortunately, there are others in this industry who appear to have chosen a different path. They've built business models around speed and efficiency, even when those models increase the risk of

customers losing irreplaceable family memories. Some of these companies are among the most widely recognized and **trusted** in the world. Let that sink in for a moment.

It brings me no joy to write about this. I understand capitalism. I understand that people are free to run their businesses however they choose, as long as they operate within the law.

Maybe I need to lighten up. Maybe I need to accept that people often get what they pay for. Sometimes families are forced to make decisions based on price alone. I understand that.

But wouldn't it be refreshing if large national companies were simply honest about what they offer? If your goal is to be the cheapest, high-volume option, say so. Don't market yourself as a careful preservation service if that isn't what you provide. Being inexpensive is one thing. Being both cheap *and* good is something else entirely — and in this business, it simply doesn't exist.

Roughly half of the tapes we work with show age-related problems. If we just tossed them in the VCRs with a “whatever happens, happens” attitude, those recordings would likely be lost forever. Yet that's effectively what happens at high-volume operations that aren't equipped to handle problem media.

We routinely see issues like mold, mechanical problems inside the cassette, and the all-too-common sticky-shed syndrome. In many cases, these problems **can** be successfully addressed — but doing so requires extra time, effort, and experience.

It's troubling to think about how many families are told their tapes “can't be transferred,” when what that really means is “we don't handle this type of work.” Little or no effort is made, they are returned to the customer, and the opportunity to preserve what's on them quietly slips away.

I can't sit by and watch this happen without speaking up. In my opinion, what's happening on a national level is disturbing. While corporate leaders are free to run their companies as they see fit, I struggle to understand how they reconcile these practices with the responsibilities with which they've been entrusted.

Thousands of trusting customers ship off boxes filled with irreplaceable memories, only to be denied the chance to see them again. And beyond that are the future generations who will never

see or hear their family history. All of this, simply to streamline a workflow and improve a bottom line.

It's a shame — and I believe it's worth shining a light on.

I promise next week's issue will be a more light hearted look at... something. We enjoy our work and will never cheat our customers out of the joy reliving their precious memories.

Lives are important.

Our mission is to connect them to future generations the best way possible.

Finally, if you have a topic you'd like me to write about, let me know at stilson@stilson.com and I'll add it to the list.

— Bill Stilson

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