

FILMLOOK^{INC.} NEWSLETTER

SUMMER

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FOCUSING ON HDV AND FILMLOOK

For many video producers, the temptation for using inexpensive, consumer grade HD formats to satisfy HD delivery requirements is greater now than ever. While broadcast and cable networks are clamoring for high quality HD content, they are also squeezing the budgets of producers, insisting they cut production costs wherever possible. So it becomes a logical (and sometimes desperate) choice for producers to take a look at HDV as an economical HD solution. Manufacturers of inexpensive HDV camcorders are making claims that their equipment is close to or is equal in quality with full broadcast HD equipment. The reality is, that these cameras are recording highly compressed HD footage that reveals severe compression artifacts when pushed to the extremes of exposure, motion or color. Producers who are seduced by the HDV sales pitch may not realize that the small format HDV, while deceptively low cost on the front end, may conceal an ugly, expensive, and sometimes unworkable post production nightmare on the back end.

True, HDV can look good when properly exposed. The problems begin when exposure levels or shooting conditions are not optimum, that is when it starts to turn ugly. Most HDV camcorders use 1/3-inch or smaller CCDs or CMOS chipsets that can overexpose easily in uncontrolled daylight. HDV does not perform well in low light situations either. Turning the gain up in the camera in low light just makes the situation worse—noise from the chipset becomes more amplified, creating objectionable (and very visible) compression artifacts. Incidentally, fast pans, flashing lights, reflections on water, highly detailed moving images and fire/explosion effects will reveal severe compression artifacts that are not as apparent in a broadcast HD camcorder. To avoid these issues with HDV, it is important to light and control exposure very carefully—even more so carefully than if you had used a broadcast HD camcorder in the first place.

Editing and color correction can be done with HDV, but with many caveats. To avoid further compression artifacts HDV should be captured then rendered as uncompressed 8 or 10 bit HD video—a lengthy process since render time is significant when converting HDV to uncompressed HD. Then there are the issues of progressive versus interlaced versus 24 frames versus 30 frames versus 720 lines versus 1080 lines. Unless you're absolutely sure all camera footage was recorded with the same frame rate in the same format at the same resolution, this could pose a potential nightmare for an inexperienced producer during editing. There is no guarantee that mismatched media (i.e. mixing Digital Betacam footage and DVC Pro HD along with HDV) placed on the same editing timeline will look acceptable on most projects, even if you are using Final Cut Pro 6.

There are compatibility issues that have been discovered with some HDV decks not playing back certain other manufacturers' HDV camcorder tapes. Also, because of HDV's extreme interframe compression method of creating HD images, physical problems with the tape (like dropouts, creases or wrinkled tape) will yield

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gigantic dropout errors, rendering some takes unusable for several frames adjacent to the bad frame or frames. On the other hand, one bad frame in an HDCAM tape may be completely invisible and undetectable because of the HDCAM playback deck's excellent error correction and concealment capability.

Green screen and compositing effects on HDV are problematic because of the high MPEG-2 compression and 4:2:0 color sampling. Visible color fringing and fuzzy composite edges expose the format's shortcomings. When color correcting, the compromises of 4:2:0 color sampling can become painfully obvious when isolating color, since there is less color information encoded in HDV than even SD mini DV. Bringing up extremely dark scenes will reveal horrendous compression artifacts and noise, with very minimal dynamic range. Finally, recompressing your project to HDV is never recommended due to the compounding of compression artifacts. Even when your final project is output to a broadcast HD format such as HDCAM, SR or D5, this will not erase the motion and compression artifacts that have existed in the original HDV camera footage all along.

As attractive as HDV is, the reality is far more unpleasant than what the marketing and salespeople of these cameras are revealing. When networks and producers are looking for true broadcast quality HD, it would be far more cost effective to shoot on HDCAM, HDCAMSR, or DVC Pro HD than to try and wrestle with the shortcomings of HDV in post. Yes, broadcast quality HD is a greater investment in the beginning than shooting on HDV, yet the post process will go far smoother (and more cost effective) and with fewer compromises and headaches when using a robust, broadcast quality HD format in the first place.

HBO SERVES UP TRIPLE PLAY

HBO Sports has produced three HD documentaries that were brought to FILMLOOK for final color correction before air. "The UCLA Dynasty," "Barbaro" and "Legends of Flatbush: The Brooklyn Dodgers" were shot in HD video, edited then brought to FILMLOOK's da vinci 2K suite for final color enhancement in HDCAM, then the standard definition version of each documentary was given film simulation and color enhancement on Digital Betacam.

"PAPER FACES" SHOWS UP FOR FESTIVALS

Director John d'Aquino's short "Paper Faces" is currently being entered to several film festivals worldwide, including the Venice Film Festival in Italy. "Paper Faces" was shot in DVC Pro HD and was entirely posted at FILMLOOK Inc. and at Sammy Sound, including offline, HD online, 5.1 audio mix, titling, and color correction. Even DVD authoring, burning and printing was done in house, making the project the first movie ever done from raw tape to finished HD project at FILMLOOK Inc. and Sammy Sound.

THANKS FOR THE MEMORY THIEF

Congratulations to director Gil Kofman's "The Memory Thief," which is continuing to make the rounds nationally and internationally at the Cambridge Film Festival, Seattle Film Festival, and True West Film Festival. Shot in DVC Pro 50, the feature was brought to FILMLOOK Inc. where it was uprezed to HDCAM 1080 at 24P then da vinci 2K color timed for festival showings. We wish Gil Kofman good luck and continued success on "Memory Thief".

ALICE IN WONDERLAND A DANCE HIT

Randell & Schippers "Alice in Wonderland" is a national dance hit, becoming a Yahoo Music Dance/Electronica Top 10 hit, an Apple Quicktime Pick of the Week, and both an AOL and Clear Channel Video Feature. The video was brought to FILMLOOK for HD finishing and output for broadcast and DVD distribution. Currently, Randell & Schippers are focusing on the all-new Denny Randell live show, with plans to premiere in the late spring of this year. The show will feature a performance of "Alice In Wonderland" including "Native New Yorker," "A Lover's Concerto," "Can't Get Enough Of You Baby" and the Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons hits "Workin' My Way Back To You," "Opus 17" and "Let's Hang On (To What We've Got)."

NEVER SAY MACBETH ON THE FESTIVAL SCENE

Gold Cap Films' "Never Say Macbeth" is currently being prepped for "Dances With Films" film festival, with new effects shots and color enhancement at FILMLOOK Inc. The comic-horror film takes place during a disastrous production of Macbeth where supernatural events and unintended hilarious accidents plague the acting troupe.

COMMUTE TO THE FESTIVALS

Res Ipsa Productions is readying the feature "The Commute," a movie that was brought to FILMLOOK for editing and finishing prior to its debut at the Action on Film Festival in July. The movie, co-directed by Dave Cohen and Marc Wasserman, is a darkly comic look at the modern world purgatory of commuting in Southern California. Last year Res Ipsa has also produced the FILMLOOK processed feature "Terminal."

PVC-1 AT CANNES

Congratulations to the producers and director of “PVC-1” for their feature being an official selection at the Canne’s Film Festival Director’s Fortnight. PVC-1 is the gripping story of a woman and her family becoming victims of an unusual act of terrorism. Unable to pay a ransom, the mother is turned into a human time bomb and is now trapped in a physical and mental circumstance from which she and her family try to break free. The feature was shot in one take on miniDV then brought to FILMLOOK for color correction, titling and uprez to HD. “PVC-1” is continuing its rounds on the international film festival circuit with an eventual debut on DVD.

TAKING STOCK IN FILMLOOK

Some projects that have recently used FILMLOOK Inc., Sammy Sound and Producer’s Post...Fox Reality and Scott Sternberg, “The Academy” and “Hey Paula” for sound mixing at Sammy Sound, online mastering and output at FILMLOOK Inc. and closed captioning with Producer’s Post...ID Playground, “Smashing Pumpkins” album promo spots for online HD mastering and color timing...O Entertainment, “Back in the Barnyard” online HD mastering for theatrical promos...Toy Box, “Geena Davis & Will Rogers Institute” and “Surf’s Up Penguin Footage” HD transfer to 24P and color correction for theatrical promos...Hilton Hotels, cross conversion of DVC Pro HD material for Hilton Hawaiian Village...Triple Horse Productions, “Songs of Praise – America” color correction and FILMLOOK processing.

*If you have a news item for the FILMLOOK Newsletter,
please email us at anna@filmlook.com and it will be included in our next issue.*