

Briefs

High demand fuels rapid growth in VFX

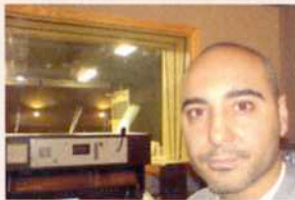
By Nicola Brittain and Adrian Pennington

KidsCo workflow on the go

Global kids entertainment channel KidsCo and London-based digital media facility JCA TV have joined forces to create an international digital workflow. KidsCo broadcasts in six territories using JCA's digital solution, Jcave, combined with a new bespoke process created for KidsCo by its director of broadcast, Sara Wookey. The tapeless workflow co-ordinates the movement of files to and from dubbing studios in eastern Europe before delivering them to KidsCo's broadcast centre in Denver.

Somethin' Else for Reid

Production company Somethin' Else has appointed Gregor Reid (pictured) as its new head of facilities. Reid will manage the studios and oversee their promotion as an external resource as well as maintaining their internal production role. Reid comes from UBC Media and has worked in studios for more than 20 years. The studio facilities at Somethin' Else are also designed to manage multiplatform content.



Camera Corps hail Leader

Leading post-houses are increasing their investment in visual effects to meet growing demand from broadcast clients and to capitalise on the high returns it offers.

Apple-based facility Unit is looking to open a CGI arm, Unit FX, in the new year targeting TV idents and commercials. It will take up three Maya, two After Effects and two Shake licences.

"We plan to expand aggressively," managing director David Peto told *Broadcast*. "On the VFX side we have grown 300% since we launched the department six months ago, with turnover up over 40% from commercials clients. We are seeing a massive amount of short-form work including titles and idents for BBC2 and Sky."

He added: "We are winning jobs from some of the bigger VFX and commercials houses because render farms and cheaper equipment mean that smaller facilities like us can offer a roughly equivalent service."

Most VFX suites can charge a 15% to 20% premium on editing suites because it is more specialised so there are fewer operators on the market.

The demand for broadcast VFX is increasing for several reasons: new equipment means it has become much cheaper to build 3D objects from scratch rather than film against a green-screen;



Unit idents: showing VFX grass for Sky HD's Heineken Cup

producers are more aware of the possibilities of broadcast VFX; and channels are spending more money on single channel and family channel idents to differentiate themselves.

Unit currently offers six VFX stations and a variety of Shake, After Effects, Furnace and Final Cut Pro tools. It incorporated VFX boutique Split Image in June.

Post company Envy has also said it is looking to expand its short form VFX, branding and finishing offering by September next year. The company currently has four Autodesk Smokes and managing director Dave Cadle said: "We are likely to double this within a year." Cadle has begun scouting Soho for new premises to house this expansion, but was unwilling to

reveal anything more about the search.

High-end drama and film specialist Pepper also plans to build and run a long-form VFX department at its Noel Street site. This will comprise 15 work stations, each running a Fusion system. The department will cost £200,000. Pepper's joint managing director Patrick Holzen said: "Until now we have had to farm VFX work out to companies that specialise in this area but haven't always been happy with the standard. This will allow us to guarantee high standards across all elements of post."

Chris Mortimer, previously head of VFX at Prime Focus, will join Pepper as the new head of VFX and Beanie Knowlton-Parry will join as VFX producer.

Scratch solution for new digital workflow



Scratch: supports Red footage

DI software specialist Assimilate has launched version 3.7 of Scratch, which supports the first Red workflow to allow an editor to work on uncompressed footage from the Red camera.

After loading the Red's Redcode Raw R3D into Scratch, post artists can assemble, conform, colour and play back in any resolution up to 4k using this system.

London facilities employing Scratch include Cinesite, Cineimage and Motion FX. Cinesite senior engineer Kevin Wheatley said: "The Red digital camera is so new that its codec is not available on many platforms; however, everyone wants to use it and Scratch makes that possible. For broadcasters, the quality in resolution with the price [around £9,500] make the Red camera, and consequently this Scratch solution, extremely desirable."

Assimilate's Scratch is able to work on high-end broadcast as well as 3D stereoscopic material, and was deployed by LA's 3ality Digital Systems to post-produce its U2 3D feature film, excerpts of which were played at IBC this year.