



courtesy of Honda Fit.

Putting HD on the Spot

By Claudia Kienzle

With a heritage of shooting 35mm film, the advertising community is no stranger to high-resolution imagery. But as more television viewers purchase HDTVs, top advertising agencies and their clients face growing pressure to shift to high-definition (HD) for the post production, mastering, and distribution of their commercial spots.

Creative Impact of HD

A leading, award-winning visual effects and design company in West Hollywood, California, A52 is seeing rapidly increasing demand for editing and mastering of HDTV spots from their commercial clients.

In recent months, A52 has tackled one challenging HD visual effects spot after another—including a high-profile HD advertising campaign to launch the Honda Fit™ new subcompact-size car with ample cargo space.

Working closely with the Los Angeles-based RPA advertising agency and MJZ director Phil Joanou, A52 helped to realize their innovative creative vision for two 30-second HDTV spots, called “Reflexes” and “Food Chain,” promoting the Honda Fit vehicle.

Autodesk®



courtesy of Honda Fit.

In "Reflexes," a Honda Fit is suspended upside down above the ground and then dropped. Viewers are then surprised to find that it has "catlike reflexes" that enable it to land gracefully on its wheels and drive away. And in "Food Chain," the classic image of a big fish eating a smaller fish is updated in a futuristic city in which one car literally eats a smaller car. The surviving car is then overtaken from behind and eaten by an SUV, which is then eaten by a Honda Fit.

Powerful HD Platform

To accomplish this caliber of effects with the utmost visual integrity, A52 has invested in a powerful infrastructure capable of handling the rigors of HD work extremely efficiently.

A52's HD pipeline comprises many Autodesk® systems, including Autodesk® Flame® and Autodesk® Inferno® visual effects compositing software; Autodesk® Smoke® nonlinear editing and finishing system; Autodesk® Maya® 3D animation software; as well as the Autodesk® Burn™ background renderer; Autodesk® Stone® high-performance storage systems; and Autodesk® Wire® high-speed networking software.

Both Honda Fit spots featured CG vehicles created in Maya that were composited with 2D digital backgrounds and enhanced by sophisticated tracking, reflections, and color correction using Flame.

"Creatives at the top agencies are very savvy, and they know that to meet their creative and technical expectations, you have to have Flame, Inferno, or Smoke," says Kirk Balden, A52's Flame artist.

"Since we have a proven track record and a powerful arsenal of Autodesk systems, our agency clients know we can achieve any visual effect they might dream up," says Balden. "To get on the same page creatively, there is a certain level of experimentation and exploration that has to take place while agency creatives are sitting with us in the suite. Burn plays a big part in facilitating this creative exploration because it relegates the time-consuming rendering of HD images to a background process so that we and our clients can continue working without delay."

In today's budget-conscious, competitive environment, having a digital pipeline driven by Autodesk technology means being able to work extremely quickly and efficiently without compromising quality. "Because these tools are so powerful, and packed with unlimited creative and technical capabilities, we have the means to tackle any aspect of their HD spot under one roof very cost-effectively," says A52's managing director and executive producer, Mark Tobin.

Springboard for Distribution

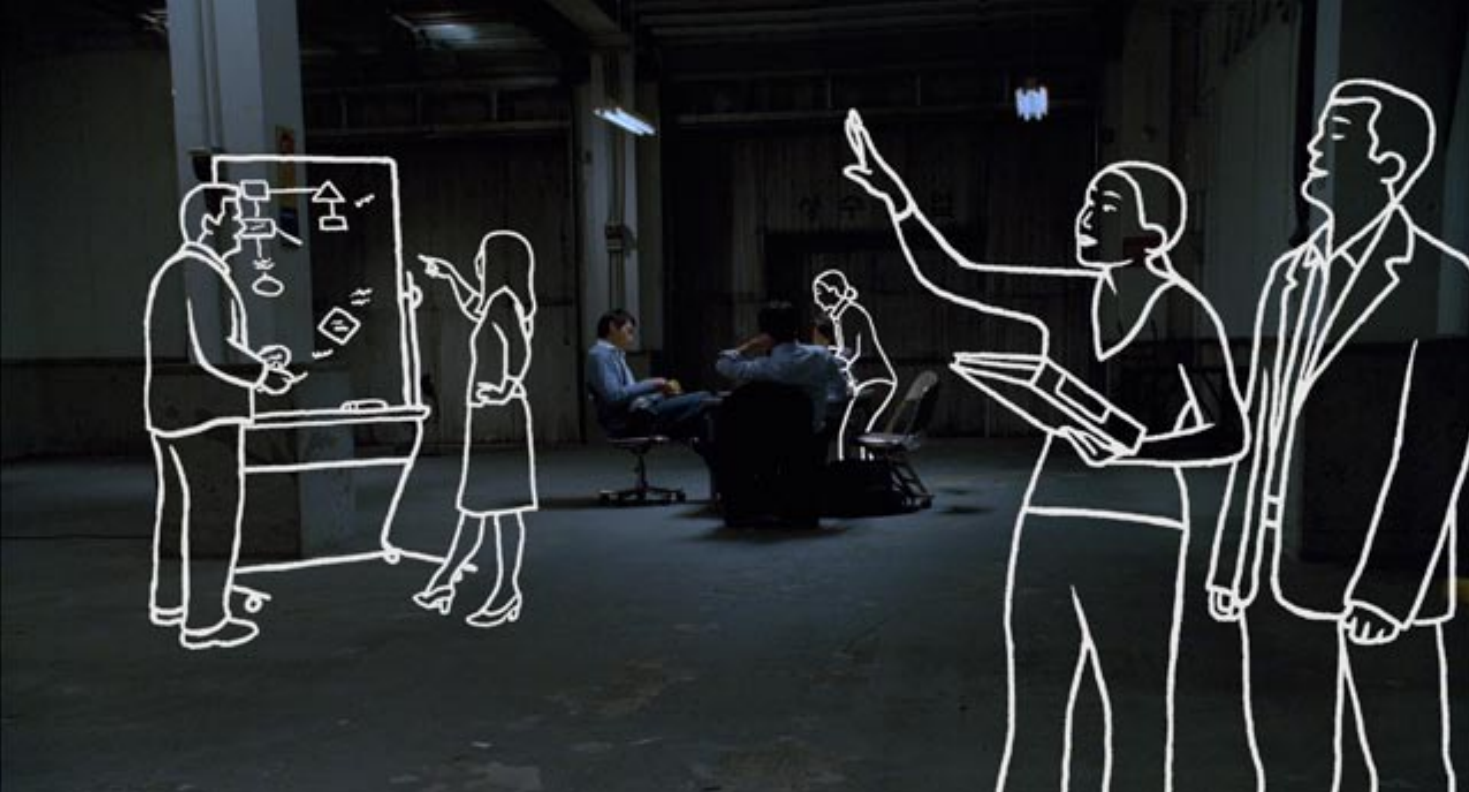
Top agencies are also attracted to HD mastering because it provides a highly efficient springboard for international and multistandard format distribution.

"After years of industry speculation that the 1080/24p HD format would serve as the 'universal master,' most of our advertising agency clients are now recognizing that 1080/24p HD mastering enables them to distribute their commercial campaigns in all the standards and formats they may need for global distribution very efficiently," says Tobin.

For example, a corporate brand campaign for Microsoft, through McCann-Erickson in San Francisco, called for dozens of spots to be mastered in 1080/24p HD for distribution worldwide in a variety of versions, including HD, National Television Standards Committee, and Phase Alteration Line.

A52 used Smoke to assemble 60-second, 30-second, and 15-second versions of "Imagine Cup" and "Startup," using Flame for compositing. The Microsoft spots show live action scenes of people working at computers and using Microsoft® technology to be creative and productive. The running theme throughout the ads is a 2D white line that animates over the scenes to represent the people's imaginations coming to life.

"We had to modify the back plates to accentuate the 2D white lines—by replacing the skies or removing highlights from the background—to make the white lines bolder so they'd really stand out," says Balden. "Using Flame tracking tools, we did tons of monitor replacement as well as extensive color correction."



courtesy of Microsoft.

Getting Bigger

About 98 percent of A52's workload is oriented to high-end commercials, 30 to 40 percent of that volume is post produced and mastered in HD. Tobin says that trend is growing.

Last year A52 saw a lot of HD commercials being produced for high-profile special events such as the Super Bowl. This year many standard advertising campaigns have also since shifted to HD.

"The HD process does take longer, and the razor-sharp resolution is challenging, which allows the talents of our artists to shine through with new levels of credibility and realism," says Tobin. "Everyone here is a part of the fulfillment of the HD promise, and we want it to be as easy as possible for our clients to migrate to HD, to give them access to all the benefits of versioning for multiformat distribution, and to make their finished products as impressive as possible."

Autodesk, Burn, Flame, Inferno, Maya, Smoke, Stone, and Wire are registered trademarks or trademarks of Autodesk, Inc. in the USA and other countries. All other brand names, product names, or trademarks belong to their respective holders. Autodesk reserves the right to alter product offerings and specifications at any time without notice, and is not responsible for typographical or graphical errors that may appear in this document. © 2006 Autodesk, Inc. All rights reserved.

Autodesk®