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—Bill Romeo
 Senior Vice-President
 Ascent Media

Autodesk Tools Provide DI Workflow for Fox's *Lie To Me*

Autodesk Lustre Used for Color Grading and Autodesk Smoke Used for Conform and Titles

Image courtesy of Ascent Media.

Based on the real-life discoveries of behavioral scientist Paul Ekman, the Fox television series "Lie To Me," starring Tim Roth, follows Dr. Cal Lightman and his team of deception experts as they assist law enforcement and government agencies to expose the truth. For Season Two of the popular drama, Ascent Media's Entertainment TV facility in Santa Monica is using Autodesk® Lustre® software for digital color grading and Autodesk® Smoke® editorial finishing software to complete conform and titles.

The series is shot locally in Los Angeles on the Arriflex D-21. During production, digital assets arrive from set on OB1 data drives and are ingested daily onto the SAN. Utilizing a proprietary DiTV workflow, Lustre is employed to color correct and create selected takes for dailies. Final conform is done on Smoke shooting in Arri Log C. The files are published for Ascent Colorist Pankaj Bajpai to color grade the final picture in Lustre. At this stage, the show benefits from the flexibility of having access to the dailies color metadata as well as the full range of original images.

"This tapeless workflow is very efficient, in a large part because of how well Lustre and Smoke talk to each other. Because everything remains as data throughout the process, we can do concurrent servicing. For example, titles can be done in Smoke while color grading is being done in Lustre," explains Bill Romeo, senior VP at Ascent Media. He adds, "The all-in-one-box approach to editorial finishing makes for an easy integration of the Smoke toolset into our workflow."

Autodesk Smoke has been used for some time at Ascent for graphics, titling and effects; however, the pipeline integration with Lustre was driven in part by the company's acquisition of the assets of PostWorks LA, LLC in December of 2008. Ascent was already moving toward file-based workflows, and its purchase of Postworks helped accelerate its move into the tapeless world. Ascent's adoption of a fully digital pipeline has helped accommodate multiple television episodic projects with tight budgets and short turnaround schedules.

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Bajpai credits the facility's tapeless environment with providing a 30 percent time savings over tape-to-tape workflows. "The true benefit of the process is that regardless of how much time we have, we're able to spend most of it working creatively," he adds. "You're not making compromises, and you're allowing various people in the chain to have their say and contribute to the final outcome. It becomes a much more satisfying process creatively."

Using Lustre, Bajpai gives the show its esoteric soft, dark and gritty look, which taps into the emotions of the storyline and characters. Developing this signature look involves extensive collaboration with the show's DP, director and producers, who often sit in on digital intermediate (DI) sessions.

"I can make revisions quickly and on-the-fly during client-assisted sessions," Bajpai says. "We'll typically start a session with a preview, and then take everyone's notes and have a general discussion. Then we'll spend two to three hours going through the show, making tweaks along the way. Because of the way Lustre works, I can address changes they ask for very quickly — almost as if I am changing typeface color in a word processor. It's literally that fast."

Image courtesy of Ascent Media.

Bajpai cites the power windows in Lustre and its capability to burn, dodge and vignette as being extremely useful for the show. He also likes the automatic tracking tools. "Lustre has it all," he states. "There are an infinite number of power windows for burning and dodging and vignetting, and auto tracking tools so you don't have to manually track. Keying capabilities in Lustre also allow us to do very fine separations of color. Working on soft skin tones in a gritty environment like we do, all of these tools come in very handy, and are an enormous benefit to the show."

Ascent uses Smoke for titling the show. Once titles are built, they're brought in and composited in Smoke. This Autodesk workflow differs from the television standard. With Smoke integrated into the pipeline, titles can be set up far in advance, rather than having to wait until the color grading is completed.

"Working with Smoke provides this tremendous advantage in terms of our workflow, and one of our primary decisions for going with Smoke was based on our need to have a system that would be future

proof. Smoke is the ideal solution for going fully from 2K to 4K to HD, or whatever format we need in terms of resolution—and enable us to work with and share those files between the color grading, editorial and visual effects teams seamlessly," says Bajpai.

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—Pankaj Bajpai
Colorist
Ascent Media

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