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Los Angeles, CA

New York, NY

Project: Badge, Running Late,
Elements, 3 Spots for Nissan Altima

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—Todd Iorio
President and
Senior Visual Effect Supervisor
resolution LA / resolution NY

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Summary

Backed by the classic strains of Stevie Ray Vaughan's "Pride and Joy," "Badge" – one of a trio of ambitious spots created by resolution, a bicoastal creative company -- opens with the pristine grill of an attractive Nissan Altima, just as the car performs an impeccably controlled sideways drift across a desert tarmac. The other spots, "Running Late" and "Elements," both open at the "Nissan Test Facility", where the Altima is put through dozens of punishing environmental and mechanical tests before being lovingly pampered by their subsequent owners. In each case, the cars appear pristine and perfect, thanks mainly to the top tier talent at resolution.

An increasingly popular destination for the best in image and audio finishing, resolution (a division of Union Editorial) uses Autodesk® Flame® and Autodesk® Maya® software to provide visual effects, design, and mix for commercials, music videos, and film. Preparing to do some clean-up on a recent trio of spots highlighting the durability and good looks of the Nissan Altima automobile, resolution President; Todd Iorio and his team experienced a welcome surprise when the ad agency provided CAD files of the car in question. Iorio spoke with Autodesk about how this way of working benefited resolution's clients, as well as the company's artists.

The Challenge

Initially bid as a fairly straightforward clean-up job, Iorio and his team were surprised when they received CAD files together with the film footage to be used in the Nissan advertisements. While CAD data files

are typically requested on jobs with a high computer graphics (CG) component, these advertisements were never billed as such during the bidding process.

"We basically bid this job as if it were a typical automotive clean-up and color correction project," says Iorio. "During the bidding process, there was no mention of CG work, but the agency producer showed up on the first day with CAD models of the Altima. It was a surprise, but not a particularly unpleasant one. It was really like we'd reached a point where handing over CAD models is suddenly the norm for every spot. This isn't an ad where the car does flips or turns into a robot, but we knew these elements could still help immensely. It also showed a great deal of confidence both in our abilities and our toolset."

In fact, what might have seemed like a communication disconnect soon proved to be a creative boon, as the unexpected CAD models enabled new approaches to particularly tough shots. Of the three spots, perhaps the biggest challenge was presented on "Badge," a spot that opens with an immaculate close-up of the Nissan logo on the Altima front grill. The stunning establishing shot is made all the more impressive by the fact that it was originally obscured by a large camera rig.

"That rig was a big challenge, because it effectively covered up the whole road in front of the car, as well as being prominent in reflections on a lot of the sheetmetal," Iorio explains. "Some problematic camera

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angles meant there was little tracking information for us to pull from, and we ended up creating a lot of elements from scratch using Autodesk Maya. It became a manual process for much of that spot.”

As if the challenges posed by “Badge” weren’t enough, both “Running Late” and “Elements” provided the resolution team with some intense challenges, particularly when it came to reflection and lighting:

“The hero of the campaign is the car, and our job is to make the cars look as beautiful as possible, while keeping scenes realistic,” says Iorio. “All three spots involved a great deal of light moving across sheetmetal and reflections of the surrounding environment in the paint of the car. Creating believable reflections required lots of imagination and technological expertise.”

In each case, the ability of both Flame and Maya to easily integrate CAD files and models made for better spots, according to Iorio,

“With the easy interaction between Flame and Maya and the pipeline they provide for using these CAD models, we had incredible flexibility in our creative process. What was more, our clients could really get involved with how we were responding to their requests.”

The Solutions

“Being able to use CAD data isn’t just for car spots with heavy effects anymore” says Iorio. “Being able to easily port CAD models of the Nissan Altima directly into Flame and Maya gave us the chance to really maximize the time we had, giving us more time to be creative. We were able to bring the models into Flame for camera tracking and combine that with renders from Maya to give us more time for creative exploration with the clients. We were able to do all the stuff we normally do, but in a far more efficient way.”

According to Iorio, integrating the CAD data enabled the team to concentrate less on dealing with frame-by-frame problems and more on the creative tasks associated with making entire shots look really beautiful.

“We treated things more like a 3D composite than live action footage,” says Iorio. “We brought the 3D model into Maya and rendered it out, so we could have some initial mattes and surfaces. We also brought that model into Flame and performed some basic projections to get the textures on areas of the car we wanted to polish. We spent less time looking at tedious and time-consuming repainting, and more time making the reflections and lighting better, and being



Images courtesy of resolution LA.

generally more creative with the overall look. The results were much better, because we were able to be more creative and more accurate with the look of the car while spending less time. We also enjoyed far more freedom with the client when it came to revisions.”

The Results

The sheer beauty of the Nissan spots has already paid dividends in the form of other, similar jobs, but it is the new way of working that has Iorio and resolution most pleased:

“Flame has really changed the way we work,” says Iorio. “Flame has long been a great tool for individual shots, but it wasn’t always the best tool for a commercial shop like ours. Spots like these are not dealing with new worlds full of spaceships and aliens. This is advertising for the real world, and Flame is now a big timesaver. Having more time means we can be more creative, feel the spot as a whole, and deal with shots in proper context. We can build jobs interactively and collaboratively like never before, and we can perform tasks exceptionally quickly, even with HD footage. For the Nissan spots, the producers were very impressed that we were able to step in and handle more work than was initially envisioned for the job. Everything was taken care of on time and on budget. There were a few late nights, of course, but not a whole lot of them. You can’t ask for much more than that.”

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