

Zee Networks
(www.zeetelevision.com)
(www.zeenetwork.com)
Mumbai, India

Autodesk® Smoke®
Autodesk® Lustre®
Autodesk® 3ds Max®

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— Vipul Bhalala
Creative Supervisor
and Smoke Artist
Zee Networks

Zee Networks Channel Branding Goes Up in Smoke

How Autodesk Smoke Helps Indian Media Giant Zee Networks Brand and Support Multiple Channels Seen across Five Continents



Image courtesy of Zee Network.

While Autodesk® Smoke® software is widely respected as a top nonlinear editing and finishing solution, the artists at Zee Networks have discovered its power as a hardcore graphics machine. They are pushing Smoke to help achieve remarkably engaging artistic visions, creating 3D CG illusions that look like the product of a high-end 3D animation software.

Summary

At Zee Networks' Mumbai, India operation, 12 Smoke artists work in shifts around the clock to create a cavalcade of promos, program opens, and other broadcast design elements for the more than 40 channels that Zee Networks delivers to over 500 million viewers in over 167 countries. Despite this heavy workload, each promo is a visually refreshing and distinctive artistic gem that entertains viewers while defining each channel's unique identity and programs.

Zee Networks also has Autodesk® Lustre® software for realtime color grading. Lustre is pivotal to the company's plans to convert its library of 80,000 hours of programming to high-definition, color grade its reality TV series, and ultimately perform digital intermediate postproduction on its original feature films.

Zee Networks also has three seats of Autodesk® 3ds Max® software for 3D animation. But it's Smoke that stoke the fires at Zee's popular channels by helping to generate an assortment of over 10 promos a day — often using just the tools in Smoke.

As a leader in Indian entertainment and culture, Zee Networks is a powerhouse that broadcasts a variety of channels via broadcast, cable, and satellite, including its flagship Zee TV, the world's largest producer and provider of Hindi television programming; as well as Zee Cinema for Hindi films and Zee Studios for English movies.

The Challenge

At Zee Networks, the Smoke department never sleeps, working feverishly to satisfy the appetite each Zee channel has for promos and broadcast design elements.

"We have a team of 45 directors that place orders with the Smoke department for any promos or graphic elements they need, and it's usually a rush. Sometimes we may only get a few hours or a half-day to produce a promo from start to finish," said Vipul Bhalala, creative supervisor and smoke artist for Zee Networks.

Autodesk®

"In my long career, I've used top 3D animation software like 3ds Max, but under these circumstances, where swift turnaround speed is crucial, there's no time to wait for images and scenes to render," Bhalala said. "We've gravitated to Smoke for our promo work because it's powerful, interactive, and gives us immediate output."

Besides the need for speed, every promo and interstitial piece has to have its own distinctive look, style, and story geared to attracting the show's target audience.

"Inspiration has to hit quickly, and we have to be able to act on our creative visions," said Bhalala. "We have to turn our creative ideas into signature pieces of art that captivate and awe our viewers while achieving the business they are designed to do—such as set the tone for a new show, or tell viewers about upcoming schedules and when to tune in for specials."

The Zee Networks' Smoke team is comprised of artists with talents in fine art, sculpture, and graphics design, among other disciplines. Being skilled artists means that Zee's Smoke team can maximize the advanced paint, graphics, and image manipulation tools within Action—the visual effects compositing environment within Smoke—and how to get the most out of them. They can use the paint tools in Smoke to draw and paint as well as pre-visualize on the software's electronic canvas.

The Solution

"Smoke has 3D tools, 3D text, virtual cameras, extrude, reveal, emboss, warps, 3D lighting, and digital video effects that we can use to give viewers the illusion of 3D," Bhalala said.

"Our artists can import textures, live action, 3D models, stock images, photographs, archival film, clips, logos, and other external assets they may want to use for their creations, as well as build audio tracks, all within the timeline-based Smoke environment," Bhalala added.

Bhalala explained, "we can start with 3D fonts, like the letters 'I' or 'O,' and then use the extrude tool to stretch out their sides to form new 3D shapes—like making a pencil from the letter I; or a music speaker from the letter O. We can also use the paint module to draw 2D objects, fill them in, and then put masks along their edges to give them the depth and perspective of 3D—like drawing sides on a guitar to convince viewers it's a 3D instrument. At times, Zee's composites can amount to hundreds of layers, with complex embellishments and refinements at every stage of the game. Smoke handles this load with realtime interactivity that supports our creative efforts and outputs the finished product quickly so we can meet the constant operational demands of our 24-hour channels."



Image courtesy of Zee Network.

Zee's channels are currently standard definition, but in the next six to 12 months they hope to migrate to 720/60p high definition. Smoke not only handles HD resolution well, it also allows Zee's artists to work in 2K near-film resolution whenever promos and trailers are slated for cinematic release.

Another critical advantage stems from the smooth, integrated workflow between all of the Autodesk solutions in the facility. With an InfiniBand high-speed network backbone, it's faster and easier to share projects, media, and timelines between all of the Autodesk products: Smoke, Lustre, and 3ds Max. With the help of Autodesk infrastructure products: Autodesk® Wiretap™ and Autodesk Back burner™ technology, Zee's artists and editors can easily use the spare capacity and resources of any idle Autodesk software to help increase productivity.

The Results

Zee Networks has quickly become one of India's most prominent media organizations because of its unique, compelling Hindi and Indian cultural programming.

The strategic use of sophisticated, eye-catching broadcast design—created primarily using Smoke—has played a major role in making Zee's channels very popular and competitive.

"We have found innovative ways to use Smoke as a fast, capable broadcast graphics machine; and when people see what we're doing, they're really dazzled by the software's unsung graphics capabilities," said Bhalala. "Smoke is feature rich, user-friendly, interactive and fast—all of which helps our artists and designers realize their ideas more effectively and deliver the highest possible quality and productivity."

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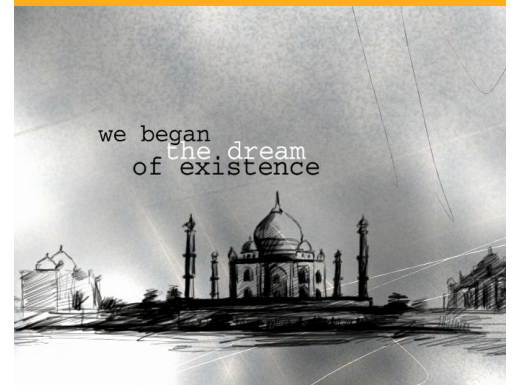


Image courtesy of Zee Network.