

Project: "SCRATCH CASE STUDY"

PlasterCITY on a Roll

in LA



PlasterCITY is on a Roll with the SCRATCH-RED 4K Workflow

PlasterCITY Digital Post is a highly respected, technically savvy team of post artists making it big in LA. They believe in the power of the latest digital technologies for high-impact imagery, including the use of the SCRATCH-RED 4K Workflow.

Since meeting in the 2nd grade as creative youngsters, PlasterCITY Digital Post founders Michael Cioni and Ian Vertovec went on to make short films and videos together, and grew up to launch successful post production careers in Los Angeles. At Southern Illinois University, the two won back-to-back Student Emmys and Kodak Emerging Filmmakers awards with their PBS series program *alt.news 26:46*. After college, the two went on to win five Regional Emmys for the PBS syndication of *alt.news*, putting them way ahead of the curve with the founding of PlasterCITY Digital Post in 2003. Teaming up with PlasterCITY Productions founder, Christopher Coppola and Elyse Roberts, PlasterCITY Digital Post was among the first data-centric laboratories structured around tapeless workflows for post production.

"We got started in 1999 working with the Sony DSR Series of FireWire Cameras. I bought a Sony PD150 DVCAM, Ian bought a 1st generation G4, a copy of Final Cut and we scored copies of Commotion DV and After Effects," says Cioni. "On our trips to the 1999 and 2000 Emmys in LA, we noticed not much was happening in the way of Final Cut post production. We also noticed Apple began ramping up its professional support with the announcement of OSX, XRaids and AJA KonaHD support. We began coupling a



Online Conformist Phil Beckner conforms Chris Cornell's latest music video "Scream" for Interscope Records

data-centric workflow with an Apple infrastructure, which seemed to be a promising way to balance quality with price. It also allowed us to begin building bridges necessary to create a digital intermediate laboratory that could eventually compete head-to-head with the heavy artillery, i.e. a more traditional post production methodology."

Cioni adds, "Tapeless is the future of film and television because we can get the end result to the market faster, at less cost and at a quality that is on par with 35mm. Clients have a long history with tape-based systems – the methodology, timing and the costs. So we were challenged with making the

clients feel comfortable with the new terminology, pricing structures, and workflow of the data-centric approach. Experimentation was real proof of the digital claims and clients rarely leave a data-centric finish dissatisfied."

The foresight of the PlasterCITY team has enabled them to build a solid business based on evolved digital technology, including digital cameras and workflows that are changing the way the industry has worked for several decades. "We're able to work with a variety of formats from different digital cameras - Arri D21, Genesis, F23, Silicon Imaging, Phantom and the RED ONE™ 4K Digital Camera, as well as all those numerous outside

services” says Cioni. “We purchased the SCRATCH® Digital Process Solution to augment our DI pipeline because it can handle so many formats - such as RED CODE RAW files, DPX, Tiff, Quicktime, and XML files – and

to SCRATCH so the colorist can perform non-linear one-light grades from the 4K source. From there we use one of PlasterCITY’s custom applications (PlasterTools) and generate an ALE in our RED Daily

Cioni adds, “SCRATCH’s versatility allows us to use the same system for conforming RED raw files at full resolution in 2K or 4K. In SCRATCH, we can conform entire feature films in a fraction of the time it takes for film scanning or HD tape assembly. With SCRATCH, we always have the ability to load 2K and 4K debayered files into any color system, including one of our two Pablo systems for final DI. This process makes best use of our systems with respect to efficiency and return on investment. The Pablos aren’t always tied up with conforming and SCRATCH can handle it very quickly and efficiently.”



Scene from “Hybrid.” Image courtesy of Stallion Media

sharing it over our central SAN makes for easy interfacing to our Pablo, Avid, and Apple systems.”

application. Files are mastered with color correction to HDCAM, SR or D5 tape completely render free.

“We’ve done over 100 RED jobs using SCRATCH in this way,” says Cioni. “In addition to conforming, we use SCRATCH for all the dailies in low res. With the client in the review session, we can make changes in real time so the client has instant feedback. This is a huge time and cost savings,” says Cioni.

PlasterCITY’s list of feature projects using the SCRATCH-RED 4K workflow

The SCRATCH-RED 4K Workflow

“We’re seeing a lot of production companies and DPs make use of the RED camera because of image quality, compact design, cinema lenses and overall lower costs. RED footage makes up a significant portion of our work,” says Cioni. “As early adopters, we’ve worked closely with the RED team to design and deliver powerful end-to-end tapeless and tape-based workflows. SCRATCH is the ideal post tool for RED footage because it’s the only software that can deliver real time results of color grading, down-converting and window-burn dailies from a soft-mounted firewire drive.”



Scene from the TV Series “26 Miles”

PlasterCITY has three SCRATCH systems running on Boxx workstations. Two are used as real-time SCRATCH datacine systems for RED footage. An on-set firewire shuttle drive is mounted

RED source R3D metadata is stored in the ALE file generated by RED Daily, allowing for the Avid to output standard EDLs that will match back perfectly to the RED source media for DI.

includes “The Informant” (Warner Bros), “Labor Pains” (Nu Image), “Need for Speed” (EA Sports), “Hybrid” (Stallion Media), “S. Darko” (Fox) and “Tree of Life” to name a few.

PlasterCITY has also done the post production in SCRATCH for numerous music videos, including Chris Cornell's "Scream" and "Part of Me."

The third SCRATCH system is used for experimentation and as backup for an increased workload. Chief Technology Officer, Stephen Beres says, "Because the RED world changes so fast we maintain a system for testing and development. This gives us the most up to date information about how a camera build will respond without having to take a machine out of production. That way, we know we are using the best and most current technologies and techniques for processing RED footage."

Beres adds, "The XML output of SCRATCH allows us to work with RED metadata in applications that would normally not have access to it. By leveraging the XML export, we are able to code application to "push" the metadata from SCRATCH to other offline and online tools."

SCRATCH Brings in New Work

The SCRATCH digital workflow has also opened up a whole new world of commercial television work for PlasterCITY. Because the RED ONE camera captures with cinema lenses and can record hours of 4K RAW media, it is rapidly becoming more common in commercial work. To date, PlasterCITY has used SCRATCH as its digital-dailies workflow for over 60 commercials, including such clients as Coca Cola, Gatorade, Coffee Mate, Claritin, American Express and Subway.

"Whether the commercials are shot using RED or another camera, SCRATCH can handle the entire post production process from conforming, to color grading reviews, finishing and output to any data or tape format. For the grading, the EDL comes in and SCRATCH is used for the trimming and prep. We use the Tangent CP200 color control panels and the colorist goes at

it asap," says Cioni. "SCRATCH has turned out to be the best tool for daily circumstances. We can do a lot of high quality work in shorter amounts of time."

"There are a lot of things to like about SCRATCH. Rendering is simplified; the way it creates folders for easy tracking of iterations, especially VFX; the review of dailies, the easy conforming and constructs, and it works in real time," says Cioni. "A good example of SCRATCH at work was a History Channel job that acquired 22 hours of RED footage and needed HDCAM SR tapes of everything with color correction. We were able to soft-mount each shuttle drive and grade immediately with one SCRATCH and layoff in another. This tandem workflow allowed us to deliver 22 hours of

highest quality results for their clients. All three companies have software that works compatibly and with RED footage. To wrangle with the numerous and large files moving back and forth, they also have 250 terabytes of storage on a 4 channel 4Gb SAN. "We're up against very high-end DI houses so we need the right tools to compete. For us, it's never about only one tool, but the integration of different tools that complement each other and the artists who use them. Using the most versatile tools makes for a more streamlined digital pipeline, customizable for both a tape-based and tapeless world."

"We took an educated, calculated risk in building a comprehensive digital pipeline and it's paying off for us," says Cioni. "The right tools are in place, as



One of PlasterCITY's SCRATCH digital dailies bays

graded RED dailies to SR tape in less than 48 hours. Now that is a very cool use of digital technology."

Clearly Defined Methodology

PlasterCITY uses a variety of digital tools from ASSIMILATE (three SCRATCH systems), Quantel (two Pablo systems and Gene Pool), Apple (10 Final Cut Pro editing systems for 2K and HD), and others to produce the

well as a talented staff of 22, for us to do what we enjoy most – excellent post production that delivers a highly satisfying viewing experience for our clients and audiences."