

the *DI R-evolution*

assimilate

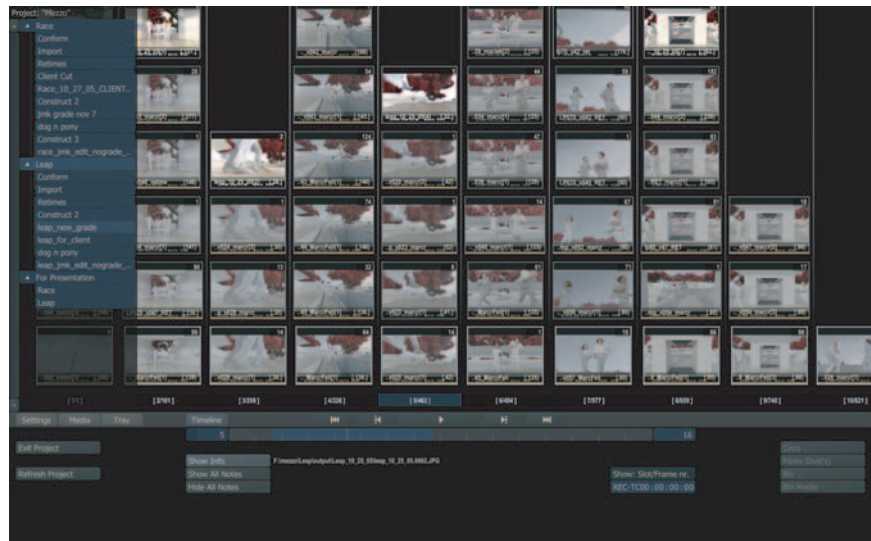
SCRATCH Brings Stability to DI Pipeline at SWAY Studios

At SWAY, efficiency and quality of work is paramount. Tools should never get in the way of the creative process and the SCRATCH Data-Centric Workflow Solution fits this profile. SCRATCH was brought in at the last minute to replace a competitive DI solution so that the project could be completed on time and within a stable DI pipeline. SWAY has high praise for SCRATCH and the ASSIMILATE team that stayed the course with them.

SWAY Studio, founded in Los Angeles in 2001 by Mark Glaser, is a high-end computer animation and visual effects boutique that specializes in photo-real CGI and character animation for broadcast commercials. Like most boutiques, they're always working with a budget squeeze, yet they continually turn out mind-blowing work that keeps the projects rolling in. Their global client list includes commercials for McDonalds, Cingular, Pontiac, Lexus, Honda, and Reebok to name a few.

Most recently, SWAY developed a commercial spot for Mezzo products in Southeast Asia, the first of two projects awarded by director Joseph Kosinski. Robert Nederhorst, Visual Effects Supervisor at SWAY, could feel the rush of excitement when taking on the challenge of a commercial with a completely computer-generated (CG) environment that was heavy on photorealistic animation and 3D effects, as well as seamless integration of live models into the CG background. "We had approximately six weeks to complete the first commercial that included shooting in 35mm film, creating the CG environment, 2 minutes of tracking, rotoscoping, rig removal, editing, color grading, rendering, compositing - essentially everything, including comps that were incredibly difficult," said Nederhorst. "When I got into this business, I wanted to work on killer projects with really great people and this was definitely one of those opportunities."

Nederhorst describes the creative development for this project as one of his more interesting



Mezzo commercial: Rob Nederhorst of SWAY uses SCRATCH SCAFFOLDS in its CONstruct mode

undertakings. "Kosinski met with our team and talked about the methodology and look to achieve. His genius lies in explaining complex yet subtle nuances he wants to achieve and bringing you into his creative vision. He has a clear way of explaining his concepts so that our team could visualize his thinking." Kosinski's visual concepts provided the impetus for him and Nederhorst to embark on a scouting trip for sites that would give them a real location from which to create a synthetic yet flawless photorealistic CG environment. "Setting high standards for ourselves, we were on a mission to get the CG background just right, so we actually did a digital scout using Google Earth to find the location we needed. We shot panoramic images of the location so we could base our lighting pipeline on

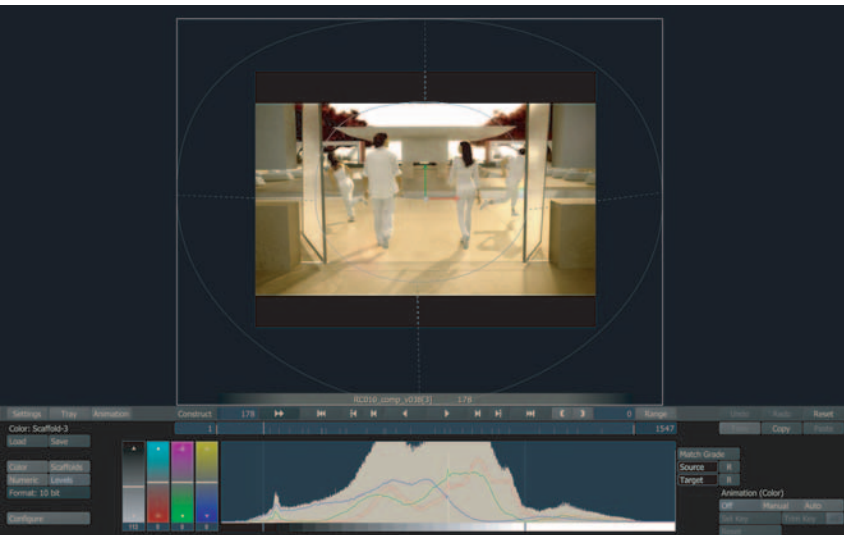
that. In the end, we loaded geographic data into a terrain generator, rotating cameras, and placing the viewer in exactly the right location. It paid off because we got exactly what we needed to create the look and environment the director wanted."

"The ASSIMILATE team came in and helped us define and set up a new DI pipeline. Even at the onset, the ASSIMILATE support was amazing."

"In evaluating multiple DI systems, we determined that SCRATCH really met, and in some cases, exceeded our needs in terms of speed, stability, and easy integration within the facility pipeline," says Nederhorst. "The ASSIMILATE team came in and

Nederhorst also worked as the colorist for the Mezzo commercial and says, "Because we were using SCRATCH with the SCAFFOLDS option, we had the multi-layer grading stack and secondary color grading to create the custom look we were striving to achieve. I was able to do a lot of special treatments with soft masking, utilizing the tracker rather than hand animating - a huge time savings," says Nederhorst. "The Mezzo project also had a huge amount of intense color grading in order to achieve a natural, photorealistic CG environment. This means we had to work in neutral color space and that way, it was like we were using photographed footage. Dealing with graded/telecine footage usually is a real pain for compositing because the colors are all over the map. But again, SCRATCH made it easy. In the CONstruct mode, I could create multiple versions, easily review all the versions, and do my final selections for the client reel and the director's reel. The same was true for visual effects. This project was heavy on visual effects and we could review all the versions in CONstruct mode."

Nederhorst adds, "It's killer that ASSIMILATE can offer us the entire DI pipeline. We work around the telecine step by working from film plates and full negatives scans rather than video resolution. We can then conform the edit and do all our final DI work in SCRATCH. It makes our job a whole lot easier to do the DI, reviews, and final check in one integrated studio. It's a big deal for productivity, speed in getting the projects done, and quality of the final master."



Mezzo commercial: Primary color grading in SCRATCH

helped us define and set up a new DI pipeline. Even at the onset, the ASSIMILATE support was amazing. We had a really great introduction to SCRATCH and very responsive, knowledgeable help was literally a phone call away. We had the data management set up within two hours, with all the myriad Mezzo project images going through the SCRATCH system. In fact, all the artists were easily sending their work to SCRATCH via the XML pipeline. I was initially not excited by that but once we implemented it, I saved at least an hour or two every day. Being able to easily get data into the DI box is such a fantastic feature. I literally was not expecting it. Fantastico! So, in a short period of time we were ready to go, working on the assembly, editing, color grading, playback and review - the whole DI workflow. I could write the ad for SCRATCH. It was that phenomenal."

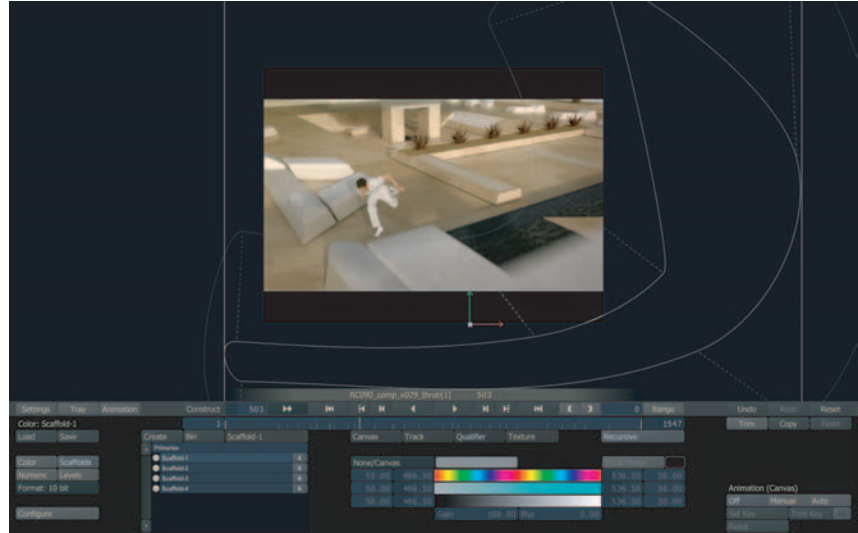
"Because of SCRATCH, we were able to bring the Mezzo project in on schedule and budget"

The decision team at SWAY included Mark Glaser, Creative Director; Matt Winkel, Head of Production; and Nederhorst as Colorist and Visual Effects Supervisor. "I'm in the classic position of begging for a solution like SCRATCH and the entire team realizes that this was one, very smart move. Because of SCRATCH, we were able to bring the Mezzo project in on schedule and budget," says Nederhorst. "There was also lots of frosting on this cake," added Nederhorst. "ASSIMILATE was incredibly responsive to our situation. They helped us define and build the DI pipeline and it's huge that they could come through with immediate bug fixes and requests for features."

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Moving forward, all projects at SWAY will be going through SCRATCH with SCAFFOLDS. "High-end visual effects are our bread and butter. We have some hot projects lined up and want to have the same experience we had with SCRATCH on the Mezzo project. We have commercial spots for Cadillac, Chevrolet, and more already in the hopper. And we have our first HD job coming up for a Super Bowl spot. It's all good news because SCRATCH is our DI pipeline and we know that SCRATCH can handle it all."



Mezzo commercial: Soft masking in SCRATCH SCAFFOLDS rather than doing hand animations