

Cefai Design expands business with SCRATCH

The introduction of ASSIMILATE's SCRATCH® Digital Process Solution at Cefai Design, a boutique post production house in Geneva, Switzerland, is generating new business opportunities. Launching the country's first SCRATCH-based DI service has expanded its prospects from VFX and CG for confidential concepts and prototype films into full-blown post on independent features and "advertainment."

Why SCRATCH: Switzerland has a long history of minuscule companies working for giant brands. But to succeed, you've got to meet the highest quality standards and show creative flair, yet without breaking the bank. SCRATCH delivers in all these aspects.

Pipeline: We decided to use SCRATCH as much as possible, and it's now the core of our pipeline. We use it primarily for conform, grading and finishing, and also for shot review and overall project management. When appropriate, we don't bother using Final Cut but edit directly in SCRATCH. SCRATCH's versioning feature lets us build up a project from storyboard to VFX. In pre-production we use SCRATCH for "grading look" studies.



SCRATCH set-up at Cefai Design - Image courtesy of Cefai Design Productions SA

Advertainment: Our corporate clients are shifting away from traditional TV commercials and pioneering the use of short films on the Internet and digital signage. The content is sophisticated and requires a cinematographic like workflow, which SCRATCH excels at.

Projects: For Swiss-watch brand Roger Dubuis, SCRATCH was central to the interactive review sessions with the agency's creative director. We pre-rendered several versions in full HD, which the clients were able to compare in SCRATCH. We did real-time speed changes and color grading too to fine-tune the results to our client's taste. For Nespresso, SCRATCH became the editing station for a complex four-minute motion-design project that involved lots of CG and versions.

Films: We recently completed a RED 4K post production consultancy and color grading job for Humpback Whales, a promotional short for famous underwater cinematographer Didier Noirod (principal DP for the feature Oceans, coming in 2010). Grading underwater imagery has specific challenges, besides the fact that rushes look all monochromatic blue at first. Cameras often move 360° through a wide range of lighting conditions. Also, underwater DPs usually shoot in continuous takes, changing exposure with pre-set buttons. To maintain exposure consistency across scenes, we used SCRATCH to re cut specific shots into small parts, or animate the opacity with a Scaffold. Light and colors fall off more in water than they do in air, so we tracked masks to isolate and grade animals in Z-depth. With shots taken at different depths, we also used vectors to align the blue of the ocean to a reference color chosen by the DP.



Image courtesy of Didier Noirod & Cefai Design Productions

Productive: I love and live by creative software, and I've been nothing but amazed by SCRATCH's performance. The GUI is extremely well designed and puts SCRATCH in another league compared to mainstream applications from Adobe or Apple. The workspace is uncluttered, has minimal windowing, and is nicely gesture-operated via a pen and tablet.

Efficient: I recently prepared a 90-minute film delivery for a client, but the DP wanted to alter two shots at the last minute. SCRATCH automatically renders only the frames that have been changed, so the final render in full HD took just a couple minutes.

Rapid with RED 4K: In well-trained hands, SCRATCH is the strongest application for a RED-RAW workflow and color space management. Loading 500Gb of RED-RAW footage at 4K takes just a few seconds and choices of color spaces and gamma LUTs are all done in context, in real-time.

Cool features: SCRATCH's color grading capabilities get better and better at every release. I like the vectors feature a lot, which lets you work on isolated tones without using keys. Also, SCRATCH's shot-management capabilities, specifically being file-based with the ability to mix multiple media – QTs, R3D, DPX, EXR and versions – make working with SCRATCH a rewarding experience.

Quality time: Working in real-time, SCRATCH makes you extremely efficient and is a pleasure to work with in long sessions. Clients appreciate its speed, interactivity, and general handling of their projects.