

Parisian facility moving into HD and film with eQ

Feb 04

FX, a Paris post production facility, is located in Boulogne-Billancourt, just west of the city where most leading broadcasters have their operations. Despite its modest size, FX offers its broadcasting and corporate customers a full range of services, from offline editing through to ready-to-air tapes, including (as the company's name implies) special effects, sound recording, a shooting stage and 2D and 3D animation. The company, founded by Isabelle Petiot in 1996, does a wide variety of work and has established an especially strong reputation in two key markets: large corporate events and children's programming. It has also become the first French facility to acquire an eQ to spearhead a movement into first HD and now feature films.



Projecting into the future

When people go to a boutique facility, they generally expect to get highly customised service. Isabelle Petiot has built FX precisely on this principle. "Our approach has always been to listen closely to our customers' requests and to find the best technical solutions for each project," she says. "On the corporate side, for example, customers are increasingly asking us to add that 'special touch' to really get the message across. On the broadcasting side, producers are being pressed to deliver more for less. In both areas, HD is becoming a key to improve quality and ensure future distribution. That's why we chose Quantel's eQ so that we could help producers make the transition to HD, without imposing any constraints or changing basic habits or workflow.

"Quantel's system is today the only multi-resolution system that really works," she continues. "It allows us to come in at any stage of the production process and to provide quality services and great value for money in both SD and HD. Its editing, effects and colour grading features make it a really efficient workhorse and, while we expected it to buttress our existing business, we thought it might give us a niche entry into the feature film business. We were pleasantly surprised, to say the least, at how fast we were able to get into the picture."



The struggle between light and darkness

In fact, just weeks after having acquired its eQ, FX was commissioned by its long-time partner Carrère Group (a leading French entertainment provider) to colour grade and conform an animation feature film.

Benoît Carpentier, FX's leading editor explains. "In fact, we're just finishing up our first animation feature film project, *The Three Wise Men*, a modernised version of the Christmas fable co-produced by Carrère group in France and Animagic Studio and TeleMadrid in Spain. We received material originated in Madrid and edited in Angoulême (in south-western France where a flourishing animation community has been built up over the last 10 years). Transferring the files and co-ordinating the workflow between the various elements was really a breeze. However, what really made the work interesting was the colour grading process. When the director Antonio Navarro first came up to Paris, he had simply worked on a mixture of Avid and Beta edits and had never seen the material in HD. The fact that he was able to visualise the images in full HD resolution made all the difference in the world. He began a truly creative process and virtually created a colour code, reinforcing the whole film's narrative process. The story is now literally a struggle between the forces of light and darkness, with the use of bright blue skies and heavenly light to ward off deep threatening reds and eerie dark shadows."

Once the creative work was completed, FX conformed all the existing elements, managed various time codes generated by the different sources (25fps. off-line material, SD, HD and 24P) to finalise the master, create several different versions - with separate opening and closing titling sequences in English, Spanish and French - and render colour grading decisions. "At no point," insists Benoît Carpentier, "did we have to make any creative compromises for technical reasons."



Take two

FX is now gearing up to do the colour grading of its first live-action feature. "This first experience has prompted us to develop a full-service offer," concludes Isabelle Petiot. "We want to provide line management facilities to our customers, taking on editing, effects, colour grading and conforming for SD and HD material and then move into downstream services, such as output to film and transfers to other media, such as DVD and internet distribution. We really believe we've made the right choice with eQ, simply because it's the most versatile, cost-effective and open system on the market. It's flexible and has a wide range of efficient features for every stage of post-production work. We're looking forward to the V2 which will allow us to get to move on to the next stage in our development."