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## NAB 2006 round-up

Well, once again there just wasn't enough time to see everything (well for me at least), but I caught a bit of the buzz and saw some interesting things.

Many people I spoke to in the post-production industry complained that there really wasn't much this year to get excited about. In fact, two of the more interesting things happened off the site: some digital camera tests, and the Creative Bridge / Assimilate pairing. But more on those later.

NAB 2006 was host to around 105,000 attendees this year, a really huge number by any standards. Here's a run-down of some of what went on.

**Grass Valley** was demo'ing a preview of version 2.6 of its Bones post-production framework. This latest version is a great improvement over previous versions, and now has a decent color grading engine, complete with unlimited shapes and keying and tracking capabilities. A stabilize node has been added to keep the restoration users happy (not to mention those who lament the Spirit's lack of pin registration). There's also a software version of the Luther 3D LUT management system implemented as a node, interestingly, this allows users to output images in XYZ color space from RGB using a supplied LUT, which makes it ideal for preparing material for digital cinema. There was also a Viper Filmstream camera coupled with an S-Two digital field recorder, demonstrating what could well become the new way to shoot movies.

And speaking of **S-Two**, they announced a smaller (and much more pleasing to the eye) digital field recorder, the S-Two Take 2. This is a scaled-down version of the big blue unit, though I'm told it's just as robust as its predecessor. The new DMag for it is around half the size of its brother (and has a reduced capacity), but can also be used in the Take 1 unit.

**Filmlight** announced the Northlight 2 film scanner. The upgraded scanner features the long-awaited infra-red

scanning mode for automated defect removal; unlike the Arri equivalent, it seems they have also been able to get it to work in a useful way.

**Digital Vision** made the bold claim that they now have the fastest grading system on the planet, although I see that it's being kept fairly low-key, at least in terms of the Digital Vision home page. The system uses 17 AMD multicore processors to get the speed boost, although it appears that much of the work is still done by the Nvidia 5500 GPU. Unfortunately I didn't get a chance to see it in person, so maybe I'll write more about it at a later date. Also announced were the new DVNR 2k image processing station for doing restoration work, and improved DVO grain and DVO dust tools.

**Autodesk** was swarming with people as usual, but there wasn't much to write home about, save for a preview of its collaborative Toxik 2007 system, which seems to have benefited greatly from the Alias acquisition.

On the conference side of things, there was a lot of focus on podcasting, and the only real post-production seminar of any note was a seminar led by James Cameron on the potential future of 3D. Interesting, but nothing we didn't see already at IBC 2005.

**Creative Bridge** were set up in a car park across the road from the convention center, but proved to be one of the most interesting things on show. The set-up is wonderfully simple, and beautifully executed. It's a trailer with a digital theatre. The projector output is controlled by an Assimilate Scratch system, and the seats were very comfortable. After about 20 minutes of sitting there in the dark, I could have been in a screening room anywhere. The real greatness of the idea comes when you consider the opportunities generated by a mobile screening room. Imagine this: you spend an entire day shooting footage using a Viper FilmStream (for example). At the end of the shoot, you walk over to the Creative Bridge trailer where the dailies have been loaded onto the Scratch during the day. Then you sit down and watch it all. Hell, you could probably even watch the dailies while you're driven home. So the next morning, you can get straight into filming the next scenes. Again, it sounds simple, but remember, this is not possible at all with photochemical film. And because it runs on Scratch, you can even toy with doing some color grading or effects if that's what you want.

Speaking of **Assimilate**, the latest version of Scratch has some UI enhancements (such as automatically generating CONstructs based on the directory structure of the image data), and it's now possible to license individual modules, such as color or dailies. There's a sister product, Scratch Remote, which allows users to log in to Scratch from an external location (we're getting close to my dream of doing a digital intermediate on the beach). Video output and pulldowns can be done on the fly, and there's Quicktime export which will make a lot of people very happy. I don't want to go into too much depth, as we'll be running a special feature on Scratch in a forthcoming article, but suffice to say it's really ahead of the competition.



Finally, rumours abound about a number of camera tests that were done off-site. Well, what I can say is that, to no-one's real surprise, Grass Valley's Viper Filmstream came out top of the pack, but to many people's surprise,

the \$9000 Canon XLH1 was second, beating a strong line of competitors.

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