



The Essential Mix SCRATCH Case Study

Ghost

SCRATCH® Boosts Opportunities for Ghost

Ghost in Copenhagen is now using SCRATCH® to enter a new phase of evolution and opportunity. As post production moves inexorably towards HD and file-based workflows, so service companies need to implement new and ever-more flexible ways of working, while keeping the bank manager happy.

At Ghost in Copenhagen, the biggest digital visual effects house in Scandinavia, they are doing exactly that with SCRATCH®, the data-centric workflow solution from ASSIMILATE. Dual SCRATCH systems are employed to expedite the post production on a range of HD and 2k projects. One is used as a dedicated grading, conforming and facility-wide media distribution hub. The second provides extra capacity when the workload increases, as well as a resource for training and creative color experimentation.

After nearly ten years in business, Ghost's reputation for delivering high-quality, design-led CG animation and visual effects has helped it to continually attract flagship Scandinavian advertising work for names such as Lego, Nokia, Siemens, Carlsberg and Tuborg beer. They often deliver the countless versions required for pan-European or global campaigns.

Ghost's credentials are such that it also has a long-time cooperation with London's Double Negative, a high-end film post production house. Ghost provides talent and services to Double Negative for several major features including *James Bond* movies, *Tomb Raider*, *Harry Potter*, *Alien vs. Predator* and more recently *Stardust*.

"Grading is a new business direction for Ghost," says the company's colorist Sascha Haber. "With our 3D pipeline well-established, we wanted to lay down an efficient 2D pipeline and to deliver more than just animation and VFX. For a very modest financial outlay, we were able to invest in two SCRATCH systems and a



Image courtesy of Ghost, Copenhagen, Denmark: Pan-European ad campaign for Coke Zero

nice digital projection suite. But with SCRATCH we get a lot more than just grading. Projects start and end in this room too."

A day in the life of Sascha Haber will see him employ SCRATCH on a multitude of tasks. First there's the input of rushes via the Bluefish card from HDSR or 2k data tapes, followed by a conform from EDL and then distribution of different shots and sequences to the company's various CG, compositing or editorial workstations. He might then be required to finesse a TV spot, using SCRATCH SCAFFOLDS to perform intricate selective color grading in a client-attend session. Next, SCRATCH might be required to import and playback 2k DPX effects shots under review for a feature film. At the end of the day he might be found outputting finished composites and sequences – either over the network to



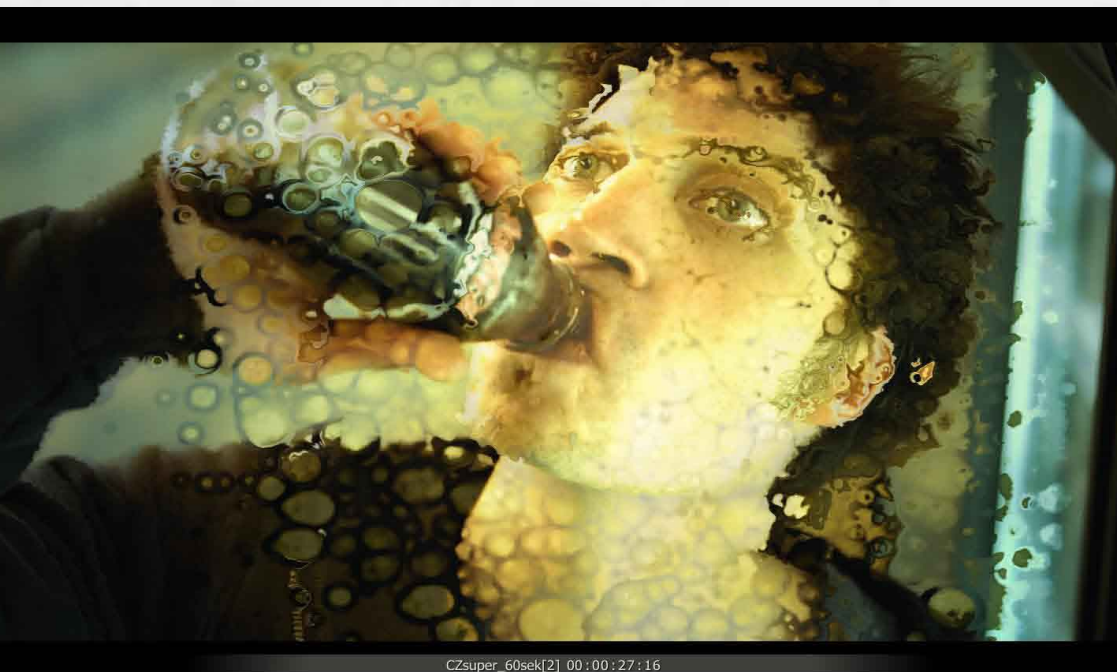
the company's editorial department as TGA files, or laying off to HDSR, or to data tape for a film-out at the local film lab. Or a client might call at the last moment and Haber will have to quickly fire off a QuickTime of the latest cut.

Ghost has been operating with SCRATCH since December 2006 and its impact was immediate. Two days out of the box Haber used SCRATCH to regrade at 2k a trailer for *Island Of The Lost Souls*, the biggest-ever Scandinavian fantasy film for which Ghost had delivered no fewer than 627 effects shots.

Since then every commercial the company has worked on has been touched by SCRATCH. More recently Haber has graded music videos for Danish hip-hop artist Ali Kazim and JaConfetti, as well as animated TV spots for Copenhagen's famous Tivoli Gardens. Next up are a pan-European ad campaign for Coke Zero, and the next avidly awaited spot for Lego Bionicle. Both projects will take advantage of SCRATCH's conforming capabilities and convenience for viewing, storing, and recalling multiple versions.

the image, without buttons being in the way. If we need to go back to a version that was made yesterday or last week, SCRATCH's folder structure is such that it is easy to navigate to that version and just play it. Conforming on SCRATCH is so fast and efficient that the director can do a new offline or online edit in the other room, and with one click we can assemble from the new EDL and play it. The clients see that we can make changes really fast, and everyone feels comfortable. For our pipeline, SCRATCH has really helped us to integrate our offline and online editing suites."

Versioning and deliverables are always something to contend with, but for Ghost there's the added dimension of catering for the wider Scandinavian market – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland – and Germany. "Just last week, we had agency people from across Scandinavia, and had to create 42 different versions of the Coke Zero spot for the different markets. This didn't just mean different cuts, but also having to contend with different crops, as well as scaling up and down for the film and TV deliverables too," says Haber.



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Image courtesy of Ghost, Copenhagen, Denmark: Pan-European ad campaign for Coke Zero

Haber says the interface and navigation around SCRATCH are winning features. "When you are doing stressful work while the clients are present – such as the DoP, producer, director and perhaps a load of agency people too – it's a good thing to have this straightforward interface. I love it. We can all focus on

Ghost is often required to create subtitles in different Scandinavian languages. "We have found a way of importing B&W DPX files into SCRATCH SCAFFOLDS for this purpose. The great thing is that we don't have to pre-render this separately in a compositing application," notes Haber.

Haber adds, "But all of this is very easy in SCRATCH. All you do is create a new output in the ConStruct module, set the resolution and aspect ratio you require and process to the disk. The scaling is done in real-time, and the color corrections are embedded and done in real-time too. The QuickTime export works like a charm. When a client asks for a master tape and a QT we don't have to render twice, we just set up on SCRATCH and 'bang', off it goes."

A further twist in the tale of deliverables is that



As for color grading with SCRATCH Haber says, “What I really like is the flexibility of the freeform shape tools in SCAFFOLDS for selective grading. You can quickly draw an outline around an object or an area, animate the size as required, and then grade within that shape. Pre-tracking is a cool, time-saving feature, as it will quickly let you know whether you can track a grade across a scene. Also, SCRATCH is very tightly integrated now with the Tangent panels, which make grading very easy to handle.”

To deepen its color-grading offer, particularly to the feature film market, Ghost is developing custom Look-Up-Tables (LUTs) with Nordic Film Laboratory. “SCRATCH’s structure for handling DPX files and LUTs is way better than other systems, and fits our visual effects pipeline perfectly. This is a great advantage when we work with other companies, such as Double Negative,” says Haber.

SCRATCH’s new Scene Detection tool has impressed Haber. “SCRATCH has had a boost of evolution in the last nine months, and it’s starting to really mature now. For example, Scene Detection is amazingly accurate, and gives you an efficient and fast way to apply coherent grades across a group of matching shots. It’s much better than scene detection systems I’ve seen in linear grading systems. It’s also very handy when you get an offline QT and a bad EDL; I match the DPX files and can reconstruct scene by scene.”

Ghost’s dual SCRATCH systems connect to the same frame store and share project files on the network, enabling the second system to be quickly deployed on overflow work. However, Haber is keen to see SCRATCH used for educational and experimental purposes too. He explains that Ghost has a flat hierarchy in which the company’s editors, animators and composers are all required to have a good all-round working knowledge of other systems. By operating SCRATCH they get a handle on conforming, color grading and the dynamics of the workflow – all helping to keep productivity high and populating the world with new SCRATCH artists.

As for the experimental side Haber says, “We are working with students at the Danish Film School. We encourage student DoPs to try out new looks and communicate new ideas through color. Because of the way SCRATCH works they can go completely overboard with color dynamics if they like.”

When asked about his favorite SCRATCH feature, Haber does not hesitate to answer. “The price. What you get for your money is a versatile, file-based workflow system that happens to make conforming and versioning really easy, and which is also very powerful for grading. And that’s a big part of our future.”



Image courtesy of Ghost, Copenhagen, Denmark: Pan-European ad campaign for Coke Zero