



The Essential Mix

# SCRATCH Case Study

Mechnology

## SCRATCH® at the Heart of Mechnology's Digital Workflow

Mechnology in Burbank, CA offers visual effects, digital intermediate and a wide range of project completion services for filmmakers and TV production. Their VFX and post production work spans feature films, television, commercials, and music videos. Mechnology is best known for its innovative work on the main title animation for *The Aviator*, and more recently, the main title and visual effects for *Even Money*. SCRATCH® is the heart of Mechnology's digital workflow.

Mechnology, co-founded and co-owned by visual effects veterans Chip Potter and Stephen Lebed, offers Visual Effects (VFX) and Digital Intermediate (DI) services for feature film and episodic Television. Mechnology is known for providing a friendly and technically advanced facility for filmmakers and TV producers. Their portfolio includes TV episodic visual effects for *Veronica Mars*, *One Tree Hill*, and *Without a Trace*; projects for independent filmmakers like Paul Tadisco's *One Day Like Rain*, and Georgia Menides and Doug Lloyd's, *Still Green*. They've also done big-picture project main title sequences for Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator*; main title sequences and visual effects for Mark Rydell's *Even Money*; over 80 visual effects, opticals and the main title sequence for SenArt Films' *Bonneville*; and visual effects for the soon to be released *National Lampoon's Bagboy*.



Title sequence from *Even Money*; directed by Mark Rydell

Because they're a boutique servicing a technically sophisticated customer base with widely diverse projects that use the range of formats – 16mm, Super16, 35mm, and HD – Mechnology required a robust and resolution-independent DI tool suite that wouldn't break the bank. ASSIMILATE's SCRATCH Data-Centric Workflow Solution™ quickly emerged as the winning solution and is the backbone of Mechnology's digital workflow. SCRATCH® excels as a data management tool, and Mechnology is fully employing the range of SCRATCH modules, such as conform, color grading, assemble/edit and real-time 2k playback and review for titles and opticals for films and HD video.

"Simply put, our job is to make filmmakers – and their work – look good. We've created an environment that fosters creativity and productivity for our clients," says Chip Potter, Co-founder and President of Mechnology. "What begins with our client as a visual effects breakdown, more times than not ends up as a discussion about the texture of the film as a whole. Mechnology was not formed to be another 'Post Facility' or 'DI House' in the traditional sense. We created Mechnology because we enjoy working on movies. Whether that means on-set supervision, visual effects production, titles, opticals or the complete digital intermediate, we are more than happy to share our experience with our customers. We support our clients



with advanced tools like SCRATCH to efficiently get the job done. We facilitate the finishing of our client films, but to us the line between production and post is gone; it's all creative."

## The Creative Process

With over 25 years experience in creating visual effects for film and TV, Chip Potter has used the full gamut of creative tools and processes. Potter is now using SCRATCH to internally review all VFX and opticals in real time 2k. "We find that SCRATCH offers an elegant solution to the creation of digital opticals, generating dissolves, fades, flips, and speed changes in real time at film or HD resolution," says Potter. "When completing title and optical work in films that are completing a traditional negative finish, it's critical to match the color grading already set by the laboratory timer."

Potter adds, "We recently finished working on Mark Rydell's film *Even Money*. We were first asked to execute Title Designer Dan Perri's main title sequence for the film. Dan had some terrific ideas to create titles that looked as though they were filled with water intercut with slow rolling waves shot under a pier at night. Director of Photography Robbie Greenberg had gone to great lengths to light these shots in a specific way. SCRATCH allowed us to build the entire title sequence and color grade Robbie's shots as he envisioned them. We then shot out a new negative and sent it to laboratory to be integrated with the rest of the film. After several rounds of color correction by the lab we were asked if we could add a few points of color to the main title sequence of the pier. SCRATCH Color Correction gives us the tool set to emulate lab color. When the color timer asks for a few points of red, SCRATCH can easily make that happen." Mechnology makes use of native DPX files and Rising Sun's color management system to ensure accurate color matching.

"Because SCRATCH operates in real-time 2k, it allows us to review all our visual-effects dailies with clients. We can edit frame sequences, do color grading, or import and playback 2k DPX effects shots in real time so that our client sees immediate results," says Potter. "We recently finished a project shot with the Thomson Viper in 4:2:2 HDStream mode. Using SCRATCH, we were able to color correct all our visual effects plates and quickly begin the compositing process. As shots were finalized our client viewed all the color-graded iterations, running in real time. This makes for a very satisfactory and smooth review process with significant time savings."

VFX for TV episodes is a good part of Mechnology's business. "We started out doing a lot of VFX work for The WB's, *Charmed*. We grew our client base to include *One Tree Hill*, *Veronica Mars*, *Boston Legal*, and *Without a Trace*. For the Disney Channel's 2006 Halloween special, *The Initiation of Sarah*, we created and reviewed over 170 visual effects using SCRATCH," says Potter.

VFX work for films also brings in considerable business for Mechnology. For *Bonneville* (2006), which stars Jessica Lange, Joan Allen, and Kathy Bates, Mechnology did all the VFX and opticals using SCRATCH. Mechnology also used SCRATCH when creating all the VFX for the soon-to-be-released *National Lampoon's Bag Boy*, directed by Mort Nathan.

## DI for Films - All Formats

"We also have clients who want us to do all the DI in the broad sense of the term," says Potter. "For example, indie filmmaker Paul Tadisco shot *One Day Like Rain* (2007) in Super 16mm. The film was transferred to HD, digitized and saved into SCRATCH as DPX. We also integrated the visual effects as DPX files as well. We did all the conforming and color grading in SCRATCH, as well as the 2k real-time reviews. The final output was in HD. Doing the entire DI process with one tool like SCRATCH is simply amazing."

Using SCRATCH, primary and secondary color grading is now a smooth process for Mechnology. Potter notes, "SCRATCH allows us to display the entire 2k color palette on a Sony CRT HD monitor. We just import the DPX files and use Rising Sun's cineSpace for color management. SCRATCH nails it every time, which makes for very pleased clients."

## Bonus Points

When asked what he likes most about SCRATCH, Potter didn't hesitate. "Where do I start? First it's the ease of use and speed. For example, the ability to easily and almost instantaneously drop in a clip or switch clips in and out. The up-tick in productivity for artists, colorists, and entire team is incredible. We can easily integrate other tools like Rising Sun and 2D/3D LUTs into SCRATCH. And then there's the price/performance value. It's a real change to get a whole lot of capability at a reasonable cost."

Because it operates in real time with any format, SCRATCH gives the creative team at Mechnology more



opportunity to experiment with visual effects and within the entire DI process.

“SCRATCH is a stable platform and a well thought out platform for DI work and VFX review. It’s a real workhorse that enables us to move through our pipeline, and as a result, our business is steadily growing,” says Potter. “I would say our customer satisfaction level is very high.”



Title sequence from *Even Money*; Director of Photography, Robbie Greenberg