

# SCRATCH makes the grades at MFX

MFX London is a VFX and DI post production boutique with a thoroughly modern approach to helping filmmakers take maximum advantage of the latest digital technology. The company, which also has a rental division in Brussels, Belgium, first deployed ASSIMILATE's SCRATCH® Digital Process Solution on-set in 2006 to streamline data workflows from camera into post.

Having worked in SCRATCH on a broad range of feature film and broadcast projects, MFX has gained huge experience and has developed new and productive post processes. Their confidence in SCRATCH is such that MFX has now implemented it as a front-line grading system. MFX co-founder and VFX artist Jonathan Cheetham describes the evolving journey.

**Proving ground:** Our first feature projects included *Silence Becomes You*, *Eichmann*, Clive Barker's *Book of Blood* and *Dread*, *Ruby Blue*, *Surviving Evil*, Bruce Dickinson's *Chemical Wedding* and *Barbarian Princess*. Over the course of these productions SCRATCH took an ever-expanding role in a range of on-set, VFX review, DI and deliverables.

**On-set review:** At a base level, SCRATCH provides a convenient way to ingest uncompressed 2K or 4K data, and rapidly deliver playback for on-set reviews. This gives reassurance to the director, DP, and other key department heads. They can watch full-resolution footage in real-time to check framing, focus, wardrobe, make-up, etc. With the appropriate LUTs applied, they can also see how the final film is going to look.

**New workflows:** Over time we've developed new workflows from set to post with SCRATCH. We sometimes pass DPX test grades to SCRATCH on-set so that the director and can consider the look as the shoot progresses.

**VFX testing:** SCRATCH is invaluable for VFX line-ups and test comping on-set. We can easily grab 2K plates shot on different days, export them to the VFX comper, and have the result within minutes. This allows the crew to adjust the cameras, lights, props and

actors as necessary, ultimately saving time and potential problems in post. Sometimes we import VFX test comps back into SCRATCH on-set to view in context within the timeline.

**Acquisition agnostic:** We've done a lot of work with Viper cameras, but we are ultimately non-acquisition specific. With SCRATCH we can handle workflows for a range of cameras and image formats – DPX, digitized 35mm, RED RAW, HDCAM – you name it. We have LUTs for every type of format, and because we're working at 2K or 4K we retain excellent image quality all the way through.

**Grading in-house:** SCRATCH's grading capabilities have really blossomed, and we put them through their paces on *The Last Harbor*, a full-length feature shot at 2K on Viper and 35mm. Using SCRATCH Scaffolds, our grader balanced and married the digital and film formats, as well as VFX shots, together into a seamless grade. We had two weeks to get the job done, and we completed on time – not just the grade, but the rendering of the 2K and QuickTime deliverables, archive versions, back-ups, etc. SCRATCH is very stable, and the result was a great success.

We give a big thumbs-up to SCRATCH's grading tools. They make SCRATCH a serious contender against the traditional DI tools that people have been using up until now.

**New projects:** We're using SCRATCH for the management and review of 600 VFX shots, plus the master grade and conform of *Jackboots On Whitehall* (a British *Team America*) all at 2K. VFX work-in-progress is ingested into the CONstruct module, where we review the latest versions and gradually sign-off in our digital grading theater. As all the material is in SCRATCH, along with the off-line edit, we can drop signed-off materials onto the timeline, which ultimately speeds up the final conform.



*The Last Harbor* is courtesy of E-Motion

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*Jackboots on Whitehall is courtesy of E-Motion,  
McHenry Bros and Cinema 4 SPV2.*

**Boosting the art of grading:**

We use a full-monty CP200 Tangent control panel, and the integration with SCRATCH is amazing. Colorists can map out exactly how they want each button to control different parameters within SCRATCH. With this power at their fingertips they can forget about the machine and concentrate on the art of grading.

**Client pleaser:** The way SCRATCH organizes footage and versions into reels makes it much easier for clients to follow what the colorist is doing in a grading session as compared to other DI systems. For review sessions, we show clients how to operate SCRATCH themselves and leave them to it. They love it. The SCRATCH GUI is clean and straightforward. They can play 2K or 4K footage back and forth in real-time as much as they like.

**Support:** Brilliant! We feel very close to the ASSIMILATE team, and it's great to have dedicated support down the road here in London. They have been terrific on training and helping our IT department integrate SCRATCH in-house. We get instant replies on any queries and, in the rare event of any bugs, we get fixes really fast.

**No risk:** SCRATCH is a solid performer, with fast and powerful tools for conforming, editing, versioning, color grading and deliverables. I never jump on to it and wonder if I am taking a risk.

