

Animal harnesses SCRATCH's conform and color capabilities for Kenny Powers, K-Swiss MFCEO

The Facility: Animal (Pittsburgh & Venice)

Founded in 2001 by director and VFX artist Michael Killen, VFX artist Jim Kreitzburg and executive producer Kathy Dziubek, Animal operates as a lean, multi-disciplinary, bi-coastal studio offering production and post-production services to commercials and music video makers. From offices in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Venice, California, the company partners with advertising agencies across the US and worldwide to deliver award-winning work for leading brands such as Audi, Dodge, Blackberry, Delmonte, Nestlé, McDonalds, and Verizon Wireless.

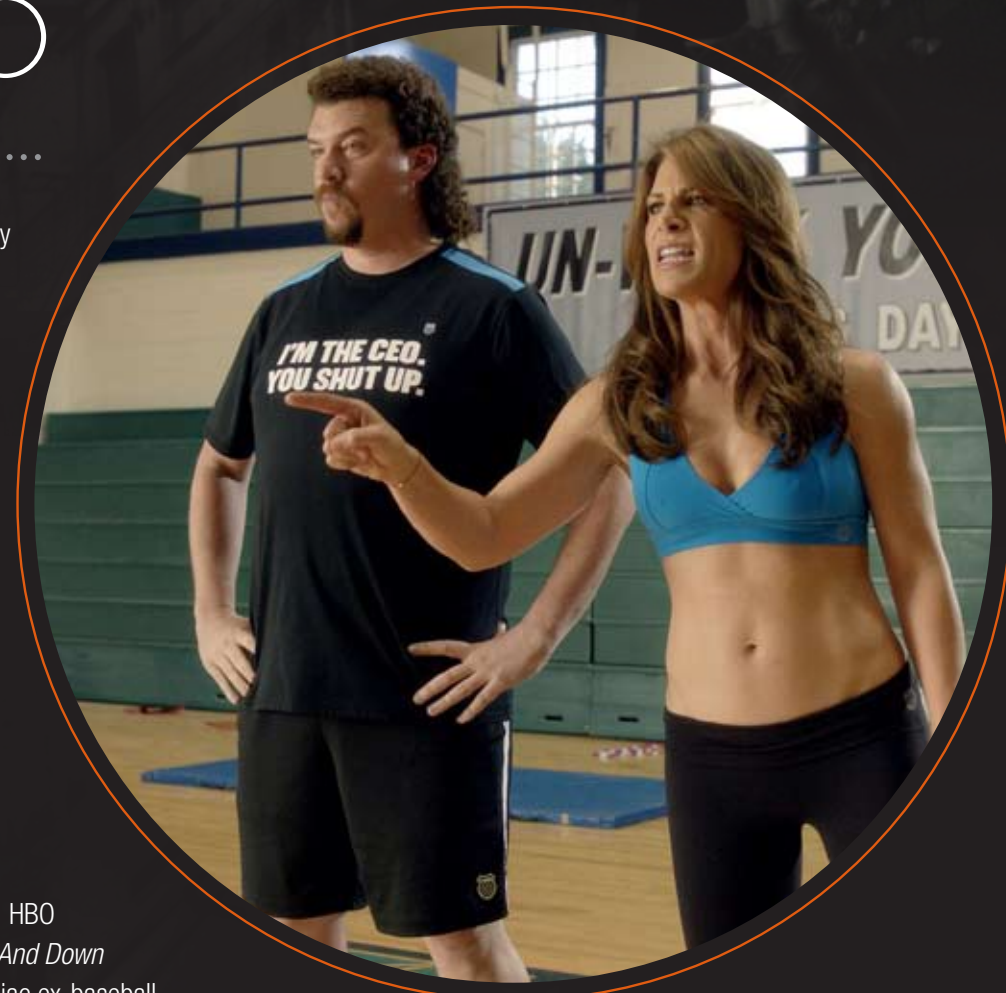
With SCRATCH as the heart of its color grading resource, Animal's next-generation business model interweaves creative and technical involvement from the conceptual stages of a project, through to on-set supervision and custom-tailored post services, which include motion graphics, VFX and CGI, color grading, finishing and compositing.

The Project: Kenny Powers, K-Swiss, MFCEO.

Animal has a particular reputation for creating talking animals – cows, sheep, lions, chickens, pandas and, most famously, Taco

Bell's spokes-Chihuahua. But it recently took on an altogether different beast, in the form of Kenny Powers, MFCEO who performs in a series of hilarious TV and viral films promoting K-Swiss Tubes training footwear. Animal posted 14 spots for the brand using SCRATCH.

The campaign is the brainchild of creative director Matt Murphy and principal Glenn Cole of the non-traditional brand agency 72andSunny in Los Angeles. The five-minute *Kenny Powers, K-Swiss MFCEO* spot features US comic actor Danny McBride reprising his fictional role of Kenny Powers, from HBO television's hugely-popular *Eastbound And Down* series. Powers is a delusional, egomaniac ex-baseball player, who is forced into retirement but thinks he can make a comeback.



K-Swiss – Kenny Powers MFCEO
Advertising agency 72andSunny, Los Angeles
Post done in SCRATCH by Animal

In the spot, Powers purchases 51% of K-Swiss stock, kicks out the existing management and sets about transforming the sports world forever - his way. Powers' presence dominates the video with profanities and ridiculous antics, such as including "MFCEO" on his nameplate. He enlists the help of well-known American sports stars as his new chiefs-of-staff: NFL pros Matt Cassel and Patrick Willis, martial arts champions Jon "Bones" Jones and Urijah Faber, America's toughest personal trainer Jillian Michaels, wrestling legend Rey Mysterio and Olympic hopeful, marathon runner Josh Cox. Hollywood director Michael Bay even makes a cameo appearance, as Powers tries to recruit him to make a new movie with him as a Transformer.

The campaign proved an instant hit. Published online in July 2011, *Kenny Powers, K-Swiss MFCEO* alone received nearly a million views on YouTube in the first month.

Project leader: Allan Stallard

Stallard has worked at Animal for nine years, starting as an editor/VFX artist, before moving into color grading. He's used SCRATCH for three years to grade spots for the likes of McDonalds, Audi, Zippo Lighters, as well as multiple music videos for the band Owl City.

"With the advent of HD cameras, and especially the introduction of the RED ONE, our advertising clients essentially stopped shooting on film. We knew we needed an effective file based workflow and fell in love with SCRATCH as soon as we saw it," he says. "SCRATCH has really fuelled Animal's growth and shaped our destiny. It has allowed us to take the photochemical and telecine processes out of the loop, while giving us power and control over new and emerging digital workflows."

The challenge: Designing a fast and efficient end-to-end workflow. *Kenny Powers, K-Swiss MFCEO* was shot in LA using



K-Swiss – Kenny Powers MFCEO. Advertising agency 72andSunny, Los Angeles. Post done in SCRATCH by Animal.

a combination of ARRI Alexa, RED MX and Canon 5D cameras, with stock footage also added into the mix. Along with the viral web film, Animal conformed and graded a further six films in SCRATCH, each with multiple versions, making 14 in total. The company also created the CG-animated Transformer robot, and flame effects.

Transformer robot, and flame effects.

"With the viral version alone having a running time of five minutes, there was a lot of coloring to do on this project," says Stallard. "Because the material originated in a variety of formats and color spaces (Alexa Log C, RED RAW, ProRes and H.264 stock footage), and the client-end of the post cycle happened in LA, we had to establish an efficient way of working. We could have had colorists working round the clock in LA, but the advanced capabilities of SCRATCH allowed us to share the

workload between our studios in Pittsburgh and Venice."

The solution: SCRATCH *Bi-coastal SCRATCH systems*

To create a seamless workflow between Animal's studios, Stallard helped to establish identical set-ups with SCRATCH systems at each site, with both having access to the same media. This enabled SCRATCH grading data and EDLs to be sent back and forth, meaning the two separate sites could share the workload, essentially functioning as one studio. "It was a very efficient way to work, and so fast. Because of the time difference between the East and West coasts, I could color during the day on SCRATCH in Pittsburgh, and then e-mail the relevant CONstructs, with the latest EDL, over to LA for Matt Lear to continue coloring. In just a few minutes after loading the new data into SCRATCH he was good to go. It was like we had systems right next door to one another."

“Then Matt (who often working in client-attend sessions) would e-mail back his CONstruct work-in-progress, so it was ready for me when I came in the following day. The beauty of working this way is there’s no Fed-Ex-ing of tapes or drives. Just done. Boom. Now that we have SCRATCH Six, I’m really excited to check out the potential of the new remote log-in features for this type of workflow.”

A versatile color toolset

In terms of grading, the initial task was to balance the Alexa, RED, 5D and stock footage- and Stallard lauds SCRATCH’s grading toolset. He says the company tends to grade with the original RAW files on the same timeline, outputting finals to DPX.

“What could have been tricky, turned out to be painless in SCRATCH. We initially played around with the Alexa LUT Generator for SCRATCH, but we got satisfactory results from just primary grading the RAW footage, and then copying the grading settings from clip to clip. Most of the RED footage was high-speed material or pick-up shots. Since SCRATCH supports REDColor2, REDGamma2 and RED Meta Data (RMD), we could change the whole balance and the ISO of the footage, and easily eye-match it to the Alexa material. The 5D footage doesn’t have any metadata, so we just did a careful eye-matching job on that using SCRATCH’s Lift, Gamma and Gain color wheels, in combination with Curves which lets you re-map the luminance or individual RGB color curves of a shot.”

Finessing the color further, Stallard says that every shot had at least one SCAFFOLD to apply in one form or another, such as a soft-edged vignette, or the isolation of part of an image to maximize its contrast or drain color. However, some shots, such as those containing performers’ faces, required more intensive work. Often a dozen SCAFFOLD layers, combining tracking



K-Swiss – Kenny Powers MFCEO. Advertising agency 72andSunny, Los Angeles. Post done in SCRATCH by Animal.

masks, the HSV Keyer, color and luma controls, allowed Stallard to adjust skin tones through two layers. With others used to grade various elements in an entire scene – like adjusting lamps that were in frame, a performer’s suit, the tone of the grass on a football field, the sky, and hero shots of the shoe. SCRATCH was also used to grade and pre-composite a small number of blue and greenscreen VFX shots, such as the scene featuring Powers as a robot.

“SCRATCH has a great color grading toolset that gives you all the controls you need to adjust the overall composition of a shot, or separate elements within a shot, so that you can ultimately create extra depth in the imagery,” he says.

Conform power and flexibility

“I’m a huge fan of SCRATCH’s conform capabilities.” Stallard admits. “CONstructs make it easy to relate where the media is, and the EDL conform just works. New EDLs on the K-Swiss job would come in overnight from the editors and we could quickly do the conform and start grading.”

“Even when we discovered that some of the 5D footage had issues with timecodes, SCRATCH’s EDL module gives you multiple choices for workarounds, rather than the zero choices

you get with other systems. In those situations we could easily locate and eye-match the problematic shots, insert them on the timeline and continue. Many other systems purport to offer media management and conforming tools, but SCRATCH is by far the best. My general opinion is that any decent-sized facility should have SCRATCH, even if it’s not used for anything more than conform. That speed and versatility is worth the price of SCRATCH alone.”

All tied together with great customer support

Impressed not just with the SCRATCH toolset, Stallard describes the customer support from Assimilate as, “phenomenal” – you’re not a number, the support team knows your name, and my e-mail requests get answered in minutes. It’s also reassuring that ASSIMILATE is really tight on technology integration and cooperation with third-party vendors like Globalstor. With other software/hardware vendors there can be a lot of finger-pointing when things are not working. ASSIMILATE really have got this part absolutely right.”

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