

Imaj gives commercials color grading a facelift with SCRATCH

The Facility: Imaj, Istanbul, Turkey

Imaj is a powerhouse, 24/7 production and post-production facility, based in Istanbul, Turkey. The business was initially established by Cemal Noyan as a production company, and began offering high-end post-production services in 1986. Its success - based on the premise of allowing talented artists to conjure with state-of-the-art technology - has been such that Imaj today occupies over 11,500m/sq of space, employs over 150 staff, and attracts big-budget commercials from the thriving Turkish market, as well as the Middle East and Europe, for household brands such as Coca Cola, Renault, Toyota, Colgate, Nike and Ariel.

“In terms of colour grading, we offer HD and file-based workflows that maximize the picture attributes of the original footage, whether it’s from film, modern cinematography cameras or archive material,” says senior DI grader, Andreas Brueckl. “We have two SCRATCH suites here, and they are at the heart of this great big factory. They’re crucial to fast and streamlined post production workflow, and they’re extremely valuable in helping us to define and create new looks for our clients too.”

Colorist: Andreas Brueckl, senior DI color grader

Andreas Brueckl has graded hundreds of commercials and stands as one of Europe’s most experienced DI colorists artists. Starting out at Germany’s Bavaria Broadcast Company in engineering, CG animation and then telecine grading, he worked at D-Facto Motion, where was exposed to SCRATCH for the first time. He then quickly found himself in demand as a freelance colorist, working at post production facilities in Germany, Denmark and Switzerland,



Coca Cola commercial, image courtesy of Imaj

delivering commercials for Audi, BMW, Microsoft and Sony Ericsson, and TV features including *Tsunami: The Life After*, directed by Christine Hartmann, DP Alexander Fischerkoesen.

Brueckl was invited to join Imaj as a senior colorist in July 2010, where he says he was truly amazed at the size and modernity of the company. He is also a founder and grading instructor of the Colormeup! Academy, a collaborative

community of editors and colorists, who disseminate their talents and skills to other young and up-and-coming artists. Using SCRATCH, he has recently graded commercials for Toyota, Colgate, Ariel, Fairy, Garanti Bank at IMAJ.

The challenges: maximising throughput & stimulating creativity
Brueckl says Turkey is an advertising-heavy market, producing three times as many commercials as his native Germany. Often he will have up to three commercials to grade every day in SCRATCH. With this kind of throughput, Imaj necessarily has to provide an efficient workflow at the core to its end-to-end service.

However, Brueckl says that along with efficiency, advertising clients also demand new looks for their commercials, which in turn causes him to do something he loves - to grade in new ways, and to develop fresh creative techniques that make for great final visuals.

The solution: SCRATCH - supporting the workflow and the artist
“SCRATCH is superb at the fundamentals,” says Brueckl. “It supports a fast and precise workflow between departments, it keeps me organized, and it’s fast at rendering.

“First and foremost, Imaj has to be a highly efficient, and the grading team is in the middle of everything. We make rushes, render out images and deliver materials to different departments in different formats - such as MXFs for editorial and 2K DPX files for VFX. They all depend on us, and SCRATCH is stable, fast and precise in delivering materials to them.”

On the organizational front, Brueckl says, “Because of the sheer volume of work being handled every day, I have to be able to manage each job efficiently, and SCRATCH’s CONstruct module helps me to be well-organised - I can keep different grades of



Nike commercial, image courtesy of Imaj

scenes and versions in separate folders and can easily go back to any of these during a session. Commercials often have revisions from one moment to the next - new takes are delivered, new effects shots come from the VFX team and sometimes the edit changes after the grade. Or, suddenly the client wants to change the color of the car in a car commercial. With a CONstruct for every different step and revision, SCRATCH gives me a uniquely structured overview that is quick and easy to access.”

As for some of the other essential basics, Brueckl also admires SCRATCH’s capability as a fast and powerful EDL conform system, and its ability to handle multi-format projects.

“We can work with ARRI Alexa footage, and the various 2K, 3K and 5K resolutions of RED, all in realtime. I often have material of two or three different formats, resolutions and color-spaces all on the same timeline in SCRATCH,” he says. “This is one its particular strengths.”

“As all the materials for each project are kept within SCRATCH, I can easily provide footage to the editorial team - typically we render MFX rushes for them with a basic look - and then just re-conform from their new EDL. The great thing about SCRATCH is that rendering is a background task. So as we are rendering materials for other departments, say DPXs for the VFX team and QTs for the customers, I can continue working on

the next job. I have not seen this capability in any tool other than SCRATCH - I know because I've tried them all."

Creatively blending color grading and compositing

"I learned the traditional approach to color grading - primary grading first, followed by selective grading - and SCRATCH does all this perfectly well. But, today clients expect you to push the creative boundaries," says Brueckl.

"SCRATCH has a feature-set unlike any other grading system, and this has allowed me adopt a new approach - a composting style of grading. Very quickly I can combine multiple layers of masks, keys, blurs and textures, and copy settings and grades between them in SCRATCH Scaffolds. This approach opens a whole new world of creative color grading opportunities, and lets you bring a new depth to imagery through color."

Amongst the many commercials he's worked on, Brueckl highlights a recent Coca Cola spot, in which the director wanted

to create a highly colorful, fairytale-style of look.

"Using three or four layers gets you so far, but in SCRATCH I was able to combine 26 different layers to achieve the right look. The way the grading tools and U/I are laid out in SCRATCH makes it very fast and intuitive. Working this way in any other grading system might be impossible, might end up being a total mess, or might drive you nuts, but its perfectly straightforward and fast in SCRATCH."

The creative options offered in SCRATCH have empowered Brueckl to develop a new approach for colorists to create painterly, soft-shaded skin tones, like those seen in fashion magazines. He has applied this technique to recent commercials for Garanti Bank and Omo washing liquid. It involves duplicating a grade, applying different blend modes and then mixing the copied grade as a texture on top. This top layer is over-exposed, the blacks are crushed, with blurs and saturation pushed high. On the visible layer, to achieve high

contrast with soft shading, specific parts of the top layer are then keyed back to soften the result. Brueckl's enthusiasm to share is so great, the technique can be viewed www.assimilateinc.com/support/tutorials.

"Using Scaffolds to create separate adjustable layers of keys, blurs, textures, blends and mixes, you can rapidly create a high-contrast skin texture, to a body or a face, that looks smooth, sculpted and absolutely lovely. You'd be very hard-pressed to be able to do this on any other system. Being able to combine tools together means there's a big creative aspect to SCRATCH, which I feel is unlimited."

"Our company mantra is: 'deliver flawless results'," concludes Brueckl. "To do that our team of talented editors, colorists, sound engineers and graphic designers must be able to collaborate to complete the post under one roof. With its range of workflow and creative features, SCRATCH is absolutely vital to this process. This is why we love it."



Coca Cola commercial, image courtesy of Imaj

Before



After

www.imajonline.com

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