

3sixtymedia implements renderless workflow with Baselight

FilmLight



Broadcast post facility integrates Baselight grading - including 20 Baselight for Avid seats - for a more efficient premium television workflow.

3sixtymedia is a broadcast production facility based in Salford in the north of England. The facility provides creative, content management and crewing services as well as post-production. The work ranges from prestige drama and documentaries to studio productions and entertainment programming.

As part of its finishing services, 3sixtymedia has installed a Generation V Baselight TWO with a Blackboard 1 control panel. As the company normally works on time-constrained broadcast projects it was important to have a tight workflow, so it has also installed 20 Baselight for Avid plugins.

Baselight for Avid is one of FilmLight's Baselight Editions series. It runs as a plugin to Avid Media Composer and provides two functions. First, it reads the BLG colour grading file which is transported as metadata inside the AAF wrapper, and imposes the grade in real time. Second, it gives the editor access to the Baselight toolkit so tweaks can be made to the grade in the edit suite.



Tales From Northumberland

This is a real boost in productivity, not least because it makes the whole finishing workflow non-destructive and render-free. No time is lost in rendering sequences, nor in transferring multiple versions of files. All grading decisions can be reversed, so the team works together to achieve the best possible results in the shortest time.

"Grading used to be a bit of an island, but we cannot work like that any more," said Senior Colourist Neil Parker. "We need to be totally integrated with the rest of the post process and be part of editorial. The ability of Baselight to work with Avid was one of the main factors in our decision to invest."

Cameras

The nature of 3sixtymedia's business means that someone can be working on a studio shoot one day, a documentary the next and then maybe a top-end drama. That's why, when selecting new grading equipment, the ability to handle any camera format, resolution and codec was a key consideration.

Part of its creative services brief is to help Directors and DoPs make the best decisions on acquisition and post. To be able to propose the right camera for the job, confident that it can be handled in post, helps greatly. Already the company is working with high-resolution acquisition, such as 4k and 5k from ARRI and RED cameras.

"We wanted a system that we could throw any camera format at," said Parker. "New cameras are coming out all the time, so there is an ever-increasing number of combinations of resolution and codec - it is a daily challenge within the entire post industry. FilmLight stays on top of all that, so we don't have to worry."

Workflow

"The key decision driver was around workflows," said Taig McNab, Technical Manager at 3sixtymedia. "The schedule for getting a show from shoot to delivery is always tight. Anything we could do to reduce the amount of time and increase the flexibility was absolutely invaluable."

"What the Baselight system offers us is flexibility around when we do the grade," he explained. "In the real world there are all sorts of pressures and things happen that you cannot foresee. So we do end up re-editing content after the grading session has been completed, and then the question is how quickly can you re-grade the additional shots and get them into the sequence."

The architecture at 3sixtymedia allows grading and editorial to take place in parallel. Grades do not need to be rendered: they are captured as metadata, which is readily portable around the network. Editors can start work on raw material, and as the colourist completes shots and sequences their metadata will move to the Avid stations, where the graded images will appear without disrupting the editor's work.

Simple re-edits, such as trimming or extending a scene, may not need to go back to the grading suite, as the metadata for each shot can simply be adjusted. Similarly, the ability of Baselight to work on multiple layers means there is no need to dismantle a shot for grading should anything change.

"With our previous system, if there were picture effects completed in edit, you had to decompose them before sending the content to grade and reassemble them afterwards," recalled McNab. "That was a lengthy, cumbersome process. That all disappears with Baselight."

The ability to present the latest grade at any point in the workflow also makes life easier for Producers and Directors who may visit the facility to check on the grade, the edit and the audio on the same day. The dubbing theatres at 3sixtymedia also use Avid Media Composers to display the pictures, linked to Protocols, and with Baselight for Avid they too can show graded pictures.

"Producers and Directors have always wanted creative decisions to be instantly available in all parts of the workflow," said colourist Parker. "That would involve processing and moving massive amounts of data around the facility. With the Baselight solution we can easily achieve this for them."

Conclusion

The nature of the business of 3sixtymedia is that each project brings a new set of challenges. A recent documentary on the singer Olly Murs, for instance, drew material from a broad range of sources on a wide range of cameras, so the grade was primarily about achieving a consistently punchy look.

Conversely, a second series of the Robson Green travelogue Tales From Northumberland called for enhancing the depth and quality of the pictures. Largely shot on the Canon C300 with additional helicopter footage, the appeal to the audience is in the rugged beauty of the landscapes.



Tales From Northumberland

Stuart Ramsay, Producer/Director of the series was extremely pleased with the outcome. "The beautiful landscapes and sweeping vistas of Northumberland are a vital part of the success of "Tales From Northumberland." I was delighted with the Baselight colour grade achieved by Neil Parker, which took our footage to a whole new level."

All of these projects - and many more - are delivered through a tightly integrated, render-free workflow that ensures quality is not compromised, even while working on television budgets and timescales.

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