

Tool Kit Reboot

ENHANCING IMAGE, STORY AND
CONTINUITY WITH COMPUTING POWER
BY DAVID HEURING

Hollywood has always attracted inventors, because there's always been money to be made if you can design the right tool and get it into the right hands. The National Association of Broadcasters' annual April gathering assembles 100,000-plus tech-minded attendees and more than 1,800 exhibitors hawking their wares—many of them hoping their invention becomes the next Steadicam or Avid.

Of course, most products along the miles of aisles are rehashed, recycled and repackaged, but a few genuinely innovative advancements emerge and promise to add efficiency or creative flexibility to the filmmaker's toolbox. Here, *DGAQ* shines a light on three of the latter—coincidentally, all designed to make it easier for filmmakers to use computing power to bring their various visions to life.



» ColorSynth is a powerful streamlined color correction suite that works as a plug-in for FinalCut, and soon, Adobe Premiere.



PHOTOS: CODEX

» CODEX COLORSYNTH WITH KEYS

THE ESSENTIALS: Codex Digital's innovation in workflow, data management and storage is widely used by directors, cinematographers, digital imaging techs and post and VFX pros. Their Codex Backbone, a simple tool for ingesting EDLs and pulling and transcoding visual effects plate shots, is used by Marvel and other post houses as well. At this past NAB in Las Vegas, Codex introduced ColorSynth, which is essentially a powerful streamlined color correction suite that works as a plug-in for Final Cut (and soon, Adobe Premiere). ColorSynth offers a depth of control over the image previously available only in the post house suite. At \$295, the price is right. Codex Keys is a rethought keyboard interface that dispenses with the trackballs.

THE INNOVATION: According to Codex's VP of user experience Philippe Panzini: "We're living in a world where collaboration happens throughout the life of a project. Codex is building a solution that can be used by just about anyone. People can develop sophisticated looks very easily and share these looks across the production pipeline. We want to make sure that everybody in the chain, no matter what product they use, can get a LUT file from ColorSynth and actually see the effect within their environment. The tool has to be blazingly fast, consistent and intuitive. As a result, the design is deceptively simple. There's enough control to do the job—and not enough to hang yourself with."

THE INSIDE DOPE: "We're close to cinematographers, directors and colorists, and we're interested in the intent of the creatives—people with an eye," says Panzini, formerly chief technology officer at Discreet Logic. "There are a dozen affordable color grading solutions out there, and most tick the usual boxes, as does ours. But that's where the fun starts—what we can do on top of that. There are so many more interesting and powerful ways to deal with the film image and color than moving sliders around."



» PIX SYSTEM

THE ESSENTIALS: PIX has become a standard tool for sharing, viewing and annotating dailies on today's far-flung productions. But it was initially conceived as a way to share all varieties of data—in fact, the acronym PIX stands for Production Information Exchange. The idea is to facilitate communication about every aspect, from casting and script revisions, to dailies and editing. "Connected set" is the current buzzword. The latest iteration of the PIX content management platform promises "24/7 live global collaboration and asset sharing, unrivaled media mining and industry-defining security." Some of the tools are still in beta mode and are not available to the wider public just yet.

THE INNOVATION: Onset is a new PIX production tool currently being used by trusted beta partners of PIX, including David Fincher and his team. "Onset helps directors avoid the need to communicate through several layers of people, as had been done traditionally," says Craig Mumma, director of product at PIX System. "Onset gives the creative a moment after each take to review, annotate and make notes on the moving image in real time on a tablet. These captured notes are then uploaded onto the PIX secure review service for the post team." The Dispatch, also part of the PIX platform, collects and collates all of the metadata from the script supervisor, camera and others, and makes it easily available for the editorial team. Dispatch can smoothly transcode and organize dailies before they are brought into Adobe Premiere, speeding up the process significantly for the assistant editor.

THE INSIDE DOPE: According to Mumma, "We strive to keep the creative team connected with what they need to accomplish. We use so many different applications today. Sometimes, I think we focus more on technology than we do the creative vision of the director. Our job is to provide tools that ensure a connected consciousness across departments in order to keep that vision alive through post." Fincher calls it "the only addiction I have left."

» PONDS VISUAL SEARCH

THE ESSENTIALS: The term AI may be reaching the end of its useful lifespan, but in the case of Pond5's Visual Search, it may actually have some practical application. The company blazed trails in the field of royalty-free stock footage, and its new search tool allows users to search on the basis of the visible content of a photo, video clip or illustration, rather than typing in keywords. It can be accessed with a browser extension or mobile app, and can search using any image from the web, or even images from a smartphone camera.

THE INNOVATION: The technology recognizes patterns in shape, color and composition, and compares them to the countless images and clips that exist on the platform. Furthermore, elements in the initial search—say, a red car that can't be in the sought-after image—can be selected by the user and excluded from the search. RedShark News, in giving Pond5 an award for the most innovative technologies at NAB, said, "This all works so well that it's like magic."

THE INSIDE DOPE: Pond5 CEO Jason Teichman says it's a new yet familiar way to find what you need. "The stock footage market has exploded, and budgets are getting more challenged," he says. "Often we have the needed footage in our database of nearly 11 million clips. Our platform gives post-production, editors and creative directors—visual people—an intuitive way to find the clip they need. Sometimes the right keyword search brings up the perfect image. But in other cases, you don't really know exactly what it is you're looking for. We've developed a new way to harness the massive power of computers by modeling our algorithms on the ways human beings process information. The goal is to make finding the shot that best tells the story faster, smarter and more intuitive for visually creative people." ♦

