



Photo courtesy of Avid Technology

Computer editing is revolutionizing the process of film production.

What do *Toy Story*, *Dream Tower* and a Toronto-produced Kellogg's ad have in common? They, along with hundreds of other features, documentaries, music videos and commercials were all edited using Avid Technology. The Avid media and film composers combine hardware and software in a new methodology that is rapidly revolutionizing the process of film production.

The Avid can take as source material such diverse technologies as videos, films, sound cassettes and scanned images, digitize them, and place these new elements into pre-existing cinematic rough cuts. Anything that can be translated into a digital sound or visual image is grist for the Avid mill. Once digitized, the editor can take the material, combine it any way deemed appropriate, add special effects and generate either an Editor's Decision List (EDL) or a broadcast quality product that can be output to disk, tape or across the wires.

What's different about the Avid? It allows a single editor, working with a suite of equipment in an office located anywhere,

the filmmaker or editor can select the shots needed, put them in order, change that order, reconfigure the number of frames to be used, match the video—or scrap the whole section, go back to the original footage and start all over again!

"Four years ago, it was uncommon to cut a feature film on an Avid. Now it would be uncommon *not* to do so," says Ron Mann of Sphinx Productions. The acclaimed director of *Twist* and *Comic Book Confidential*, Mann and his editor, Robert Kennedy, have recently finished editing a program on Elvis and Kerouac for a Disney Channel adaptation of

to compile a film using material shot and digitized elsewhere, and deliver it for broadcast. A network of editors can work simultaneously on a film without compromising the work of others and without having to wait for days or weeks for their source material to be released. Special effects that used to take weeks can now be ready in hours—and if the director doesn't like them, they can be altered at the click of a button. Live newscasts can include edited material—direct from the scene of the action.

From 15-second commercials to the most sophisticated feature film, production methods have been revolutionized by the appearance of digital non-linear systems such as those brought to market by Avid Technology. Avid allows the filmmaker to automate every step in the process, from capturing and cataloguing footage through to creating the final output on tape. Once the input (audio, video, scanned image) has been digitized and logged,

David Halberstam's book *The Fifties*. He has databases containing the videos of every interview he completed for that project, as well as each transcript. Mann or Kennedy can search either database to find a clip they need. In some cases, only a phrase is required; with the Avid, such a search can be completed in a phenomenally brief amount of time.

Avid is a software system that combines a PC-styled computer keyboard and mouse with two monitors, various multimedia drivers (video, CD-ROM) and large amounts of data storage. Depending on the configuration, the filmmaker will have frame-accurate trimming, full-screen editing, 2-D and 3-D effects, colour-correction and key effects. Instead of physical bins filled with pieces of film, there are files—also called "bins"—containing digitized (scanned) versions of the footage. The Avid software marks the time line consistently (24 frames, 30 frames, even 25 frames for the European PAL standard) across all elements for ease of matching. Sound is also represented graphically on the screen, making precise matches possible.

On one of the monitors, the Avid can provide a shot-list, or a more extensive description (with accompanying visuals) of certain scenes, or display images from dozens of clips at once. By clicking on an image, the editor can "drag" a clip over to the second monitor to be marked for inclusion in the fine cut, or the sequence can be manipulated by adding other layers of visual imagery or sound. There are three modes: in "cut," editors work with the time line, putting pieces together for the final product. In "trim" mode, frames can be added or deleted, which pushes other pieces of the cut accordingly. In the "effects" mode, editors can experiment with colour keys, rotation, scaling, drop shadows, sweeps, spheres and page curls.

Denis Takacs of Smash Editorial, a Toronto post-production house that specializes in commercials for such clients as Kellogg's, McDonald's and Leon's, is a firm supporter of

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the Avid. He enjoys having this new technology combine sound effects, music and voice-over with multiple levels of visual images. One thing that Denis appreciates is that he can copy a section that he likes and experiment with it while not disturbing the original cut. In a recent demonstration, Takacs showed off a relatively new feature, a 3-D effects box which allows images to be manipulated along their "x-axis": they fly in, rotate or twist with amazing clarity.

Some editors still enjoy the physical actions involved in editing film: selecting the clips, splicing them together, watching the enormous amounts of raw footage reduce to the finished product. One veteran complained that the Avid was "creating desktop publishing in films." However, those who have become accustomed to digital editing have decidedly become converts.

Ron Mann points out that, for filmmakers like himself who use a lot of graphics, the Avid saves time and gives him greater creative flexibility. Ron and the Sphinx staff can create cards and titles—using Photoshop or Illustrator—that would have been sent to an outside firm before. They get the look they want, and they don't have to wait two weeks or more to see if it has turned out the way they hoped. (With 32 layers of "un-do," if something doesn't work, it can quickly and easily be changed anyway.) In the end, even if the final cut does utilize effects firms, Sphinx is still ahead of the game, because they know that the visuals that they need are "do-able."

There is no question that the Avid—and other similar technologies—are having an impact on the industry. Sheridan College now offers Avid-accredited courses. Newly minted Avid-trained editors are going on the internet to advertise their services. New and relatively small firms are emerging in all sectors of the industry: animation, documentary, fiction features and commercials. Smash Editorial, for example, began on Denis Takacs's dining room table where he and his Avid delivered broadcast-ready tapes of NFB films for the Discovery Channel. It now boasts a large roster of corporate clients and will soon be editing Deepa Mehta's next feature film.

Thanks to the Avid, new firms like Smash Editorial and older, but still effective, producers such as Sphinx Productions are reaching their goals of placing products into the marketplace at a truly remarkable pace. ■



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