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"With Final Cut Pro, we're able to work natively with almost any video format. That gives us a tremendous amount of freedom."

Mark Bashore, Digital Kitchen

Digital Kitchen: Creativity in the Blood

By Dustin Driver

How do you market to a vampire? That's the challenge interactive agency Digital Kitchen faced as they created a series of fang-in-cheek ads to promote HBO's smash show *True Blood*. Using applications such as Final Cut Studio and Adobe Creative Suite, the all-Mac shop produced billboards and print ads for brands like MINI and Gillette, and a collection of darkly humorous online viral videos revealing that, after all, vampires are people too.

"The *True Blood* campaign is done on software and hardware that you can get at the Apple Store," says Mark Bashore, Digital Kitchen's creative head. "The tools are easily accessible, which allows us to focus on being creative. That's why we use the Mac."



Courtesy HBO

It's not the first time Digital Kitchen has crossed paths with the undead: They also created the swampy, atmospheric opening title sequence for *True Blood*, now in its second season. The agency already had a reputation for crafting creepy, cutting-edge intros, including the memorable opening credits for HBO hits such as *Six Feet Under* and Showtime's *Dexter*, and for Fox's phenomenally successful *House*. Digital Kitchen has also produced ads for Budweiser, HBO, Coke, Showtime, Sundance, AT&T, and Microsoft, among others. With offices in Seattle, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Manhattan, it's

The agency increasingly turns to Final Cut Pro to produce video sequences for television and the web. "We edit most of our HD entertainment projects in Final Cut Pro," says Bashore. "With Final Cut, we're able to work natively with almost any video format. That gives us a tremendous amount of freedom."

"That's the inherent flexibility of Final Cut," agrees Andy Steinberg, Vice President of IT at Digital Kitchen. "We can work in any format that fits our workflow. To say our workflow is organic is an understatement. It's always changing, and no two jobs have the same steps. Final Cut works how we want to work, regardless of formats or workflows."

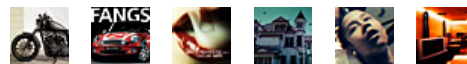
Fusing together miscellaneous footage is standard practice at Digital Kitchen. The shop works with every codec imaginable, from DV to uncompressed 4K. "As an editor who deals with heavy graphics and FX work, I work with numerous formats, frame rates, and aspect ratios," says Digital Kitchen editor Andrew Maggio. "No other platform has allowed me to do this as seamlessly as Final Cut Pro. It also allows intense timelines involving many layers to be mocked up and rendered, with speeds that won't interrupt the flow of a client session."

Aim for the Heart

True Blood is a true hit, the biggest thing on HBO since *The Sopranos*. To promote the show, HBO had already introduced a few fake commercials featuring the show's simulated blood drink. So for Digital Kitchen, it was only logical to think about marketing other everyday products to vampires. The agency pitched HBO on a multimedia campaign featuring print ads, billboards, and short videos distributed on YouTube and other websites. Before long, major brands like MINI, Harley Davidson, Gillette, ECKÖ, and Monster.com had signed on.

The Digital Kitchen crew in Chicago used Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator on the Mac to produce the print ads. To make them as authentic as possible,

Gallery



A print ad from Digital Kitchen's *True Blood* campaign.

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True Hybrids

For the *True Blood* title sequence, Digital Kitchen combined film clips in a myriad of styles to create a morose melange that reflects the show's darkly comic premise: that vampires are among us, their lethal bloodlust now sated by a synthetic blood drink. The titles blend film and digital footage, along with handmade paper-cut titles that were scanned and dropped into the scene with Adobe After Effects.

The team used Avid Media Composer on the Mac to assemble the diverse footage. The sequence is typical Digital Kitchen: a hodgepodge of formats from scanned film to DV to HD mixed with graphics and handmade artwork. "We shot everything from 16 mm film to HD video, which is typical for us," Bashore notes.

they borrowed from existing campaigns, adding taglines like "Feel the wind in your fangs [MINI]," "Dead Sexy [Gillette]," and "Outrun the Sun [Harley Davidson]."

Digital Kitchen also devised a series of homemade and found-footage style video clips to immerse viewers in the *True Blood* world. In addition to several videos that tell the story of vampires coming clean, the agency crafted a short fake international news spot and a CCTV-recorded legal deposition.

"First and foremost we're a digital agency," says Bashore, "but our roots are in making films. The place is filled with people who love filmmaking and storytelling. With these viral video pieces, we wanted to tell the stories of people 'coming out' as vampires. We shot in an un-composed, under-produced manner, and ended up with a style that accentuates the story, not the production."

Watch a viral video created by Digital Kitchen to promote *True Blood*.



Production with ProRes

In most cases, the Digital Kitchen production crews edit uncompressed native footage. But when there's heaps of HD footage, they turn to the high-quality Apple compression codec ProRes. "ProRes is perfect for ingesting tons of HD material," says Steinberg. "It cuts file size tremendously and keeps the quality up. You can do a side-by-side challenge between uncompressed ten-bit HD footage and ProRes, and it's real close. You can't say that for any other compressed codec."

Resources

Final Cut Studio
Mac Pro

MacBook Pro
Final Cut Studio Workflows

Seminars

Motion for After Effects Users
Accelerate Your Video Production

Aperture

For people who love photography.



Final Cut Studio

Go beyond mere editing in a Final Cut world.



Logic Studio

Powerful tools for music production and performance.



The new Mac Pro

The fastest, most powerful Mac ever.



Mac	Pro	Profiles	Digital Kitchen				
Considering a Mac		Macs	Wi-Fi Base Stations	MobileMe	Applications	Developer	Support
Why you'll love a Mac		Mac Pro	AirPort Express	Learn more	iLife	iPhone Program	Where can I buy a Mac?
Compare all Macs		Mac mini	AirPort Extreme		iWork	Mac Program	AppleCare
FAQs		MacBook	Time Capsule	Mac OS X	Aperture	Safari Program	Online Support
Try a Mac		MacBook Pro	Which Wi-Fi are you?	Snow Leopard	QuickTime		Telephone Sales
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Movies		Magic Mouse	Xsan		Logic Studio	Science	ProCare
Web		Magic Trackpad	Mac OS X Server		Logic Express	Business	Certification
Music		Keyboard			Remote Desktop		
iWork		LED Cinema Display					
MobileMe							



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Mark Bashore, Digital Kitchen



Digital Kitchen: Creativity in the Blood

Digital Kitchen has its own studio equipped with several HD video cameras, including the Sony EX1 and video-equipped Canon 5D Mark II DSLR. Several crews shot the footage for the viral videos in Seattle and Chicago. To get amateur-looking footage out of top-notch equipment, the Digital Kitchen crew employed unsteady camera handling and poor lighting.

Each project at Digital Kitchen has three or four team members, including editors and effects artists. It's a ping-pong production style that requires complete system compatibility and easy media management. To manage all this unbridled collaboration, Digital Kitchen uses Final Cut Studio with a network of Xserve servers and Xserve RAID storage solutions.

The resulting workflow couldn't be smoother, Bashore says: "I began cutting the 'vampire gymnast' news video with Final Cut Pro on my own MacBook Pro, then passed it to one of our editors halfway through the process. It took her just minutes to translate the project and get the media. Only Final Cut Pro can do that."

Final Finishing

Whether they're creating dead-on reproductions of home videos or assembling eerie intros, Digital Kitchen needs cutting-edge color correction and finishing tools to get the right look. In the past, they turned to color correction houses with complex equipment. Now they use Color, the professional color grading application included in Final Cut Studio 2.

"We're building Digital Kitchen's first-ever color correction suite using Color," Bashore says. "The old commercial model of color correction is expensive, and few clients are willing to pay for it. So we decided to add color correction to our arsenal of start-to-finish, one-stop production at Digital Kitchen."

With Color, the agency is able to provide greater value to clients. "Typically color correction would be a long, expensive, out-of-house process," says Bashore. "Now we're able to do it here with one guy on a Mac."

But lowering costs is just one advantage of using Color. "It's about creative freedom," Bashore says. "We used to have to wait until the end of a project before we could color correct, and then we'd only get a few hours in the suite. Now we can color correct anytime we want and try on different looks and feels for a piece while it's in production. It lets us accomplish much more."

To get more stylized looks in their video materials, the crew uses Final Cut Studio effects filters. "We're trying to move beyond strictly adjusting lighting or color aspects of the frame," says Bashore. "We don't just color footage — we treat it, and we like to make that treatment unique for each project. With Final Cut, we've manipulated footage that's come in off the cameras in ways that I know the expensive color correction suites simply can't do."

Creative Flexibility

At Digital Kitchen, roles are flexible. Producers edit, editors produce, and creative directors shoot video. "You'd be hard-pressed to tell the producers from the creative directors," Bashore notes. "It's a real workshop environment, and we blur the lines when it comes to job titles. Creativity comes first."

That kind of open innovation and collaboration takes reliable, easy-to-use, and completely compatible tools. "We need hardware and software that allows us to be flexible," says Bashore. "I can do 50 things at once on my Mac, and the Pro Apps are so intuitive to use that I can jump from one to the next. That means that I'm not stuck in one creative area — I can branch out. My Mac provides the tools, and the rest is up to me."

Remote Management

When inspiration strikes at Digital Kitchen, normal business hours become meaningless. To ensure the creative crew has support around the clock, the Digital Kitchen IT team uses Apple Remote Desktop. "I've used Apple Remote Desktop on my laptop with my 3G card in a cab in Manhattan," Steinberg says. "There's really no limit to what you can do with remote access. In addition to server-side maintenance, we use it to remotely maintain client computers. If somebody in our New York office is working late and the local IT person is gone, my IT guy in Seattle can remote into a designer's workstation and tweak font settings or application settings. That enables us to do what we do."

iChat Essentials

When you're working with four main offices, communication is key. "If you ask me what the lifeblood of the company is, it's iChat," says Steinberg. "It's used for everything. It's used just to contact people, to send files, for video chatting. It's not so much a feature as something that's part of the daily grind."

Equipment List

Hardware

[Mac Pro](#)
[MacBook Pro](#)
[Mac Mini](#)
[Xserve](#)
[Apple Cinema Display](#)
[Airport Extreme](#)

Software

[Mac OS X Server](#)
[Final Cut Studio](#)
[Logic Studio](#)
[iWork '09](#)
[Apple Remote Desktop](#)
[Xsan](#)
[Avid Media Composer](#)
[Adobe Creative Suite](#)

Useful Links

[Digital Kitchen](#)
[HBO True Blood](#)

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Compare all Macs	Mac mini	AirPort Extreme		iWork	Mac Program	AppleCare	
FAQs	MacBook	Time Capsule	Mac OS X	Aperture	Safari Program	Online Support	
Try a Mac	MacBook Pro	Which Wi-Fi are you?	Snow Leopard	QuickTime		Telephone Sales	
Find out how	MacBook Air	Servers	Accessibility	Final Cut Studio	Markets	Genius Bar	
Mac Basics	iMac	Servers Overview	Safari	Final Cut Server	Creative Pro	Workshops	
Photos	Accessories	Xserve	Learn more	Final Cut Express	Education	One to One	
Movies	Magic Mouse	Xsan		Logic Studio	Science	ProCare	
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