FLEXIBLE SYSTEMS KEEP INDIE FILM EDITOR ON TOP OF HIS GAME.

Jason Stewart uses HP Workstations together with Avid Media Composer Mojo DX systems to cut-costs and maximize his craft with speed and stability.

To learn more about HP Workstation solutions for Avid editing systems, visit:
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Director Bob "Bobcat" Goldthwait (left) and editor Jason Stewart (right) in an editing session

In editing director Bob "Bobcat" Goldthwait's latest independent film — "World's Greatest Dad" — freelance editor Jason Stewart wanted to explore all the creative possibilities and craft a movie that would outshine the competition at this year's Sundance Film Festival, and ultimately garner a distribution deal.

But creative experimentation takes time and time is money. And like most independent films, "World's Greatest Dad" was challenged on both fronts.

With only 16 weeks to edit the 90-minute film—a comedy starring Robin Williams—Stewart knew upfront that there wouldn't be time for downtime. He would need a nonlinear editing (NLE) system with rock solid reliability; seamless hardware and software compatibility; super fast rendering; and a streamlined workflow that could make the most of the precious time he was given.

Proven Workhorses
While the project allowed him to work on any NLE on the market, Stewart chose the setup he used based on his own growing freelance editing business on an HP Workstation featuring the Avid Media Composer Mojo DX system. Besides his editing talents, Stewart provided the movie with his two identically-configured HP Workstations and set them up in rented edits suites at Santa Monica's Wow and Flutter West.

"In my experience, the HP Workstation and Avid Media Composer are both proven workhorses designed with professional editors in mind," said Stewart.

"When I recommended this hardware / software combination to 'World's Greatest Dad,' I felt confident the offline would go without a hitch — and not fall prey to the kinds of bugs and crashes that cause missed deadlines."

"Together, these systems delivered the power, flexibility, and processing speed that were crucial to our creative process," Stewart added. "When Bobcat said 'Let's trim this' or 'Let's add this', I could quickly make the change, hit play, and we'd sit back and watch our changes happening in real time. Because the workstation and software together processed as fast as we could think, our creative energy wasn't stifled."

Dynamic Storytelling
In "World's Greatest Dad," Robin Williams plays Lance Clayton, a frustrated writer who finds fame after he fakes a suicide note written on behalf of his late teenage son to cover up for his accidental death. The note becomes an instant hit, catapulting Lance into the media spotlight. Stewart's extensive experience editing top-rated Reality TV shows enables him to bring a fresh, spontaneous approach to the editing of full-length feature films. But even when the story is scripted, he still likes to experiment with different, dynamic ways to assemble scenes to convey the story with greater impact.

Prior to starting work on "World's Greatest Dad," Stewart saw a demo of a new Media Composer feature called ScriptSync and immediately recognized what a valuable timesaver it would be to his tight editing schedule. "ScriptSync had a revolutionary impact on 'World's Greatest Dad' because it saved us an estimated two full weeks of laborious effort that we were able to reinvest in the creative process to make the movie better," Stewart said.

"One of the most tedious aspects of editing is rummaging through bins looking for scenes and takes, and playing them one after another to determine which works best. If it takes a few moments to find each clip, by the time you hit play, you've already forgotten the nuances of the preceding choices," Stewart added.

ScriptSync accelerates the editing process by synchronizing the script with all takes of the source footage using phonetic indexing of text and dialogue. You can highlight portions of the on-screen text, and icons automatically appear next to the words providing easy links to all the desired video clips containing audio of those exact words so you can play them in quick succession for easier comparison.

Cost-efficient Creative Workflow
Powered by Quad-Core Intel® Xeon® 5345 2.33GHz processors[1] and four gigabytes of RAM, Stewart's two HP xw8400 Workstations provide him with outstanding and consistent performance. The Avid Media Composer software also provides real time functionality, and the Avid Mojo DX accelerates video and graphics effects processing, which eliminates rendering.

"Not only are these systems fast, their performance is consistent and predictable, which allows me to push deadlines and work right up to the last possible minute with confidence," Stewart said. "If we've got a 7pm screening, I know I can use that day to refine the editing, rather than troubleshoot problems or forfeit that time altogether."

While the HP Workstation and Avid software are robust enough for HD editing, this movie's 35mm film was transferred to DVCAM and edited in SD to keep costs down. "Cutting costs is a key driver in the independent film community, and that's why many editors opt for cheaper editing systems," said Stewart.

"But my experience with Avid and HP products has convinced me that, in the long run, they are more cost-effective because I'm able to spend more time being productive, and less time dealing with frustrating delays."

"On 'World's Greatest Dad,' the realtime processing speed of the HP Workstation and the Avid Media Composer software, coupled with features like ScriptSync, saved us about three weeks of editorial—valued at thousands of dollars—an impressive return on investment," Stewart said.

"As a result, we delivered a more polished, well-crafted film in time for the Sundance deadline, and one that we believe will compete favorably for distribution and audiences in the ultra-competitive independent movie marketplace."

THE COMPUTER IS PERSONAL AGAIN.