



"How Much Money Do You Have to Get Happy?"  
by Patrick Gregston

One of the constant questions in post-production is: "Just how much does the picture editor do?" While desktop tools are constantly adding more functionality, the question of what the focus of the editor's attentions should be can become "Just how much can one person do?" More than one show has found itself with an expanding visual effects catalogue, and suddenly another editing system for an effects specialist becomes the cost-effective way to meet the deadline. Often, whole departments spring up to do what was originally thought to be something that could happen on the editor's desk. Other shows have built elaborate speaker and mixer set-ups in the hope of doing temp mixes from an assistant's workstation.

More important is the management of the storytelling process. Just because an editor can do the mix on his/her desk, should they? Does this serve the production? Is compositing an editor's job? How to decide? What division of labor will tell the story best?

I personally like to reference a statement made by Paul Hirsch, A.C.E. not so long ago in a meeting not very far away.

It was a time of turmoil in post-production. Digital desktop editing had arrived, and the digital revolution had brought a new set of challenges to the post environment. Where 35mm mag required physically different environments for editing and mixing sound, the new workstation made it possible to do things editorially at the mixing stage, and new articulations in sound had made mixing almost an inevitable part of editing. These developments made it clear that the traditional separation of jobs, skills, and workflow was changing. In fact it had already changed to the point that actionable violations of the existing labor

agreements in mixing facilities were the rule, not the exception.

While at this time 'HD' was yet to be anything other than a once failed video format (along with laser disks, and their silly alternate programming ideas), the prospect of uncompressed footage on the desktop was slowly making itself apparent, although it was still distant. Other dark shadows cast by the big bright beautiful tomorrow promised by technology were also clear. While the industry convulsed and organically attempted to digest these often irritating issues, a forward-thinking individual called a meeting.

The individual, a labor executive with responsibility to oversee and enforce contracts, requested a committee to discuss technology development. The executive wanted to get a feel for what the members thought was going to happen. The executive took the approach that labor loses if it stands in the way of change, but it can at least avoid getting hurt if it anticipates and works with progress.

At this meeting, an editor, who's an early adopter and promoter of the digital tools (who ironically is reviled in Tewkesbury because he tells them what is wrong) stated that soon "There will be a single tool that will permit the editor to do everything including mastering at one desk". There was some discussion of just what that could be and how far off it might be. Paul spoke and said:

**"I have already worked on that system. I did the dialogue and sound effects editing. I did all the opticals..."**

The other editors expressed some doubt that this was possible. Paul said:

**"I did it on my first job, on a Moviola. We aren't talking about technology; we are talking about how much money our employer has to get happy. On my first job the producer could afford one guy, me, and I did it all. Now I am fortunate enough to work for producers who can afford a hundred guys".**

The meeting went on to discuss lots of equipment, work roles, and what we thought might be workable solutions to

the contract rule issues, work models, and so on. However I think what Paul said made a big impression on the business rep, who then fashioned a solution based on what is called 'primary skill'. Now, the producers who can afford big crews won't be able to make them work as sound editors one day and mixers or recordists the next. At the same time, new tools and methodologies can come in.

Eventually, in agreement with the producers, the job descriptions have all been re-written to reflect the role responsibilities instead of the technical tasks or tools by which they are accomplished. Interestingly enough the description of picture editor and assistant received very little change, in that they had always been described in terms of their creative and supportive functions, as opposed to execution and tools.



"Pushing Buttons"  
by Greg Snyder

One of my first paying jobs in the movie industry was working as a production assistant in the office at American Zoetrope, where Agnieszka Holland's *The Secret Garden* was in post-production. At that time the Lightworks digital film editing system had just arrived, but Zoetrope was still using a tape-based non-linear editing system called Montage, a huge thing with banks of Sony Beta decks that took up at least 2 rooms. Meanwhile, I was also working as an editor and tape operator for no pay in an intern capacity at a post-production company down the street and I was extremely interested in any technology I could get my hands on. The Montage, however, scared the pants off me with its apparent complexity. I asked one of the editors in the hall one day how he learned to operate and edit on the Montage system. He told me that he had been freelancing as a film editor in New York City and was asked in a job interview if he knew how to run the Montage. He said yes he did, but in reality he had never actually used one. He got a hold of a Montage manual, crammed with it overnight and showed up the next day more or less ready to work. I was impressed with his display of confidence and that story helped me lose any fear of technology I might have had. In fact, I followed his example when I interviewed for my first job on the Avid. I had worked with a couple of other, simpler non-linear digital systems, but I basically jumped into that job with very little working knowledge of the Avid and learned it on the job. I wouldn't recommend this approach in every situation because not knowing your stuff can really get you into trouble, but if you have developed your editing craft and you understand the fundamentals behind the technology, the rest is just learning how to push buttons.