

From dubbing to 3D - how to stay ahead



Pioneering and expanding the range of services is Eyeframe's recipe for staying ahead in a challenging market. CHRISTOS GLARIDIS, Director of the leading independent production company, tells JEAN-LUC RENAUD how streamlining workflow and creative commitment form the basis for getting clients to embrace Blu-ray.

When did Eyeframe come about?

Dubbs had been known as a reliable dubbing facility for broadcast and corporate clients for over 15 years, but it was not necessarily known as a creative facility. We needed a new name to reflect our growing creative side, complete with encoding, authoring and design services. So, we decided to rebrand our new media division and we called it Eyeframe.

This was very successful and we found ourselves doing an increasing amount of DVD feature films. More designers joined as the business grew, until we reached the point where we could also offer, HD DVD, Blu-ray and bespoke graphic services.

How was your entry into DVD authoring?

We came to DVD later than others. While not as expensive as Blu-ray, the DVD equipment was still a big investment. Because our history was in video, we were fortunate to be able to put this skill and expertise directly behind the DVD investment. The biggest investment was not the machines or the infrastructure. The human expertise in the creative video skills is the major investment and the more challenging aspect of becoming an expert in DVD and BD.

At which point did DVD become a challenging proposition in terms of revenue generation?

We don't describe ourselves as just a DVD or BD authoring house. We never have been. Dubbs and Eyeframe are essentially one company. Our income comes from a spread of activities, not just one or two. Though making DVDs is a challenging revenue proposition and has been for the last two years, our current philosophy is to say "yes" to all work, not turning it down because of the pricing, though we do have our limits.

We sit down with the client, we discuss the budget, we see to it that it works out for both parties. For us, DVD is not just a disc. It is encoding, dubbing and all the other related services. We package our prices accordingly.

Because we entered DVD later than others, we missed the high days of £15,000 DVD commissions. Our challenge then was to aspire to produce creatively, work as good as the more experienced companies who had been around for longer.

To be able to produce discs on ever-lower budgets and still make it a worthwhile exercise, we had to streamline our infrastructure to build a very efficient workflow. That's the secret of profitability.

This challenge helped our design department to grow above and beyond just servicing DVD and Blu-ray. We do motion graphics, posters, print design amongst other things. Our designers come from industry sectors outside DVD and BD. They give an edge to our DVD and BD design.

When did you decide it was time to move into Blu-ray?

We had already invested in HD in the tape duplication side, so the infrastructure was already there. We had already built a strong team with HD skills. So, we decided to go ahead with the investment in BD and HD DVD. Instead of being followers, this time we wanted to be one of the pioneers and became one of the first three companies in the UK to offer authoring across both formats.

Also, by that time, we had built a client base we knew would be the first wave of content owners to want to move into high definition. We had always offered advice to our clients, so we saw an opportunity to offer advice on Blu-ray, to educate and guide them.

Did you notice different strategic approaches between the big studios and the independents? Who were more willing to take risk?

The big studios were first, but their BD titles coming to the UK were made in the US. We endeavoured to build our clients' confidence in us. They wanted to know if it was a format that would stay around, whether they could expect a return on their investment. We invited them to try it, and we accompany them on their BD journey.

Our first BD title was Optimum's *Wolf Creek*. We had a long relationship with Optimum dating back to when we were a



new DVD company and they were a smaller independent distributor. We helped them become one of the earliest BD adopters.

Did BD commissions come from your established client base of broadcasters and TV producers through Dubbs?

BD started slowly with features as distributors sat back and waited for the end of the BD - HDDVD war. Meanwhile we were doing more on the corporate side, strangely enough. At the start, Blu-ray tended to be the preserve of musical and feature films, but now TV series are increasingly getting the BD treatment.

Actually, the BD move via Eyeframe changed Dubbs' traditional client base.



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Before, Dubbs was doing more broadcast and advertising work along side feature films. Now it is mostly work for film distributors. We hold their masters, we service their dubbing requirements, and with Eyeframe, we look after their DVD and BD requirements.

We have become truly a one-stop shop for a wider range of clients, as the various industry sectors are getting closer to each other's.

With the price of BD discs falling so rapidly, many authoring houses complain that publishers ask for Blu-ray on a DVD budget. It must already become difficult to make money out of the new format?

It is increasingly difficult to make money out of Blu-ray and DVD. We are constantly monitoring our internal processes to try and minimize costs without effecting the end quality. We have had no choice but to be successful in doing this. Because we have been involved in the format from the beginning, we have built an experienced team, which makes a huge difference in workflow and delivery timescale – the recipe for profitability.

With Dubbs we got used to a fast turnaround environment. Dubbing for broadcasters is a daily, hourly deadline business. We brought this training and philosophy to DVD and Blu-ray. Eyeframe can produce high end BD titles in two weeks. Well managed, with the right skills at hand, it

becomes less expensive to create a good product.

Surely, BD-J and BD-Live applications increase a title's budget.

Yes, BD-J and especially BD-Live applications will increase the titles budget. We are keen to show clients what can be done with BD-J and BD-Live. And it does not need to cost a lot. Sofatronic's Kaleidoscope has enabled us to be the first in the UK to push the boundaries of the BD format. We believe it is up to us, as an authoring studio, to show clients what can be done. We therefore decided to include some BD-J elements with our titles as standard, without charging extra. The timeline, for example, will be a standard feature on our BD titles. What we don't want is for BD to look like DVD, that's not going to help the format. It's a pity that so little marketing effort is being put into the promotion of Blu-ray compared with HDTV and now 3D.

BD-J is bringing everyone a step closer toward the digital era. BD-Live is a bridge into the online world. BD is not so much its own format as part of the future digital format.

What is the BD title you are especially proud of?

There have been so many for different reasons, we are always trying to focus on making current titles we are working on the best that we have produced. The title currently that is being created using the whole range of services we offer is the 11-DVD, 9-BD *World At War* boxset. This includes complete restoration, re-grading from original footage, re-panning and scanning and turning mono into 5.1 audio. We used the Archangel HD tools, before it was released in the market, which we were testing for Snell.

The BD format is uniquely suited for newly-restored masters. Though there is an array of ever more sophisticated tools on the market, when it comes to restoration it's ultimately the operator's skill and expertise that control the process.

Isn't 3D pushed too early when the BD format has yet to reach a critical mass?

I think these two formats have the capacity to run along side by side to each other, BD after all is the perfect format for 3D. It's not



that our clients are not in a hurry to move into 3D titles, there just isn't a lot out there to distribute. The hardware is only just hitting the stores, so how many units of a 3D Blu-ray disc will they sell if there are only a few players in people's homes?

There is also the issue that there are several kinds of 3D: broadcast quality and Blu-ray, what consumers will see on Sky will be not be the same standard as Blu-ray 3D. Also, 3D glasses may turn out not to be popular with consumers. The industry must be careful that 3D doesn't become just a gimmick.

It still remains that, whereas with BD some consumers have trouble seeing a marked improvement over DVD, with 3D everyone can see the quantum leap.

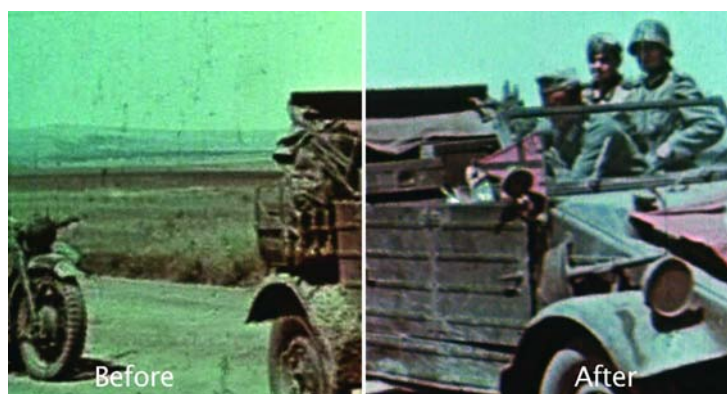
We work on 3D disc promos, destined for the electrical superstores around the UK that already have 3D-ready screens. Also, a company asked us to transfer a 3D film trailer on to a Blu-ray disc for a screening at the Cannes Festival. They gave us a 12-hour turnaround. We delivered! We are also currently working on our first 3D feature.

We will never touch those automatic 2D-to-3D conversion tools. The quality difference in output is huge. The same with conversions. We always prefer to go back to the original master.

What will be Eyeframe activities in two years, five years?

We will be offering DVD, BD and 3D BD if it's still around. We will definitely be working even more across digital content management. Eyeframe has increased its existing infrastructure to digitise clients' assets, hold them, content-manage them. The tape business will diminish and become more specialised. Our graphics department will continue to grow; we will continue to produce even more motion graphics outside of DVD and BD.

This year we set up Eyeframe Events, a division where we produce awards shows, conferences, filming, product launches, etc. This is already a growth area for us.



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