Cut to the Chase:

Post-Production, FCP, Motion Graphics, Color Finishing Blog

HDV, The Half Child

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There is a lot of talk around the interwebs about HDV and Final Cut Pro. Most notably from my readings, the Creative Cow (or The Cow) has thousands of posts relating to this topic. While I'd like to say I have a crack research team that has read all posts on The Cow and has provided me with a summary of them, that's simply not the case. What I do have though is experience working with HDV natively and mixed with HD footage. HD certainly was around before HDV, but consumers couldn't afford it. So what happened? The manufactures got SD DV man and HD woman super drunk, got them a hotel room, and nine months later, out popped baby, "HDV." The story goes on, but basically after HD remarried P2 dude, HDV became "The Half Child."

More...

Before we really get started, I'd like to say (as I will say time and time again here), this is a huge topic. I don't doubt that in the coming days I will be posting compliments to this, only because I know I will find a new bit of info I want to share. Having said that - lets attempt to make this as quick and painless as possible.

Shooting HDV on whatever camera you have is probably a breeze! You play it back on your TV, computer or that iPod size screen attached to your camera, and you are probably pretty satisfied with quality. After all, this isn't what most prosumer level users of HDV are complaining about. Rather, the problems with HDV lie in the post side of the workflow. It's a sticky material to work with. However, Apple has provided us with some work-arounds, work-

throughs and overall workable options of those of us who have adopted the half child.

Multiple Format Timelines:
FCP 6 now comes with this "amazing" new feature that allows you to edit multiple formats in one timeline. It's a great feature, assuming you are working with multiple formats. The one thing you have to consider when setting up a sequence for multiple formats is your aspect ratio. You can slap HD in an NTSC 4:3 sequence and get a letter box effect, you can take NTSC 4:3 footage into a HD sequence and end up with black on either side of the video or get a number of results with any number of combinations. My suggestion: either use "Easy Setup" to set up your project/sequence or allow your settings to set themselves once you drag that first clip onto the timeline.

All this being said, if you are working solely in HDV, it doesn't do anything for you.

HDV as an Only Child:
For you brave producer/editors out there who have chosen to only love HDV, there are plenty of suggestions on how to handle your editing workflow. Really, if you want to take the time to read ongoing, never-ending articles on the matter, be my guest. I have read a handful of the posts and articles on The Cow, and after working through some of their recommendations, I have decided the following for projects which might be only shot and edited in HDV: Work natively in HDV.

There it is. No more to be said. Native HDV! After reading everything I could stand to on the matter, I have decided to work with HDV natively. But for you skeptics out there, here are some other options.

* Option 1: Digitize to Apple ProRes 422. Many suggest digitizing HDV into the Apple ProRes 422, however that requires a capture card. On my edit station, I'm not using a capture, nor do I have the money or the need to capture to FCP with anything other than Firewire. If you are blessed enough to have a capture card hard wired with the ProRes codec, but still choose to use HDV, here is an example of the process. You simply set your hardware to be aware you want to use the ProRes codec, and off you go! Your footage will

be digitized with the usual HDV aspect and frame rate, but rather than baring a HDV 1080i60 bla bla bla codec, it will flaunt the "Apple (I'm better than you) ProRes 422" codec. Be sure your render settings are set to also render to the ProRes 422, and you will be happy happy while editing. If you are going to DVD, you can master to ProRes for an archive file, or send it through Compressor to get the usual mpeg for DVD.

* Option 2: Transcode to ProRes. The other option if you don't have a capture card is to transcode to ProRes after you digitize your media. Now, this sounds all well and good, but it takes some time. Especially if you have an hour or two of footage for one program. This might be a viable option if you have a small amount of footage and need a super quick turnaround. While you'll spend some time on the front end doing the transcode, you will experience faster, more efficient render times.

* Option 3: Edit HDV, Render ProRes. Just when you thought this couldn't get more twisted, here it goes. Digitize HDV, Edit HDV, Render ProRes. Yes, you can do that. But I wouldn't if I were you. I don't see a gain in this workflow. If anyone has a good idea why anyone would want to go here, please let me know!

* Option 4: HDV all the way. Ding ding ding. You got it. Digitize, edit, and render all as HDV. This is my pick, for the workflow I'm working in. Because my final output is 4:3 NTSC, my workaround is to nest the HDV sequence in a NTSC 4:3 sequence and do my final render there. When I start, I use Easy Setup to make everything happy happy in the HDV world. Once I've done my edit and I'm ready to create my NTSC 4:3 file, I go back through Easy Setup and set everything to NTSC DV 4:3 29.97fps. Then, render, export and enjoy. This option also is available in a DV NTSC 16:9 Anamorphic setting for users needing a 16:9 file.

Summary

Of the four options, if you intend to present your project as NTSC 4:3, option four is probably for you. If you need a high res 4:3 (letter boxed) or 16:9 file, I would recommend option 2. If your project is long form HDV and you don't need a quick turnaround, maybe option 2. Really, there is no right or wrong answer here. Try out a workflow, see how you like it, and if you don't, dump it and move on!

The important thing to remember here is that this is not a science. Its more of an art form. Find a style and process that works, and learn to love it! Just because HDV was wrapped in a blanket and left in a basket by the firehouse, doesn't mean it shouldn't get some love occasionally.

My opinion in one sentence or more: Stay away from HDV (there are better ways out there). I've been spoiled to have made the leap from SD to HD, and while HD does have its obstacles, and is more pricey, (and you could go on...) but the obstacles seem to be easier to over come.

Your thoughts and comments are welcome. Check back in 2 weeks for an article on the HXV-200.

PS - If you are getting ready to purchase equipment, stop and consider ALL your options. If you have $6,500 to blow on gear, GO HD! An HXV-200 and 16GB (or in November 32GB) P2 cards will serve you better than HDV (do keep in mind your storage space).

If you have $4,000, consider a higher end SD cam that might shoot 24p and native 16:9. Canon's XL2 or Panasonic 100A or B and accessories will get the job done just as well and possibly with less headaches than HDV. Hmmm... sounds like this should be an article in itself. Stay tuned!

Editor: Allison Raines

Related Links:

* Creative Cow: Apple's ProRes 422 --- PART 1
* Creatice Cow: Apple's ProRes 422 --- PART 2
* Also be sure to check out the help files that came with FCS 2

Keep in mind - there is A LOT of information out there. The two articles above from The Cow are lengthy, but cover Apple ProRes as it relates to HDV along with several other topics.