

Post-production time machine

Award-winning visual effects are the end product of a high-efficiency post-production workflow



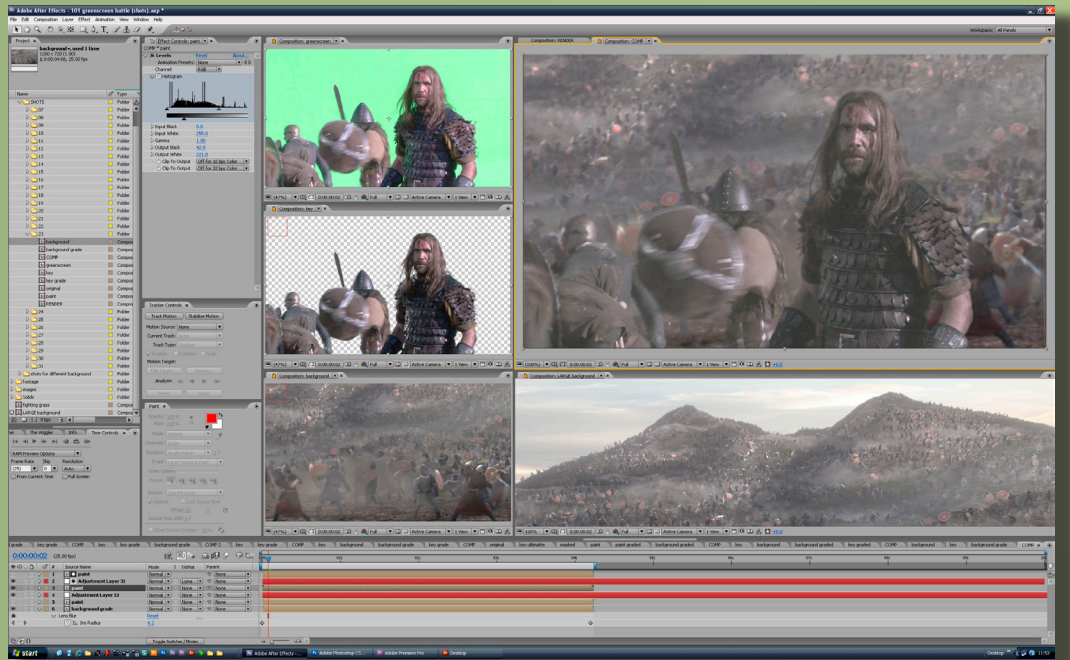
From idea to realisation. Gareth Edwards has always wanted to be able to plug a cable into his head and let the film he's thinking about flow out. Though this is still in the realms of science fiction, being able to dramatically reduce workflow barriers in the process of film-making, and pushing process into the background, means Edwards can get as close as he can to that vision of going from idea to reality in as few steps as possible.



Edwards has produced award-winning work on prosumer equipment that can beat those working on the most expensive, exclusive post-production machines.

"From a visual effects point of view, Adobe After Effects is Adobe Photoshop with a timeline. It's exactly what I'm after."

Gareth Edwards, filmmaker



A trained film-maker his work on visual effects for the BBC series 'Seven Wonders of the Industrial World', won him the chance to direct again. Then the BBC gave him a show to do on what the end of the world might look like: 'End Day' and his next piece BBC visual effects work on the programme 'Hiroshima', won him a BAFTA.

"All this I did on off-the-shelf equipment with Adobe® software - none of this was high-end kit," he says. The BBC then gave him a project that required the digital creation of a vast army and sweeping historical vistas – the story of Attila the Hun. Attila involved 260 visual effects shots, foreign locations, and five months of post-production work for Edwards. Working with Adobe Creative Suite® Production Premium, he says, is the only way such a project could have been finished within budget and to the quality standards required.

"If you could have a time machine, and someone could show you your film before you make it, you would make very different decisions about what you're about to do. But in post-production, you can do that," Edwards says. His time machine is Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium's mix of Adobe Photoshop®, Adobe After Effects® and Adobe Premier®.

"In Adobe Premier I set up my timeline and, even if I haven't done any of the work yet, I'll create a crude version of the shot - a crude

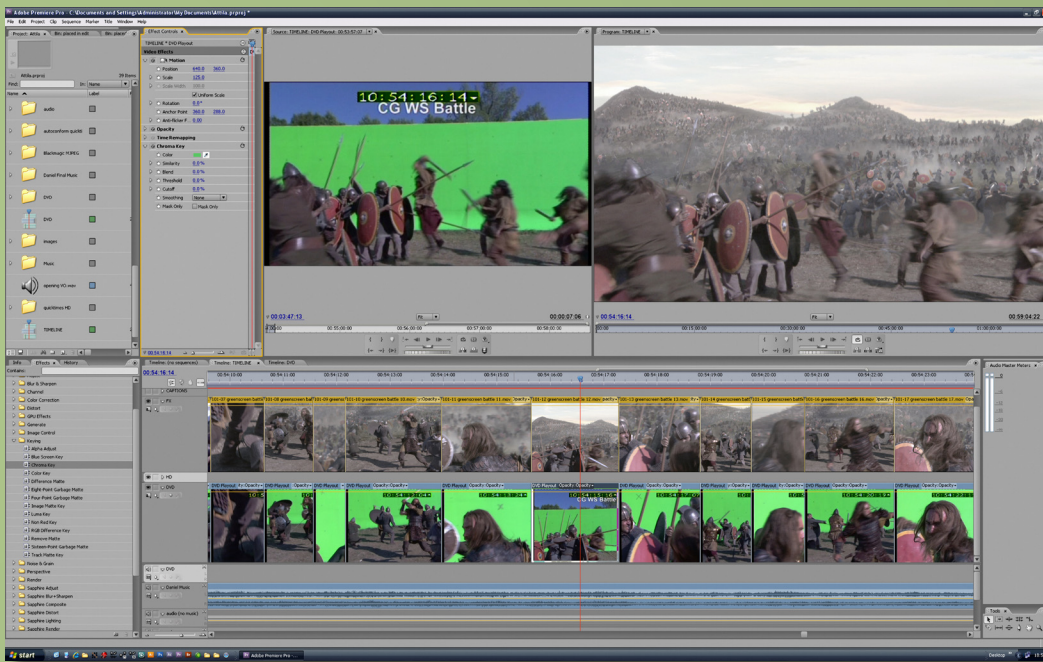
pre-visualisation. Then I'll export the clip to Adobe After Effects, track it, and re-import it into Adobe Premier, managing all the assets using Adobe Bridge - and within half an hour I can see roughly how that shot's going to work within the context of the film."

This helps Edwards keep costs down to a bare minimum and gives him maximum control over his projects. "Only when I can see the whole film working do I start creating the effects. If you can have your process in a much more fluid state, and at any time watch the end product, you make better decisions."

Attila's effects, and Edwards' other visual effects work, can be produced by just one man in a home office because of two fundamental elements, he says: the ability to reproduce, and go beyond, the capabilities of high-end video editing and post-production equipment on desktop computers; and the seamless integration between post-production, editing and image manipulation packages found in Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium.

More bangs for fewer bucks

"TV is a visual storytelling medium. The best tool for manipulating visuals is Adobe Photoshop - there's nothing that comes close to it for creating photorealistic images. Adobe After Effects is so integrated with Adobe Photoshop that it naturally becomes the software you should choose to create your visual effects."



“Once I’m working with Adobe Photoshop and Adobe After Effects, it becomes natural I should edit in Adobe Premier.”
 Gareth Edwards, filmmaker

“I can play with the layers in Adobe Photoshop and import them directly into Adobe After Effects and they’re automatically updated. From a visual effects point of view Adobe After Effects is Adobe Photoshop with a timeline. It’s exactly what I’m after. Once I’m working with Adobe Photoshop and Adobe After Effects, it becomes natural I should edit in Adobe Premier.” The abilities small film-makers like Edwards now have at their fingertips with Adobe, he says, makes buying high-end ‘traditional’ video equipment pointless.

On Attila he saw how much less Avid was able to deliver, while working with his editor Colin Goudie on the final cut before his CGI work began. Around half the director’s time in edit, he says, is “dead time”, waiting for suggested changes to be made. Edwards used this dead time to work on pre-visualisations on his laptop, also running Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium.

“Being used to Adobe Premier, I’d be making suggestions for adding effects or increasing layers, and Colin was often frustrated with Avid’s limitations. I couldn’t believe that Adobe Premier, at its price, was doing so much on just a laptop. Avid was crashing far more often, and the gap became very clear. Also you’re tied into proprietary hardware with Avid, whereas you can use Adobe Premier on any computer you want.”

The iterative visual interface and functional changes made to Adobe Creative Suite packages have helped him work, he adds. The tabular user interface is a great improvement, he says, but it’s the tight integration between the applications within the suite that has really helped out with post-production workflow, “It feels like your using one piece of software!” he enthuses.

“A fundamental part of visual effects is stitching images together so you have a seamless background plate. It’s quite time-consuming to line up all those images and blend them together, and the fact that Adobe Photoshop is more automated at doing that really speeds up the process.”

Making workflow easy

Moving assets between packages, a major headache in some workflow set-ups, is easy with Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium, says Edwards. Being able to access these assets with common interfaces across packages is even better. Together, these advantages make huge workflow advances, he says.

On Attila attention to historical accuracy was vital. Edwards had got a city wall detail wrong – but did not know until an expert screening. “Changing such an element at that point would normally be a really big job.

Customer:

Gareth Edwards

Challenges

- Deliver high-end post-production results on TV budgets
- Avoid normally complex post-production workflows and asset management

Solution

Adobe® Creative Suite® Production Premium
 Inter-package integration and cost-efficiencies of Adobe production suite cut costs and enable rapid post-production

Results

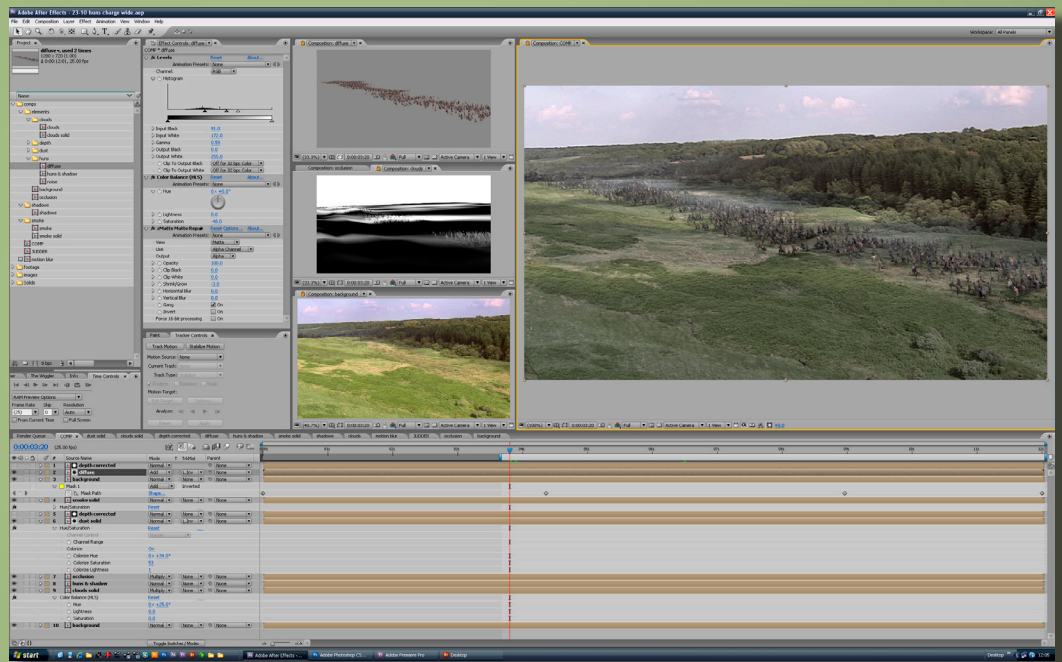
- Save time and money in pre-visualising work
- Beat high-end post-production equipment in delivery, flexibility and ease of use
- Efficient management of assets seamlessly within the workflow

Systems At A Glance

- Adobe® Creative Suite® Production Premium
- Platform: Windows XP
- Hardware: Mixture of 64-bit and 32-bit PC desktop and notebook hardware

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Gareth Edwards, filmmaker



But I just press Ctrl-E in Adobe Premier and the Adobe After Effects project opens; I'd then hunt for the layer that has the wrong walls and highlight that, press Ctrl-E, and Adobe Photoshop opens with that layer. I can just change that layer, close it all down, it saves and automatically filters back to the timeline and re-renders. It becomes a really simple process making changes. The applications are just so well integrated now."

The packages within Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium keep a tight track on assets, Edwards is free to get on with creating. "There are so many things when you're making a film that you have to remember and carry in your head, that to be able to forget about these things and leave it up to Adobe Creative Suite to worry about - which file came from where, which version it is - is great."

"If I was using different software, that wouldn't be possible. If I was moving between Apple Final Cut Pro™ and Autodesk® Combustion® or anything else, I would have to be very clever, organised and careful with the way I worked, because it would very quickly become confusing."

Edwards' one-man award-winning post-production studio only exists, he says, because Adobe is empowering the little man. Slashing costs and time in workflow on top of this, he says, means he gets the edge. "If you can find

clever ways to speed up your workflow that's going to translate to your budget."

"Ironically, I find that I can work faster using Adobe software than if I was given more expensive software, because it's so integrated. It allows me to compete. Adobe has liberated me - it's become less about who's got the monopoly on expensive gear and more about who's got the better ideas. But it would be completely unfair of me to say that I could do what I do without this software - I couldn't at all."

Compared to winning a BAFTA the Sci Fi Channel's Sci Fi London 48-hour Film Challenge 2008 might sound obscure. But since making Attila, Edwards has won that award with a five-minute short, scripted, shot and edited in just two days. The result, 'Factory Farmed', is a winning example of a science fiction short produced with, according to the competition criteria; minimal resources and in a very short time. Only his Adobe production suite lets him fully deliver. That is not quite plugging a wire into his head - but it is not very far away.



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