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Bob Donnelley shows off his PS Teknik gear for getting a film look

DSLR TIPS

Heard the news? DSLRs are here...Get to know them in this primer



Rich Rubasch
TILT MEDIA INC.

Back in Time

When I got started in video production film was the rule. That or Betacam. But there wasn't much in between.

Three quarter inch tapes still found their way into the edit bay on occasion, and one inch tape was the preferred film transfer format before Digi-Beta came along. There was certainly no such thing as tapeless media, heck we were still transferring animations from AfterEffects one PICT file at a time to the Abekas digital disc recorder on floppy discs. Crazy!

As I recall, film look was more of a frame rate thing and perhaps an overall graininess that defined it as such. Video was prevalent in its good old interlaced 30 frames per second form and the tape vault was a mix of large one inch reels and beta cassettes.

If memory serves, the original Sony VX 1000, the revolutionary DV camera that would change the production landscape, could only shoot in 30fps interlaced. Not exactly film look. But it took the production community by storm, put decent quality digital video in the hands of amateurs and pros alike and made video accessible to the masses.

More or less.

That was 1995.

It's been fifteen years since that revolutionary time...any of it sound familiar?

Can you say DSLR?

I suppose the big difference is that we all have become accustomed to progressive shooting, so the frame rate benchmark is built in to most modern cameras.

But what film's greatest creative advantage has always been it's shallow depth of field. It was the one look that a stock fixed lens on a video camera couldn't capture. And the one look that came at a very steep price.

Enter the Video DSLR.

The new Canon T2i is capable of shooting full frame 1920 x 1080 HD video at 24 and 30 fps with all the advantages of shallow depth of field and interchangeable lenses.

Oh, for about 800 bucks.

Game changer? Well, let's at least say they tell me it's a revolution...it's the VX1000 times five at less than 1/4 the price. I'd say that qualifies for something?

So do the new breed of DSLRs come with some shortcomings? Perhaps...and to get an idea of what you'll need to know, we've covered it in this issue. And don't forget to check out the photos from our past events. Then head over to the bck cover to see what's next...Enjoy!

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Let's Talk Taxes

Most of us were excited in 2005 to hear that Wisconsin was implementing a film production tax credit program to give a boost to the film industry in our state. Last year Governor Doyle's partial veto significantly scaled back the program limiting the number of productions that can take advantage of the program. So where does the Wisconsin Film Tax Credit stand today?

Film Wisconsin provides a refundable tax credit of 25% on direct production expenditures and a 25% investment tax credit for investing in Wisconsin-based productions. In addition, production companies doing business in Wisconsin can get a 15% film production investment credit on expenditures for property and equipment.

The most significant change was a decrease in the cap on tax credits from \$1.5 million down to \$500,000 million. According to Travis Moody of Red Star Pictures LLC, "once the \$500k is gone, it is gone. This means that one project can come into the state with a \$2m budget and theoretically take all \$500k for the year. The program then becomes non-existent for other films that year and makes other nearby states, such as Michigan, who offer a larger incentive program more appealing."
(www.redstarpictures.com)

Michigan offers cash incentives on a sliding scale, with a Michigan spending threshold of \$200,000: 12% refund on \$200,000-\$1 million expenditures, 16% refund on \$1-\$5 million, 20% on \$5-\$10 million. All of our neighboring states offer some form of tax credits for the film industry.

Another significant change was the attempt to remove a loophole that gave 25% tax breaks to salaries and wages of nonresidents. According to Badger Guide LLC, "Even though this proposal ends the payroll company loophole, a company can still get a 25% tax

credit for hiring a non-resident. The only difference is that the credits are limited to the first \$50,000 of wages paid to each non-resident. This doesn't seem to put residents at much of an advantage. A company can still hire a crew person from Chicago and get a 25% tax credit. Unless that worker will be making more than \$50,000 on that project there is no tax advantage to hiring a resident." (www.badgerguide.blogspot.com)

Not all of the changes to the bill are bad. Some other notable changes are that 35% of the project's total budget must be spent in Wisconsin to qualify. The threshold for an accredited production has been lowered from \$100,000 to \$50,000. The eligible timeline for a video game project was increased from 12 to 36 months. A complete list of changes can be found at FilmWisconsin.net.
(www.filmwisconsin.net/Incentives/Synopsis.asp)

The biggest feature film to have been produced in Wisconsin since the tax credit program came into place is Johnny Depp's *Public Enemy*. The Department of Commerce reported the production made the state \$5 million during filming. The tax credit program gave back roughly \$4.6 million in return. This basically eliminated the profits potentially gained. That tax money is greatly needed at a time when we face huge budget deficits. But now, but by limiting the program so much, it may have undone what it originally set out to do: to bring a more major motion picture productions to Wisconsin.

Again, Travis Moody, "Unfortunately, until a more competitive incentive program is put into place, there will only be limited growth of a sustainable film industry in Wisconsin. The big problem with attracting a limited number of films each year to the state is that it does not create steady jobs. It only creates a job for someone in the industry for a month or two per project and if there is only one or two projects per year, then we can't have a serious film industry in Wisconsin."

DAN SMITH ***Selling your program*** ***to the cable networks***

Dan Smith has plenty of experience with the networks so he was a great choice to give us some tips on getting a TV show on the air. We also combined our holiday party at the perfect venue at Yahara Bay Distillery. The biggest tip Dan had for us was to really get to know your target network...know what they are airing now and what might be a good fit...don't try to force a new show idea that doesn't fit their current lineup. See Dan's work at www.trianglemediaworks.com and download his presentation at www.mcai-madison.org. Thanks to Tilt Media and ProVideo for sponsoring the event!



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Super Marketing

Overall the response to this year's Superbowl commercials has been pretty luke warm. Still, it was a pretty well rounded grouping of spots...and the highest percentage yet of HD spots. Let's take a look at the numbers.

- 124** Total number of spots from the coin toss to the end of the game.
- 11** Number of spots broadcast in SD.
- 10** Number of spots promoting a movie.



- 12** Number of spots for car companies.
- 6** Number of spots in the biggest block of spots.
- 11** Beer commercials.
- 23** TV show promo spots.

I thought the Late Show promo with Dave, Oprah and Jay was pretty bold with all the press that the late shows have gotten lately. I was surprised that the local/regional blocks had mostly SD commercials, except American Family Insurance, especially since WISC will accept HD spots for local broadcast.

Coke had a couple entries and they always produce a high quality spot...remember the African Safari sleepwalker?

And how many of you made it out to Denny's for a free Grand Slam breakfast on the Tuesday after the Superbowl?

Lastly, I think the Who really rocked it. Loved the show they put on. The game wasn't bad either.

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Student Success

In the ambiance of the new HD theater in MMI's new building, students and members alike got tips from the pros on how to land a job. Georgia Roeming from The GEO Group, Tom Kermgard from ProVideo and Travis Moody from Red Star Pictures headed up the panel. It was an engaging event for all. Once again, special thanks to ProVideo for providing the food for the larger than usual hungry group. Thanks to MMI for hosting the event.



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BOB DONNELLEY Getting a film look with your video camera

According to Bob Donnelly it turns out we really don't want more depth of field, we want a lot less of it. And to accomplish that look with your average HD video camera what you're going to need is a film lens adapter. Bob brought along his toolbox of goodies to ProVideo for a demonstration of the technology from P+S Technik on both a 2/3" chip camera (thanks Jason Koehl) and Bob's own Sony EX-1 1/2" chip camera. More and more clients are looking for that definitive film look, and that includes softer backgrounds and more focus on the main subject. Bob did a great job showing the different lens options and Fred Graber helped out as talent. www.nacamera.com
Special thanks to ProVideo for hosting...



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P+S Technik sample frames



Cinematography - DSLR Style

Digital cinematography is changing so rapidly these days that a printed book on the subject will likely be outdated by the time it reaches store shelves; this is especially true when it comes to the rapid release cycle of DSLRs. Up-to-date information can be found on online forums, but forums lack the organizing principles of a book, and as a result it can take a ludicrously long time to piece together reliable information.

DSLRs are a great enabler on the “no film school” front, as they are priced to own and allow aspiring filmmakers to follow the “buy a camera and learn” lesson plan. But as with any creative tool, a DSLR is only as good as the person using it. While these cameras offer a world of advantages, they also come with considerable drawbacks. However, these drawbacks are worth dealing with in order to get the kind of amazing images possible with an imaging sensor that has twenty to thirty times more surface area than that of a similarly priced, dedicated video camera. To emphasize: these cameras are not designed to shoot movies. Their primary function remains to shoot still photos, but it just so happens that they shoot amazing video very inexpensively, and for that they are worth tinkering with, hacking, and jumping through a lot of hoops to use. And make no mistake: to modify these still cameras to behave like “real” movie cameras, there are a lot of hoops to jump through, but you will be rewarded by using a camera that many of us could only dream of a few years ago, for cheaper than any of us imagined.

One could write an entire guide on choosing a DSLR; each shooter’s DSLR choice comes down to availability, price point, and their own particular needs. To go into it briefly: at this point in time I believe the Canon series offer the best quality and flexibility for filmmakers, due in part to their superior h.264-based codec (which is of higher quality than the MJPEG codecs of Nikon and the lower-bitrate AVCHD codec of Panasonic’s offering). The recently announced Canon Rebel T2i (a.k.a 550d, due in March) looks like a heck of a deal — it’s basically the same camera as the 7D for less than half the price (some

differences: less weather coating, slower continuous shooting in still mode, and SD cards instead of CF). The 7D (\$1,700) and T2i (\$800) share the same APS-C sensor size, although preproduction tests of the T2i reveal it to be slightly worse in low-light than the 7D. The 5D’s biggest advantage over its lesser cousins is its low-light performance thanks to its full frame sensor. With the announcement of the T2i, the 7D has effectively been dropped into no-man’s land for DSLR filmmakers. Thus for \$800 you can get an APS-C-based camera, or step up to the full-frame 5D1. For even better low-light performance, the \$5,000 1D Mark IV, despite its smaller sensor, will generally be a step up from the 5D due to Canon engineers squeezing better low-light performance from a smaller chip thanks to some newfangled technologies.

When budgeting for a camera package, assume the camera itself is going to make up a third (or less) of your overall expenses. This is just a rough rule of thumb, but if you have \$3k to spend, don’t target a camera that costs \$2,600; consider a \$1k camera body and then budget for lenses, tripod, audio equipment, etc. and see where you end up. DSLRs are capable of capturing great moving images, they are by no means optimal for movie making in terms of features or ergonomics; thus a plethora of add-ons are necessary to make a DSLR behave like a “legitimate” movie camera. Unfortunately, much of the add-on market is targeted at accessorizing cameras that cost several times as much as a DSLR; when your camera costs \$40k, it makes sense to spend \$2k on a matte box; when your camera itself cost \$2k, it’s a bit harder to justify.

“Buy used” has seldom been more true than when it comes to DSLR lenses. New DSLRs come with autofocus lenses, which work great for still images, but in video mode they’re stuck using a contrast-detection method which is too slow to be viable; no one should be using autofocus on narrative films anyway. If you buy the camera with a bundled lens, you’ll get a solid all-around lens for taking still photos; however, if you’re on a tight budget

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and are mostly interested in shooting movies, you can skip the bundled lens, buy the body-only version, and spend the savings on used lenses. Here's where the great advantage of "obsolete" technology comes in: there are thousands of manual focus-only lenses available with a deflated value because of their relative uselessness on modern DSLRs — except when it comes to video mode, where they're suddenly useful again. While you can't beat good cine lenses, at this price point it's a blessing to have so many interchangeable lenses available at bargain prices. Also, whereas many of these older manual lenses may not be up to the task of resolving 21 megapixels with aplomb, they don't need to; in video mode, 1080p amounts to just shy of 2 megapixels, and any decent SLR lens outstrips this resolution. For the web almost any SLR lens will be sharp enough, but if you're planning on going to the big screen (theatrical, a festival run, etc.) then you'll want to make sure you're getting a sharp enough piece of glass.

When it comes to choosing focal lengths, the first lens you should purchase is a 50mm prime, which is wide enough to get room coverage, yet not so wide that it introduces much geometric distortion. Hitchcock used it for the majority of his shots; they're workhorse lenses and are generally inexpensive. When buying lenses you will generally want faster glass for the best low-light performance and flexibility (f/1.4 is basically as fast as it gets). To the layman, f/stop numbers seem undifferentiated, but the drop-off in light transmission from stop to stop is significant; exposure is logarithmic, so f/1.4 transmits twice as much light as f/2, f/2 twice as much as f/2.8, f/2.8 twice as much as f/4, etc. After the 50mm one should expand in both directions, adding a 28mm or 35mm lens on the wider side as well as an 85mm and 135mm on the zoom side (these



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Cinematography - DSLR Style

numbers are approximate, given the varying lens lineup of different manufacturers). It's also a good idea to have a general zoom lens to hit particular focal lengths, especially on the longer side, so something like a 70-200mm would serve you well.

DSLRs are so lightweight that they don't move like a film camera; if handheld, they jitter like a consumer camcorders, instantly marking your footage as amateur. And in many cases DSLRs are ergonomically worse than a camcorder, as they are designed to shoot stills, not video. There are two main steps in adapting your DSLR to handheld video work. One, add weight in order to increase mass



and minimize jitter. Two, add a third point of contact to stabilize the camera against your body (and relieve some of the burden from your arms). Because the mirror of your DSLR is raised during video

shooting, you can't use the viewfinder to press the camera against your face for a third point of contact as you would while shooting stills. This leaves you with needing some sort of attachment to adapt a fundamentally unergonomic chunk of metal to your fleshy human form.

DSLRs weren't designed to shoot video in a bona fide video production environment, so no matter which DSLR

Continued on page 15

A dramatic landscape with a purple and orange sky, lightning bolts, and mountains.

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Build Connections. Deliver Your Message. Get Results.



Frame Size Matters

We probably all have a pretty good idea of the difference between SD and HD, especially in image quality. But sometimes it helps to take a closer look at why these images look so much better on our monitors. And with the surging interest in the latest offerings of DSLR cameras image size is even more important to consider.

In the comparison below (thanks to Creative Cow Magazine - www.creativecow.net) you can see how pitiful the little NTSC frame is dwarfed by the rest of the pack.

And I'm not sure anyone would be bragging about their 4.3 megapixel digital camera but take a look at how even that image size makes full 1920 x 1080 look relatively small.

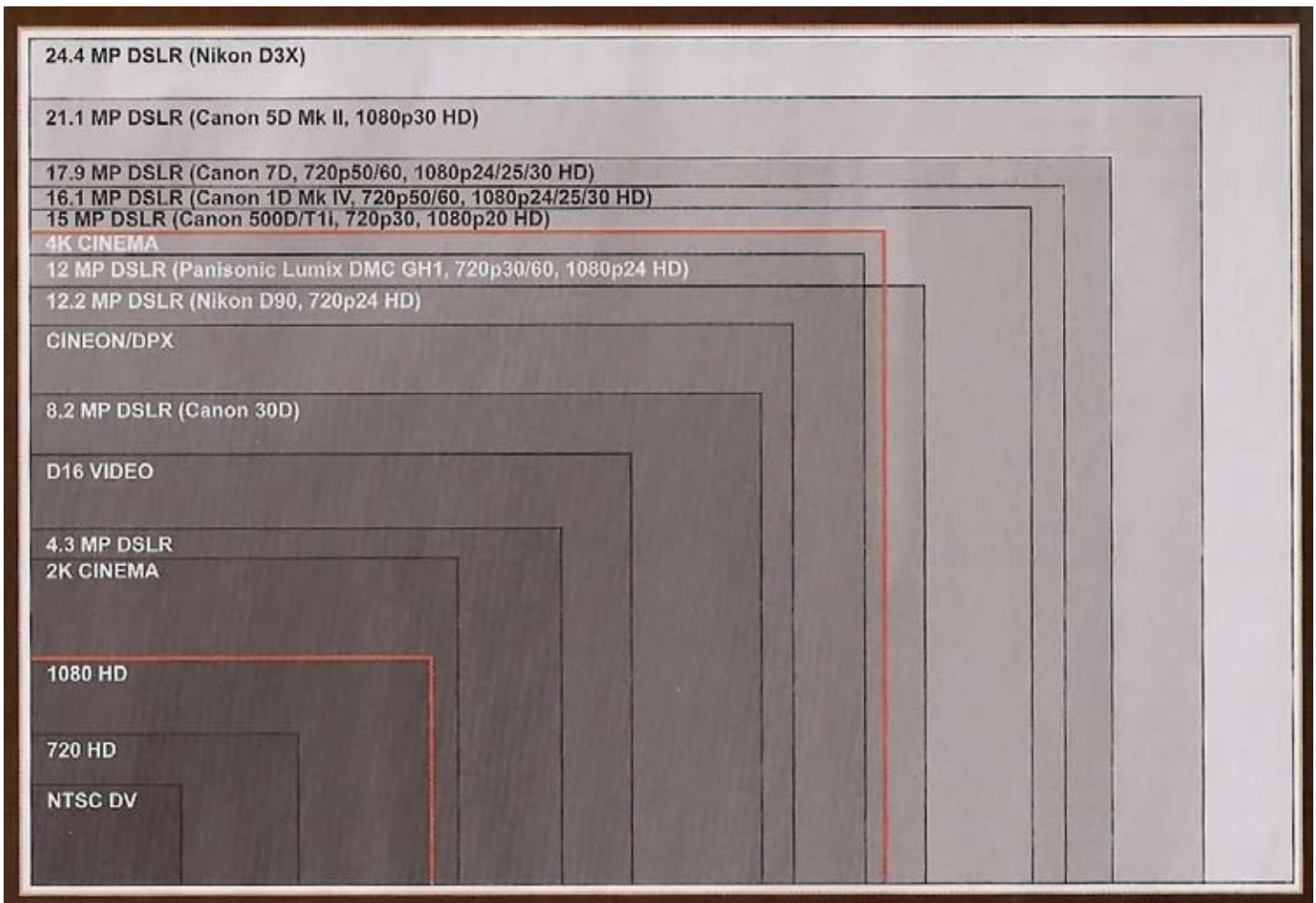
Once you climb up into the 12 megapixel range you start to

see that it truly is a large image, right up there with full 4k Cinema images.

One of the issues that has crept up in the new DSLR with their larger imagers is heat. The new Canon T2i has notably been heating up to the point of shutting down after recording even short 5-10 minute clips.

That said, if you haven't been paying attention, this new breed of photo/video camera is certainly getting a lot of attention, and with the low cost of entry, it even makes sense for budding home movie makers to try their hand at shallow depth of field.

Send a report if you have used a DSLR on a shoot to storyboard@tiltmedia.com.



Cinematography - DSLR Style

you buy, you're likely to have overheating problems. This is when the DSLR's operating temperature rises to the point where the camera either shuts down automatically, or the image becomes noisier due to the excess heat. This generally happens after several minutes of continuous shooting; in the case of the Nikon D90, the camera will just shut down and you'll be unable to enter Live View mode until it has sufficiently cooled; in the case of the 5D the camera will allow you to shoot as it overheats but your image will become noisier due to interference from the heat. Overheating is an unfortunate side effect of getting a whole lot of camera for very little money, and the best solution is actually to get two camera bodies so you can shoot with one while the other cools. Or, if you're on a major production, get 13 bodies. Other than that, there's not a whole lot you can do to prevent it, other than to take the camera out of Live View whenever possible, keep the shooting environment as cool as possible, and plan your production's breaks accordingly. On staged productions where cutting often is a standard operating procedure, DSLR overheating is not a deal-breaker; if you're considering a DSLR to shoot interviews, however, this is a major consideration as your camera will inevitably run into issues in the middle of an interviewee's spiel.

DSLRs aren't designed to record high-quality audio; they lack professional inputs for microphones and have an auto-gain circuit that ruins any chance of manually setting your levels. That is not to say you can't record theatrical-quality audio on your DSLR production; you just need the right equipment. Essentially, you have two options for audio recording: on-camera, or separate-system. On-camera is what any video camera user will be familiar with; you plug in your microphone(s), and the audio is recorded together with your video. Separate-system is what filmmakers accustomed to shooting celluloid will be familiar with; you record visuals to one medium and sounds to a separate recorder, and then have to sync the two up during editing (thus the need for a clapper on shoots). Both approaches have their pros and cons (briefly: separate system affords you higher quality audio recording at the expense of convenience in the editing room; on camera is the converse), and which approach you go with will depend on your production needs and whether you even have the option of on-camera recording (your DSLR may not have a mic input, or you may be unable to disable the auto gain).

Special thanks to Ryan Bilborrow Koo for this informative article.

For the complete article just point your browser to:

<http://nofilmschool.com/dslr/>

Soundbites

Greater Wisconsin Chapter Plans Merger

The Greater Wisconsin chapter leaders have evaluated how to best serve our members, and the plan is to merge with the Madison chapter. Given the current state of the economy, people's limited time to volunteer, and the amount of energy/funds required to plan meetings, run CameoFest, put out a newsletter, etc, they have decided to combine resources with the Madison chapter at the end of June. Madison is the largest chapter in the Association – and also happens to be the closest chapter.

Greater Wisconsin will still hold their planned March meeting on Copyright and the Internet, and How to Make Your Website Work Harder. They will also still hold CameoFest for the last time later this year.

