

THE DIGITAL IMAGING TECHNICIAN

The Digital Imaging Technician (DIT) seminar, held at the BFI in December 2014, was organised by HDDC for Creative Skillset as a pilot course for DITs to show the breadth of knowledge and practical experience they would need to perform the increasingly important roles the job entails, if high end cinema and TV productions are to get the maximum benefit from moving into the world of capturing, and post producing images as data, rather than film or linear video.

A two day programme showed just why the skills required of the digital imaging technician are so vital in this new environment.

Veteran film & video technologist Peter Wilson of HDDC organised the seminar, which made it clear how vital it was that proper and thorough training of DITs becomes standard practice, if the industry is to reap the full benefits of the switch to capturing images as data.

"As we show in these two days, there are things DITs really have to know – especially when something goes wrong on the shoot. They have to be able to diagnose where the fault is – and how to go about getting it fixed" he says.

"The role of DIT is much more complicated than people realise – and that level of complexity is broadening all the time" adds Wilson. He wants the industry to understand the level of responsibility the DIT has, right through from the camera to post production. "He's going to be the digital expert – the guy you turn to in a crisis to ask 'what do we do now?'".



Initially, the role of the DIT was thought to consist primarily of dealing with the storage, copying and transcoding of the image data captured, to pass on to post production. The amount of data being recorded on a high end production is vast, and requires faultless storage, copying and logging. While still a very important part of the job, it became clear that a thorough knowledge of many other aspects of the increasing prevalence of digital technology in production was also required.

The role of the DIT starts with the camera – working with the DOP and camera team to ascertain the objectives they have in choosing the specific camera system they're planning to use, including assisting with camera set-ups, inspecting the images coming out of the camera, recording the data, making backup copies, and ensuring the right metadata is captured – checking all through the process that all the media recorded is in good order and correctly logged - it's all part of what the DIT does.

The DIT has this vital 'quality control' role during production, relied on to flag up any problems with what's being recorded. So a thorough knowledge of cameras, recording formats and backup systems is therefore essential, as is a full understanding of the science of image capture, in terms of spatial and temporal resolution, how colour space works, and can be manipulated. Understanding the effects of different kinds of compression is important too – knowing what can be used in certain applications – and what must be avoided. In fact, the sheer amount of detailed knowledge required might suggest the DIT role itself might eventually be split into some of its key component areas.



The data wrangling role is one – so is the role of on-set colourist, as the director and DOP need to see exactly what's been recorded by the camera, and that's difficult when cameras like the Arri Alexa or Red cameras are capturing more image data in raw form than can be shown on monitors on set.

Some initial colour correction needs to be done offline, on set. Some DOPs want to see a specific 'digital dailies colourist' recognised for this key role.

The better prepared the DIT, in terms of technical knowledge of the digital systems in use, and in terms of experience of digital production, the more value he or she is likely to bring to any production on which they're working.

"You have to learn the history. It's a vital foundation to understanding what the appropriate technology to use is now, when things are developing so quickly. You need the background, to inform your decisions on what current options to choose" says Wilson.



One example is workflow. Many companies offering services and systems for use by DITs suggest particular workflows to suit what they provide, but according to Wilson, every production is different, and the optimum workflow for each one will differ. A fully competent DIT should be able to plan the best workflow for a specific production. "I designed this course to teach people the fundamentals, so they could adapt and build what's needed into any workflow" he says.

It's very much a case of practical competence with the technology, so is the whole area of educating DITs a candidate for the renewed enthusiasm for apprenticeships?

"Yes, that could work well, given that the DIT role is very much a practical thing – it would help those starting out get up to speed on the skills needed" says Wilson.

Article by Nick Radlo, January 2015

