

## Feature

### 2003 - Free stuff, Updates, HD and some more...

By Neil Sadwelkar and Bimal Unnikrishnan

Before you venture into the length of this article, be forewarned - there isn't any earth shattering revelation here, nothing that will make you say 'wow!' Nothing remotely revolutionary. Don't blame us - 2003 has been rather uneventful so to speak. Not that 2002 was any more or less eventful. And 2004 may not be any different. But that's the way this industry is - every year things are improved upon, more sophistication, more power and more user controlled features are added. But if you were waiting for a new logic to be introduced in the work flow, a new 'never-been-so-good' software or hardware tool to be launched or a new image acquisition format to be developed, you would be disappointed. Nothing of that sort has taken place so far in this year.

But this is not to imply that 2003 has been any less exciting. It definitely has been - especially if you are an end user, well, just smile your brightest smile - you are indeed one lucky guy, pal! More about it later.

But purely at the technology development level, nothing historic has happened this year. That's pretty much expected too. An industry, that's as standard-centric as this, wouldn't witness revolutionary changes in a matter of year or two. Revolutions happen once or twice [at best] every decade or so. But yes, trends do tend to proliferate - changing user profiles, changing user tastes, changing workflows, falling prices, new features etc. have been on the upswing this year too. 'Video industry is a trend-driven business' would be a rather apt statement. Let's get into some details -

#### Cheap, Cheaper and now Free!

This has been the best thing to have happened this year if you are an end user! Tools, whose prices used to read like some complex binary data, now read more like your yearly take home or in some cases monthly take home! This isn't an accident! We should thank the Intels, AMDs and IBMs of the world for boosting the computing power of our processors beyond imaginable thresholds. We should thank a bench of small or medium sized companies for porting cheap but powerful video tools for desktop computers - and for, in the process, taking the wind out of proprietary behemoths! We should thank the emergence of DV technology [and FireWire, of course] for letting us do what we do at 1/4<sup>th</sup> cost or less. Well, a lot of things have contributed to these 'cheap' phenomena!

Increasing competition from new and often small players have forced many established companies to re-define their pricing strategies. Take a look at this - Apple Final Cut Pro was introduced some years back at about INR 50,000 [US \$999], soon Avid came up with Xpress DV. This year in January, Apple introduced Final Cut Express, a watered down but very functional version of the exalted FCP, at about INR 15,000 [US \$299] and Avid, now hold your breath, started offering free download of its Avid DV [known as Avid Free DV] on their website! Could you have imagined this a few years back? Not only that, Avid further slashed the price of Avid Xpress DV to about INR 35,000 [US \$695] in 2003 November! Now Avid and Apple are not the only ones in the 'cheap, cheaper and now free' zone. There's Softimage [3D kid brother of Avid] which introduced a freely downloadable version of Softimage XSI on their website in 2003, February. Not to be left behind, even Alias, makers of the venerable Maya, started offering free downloads of Maya Personal Learning Edition [PLE] 5.0 on their website in October 2003 - this was originally shipped commercially [albeit at reduced prices] in June 2003! In January this year, Discreet announced version 2.1 of Combustion software at a vastly reduced price of about INR 50,000 [US \$995] - compare this to the US \$5,000 price tag that version used to carry!

Another possible reason for all these price cuts and free stuff is the need to expand user base. With the emergence of desktop platform as a very viable alternative to high-end proprietary creative tools, the no. of people who own or use the tools also have increased by many folds. In this scenario, it becomes imperative for any creative tools vendors to play the 'market share' game. Whichever way, who is complaining!

#### Catch that flight to LA or buy this SD/HD Card!

Don't believe it? An HD editing-capture card with some real-time effects thrown in today costs about US \$1000! Well, there are many cards that still cost much more. Pinnacle Cinewave

and AJA Kona still cost in multiples of thousands of dollars. But Black Magic Design's DeckLink cards are priced at an amazing sub-1000 dollar point! The important point here is, your desktop machine could be made HD-ready for as little a couple of thousands of dollars! And we definitely think this is the next exciting thing since Madhuri Dixit did a 'dhak dhak' in Beta [not SP]. Now this takes us to the HD-mania amongst Television Channels - not in India bhair, In the US of A!

### **HD-Cast!**

2003 saw many more US Television channels jumping into the HD bandwagon. CBS had live telecast of Super Bowl, NBA and Wimbledon in HD. Of course, many of them were in near HD resolution of 720p. But lots of channels have either adopted HD as one of their broadcast standards or are in the process of doing it. Soon in India too, we might see some broadcasters venturing into HD transmission - before that we will have to have some logical pricing for HD Television sets!

HD format makes news in the production environment too. Starting with ILM's Star Wars Episode II - Attack of the Clones, which was completely shot in HD to a growing number of Television commercials and documentaries that have been shot in HD, this year witnessed the emergence of HD format as a serious alternative to traditional film. As usual, in India, we are still pondering over the move to HD - may be 2004 will see some action in this area out here.

Even channels like Discovery and National Geographic have acquired editing & finishing systems that are designed to take advantage of the HD format. You could get some insight into the HD format by reading our earlier article on the format.

### **Be updated!**

2003 also saw a number of significant updates for some of the existing software and hardware tools - and even the interim updates were significant and feature heavy.

Starting with Apple Final Cut Pro which had its version 4 coming out in April 2003, followed with an interim upgrade to version 4.1 in November. Discreet updated Combustion to version 2.1 in January and came out with a full upgrade to version 3.0 in November. In the same month Discreet 3ds Max also went up to version 6.0. Discreet also came out with full upgrades on their high-end finishing & graphic machines - version 5 of inferno, version 8 of flint and flame which again were upgraded to 5.5 and 8.5 respectively in November this year.

Adobe came out with After Effects version 6.0 in July, followed by Adobe Premiere Pro. Premiere Pro, besides severing ties with long term partner Apple [*which means they didn't port Pro for Mac platform*] boasts of a completely re-written code, which explains the non-numerical upgrade from Premiere 6.5 to Premiere Pro. In October this year, Adobe launched a new version of Photoshop - Adobe Photoshop CS [*stands for creative suite*] along with CS versions of Illustrator, InDesign, GoLive and version 6.0 of Adobe Acrobat Professional.

Avid started the year with a release of Avid Symphony v4.7 for Mac platform. In April, they announced Avid Xpress Pro with Avid Mojo, a combination of new nonlinear editing software and portable Avid Digital Nonlinear Accelerator hardware or Avid DNA.

Ok, it's not as if these are the only companies worth mentioning - believe us when we say that there are many many more... Check out the '2003 - a heavily edited and somewhat biased timeline' at the end of this article to see some of the stuff that took place across this year.

### **New formats**

Panasonic's announced support of DVCPRO50 video transfer via FireWire meant that a viable replacement to Betacam could actually be at hand. Using 3.3:1 compression and 4:2:2 processing DVCPRO50 surpasses DV in quality while still needing data rates lesser than uncompressed Betacam. But till these are accepted by channels and cost realistic amounts [*\$15,000 to \$20,000 for a deck*] don't throw out your Beta yet.

Sony introduced a new Optical disc camcorder and decks. These use special CD sized 'blue laser discs' to record up to 23 GB data. The camcorder can shoot in DVCPRO or Betacam IMX formats and store offline quality low-res video simultaneously with full quality video. This format holds the promise of finally changing the way we shoot and edit video because it is disc based and hence random access. Here too, until the pricing scales down from \$ 19,000 to \$ 34,000 for a camera and \$ 15,000 to \$ 26,000 for a recorder, don't count on this replacing your Beta or Digi.

Basically nothing dramatic happened [*or did it?*] in digital media in 2003. In computers, processors followed Moore's Law and got faster. Except Apple CPUs which fell dangerously behind until the G5s got their graph slightly closer to the one Moore drew. In video, formats remained as they were. None died and no significant ones were born. HD adoption spread worldwide, but in India, stayed nearly where it was through 2003. NLEs got better because computers got better. Ditto for software as software makers put enough juice in their code to entice the gullible masses to go in for that faster computer.

So, 'the more things change, the more they remain the same' was the mantra for 2003. The video and film industry in India had a much better year in 2003 than in 2002. And at year end, most production houses closed through Christmas to New Year's. In fact, if you throw a stone at any popular holiday destination, you would be sure to hit a producer, director

cameraman, or recordist. Even an editor if you got lucky. Echoing these sentiments, Misenscene too will close 5 days in the festive season and Creative-1 will skip an issue to be back with a larger one to start off 2004 with.

### Audio

Digidesign upgraded ProTools to work with newer G5 and Panther systems. And of course so did Logic Audio - now part of Apple. But that didn't change Logic's distance from top-slot ProTools.

MOTU, M-audio and others introduced faster and better audio and MIDI interfaces. Some even FireWire and USB based, and very reasonably priced too.

In July, Sony acquired Sonic Foundry and with it, SoundForge, Acid, and Vegas Video became Sony products.

Roland and Cakewalk announced a 'strategic alliance' which would mean one would write the software that worked best [or *only with*] the other's hardware.

At Adobe, a new audio application 'Audition' was released which was based on Cool Edit that Adobe aquired some months ago.

### Others

DVD-writers got faster and cheaper and hence more commonplace [Down to Rs 12,000 in India]. Even some PCs shipped with DVD-RW as standard [Apple machines have had them for years]. Blank DVDs got cheaper too and went as low as Rs 120 a piece in India. So backing up to a 4.7 GB DVD made backups for digital media a reality.

Serial ATA finally entered computers - PCs and Macs - and promised better throughputs. Year 2004 may be PATA's [parallel or 'normal' ATA] last year. USB 2 all but replaced the earlier USB 1.1. And that made external hard disks, and scanners faster and more reliable. Even FireWire became commonplace in PCs.

64-bit processors made a first appearance with Athlon and IBM producing them for PC and Mac. But till year end no 64-bit native OS was on the horizon.

And in Cricket, India beat Australia at home [theirs] for the first time after the introduction of U-matic - the first cassette tape based pro video format.

### In India

In 03 TV shows were shot on Betacam or DigiBeta. Some were even onlined on smoke systems. Ad films were shot on DigiBeta or 35 mm. Docus and other films used DV, some DVCPRO. None of this changed through 2003. And no new formats appear to be poised to replace them. Features were done as they always were. A handful of films used Digital Intermediates to create theatrical prints as against the time-tested negative cut process. But this too will take a while to become a trend. May be in 2004, maybe later...

### 2003 - a heavily edited and somewhat biased timeline

Jan-03	Pinnacle Releases CineWave RT 3.0
	Discreet Ships Combustion 2.1. New version sees price reduction to \$995, no dongle.
	Avid Announces Free DV Editing Software
	Discreet Character Studio 4 released
	Version 2.0 of Media100 844/x released
	Avid Symphony version 4.7 for Macintosh
	Dsicreet announces updates - inferno 5, flame 8 & flint 8
	ILM's openEXR is supported in digital fusion
	Adobe After Effects is updated to 5.5.1
	Apple introduces Macintosh G4 dual 1.42 GHz - introduces firwire 800 as a standard component across all the models.
Feb-03	BOXX technologies adopt AMD Athlon processors
	AMD introduces AMD Athlon XP 3000+ series of processors
	Softimage offers free version of Softimage XSI

	Digital Voodoo introduces HD Vengeance
Mar-03	Discreet announces Cleaner XL for Windows
	Corel updates Graphic Suite to 11.693
	Avid announces Avid Active ContentManager version 2.1, a customizable digital asset management and distribution solution.
	BOXX technologies introduces BOXXSD
	NewTeK announces Video Toaster [VT] 3
	ToonBoom announces US Animation Opus
	Discovery introduces Avid DS HD into their production line
	Pinnacle introduces Liquid Purple version 5
	Adobe unveils Adobe encore DVD for Windows XP
	Black Magic Design announces compatibility with Windows
Apr-03	ATI Radeon 9800 Pro launched
	Digidesign updates ProTools to version 6
	Apple introduces Final Cut Pro version 4.0
	Discreet lustre - a digital colour correction tool for films is introduced.
	Avid announces Avid Xpress Pro with Avid Mojo
	Black Magic Design announces new editing cards - Decklink Pro & SP
	Discreet updates Combustion to version 2.1.1
	Apple updates Mac OS X to version 10.2.5
	Digital Voodoo introduces SD Greed for Mac
	In-sync Speed Razor 5.5 announced
	2d3 has releases Boujou 2.1. Boujou is a professional-level 3D camera matchmoving suite.
	In-sync announces Speed Razor HD 2.0
	May-03
Jun-03	AJA Video Systems ships Io, an uncompressed audio and video FireWire capture device.
	Apple releases Shake 3
	Intel introduces new Intel Itanium 2 processors and Intel Xeon processors MP
	Kaydara Motionbuilder 5 is launched
Jul-03	Digidesign releases a new add-on bundle for Pro Tools LE: DV Toolkit.
	Adobe Premiere Pro announced - excludes Macintosh platform
	Adobe After Effects 6.0 announced
	Alias-wavefront becomes Alias
	Alias Systems announces Maya Personal Learning Edition (PLE) 5.0, a non-commercial version based on the latest Maya software.

Aug-03	version 8.2 of dps velocityQ and velocity announced
	Apple announces update for FCP to 4.0.1
	Adobe ships video collection
Sep-03	Black Magic Design introduces Decklink HD
	BOXX Technologies announces BOXX HD PRO
	Bluefish [a part of the Digital Voodoo family] introduces HD Lust
	Mackie [the famous audio gear company] is re-christened as Loud Technologies Inc.
	Pinnacle announces Cinewave 4
	Matrox introduces New Parhelia 256 MB graphic card
	Adobe Photoshop CS ships
	Combustion 3 & 3ds Max 6.0 announced
Oct-03	Avid ships Nitris Real-Time HD and SD Finishing Systems
	Alias Systems releases Maya Personal Learning Edition (PLE) 5.0, available as a free download.
Nov-03	Avid announces a price drop for its Xpress DV non-linear editing system to \$695.
	Discreet announces inferno 5.5, flame 8.5 and flint 8.5.
	Apple updates DVD Studio Pro, Final Cut Pro and Shake.