

■ PRODUCTION/POST PRODUCTION

Teaching the Tools of the Trade

High School Video Production Sees Positive Results

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At Hereford High School in Baltimore County, MD, the faculty and administrators strive to meet their students' individual interests and goals, while satisfying graduation requirements and preparing students for professional and vocational careers, in such areas as communications, videography and post production.

Although Hereford's technology program instructors consider themselves different and progressive in their teaching philosophy and curriculum, the school's technology program suffers the same funding shortfalls and equipment obsolescence experienced by many schools. As more and more students enter high school with an established technology mindset, it can be difficult to maintain student attention and interest when the technology lab's tools and equipment are outdated, or when 30 students vie for time on too few cameras, computers or editing bays.

Currently, Hereford's technology education program's expendable supplies budget is only \$3,000 and is shared between three instructors and 540 students. There is also the Baltimore County Technology Education Fund that all county technology teachers can draw from for big-ticket items, but funds are limited, and getting approval for purchases from county supervisors is a test of tenacity.

Compelled to offer his students real-world experiences, but trapped by budget restraints, Hereford technology education instructor Tom Littlejohn is selective of the capital equipment he acquires for his lab. The products must be affordable, easy to use, able to withstand wear and tear, and supported by a strong technical support program.

Enter Video and ScreenPlay

Last fall, Littlejohn began researching options for a new video editing system for his lab. He sought counsel from his peers, cruised the Web, reviewed product-marketing literature, talked to video equipment dealers and attended video editing-related tradeshows. In the end, Littlejohn opted for an Applied Magic ScreenPlay video-editing appliance.

ScreenPlay is a turnkey, nonlinear video production appliance that offers broadcast quality video, realtime performance, and an easy-to-learn, student-friendly interface. ScreenPlay uses a proprietary operating system specifically designed for video editing. Therefore, there's no need for system configuration or add-on boards, nor is the user confronted with the frustration of hardware or software incompatibilities. Add on Applied Magic's patented



Students at Hereford High School in Baltimore County, MD, use ScreenPlay to edit a variety of videos.

ASIC technology and the result is an efficient, realtime operating appliance.

"Applied Magic has created an easy-to-use, reliable, hassle-free system that delivers outstanding image quality and the features my students want and use the most," says Littlejohn.

"My students are not intimidated by the technology, nor are they restricted by hardware and software limitations. Since my students don't have to wait around for their projects to render or struggle with incompatibilities or crashes, they have more time to be creative and to develop their own editing style."

Using a television, PC monitor or broadcast monitor for display, ScreenPlay's realtime features allow Littlejohn's students to: capture and edit video; add titles, including outline, drop shadow and character extrusion; add transitions and special effects, including variable speed slow motion; add color effects, including solarize, posterize and sepia tone; and adjust audio, including full envelope control and four stereo channels.

"We designed ScreenPlay with students and non-technology teachers in mind," says David Newman, chief technical officer for Applied Magic.

Littlejohn currently has one ScreenPlay that he uses in each of his classes—Introduction to Technol-

ogy Systems, Communications Technology and Introduction to Radio/TV Production. The three classes consist of about 90 students who produce a wide range of video productions for class as well as for other extra-curricular activities associated with Hereford High School, its student body and community.

GUI Appeal

"Because the ScreenPlay is so easy to use, my students grasp the concepts of communication through video faster than ever before," explains Littlejohn.

"As a result, I am seeing more experimentation in the students' video projects and witnessing the emergence of their own personal creativity and styles. And it's not the result of my teaching."

ScreenPlay comes with a 9GB or 18 GB SCSI AV rated hard disk that is expandable via an external ultrawide SCSI connector supporting up to 15 simultaneous SCSI storage devices. Also included are multiple S-video and composite inputs and outputs, aDV-1394 input and output and still photo input via a PC-Card slot and a CD-ROM drive for entering graphics, fonts, effects and software updates.

But aside from ScreenPlay, Hereford's students have access to VHS and S-VHS video cameras, two mini DV format video cameras, a Panasonic editor

for cuts-only editing, a Videonics MX-1 switcher for multi-camera live video events and an Apple G3 computer.

To accommodate so many students on the little equipment he does have, Littlejohn divides his classes into production teams of about five and varies the production schedules of the teams' class assignments—the first assignment being a 30- to 60-second commercial.

"The commercial provides the students their first experience with using video cameras and editing equipment to produce a final edited video project. The addition of ScreenPlay, its fast learning curve and easy to use interface, allows students to experience the entire video production process—from idea to final edited video—in less time than the previous methods of linear and computer-based nonlinear video editing."

In addition to editing video on the ScreenPlay, Littlejohn's students also use the ScreenPlay's audio tracks to "mix" music and voice for audio "spot" commercials, public service announcements, station IDs and promos.

"The audio envelope controls and nonlinear editing of audio tracks allow students to rapidly create a completed audio production. We record the final audio to either video tape or mini disc for use during simulated 'live' radio broadcasts."

Outside the classroom, Littlejohn and his students use the ScreenPlay to edit a variety of activities and events; for example, videotaping Hereford's student teachers in action and then editing the footage into a package that the student teacher hands over to his or her professors for evaluation of his or her teaching skills. Students also compile audition reels for Hereford's performing arts students and videotape athletic events for post-game review by athletes and coaches.

Although his students use other classroom tools to edit, Littlejohn says most prefer to use the ScreenPlay.

"I prefer using the ScreenPlay because it is easier to use, it's realtime, and it has more real-time transitions and effects to play with," says student Tasha Warne, 18.

Before taking Littlejohn's Introduction to Radio/TV and Communications Technology classes (fall '99), Warne had no experience or interest in video editing. In fact, she claims to have "hated computers and all the glitches." Today, although she aspires to be an actress, she is considering video production/editing as a career path.

Prior to Littlejohn's Introduction to Technology class, 17-year-old Lindsay Famula was unsure of her career direction. However, after taking the intro class and an independent study in audio/video technology, she has set her sights on a career in communications.

"ScreenPlay definitely gave me a feel for editing and communicating using video," she says. "I found it extremely easy and fun to use, and it was a big part of helping me make my decision to pursue a career in communications."

An avid supporter of the performing arts, Lindsay used her newly found video production skills to create a fund-raising video for Hereford's performing arts program. "Lindsay really took to the ScreenPlay," said Littlejohn. "She has developed her own video production style and her confidence has grown to where she is taking other students under her wing and teaching them how to shoot and edit video. This probably would not have happened had she just used the other editing systems we use in class."

Senior Matt Prybylski, 18, has been producing music videos for about two years, originally doing cuts only edits and progressing to computer-based editing on the school's Apple G3 using Avid Cinema. Today, he also prefers to use ScreenPlay. "When I use ScreenPlay, the output is a much better quality," said Prybylski. "When video comes out of ScreenPlay it is much less pixelated compared to Avid Cinema. It's also great to have all of the transitions and special effects like slow-motion, and to be able to control the rate of the effects."

With so many of his students vying for time on the ScreenPlay, Littlejohn says he is convinced he made the right decision to acquire a ScreenPlay over competitive products. "A lot of times, as a teacher, I really don't know if the classroom experiences I give my students really effect them, make a difference," said Littlejohn. "Sometimes I am quite surprised at the result, what the outcome is." ■

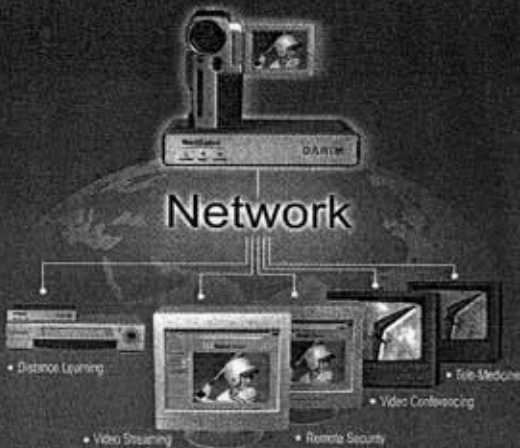
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