

Local Hero harnesses SCRATCH® for creative DI on Pitch Perfect

The facility: Local Hero Post, Santa Monica, LA

Local Hero Post is an artist-led DI boutique, based in Santa Monica, California. Established in 2006, it lays claim to being an all-SCRATCH facility, and has racked up more than 60 feature DI credits.

Harnessing the very latest version of SCRATCH, the company is enjoying the advantage of being able to conduct “creative DIs”, where the landscape of the grading session goes beyond color correction, and into additional areas of compositing and VFX to fine-tune the image. At Local Hero Post, the result is that filmmakers and digital artists now collaborate in more creative and efficient ways to deliver the end product – all within SCRATCH.

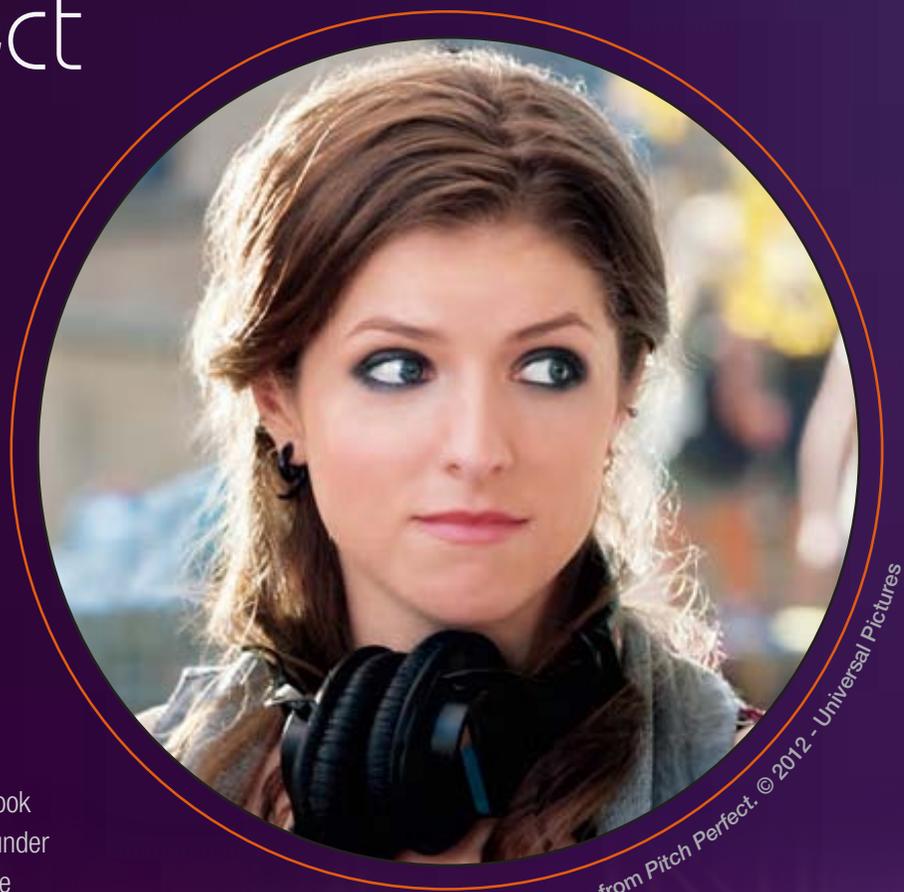
The company employs nine SCRATCH systems, scaled to suit the task at hand – all the way from laptops for on-set dailies or remote work, to fast, custom-built PCs with the latest graphics and accelerator cards for client-attend creative DI sessions. Grading is performed on a 16ft screen in a 2K digital projection theater that is 2D/3D switchable, and any SCRATCH system on the network can be connected to the theatre.

Recently, the company has extended its services to offer pre-production workflow design and camera testing, on-set

digital dailies, through to editorial with sister company Digital Difference, and creative DI grading, home video and theatrical DCP mastering, plus archival. *Pitch Perfect* (Universal/Gold Circle Films), *ATM* (Gold Circle Films), *Any Day Now* (PFM Pictures/Music Box Films), *Death Race 3* (Universal) *The Haunting In Georgia* (Lionsgate), *Hours* (Safran Company/PalmStar Entertainment), and *The Possession Of Michael King* (Gold Circle Films) are among the recent, digitally acquired features to take advantage of these services.

“We’re laser-focused on making digital images look the very best they can,” says Local Hero Post founder and supervising colorist Leandro Marini. “We take images that are shot with digital cinema cameras, put them through the appropriate workflows and then apply levels of polish to bring out the best in those images.

“We’re not just pure color correction – that’s yesterday’s mentality, and a bygone business model. SCRATCH can perform



Scene from Pitch Perfect. © 2012 - Universal Pictures



magical somersaults in front of the client – not just grading, but an array of additional image manipulations that have never been possible before in a color session. It’s an exciting new revolution in post-production.”

The project: Pitch Perfect (Universal Pictures/Gold Circle Films)

Pitch Perfect is the 2012 musical comedy, starring Anna Kendrick and Brittany Snow, directed by Jason Moore, well-known for having staged Avenue Q on Broadway, and lensed by cinematographer Julio Macat ASC (Ace Ventura: Pet Detective, The Nutty Professor, Wedding Crashers).

In the film, Beca (Kendrick), a freshman at Barden University, is cajoled into joining The Bellas, the school’s all-girl capella singing group. Injecting some much-needed energy into their repertoire, The Bellas take on their male rivals The Treblemakers in a campus competition. The film is loaded with sharply choreographed dance routines and a bulging soundtrack mixing and mashing-up old hits with new favorites, rendered vocally without any instrumentation.

During testing, Pitch Perfect was well-received by audiences, who gave it an "A" CinemaScore on an A+ to F scale. The first

of four trailers was released on June 14, 2012, and within a month of its release in North America, the movie made over \$51m, a handsome return on the estimated production budget of \$17m, with release in the rest of the world still to come.

The movie was shot on-campus at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, using ARRI Alexa cameras recording to ProRes Log C. “The workflow from camera into post could not have been more straightforward,” says Marini. “SCRATCH reads the original native ARRI ProRes Log C files. We designed a LUT to convert the material to linear color space and off we went. We only transcoded to 16-bit TIFF at the end of the DI for final delivery, again in SCRATCH.”

The artist: Leandro Marini

Aged 11, Marini saw Pixar’s *Toy Story* and decided he wanted to work in the movie business. He learned the art of CG modelling and animation during his teens, before jumping into 2D compositing. Armed with these skills he worked for six years as a freelance digital VFX artist at facilities in Miami on commercials for the likes of *Ford*, *Sara Lee* and TV shows on Viacom’s VH1 channel. It was then that he moved to Los Angeles, and with a partner, formed Local Hero, a small boutique dedicated to creating perfect images through color and finishing.

“Although I work on the creative side, I have always been interested in R&D and finding new ways to handle jobs as efficiently as possible,” he says. “In the run-up to starting Local Hero Post, we looked at range of heavy-iron DI systems, and were underwhelmed by what we discovered. For the \$500,000 price tag these were fast but pretty basic systems, designed around film negative, log-based color grading, and whose capabilities could not be extended beyond color.



Scene from *Pitch Perfect*. © 2012 - Universal Pictures

The first generation of digital cinema cameras were coming on to the market then too, but the images were being forced down inappropriate workflows. Little wonder they initially got a bad rap. But we realized this was the future of movie making, and if you changed the mentality, adopted linear workflows, and treated the images with the same care as film, you could achieve spectacular results.”

Marini adds, “For the price tag of the heavy-iron systems, we realized we could do multiple of “something else”, and that’s when SCRATCH came onto our radar. It was, and still is, more progressive and interactive than all of the heavy iron systems, embracing file-based workflow from the latest digital cameras, and more appropriately-priced too.

We learned from each project we worked on how to improve the workflow for the next project through the door. That’s the way it still is today, apart from the fact that Local Hero Post has grown exponentially into a 10,000sq/ft facility, and that’s only going to continue.”

The challenges: hitting deadlines on an unexpected hit

It was during the DI for *Pitch Perfect* that Universal discovered that audience tests figures were going through the roof. Consequently, the project rapidly went from being a mid-budget production, to one of the most-anticipated releases of the year, and was given a significantly enhanced marketing budget.

“For us, it meant the project escalated from being a traditional DI, to one that needed fast turnarounds on different pre-release versions as well as on-going requests from the marketing department for trailers and other marketing materials – all during the DI,” says Marini.

“The studio came to rely on us, a DI boutique, to deliver on time



Scene from *Pitch Perfect*. © 2012 - Universal Pictures

and on budget. There was no room for error. We had to have a rock solid workflow, and to hit deadlines, as any delay could adversely affect the release of the film and its marketing. SCRATCH rose to the occasion and handled everything that the studio and the filmmakers threw at it.”

The solution: SCRATCH

Given a normal schedule and workload, Marini says Local Hero Post could have easily done all the work for *Pitch Perfect* on one SCRATCH system. However, with preview screenings and a constant need for marketing materials on top of the main DI, to ramp up the speed of delivery, four SCRATCH systems were dedicated to the show – one for editorial changes and reconforming, another for the main color grade, one for

preparing the theatrical and home video masters, and one for one creating additional invisible VFX, such as lens flares and lighting effects.

“This way we could react fast to requests that came in overnight from the studio, for preview versions and marketing materials, and could carry a lot of the color work we did on these versions into the DI,” he explains.

Marini says that in terms of the DI, *Pitch Perfect* was not a particularly difficult grading job. “It was beautifully shot by Julio, who is a master in lighting and shooting bright and engaging Hollywood comedies. So rather than having to fix anything major, we spent most of our time fine-tuning the look and adding creative flourishes.

I work a lot with Canvas shapes and the variable softness controls to enhance skin and face tones. It's really fast and interactive to draw a shape, adjust it, track it and animate it, and Julio could not believe the speed at which we could work. With SCRATCH you can grade at the speed of thought, push and pull the tones and hues in different areas of the frame, and ultimately paint with light like no other system," he says.

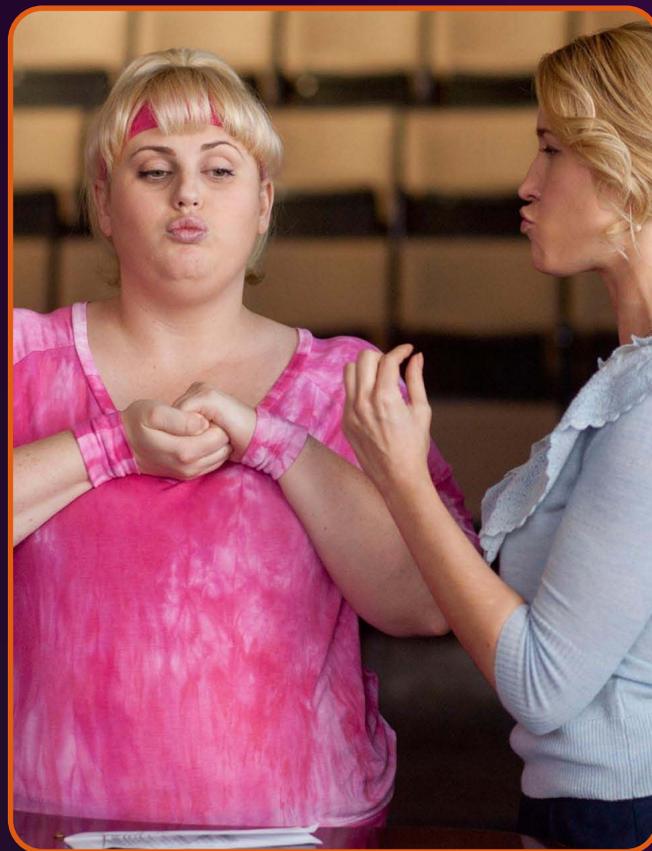
However, it's the addition of lens flares and light effects, that Marini says gives a good view into the power of the creative DI. "There were shots that had natural lens flares from the original performance on-set. Jason, the director, liked the effect, but wanted more. He also wanted to extend the lightbeams cast by spotlights, that could not be practically photographed. I showed him how easily I could create the flare effects in SCRATCH, using GenArts' Sapphire OFX plug-ins, and enhance the spotlight effects using SCRATCH 3D tools to create lightbeams and animate them. It was quite an eye-opener, and Jason really couldn't believe this was possible in a grading session."

As it turned out, Moore wanted so many additional effects that Marini had a second SCRATCH system installed in the DI theatre, dedicated to creating the effects. "Working with the Jason, we'd tag say 20 shots per reel that required treatment, and I would hand them over to my an assistant. I then continued the main grade, whilst my assistant worked on the effects. Within half an hour he had the flares or the lighting effects ready. We'd simply switch the input on the projector, view the results and then dial them to Jason's taste."

Marini notes, "The fact that we are now able to do color timing side-by-side with tasks like slipping an edit, object replacement, beauty work, and even some VFX – like changing skies, adding lens flares and lighting effects – and then output multiple versions, all in one system, makes the modern DI more

like a compositing session that you'd typically see on a TV commercial. That's Creative DI.

"Thanks to SCRATCH, the DI suite has now become a collaborative, creative playground, where the session is more about the imagination of the filmmaker and the talent of the artist, than the limitation of the box. We can now say "yes" to more requests, rather than deferring the work until later, or passing it over to a different room, or even a facility on a different continent. It's much more efficient and leap forward in helping filmmakers reach their visual goals. This approach sets us apart, and allows us to offer a more filmmaker friendly, creatively focused alternative to larger facilities."



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