



Fusing technology and art

Accomplished VFX artist stays in the creative flow with Adobe® Creative Suite® 4 Production Premium software



How The Syndicate's Workflow has Improved with Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium

Pain points

"I am always on deadline, so I need to work faster and stay in the creative flow. When applications don't connect well, I have to take a lot of additional time and undergo extensive mundane, non-creative tasks to export files out of one application and bring them into another. That switches me from my right brain to my left brain—never a good thing. I need a way to break down the walls among applications to stay creative. Side note: I'd also love to start working with RED camera output."

Solution: Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium offers

- Productivity improvements, more unified integration between programs, and enhanced Dynamic Link functionality
- A native workflow for RED R3D files and a wide variety of other tapeless camera formats

Ben Grossmann is a modest man with impressive accomplishments. As Creative Director for The Syndicate, he has worked on films with legends such as film director Martin Scorsese, music videos for hot bands like Radiohead, and network branding packages for ESPN, NASCAR, and Monday Night Football. His innovative TV commercial work for Six Flags Theme Parks garnered widespread acclaim. Grossmann also won an Emmy award for his visual effects work and collaborated with talented companies like The Basement. He credits his success to a high level of creativity, being surrounded by brilliant people, a bit of luck, and cost-effective yet powerful Adobe desktop software: in particular, Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium, including Adobe After Effects® CS4 and Photoshop® CS4 Extended software.



Using Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium software to produce commercials for Six Flags Theme Parks enabled Grossmann to create spots with a high budget look that accomplish more than can typically be achieved for a commercial.

“What’s amazing is that you can be in Adobe After Effects, click a button and start editing the same media in Adobe Premiere Pro. Dynamic Link lets you see the changes you’ve made reflected across all of your Adobe applications on the fly.”

Ben Grossmann, creative director, The Syndicate

“I started using Adobe After Effects at version one, as soon as it became available,” says Grossmann. “Since then, it has been my tool of choice. I use it all the time for previsualization, mockups, color correction, compositing, final integration—everything I need, depending on the project.”

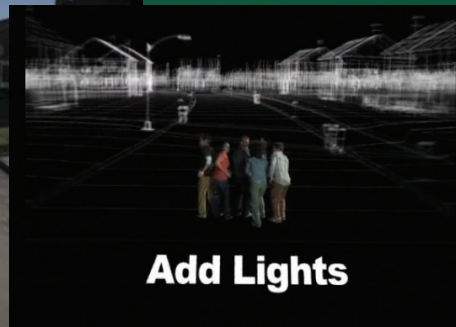
Grossmann started out studying International Relations and Political Science, but he was paying for school by designing posters, fliers, websites, and other materials for a variety of clients. Via a circuitous route, his technical acumen in Adobe software led to a career in visual effects. Based on his skills, he soon had an entry-level job in a digital video design studio working on movies, television commercials, and music videos. His career took off from there.

Seeing is believing

In 2008, Grossmann worked with Martin Scorsese to produce a 10-minute documentary-style TV ad for Cava Freixenet. The ad pays homage to Alfred Hitchcock and uses many of the legendary director’s cinematic styles. The schedule for the project required creation of 40 shots in six weeks, a major feat. Grossmann and a small team of crack VFX artists were tasked with using 2D photographs shot in New York’s Carnegie Hall and stitching them together as background panoramas. He also needed to meld the 2D backgrounds with live-action footage of actors shot against a green screen.

Grossmann began by organizing the photos in Adobe Photoshop Lightroom® and adjusting them in Adobe Photoshop Extended software. He then stitched the photos together as background panoramas using Photoshop Extended. Once the backgrounds were stitched together, they were used during the green screen shoot to help Scorsese visualize the end result.

“We had two MacBook Pros running After Effects on the set, so we were able to overlay all of the elements—2D backgrounds, the Carnegie Hall mock set, and the live action green screen—and adjust the camera angles to be sure we got all the shots we needed,” says Grossmann. “The power of Adobe After Effects for previsualization is immense. When you can see comps of everything in advance, it makes for a better end product.”



Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium, including Photoshop CS4 Extended and After Effects CS4 software, helps Grossmann to visually convey the process of projects to clients, from demonstrating initial concepts to displaying how CG and VFX elements will be combined to create final visuals.

Once the shots were nailed, Grossmann and the rest of the VFX team brought all the elements together in high-resolution using After Effects and Photoshop Extended. The stitched high-dynamic range panoramas became the final backgrounds for most of the composites. For one trademark Scorsese shot, the panoramas were projected like wallpaper onto a simple 3D model built of Carnegie Hall to create an immersive sense of really being there. Grossmann notes that other clients have requested the same previsualization approach for their commercials, music videos, and feature films.

The tools of choice

The Syndicate is known for hiring talented artists and letting them choose the workflows and tools they prefer. Adobe software tops the list among artists. Although Grossmann's mainstay tools are After Effects and Photoshop Extended, he notes that he has used many Adobe products over the years.

"Once you learn one Adobe application, it's easy to absorb all of the others," says Grossmann. "There have been times when I've tried a field I've never worked in before, like web design, and because the same concepts and tools apply across Adobe applications, I have been able to succeed in a completely new media form."

A full Adobe toolset

Grossmann is also experimenting with Adobe Premiere® Pro CS4 software for video editing, and Adobe Encore® CS4 software for interim and final project delivery. He notes that a key driving factor in using Adobe software is the tight integration among Adobe's software applications.

"When you are using different applications that don't connect well, you have to take a lot of additional time and undergo extensive mundane, non-creative tasks to export files out of one application and bring them into another," says Grossmann. "You have to know which formats both applications can export and import. It often becomes a huge bottleneck."

To cope, Grossmann and other artists at The Syndicate previously tried to stay in one application to avoid complications, even if the application did not provide the right functionality. But now, with exceptional integration among Adobe After Effects, Adobe Premiere Pro, and Adobe Photoshop Extended, there's the opportunity to eliminate importing and exporting, and artists can work within a more integrated software suite.

The Syndicate

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Challenge

- Maximize quality of and creativity in every project
- Work efficiently and minimize creative interruptions

Solution

Tap into the integrated set of tools available in Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium

Benefits

- Created award-winning CGI and visual effects
- Met stringent deadlines with stunning results
- Achieved a more streamlined, creative workflow due to smooth integration among software

Toolkit

- Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium. Components used include:
 - Adobe After Effects CS4
 - Adobe Encore CS4
 - Adobe Photoshop CS4 Extended
 - Adobe Premiere Pro CS4
 - Adobe Dynamic Link
 - Adobe Photoshop Lightroom



Grossmann's innovative TV commercial work for Six Flags Theme Parks garnered widespread acclaim and was achieved by combining specific, well-thought-out instances of production, visual effects work, creative editing, and effective art design; all made possible by a brilliant team and Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium software.

"With Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium, we have access to a suite of applications that work very well together, and that has a major positive affect on the creative flow."

Ben Grossmann, creative director, The Syndicate

"What's amazing is that you can be in After Effects, click a button and start editing the same media in Adobe Premiere Pro," says Grossmann. "Dynamic Link lets you see the changes you've made reflected across all of your Adobe applications on the fly. With Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium, we have access to a suite of applications that work very well together, and that has a major positive affect on the creative flow."

Staying creative

Like all visual effects artists, Grossmann's world is governed by a fusion of technology and art, with his left and right brains vying for attention. It's difficult, he says, to stay in the creative flow when he meets a technical roadblock that forces him to stop his creative thought process. When technical difficulties arise, he has to switch to the left side of his brain, and ask himself how to fix the issue so he can get back to being creative.

"With Adobe software, everything becomes so much more natural," says Grossmann. "Adobe software applications are like languages. It's easy to be fluent in many of them so that you can tell your story without hesitating or stopping. Adobe tools are so well designed and so well integrated that you can focus solely on being creative. With Adobe software, the technology becomes invisible."



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