



Broadcast graphics **gurus**

Big Machine Design lends ABC's *20/20* a fresh new look, updated each week using Adobe® After Effects®, Illustrator® CS, and Photoshop® CS software



The ABC News show *20/20* is among the most respected and long-running news magazine shows on television. Airing on Friday nights, the show keeps audiences engaged with a compelling blend of hard-hitting news stories and interviews, led by respected cohosts Elizabeth Vargas and John Stossel, with many top stories covered by veteran journalist Barbara Walters.



The secret to keeping audiences engaged? Fresh show content and lively discussions are just the beginning. Compelling on-air graphics are another important part of helping to ensure that audiences come back for more. For the fall 2004 season, ABC News contacted Big Machine Design (BMD), a full-service creative services studio based in Hollywood, California, to give the weekly news magazine show a facelift in the form of a major broadcast package redesign.

“We needed to develop a look more suited to younger audiences,” explains BMD Cofounder Ken Carlson. “At the same time, we had to maintain a professional appeal that reflected the show’s serious attitude toward investigative journalism.”

A dynamic new look

The new *20/20* package includes an elegant, clean show opener, teasers, bumpers, and in-show graphics, as well as physical graphics presentations included within the actual *20/20* stage set. Working in tandem with Los Angeles-based David Berrent, the executive producer who oversaw the assignment for ABC News, BMD created a dynamic look for the entire show along with a next-generation template system that would enable everyone involved on *20/20*, from editorial to the control room staff, to more easily leverage the new look.

To begin the redesign, BMD used Adobe Illustrator CS and Adobe Photoshop CS software to generate and present initial storyboards. Once ABC News and Berrent selected a look from among the initial creative options, BMD began producing broadcast graphics.

After shooting the hosts on Sony HDCAM at 24p, BMD created 3D elements in Cinema 4D software and 2D elements such as logos and text in Adobe Illustrator CS and Photoshop CS. BMD composited and animated the live-action footage, logos, 3D elements, and other broadcast graphics components using Adobe After Effects software.

According to Carlson, built-in Keylight keying in After Effects resulted in a tremendous time savings in working with live-action footage of the hosts. The firm previously used other software for keying; however, the BMD creative team plans to use Adobe After Effects and the Keylight plug-in as its standard tool moving forward because of its speed.

To help *20/20* appeal to younger audiences, Big Machine Design created fresh, clean motion graphics using Adobe After Effects software.



Easily customized After Effects templates enable the ABC News 20/20 production staff to quickly tailor text and graphics for each episode of the popular news magazine show.



“The After Effects keying solution is nearly 80% faster than previous keying tools we’ve used.”

Ken Carlson, cofounder, Big Machine Design

“We simply put an Eyedropper down on a chroma-key background, and the keying results were nearly perfect,” says Carlson. “The After Effects keying solution is nearly 80% faster than previous keying tools we’ve used.”

Updated graphics each week

BMD didn’t stop with just producing the new package. Among the most interesting aspects of this project is a set of templates in After Effects that ABC News designers and editors can use on a daily basis. Now, everyone from editors to designers working at 20/20 can access the show’s new look. For the first time ever, 20/20 staff can plug video and text into a refined 3D environment to create new graphics every week.

“The ‘cut and paste’ Adobe design workflow enables ABC News editors and designers to easily replace footage, text, or graphics, without completely rebuilding project files,” says BMD Cofounder and Executive Producer Steve Petersen. “This makes it very easy to make changes at a moment’s notice—an important factor in broadcast environments.”

By using templates in After Effects as a starting point, the 20/20 team in New York can retype text or swap project files to customize teasers and other components of shows. As a result, ABC News can achieve a sophisticated look that can easily be refreshed. For example, editors can make text move along a path. Although this would be more difficult using other types of systems, it can be accomplished easily using the templates provided to ABC News.

“Using Expressions in After Effects, we enabled the designers and editors at 20/20 to change the text in one place and have the change be reflected wherever it’s needed, on a variety of layers,” says Carlson. “This is all accomplished without affecting more sophisticated effects such as 3D camera moves.”

Company

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Challenge

Develop a fresh, elegant broadcast graphics package for the ABC News show 20/20 while enabling the show’s staff to update graphics weekly

Solution

- Combine animated 2D and 3D elements with live-action footage of hosts Elizabeth Vargas and John Stossel to produce a clean new look for the show
- Deliver templates in After Effects that enable ABC News staff to add sophisticated effects and update content weekly with minimal effort

Benefits

- The flexible Adobe workflow enabled Big Machine Design to develop an elegant, clean package for ABC News’ 20/20
- 80% faster keying to incorporate live-action footage of the hosts into the show opener and other show components.
- The After Effects templates enable everyone involved on 20/20 to easily leverage the new broadcast look
- Big Machine Design provides a value-added service in the form of easily customized After Effects templates

Tool Kit

- Adobe After Effects
- Adobe Photoshop CS
- Adobe Illustrator CS
- Cinema 4D
- Dual-processor Apple Power Mac G5 computers running Mac OS X at Big Machine Design
- PCs running Microsoft Windows XP Professional at ABC News
- Sony HDCAM format



Integration among Adobe software applications enabled Big Machine Design to quickly and easily composite vector graphics and photographs. For example, when the creative team brought layered Photoshop files into After Effects, the files came in as comps, ready for animation.

Smooth cross-platform workflow

Big Machine Design created the broadcast package and templates for *20/20* on Apple Power Mac G5 systems running Mac OS X. Thanks to the full cross-platform compatibility of Adobe software, everything works flawlessly in ABC News' PC and Microsoft® Windows® environment in New York, without requiring file translation or other complex workarounds.

According to Carlson, producing broadcast graphics using Adobe desktop tools and providing After Effects templates has not only become a standard service that BMD provides to clients but is also a growing trend in the broadcast industry.

"After Effects is taking the broadcast industry by storm," says Carlson. "Its flexibility and power really cannot be beat."

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