

30 second

A Snapshot of Commercial

Television commercial producers have only a few brief seconds to grab the attention of audiences and make an indelible impression. With the intersection of creativity and technology in today's hybrid workflows, their decisions are more important than ever. Increasing numbers of viewers are watching television on high definition screens. Meanwhile, competition for audience attention is growing through non-traditional media like the internet, handheld communication devices, and iPods.

"The percentage of households with HDTV sets is growing," notes Bill Bennett, ASC, who has earned over a thousand commercial credits as a director of photography. "Many sports bars also feature HDTVs to draw in fans. Broadcast advertising is still an effective conduit for reaching audiences. The higher resolution and better picture quality of high-definition televisions today make film's superiority as a capture medium even more apparent."

Richard Vedvick, president of Forde Labs in Seattle, believes there is a great deal of misinformation in the marketplace about high definition. The term itself can be used to refer to technology, cameras, post-production equipment, processes, or display devices that capture, manipulate or display images using more picture information than previous systems.

"I believe film is still by far the superior mechanism for image origination," says Vedvick. "And in most situations the costs of shooting film and HD are comparable, especially if a spot requires a second color correction pass, which is usually the case with video origination. This expense is often left out of video bids."

Below: Cinematographer David Rosen in the Moab



Above: Bill Holden (white shooting vest and jeans) setting up Jimmy Jib at Lake George, near Anchorage.

story-telling

Production

Mark Brinster of Brinster & Company, based near Anchorage, Alaska, has produced award-winning campaigns for clients large (American Express Travel) and small (Spenard Building Supply), as well as documentaries and narrative films. He owns both film and HD cameras.

"Nothing comes close to film," Brinster says. "I think HD origination is more troublesome and, by virtue of the cost of the gear, it can be more expensive than film. Also, when we get an HD project, so much of the upfront conversation is about getting the film look. At times, I have said, 'Look, we can shoot this on film for 80 percent of the cost of HD, and that will give you the look you want!'"

Testing conducted by Kodak scientists indicate that an image recorded on a 35mm frame can be converted to an 8K to 9K digital picture file. Film also has an incomparable dynamic range that enables cinematographers to record more nuanced colors and tones in scenes with both dark shadows and bright highlights. The most advanced digital cameras can dig deep into the darkest shadows, but they tend to blow out details in highlights.

"Film simply provides more creative flexibility and latitude," says Bennett. "When you are shooting in uncontrolled environments, you can save valuable time and create more compelling images that enables the producers and ad agencies to tell their stories."

"As far as speed of production, film can handle overexposure so much better," adds David Rosen, owner-director of Shooters Film Production in Honolulu, Hawaii. "In many situations, you don't have to spend as much time controlling or building up light levels to make them work with video's smaller contrast ratios."

Furthermore, recent advances in post-production and display technology mean that more of what is captured on film can be delivered to the post stages, adding another dimension of creative flexibility

Below: Erich Volkstorf behind camera.



and resulting in a richer experience for the high-definition viewer.

"I consider the look, the cost and the speed of production when we are making decisions about the choice of media," says Rosen. "With film images, you have incredible control in post-production. Digital intermediate technology has brought unlimited options to today's moviemaking process. We've been doing the equivalent of a DI with film commercials for some 20 years, and today that technology is better than ever. Our advice to agency clients when they shoot raw HD is, unless they do a secondary color correction, they're not going to get the looks we can create in DI. Once they pay for that secondary color correction, the costs are about the same as shooting film."

The commercial production industry has been slowly transitioning to finishing and airing spots in high-definition format. Bennett says it takes about 60 seconds to replace the 4:3 ground glass in the film camera with a 16:9 ground glass. Everything else during production is the same. In post, he says the facility just flips a switch on the telecine to convert it from standard to high definition.

"I think that being open to new thoughts and technologies is important."

Brinster concurs, "Right now, about 90 percent of the spots we deliver are in standard definition format, so there is added time and cost for down-converting HD images."

For commercial producers with a long-term view, film is still the only proven archival method. No video format, hard drive or disc has stood the test of time.

"Once you have it on film, it is good forever, and it can go gracefully into any format you want, including HD, 720p, 1080i, and whatever tomorrow brings," Bill Holden of Holden Productions explains. "The number of new formats coming out now is dizzying, and each one requires its own deck and archival process. By mastering on film, you have any option you choose."

"When we see material that might have a longer shelf life than just a quick campaign, we like to know it will last and be an asset in future projects for that agency and sponsor," adds Brinster.

"I think that being open to new thoughts and technologies is important," says Erich Volkstorf, an award-winning director of photography based in Seattle, Washington. He shoots commercials, features and other projects for a client list that includes Boeing and Microsoft. "That doesn't mean that just because it's new, it's necessarily better, or even as good. Film gives me much greater flexibility. In the transfer or the editing or the final printing, I can give film a 'high-tech' look if that's what I'm after."

"All capture formats are just tools," continues Volkstorf. "It's important to remember that what we do, whether it is features, commercials, music videos or documentaries, is tell stories that convey feelings. Having the right tools makes my job easier, faster, cheaper, and most importantly, more effective."

Visit www.getnoticed.com to read more about trendsetting commercials from Mark Brinster, Bill Holden, Erich Volkstorf and David Rosen. ■



Above: Cinematographer Bill Bennett, ASC on a commercial shoot.

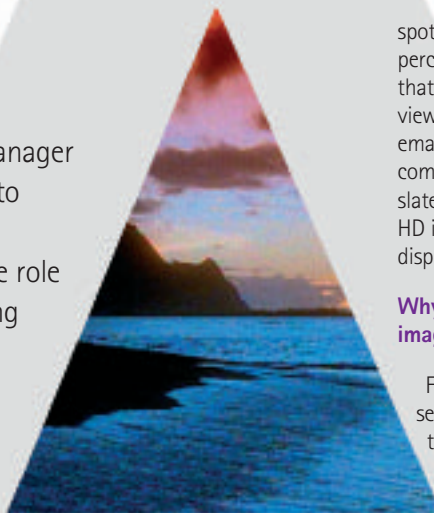
"Broadcast advertising is still an effective conduit for reaching audiences. The higher resolution and better picture quality of high-definition televisions today make film's superiority as a capture medium even more apparent."



Above: Bill Holden (white shooting vest and jeans) and camera assistant Tom Pillifant on Knik Glacier, accessible by helicopter only, grabbing some shots while the Jimmy Jib is being set up.

Frequently Asked Questions about Digital HDTV

InCamera asked Rich Carlson, technical manager for Kodak's Entertainment Imaging Division, to address some of the most frequently asked questions about the choice of media and the role that the evolution of motion imaging technologies plays in creating commercials for high-definition television:



spots actually aired in HD due to the perception in the advertising industry that many households cannot receive or view HD broadcasts. However, all four cinematographers recommend finishing TV commercials in HD format even if they are slated to air in standard definition, since HD is the highest quality broadcast and display format.

Why do filmmakers prefer film for images destined to be displayed in HD?

Film offers greater flexibility on the set and during post-production due to its much greater dynamic range. More importantly, film has a unique dreamlike quality that evokes a different emotional response from audiences. Audiences subliminally associate the film look with quality. Advances in post-production and display technology mean that more of what is captured on the film can be delivered to the post-production stages, adding creative flexibility and resulting in a richer experience for the viewer.

Why post in HD format if the spot isn't going to air that way?

Because there are nuances in colors, contrast and other details recorded on the film negative that are rendered more effectively with an HD telecine transfer, which you then convert to standard definition video images. Cinematographers and directors believe that makes a difference.

What are some of the differences between film and digital video?

It's a common assumption that an image recorded on a frame of 35mm color negative film can be scanned and converted to digital data at 4K resolution. However, testing conducted by our scientists last year indicated that when you scan an image recorded on a 35mm frame it can be converted to an 8 to 9K digital picture file. Film also has an incomparable dynamic range, which enables cinematographers to record more nuanced colors and tones in scenes with both dark shadows and bright highlights. The most advanced digital cameras can dig deep into the darkest shadows, but they tend to blow out details in highlights.

To find out more about HD commercial production, go to www.getnoticed.com and click on Q+A. ■

How many households have HDTV sets?

A recent study by In-Stat, a tech market research firm, estimates that the rate of growth of HDTV households will continue to be strong over the next several years, and by 2009, HDTV households worldwide are forecast to reach 52 million. Another study from Kagan Research estimates that by 2015, HD households will reach 110 million. The firm estimates that more HD programming and lower HDTV costs will drive the number of HD households to nearly 97 million, or 82 percent, by 2010.

Does high-definition television require images to be captured with digital video cameras?

No. In fact, 35mm film is by far the best capture medium for content destined for HD display. The higher resolution and better picture quality of high-definition televisions make film's superiority as a capture medium even more apparent. The vast majority of dramatic content seen on high-definition television today is originated on film.

Are many commercials produced and aired in HD format?

Four cutting-edge cinematographers—Bill Bennett, ASC, Allen Daviau, ASC, Wally Pfister, ASC and Paul Cameron—recently addressed these issues at a seminar in Los Angeles. They have cumulatively compiled over 1,500 TV commercial credits. Although they have photographed HD spots using film, very few of those

