

ORATOR - EYE-OPENER SESSIONS

CABLECASTING WORKSHOP NO. 1:
Electronic Editing

Session Chairman:
Greg Liptak

Participant:
Matt Spinello
"Electronic Editing: The Ultimate Production Tool"

MATT SPINELLO

Electronic editing in the one-inch videotape format gives engineering technicians the professional capability of eliminating "dirty edits"; costly, time-consuming retakes; and the scraping of hour-long productions due to short segments of outdated material within previously taped productions.

Producer/directors employ the editing capability in the creation of multi-scene, involved productions. A single camera/recorder system employing electronic editing eliminates the need and expense for several cameras, operators, monitors, and control rooms normally required for a segment which might demand twenty various scenes spread throughout a taping location area.

Electronic editing, utilized in a present day CATV system gives the facility a full-fledged studio/control room/staff capability, at the expense of a single camera/recorder system, with a minimum staff of two: Producer/director/camera operator, and technician.

We have perhaps become so accustomed to the polished network productions we see today on commercial television and we have forgotten the many humorous incidents piped into our living rooms in the days prior to the availability of videotape, which first gave studios the ability to reshoot a segment, and eventually the editing capability to redo short portions or entire scenes within a production.

During one of the late President Eisenhower's whistle-stop campaign tours in New England, several television and radio studio crews were on hand to pass Ike's "live" comments to their audiences. As the story goes, five or six radio stations had strung cable from their remote vehicles to hand-held and mounted microphones; TV studios had placed similar equipment and TV cameras on the train station platform. Fifteen minutes prior to Ike's scheduled arrival word was received that the train would be arriving on track number six, instead of track number one, as originally scheduled.

Engineers, announcers, and TV cameramen scampered to add extensions, wire new cable connecting, and stretch their equipments across six pairs of railroad tracks.

Fifteen minutes later President Eisenhower's train arrived, on time, on track number one, as originally planned, severing all cables.

Thousands of viewers in the Midwest will recall a one-minute dairy products commercial aired in the mid-50's, written to spotlight the sponsor's ice cream and cottage cheese, with the last twenty seconds devoted to homogenized milk. The milk scene included the usual pour shot, with an extreme close-up of a drinking glass, the sponsor's carton of milk clearly identified,

and the announcer's hand. The female voice urged, encouraged, practically demanded that mom consider her children's health; that she buy the sponsor's product since it was as nourishing and delicious as it appeared on screen. The video side of the commercial at that point brought a drinking glass into viewers' homes, the size of their TV screens. As the talent poured, giant lumps of sour milk filled the glass.

Other viewers will recall a pitch by a sincere announcer who promised that the plastic automobile seat covers being shown were waterproof, fireproof, practically indestructible; they were, we assume, until he poured lighter fluid on the sample seat and lit it with a match, while viewers witnessed "live", the total flaming destruction of the seat and seat cover, in a matter of seconds.

The same announcer several months later left television to return to radio following his "live" demonstration on how a special exterior paint repelled water. A cement block was used as a demonstration sample; one side coated with regular (porous) paint, the other with the new repellent product. During the live demonstration, the announcer forgot to reverse the brick, and while expounding upon the quality of the product and its repellent characteristics, applied water to the surface of the brick. It was immediately absorbed deeply into the brick as though it were a sponge.

There have been other incidents, hundreds possibly thousands. The announcer who, on "live" camera, reached back toward several shelves to bring a beer stein to camera-front, failed to notice that one of his large, ornamental cuff links caught the thin wire shelf support. When he moved his hand forward, the shelving, supported by lightweight pegboard, moved with him enough to spill 150 ceramic beer steins to the floor in a thundering crash.

Possibly the most repeated incident relates to a pet show, another "live" segment, where on an extreme close-up, a spider monkey chose to put himself in the spotlight by grabbing a parakeet and biting its head off before the camera operator could pan away or the director could call for a shot change. The incident enabled the studio to determine what their viewing audience was at that particular hour of the day, since, as one spokesman relates, the switchboard received a maximum number of telephoned complaints from irate mothers and grandparents.

The aforementioned incidents when retold are very humorous to most listeners; they were not too funny when they actually happened, especially not to sponsors who canceled contracts because of them, and possibly generated lawsuits against the studios involved. They may be humorous sidelights in the career backgrounds of those who were involved in the individual productions; they were not funny at the time to those who may have been fired

because of their negligence in failing to preplan each segment ahead of time.

Videotape today gives the director, the engineer, the talent, another chance; in fact, as many chances as needed, time allowing. An editing capability lessens the pain even more by allowing replacement of the shortest or longest portion of a segment without sacrificing the entire production. The videotape recorder with editing enlarges the studio area by allowing segments to be taped individually, in sequential order. Most important to the system's budget, electronic editing provides the capability of scene-by-scene assembly for the most elaborate productions, with cost of equipment limited to a single camera/recorder/monitor system. It permits professional quality productions by less experienced personnel. This is an important consideration to CCTV or CATV videotape presentors.

The moment of truth in the matter lies with the end result achieved in the final videotaped presentation. At the Ampex Video Institute in Elk Grove, Illinois, west of Chicago, the instructors who deal with the production aspects of the institute's TV courses, intentionally overemphasize the importance of production preplanning; detailed preplanning. Reference is continually made to the "Monocular Eye", the non-dimensional TV tube, during the week-long courses on CCTV, and how it relates to the viewer.

Joseph Sheehan, Professor, Georgetown University, stated earlier this year in his opening remarks to the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, "A child has seen at least 4,000 hours of television by the time he enters kindergarten". That makes him an expert where the Monocular Eye is concerned, since he is consciously or subconsciously aware of a certain level of quality and content on any segment or portion thereof to which he is exposed via videotape, film, live or slide materials fed through a video monitor/receiver.

If a finalized presentation includes distractions such as out-of-focus scenes, jerky pans, tilts, zooms, or any one of the disastrous incidents mentioned earlier, the viewer, kindergarten newcomer or adult armchair veteran, may be taken more by what to him is considered humorous. The average viewing background of most audiences has been tabulated at from 15 to 20 years. This is a mass video educated audience that cannot be misled. A disinterested viewer, agitated by a dull, flat-lit telecast, with a variety of production flubs included, becomes a "channel-switcher". In the case of a captive audience that must remain in their seats, regardless of program content, they may be able to apply the technique used by various rebellious groups. The video and audio may be evident, but the disinterested can "tune it out", mentally.

A "running" segment, where a director must coordinate the efforts of several camera operators, a video switcher and talent on-stage, is a time-consuming venture involving detailed planning, rehearsal, and experienced personnel in every position. The final viewing audience of a production has no chance to see the overall studio arrangement, has no way of knowing that an ace camera operator, out with the flu, was substituted with a secretary who has perhaps never seen the backside of a TV camera; or that someone inadvertently walked through the studio area during the production and kicked the wall plug from two important lights, creating a near blackout during a critical point of the production. In fact, that audience to whom we are attempting to convey a message, to train, sell, basically to communicate with, couldn't care less about what our problems were. They can only judge our efforts by the final result as presented to them on the TV screen.

The network strikes of several years ago proved this point when executives were pressed into the positions of announcers and engineering technicians following walkouts by experts in those areas. Audiences were immediately alerted to the distractions of high, squeaky announcements, with occasional word-fluffs, in addition to audio from one source being aired with video from another. Audiences were humored by it all. If asked the next day whether they witnessed the mistakes of the evening before, most viewers would have been in a position to explain in detail what went wrong. However, it is doubtful they would have remembered what message the temporary announcer meant to convey.

Electronic editing, properly utilized, can serve the small, medium-sized, even the largest facility, as a form of magnetic insurance policy to produce effective, usable, salable videotape productions. It can cut costs, professionalize final segments, and command viewers to accept the message.

A lengthy script, broken down into short segments can be more readily memorized by an inexperienced talent. Editing allows the individual to deliver short swatches of material, take time to collect thoughts for the next portion, tape it, view it for acceptance or retake, and repeat the process for each portion until finalized. An instructor who may have spent eight working hours finalizing an involved presentation, may find months later that portions of the statistical material within the segment have changed. The eight-hour session need not be repeated. New statistics may be edited into appropriate portions of the segment. Sequences may require remote location of the VTR system for various scenes, to be incorporated with film or slide sequences. The entire production may first be shot on remote location, with an audio track laid down in the areas on the tape where film or slides may be later edited in, back in the studio facility.

The Ampex Video Institute's "Road Show" crew has been involved on a number of occasions in accumulating as many as thirty hours of material for various organizations on remote location. The segments were then returned to Ampex, screened, and the best scenes chosen for editing into a master tape. On one occasion the production team recorded more than twenty hours of tape 11,000 feet up, in the mountains in Aspen, Colorado, for 8th Interski, a congress of professional ski instructors. The best scenes were chosen for a one-hour master in which one hundred-eighty edits were employed. The edits appeared as individual "takes" or cuts when viewed on the final master. Audio for the production was added after the edited master was produced.

When the background noise in a factory sequence prohibits the recording of the audio track, the video scenes may first be edited together, and the audio added later under studio conditions. Conversely, for special effects put to music. An audio track might first be recorded, the video portions later assembled in time with the music.

Time lapse sequences may also be compiled with an editing capability to study the deterioration of a product under adverse conditions, or, in the case of plant life, to study its growth pattern frame by frame. Animation may also be employed in a form of building blocks. A word may appear to be spelled out letter-by-letter by editing each scene as letters are added one at a time.

There is no denying that the suggestions made here demand a skill, a knowledge, and somewhat of a background to initiate. However, the demands center around two individuals: A producer/director and a technician. The 20-scene production need not employ twenty cameras and operators to be coordinated through a control room atmosphere, nor twenty monitors for the director to check each operator's position and composition. One inexperienced operator may be "talked into position" prior to rolling tape for the scene. The immediacy of videotape then permits monitoring the scene immediately. If the scene is acceptable, the director "talks" the camera operator into the next scene, repeating the process until the segment is finalized to satisfaction. Should a decision arise following the finalization of a one-hour production which argues that a 45-second portion of the tape is poorly framed, amateurishly performed by the talent, or statistically incorrect, an edit at the point replaces the flub, without retaping the entire one-hour production.

Videotape and electronic editing will never replace film. There is a definite place and need for both. As stated by Wm. Mutschmann, President, Mutschmann Films, Inc., before an American Petroleum Institute gathering in Chicago last month, "Most of us are aware, or have seen how motion pictures have been used to assist in corporate communications, training, telling and industrial story, etc. That motion pictures are not produced on

a wider scale lies simply in the fact of . . . cost. They provide dramatic impact and sweep of sight, they provide sound and action -- but they cost money.

"The principal advantage of videotape is that you can achieve these important factors -- at greatly reduced cost. At the same time, a videotape program or presentation does something no film can really do, . . . convey the immediacy of a talk or action -- as though, like television, it is happening right now while you are viewing the receiver. . . .

"Duplicate prints of a 15-minute film, professionally prepared at considerable cost, run about \$75 a print. Duplicate copies of a 15-minute videotape, professionally prepared . . . run only about \$36 a copy. . . . In the case of a film production, and here I speak as one who has produced many industrial films, you sometimes shoot 10 feet of film that never get used for every one foot that does Such a degree of perfection, however, is not required -- nor is it expected by an audience -- in videotaping

"Take the \$75 film duplicates and the \$36 videotape duplicates I just mentioned. Suppose, as is frequently the case, it becomes necessary to amend or to change what has been done. In the case of the film, each of your original \$75 investments must be written off; you can recall the duplicates, but you must shoot and edit new film and process entirely new duplicates.

"In the case of videotape, you can recall the duplicates, erase the video and audio images, re-record and re-distribute. And what's more, you can do this ad infinitum".

In the case of the classroom teacher, videotape, its editing capability, and storage and retrieval characteristics, will enhance, supplement and aid their processes of instructions. As far as videotape eliminating instructors in a form of duplicable automation, the facts may best have been summed up by an anonymous professor who last year stated: "The teacher who is fearful that he will be replaced by videotape, should be!"

The fact remains that CCTV, CATV, or Commercial Broadcast Facilities currently incorporating electronic editing realize the immediate value in the added capability. To electronically splice scenes, from a number of sources, saves time, costs, and ruffled attitudes of talent, studio personnel and engineers.

Those who have been exposed to the editing capability within the one-inch videotape format are in general agreement that use of the electronic editor eliminates three-fourths of the battle toward the pursuit of high quality videotape productions!