

PRODUCTION

TOO MUCH KIT, NOT ENOUGH TIME

Script and budgets play a major role in decisions about kit and camera use, says **Gavin Struthers**



It is very easy to get bogged down by the wealth of new camera technology on offer.

Modern cameras have a short shelf life and difficult choices have to be made by facility companies: what to buy for hire, what to avoid until something better turns up. Film camera choice used to be based on the camera system and the rental house you preferred, but those days are gone.

Now, we are confronted by an array of digital cameras that

'Kit must be flexible and serviceable to work at the speed of TV schedules'

record to different digital formats and operate in very different ways; the native Red MX chip image sees the world differently from the Alexa chip, which in turn sees it differently from Sony's F35/F65 or the F3. Then there are considerations such as type of lens, choice of monitor, HD wireless sending, colour space, along with different post workflow options.

As prep time is shortened but more kit needs to be prepped, it is fundamental that I have a basic starting point from which to generate an equipment list and workflow. Generally, this package will fall somewhere between the requirements of the script and the limitations of budget. Primarily, the kit needs to be flexible and

serviceable to work at the speed of TV schedules.

For the second series of *Downton Abbey*, we had three 17-inch HD monitors in a 'video village' set-up. This allowed a sizeable crew to see both Alexa camera feeds and a DoP monitor for exposure checks when required. On a period drama of this magnitude, moving the set-up around three areas on the stages and three areas at Highclere Castle added very little time to our day.

Inspector Morse prequel *Endeavour* required a different approach. I needed to shoot on two cameras, with an option to split off one at short notice. The cameras had to be capable of handling fast ISO ratings, because some scheduled days meant we would be struggling for daylight or not have the time to light up to a stop. They also needed to be lightweight, easily serviceable and within budget, so I opted for two Red MX cameras with Primo prime lenses through Panavision UK.

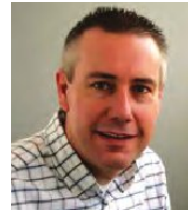
The *Endeavour* script contained 187 scenes with very few at the same location. Moving quickly was important; we didn't have the time or manpower to move a plethora of monitors so I removed the 'video village' concept and worked from four Astro and two focus monitors. These are small and lightweight with built-in waveform monitors. The set-up was similar to a film set, with the camera operator giving feedback and the costume and make-up departments standing on set or watching with the director.

➤ *Gavin Struthers is a director of photography. His recent credits include Endeavour, Downton Abbey and Garrow's Law*

POST

TRAINING FOR THE REVOLUTION

Training is a vital component for a successful move to a file-based workflow, writes **Brian Hardman**



As someone who trained on 2" VTR machines in Granada's heyday,

I have witnessed several technological revolutions.

The backdrop to the last significant revolution of the industry moving to non-linear editing was a relatively well-resourced and trained production and facilities workforce. This foundation provided for time and effort to understand the nature of change and how it could be best embraced.

But the fragmentation of large broadcasters into more a disparate and casual staffing model has coincided with the next big technological sea change – the much vaunted file-based revolution. This timing is, at best, unfortunate as the industry lacks a solid foundation of training and experience to manage this transition.

Practically, this means we are seeing capable, experienced production teams being thrust into whole new disciplines dictated by technology without the required training, understanding of the bigger picture or, in most cases, time or desire to take much of this on board in ever-pressurised budgetary and time-constrained production processes.

Suddenly, PDs have to handle far more complex menu-driven cameras and become data-management savvy.

In 20-odd years of working with cassette tape formats, I can count on one hand the number of occasions when a rushes tape has been lost irretrievably, or damaged beyond repair. But worryingly, I

can recount many examples of original file content being lost, erased or damaged over the past two years through bad practice, poor training or compromises over kit or personnel – though not on projects we at Sumners have had direct responsibility for.

And now for the good news... Much has been written about the demise of post-production, but when you break down the roles, responsibilities and function of the post-production providers, the key is project management, experience and taking responsibility. Once you get past the technology and kit debate, this is still where we as a sector add value.

'The industry lacks solid experience or training to manage this transition'

Additionally, in the fragmented landscape, we have a role in providing advice, education and training for the wider industry.

Much of this reasoning is behind Sumners' partnership with the University of Salford at MediaCityUK. We hope not only to provide current best-practice education and experience for new entrants, but also offer real-world exposure through state-of-the-art facilities, doing real work in the University of Salford building.

With so much technological change occurring concurrently, it is important not to lose sight of the professional discipline still required and – most importantly – develop the right talent.

➤ *Brian Hardman is technical director at Sumners Post Production*