

Beginning in Video Effects

So you want to put some special effects on your video. Where do you start?

We better try to understand what ‘video effects’ are.

Video effects can be defined as anything one adds to ones video after it has been shot and assembled in a video editing timeline. Of course, this does not include videos that are made up solely of video effects, but most of us don’t do that.

On your last holiday, you shot some nice video and stills and assembled them into a story.

Now you want to add a title. A title is a video effect, albeit basic. Anything that you add to your video electronically can be defined as a video effect.

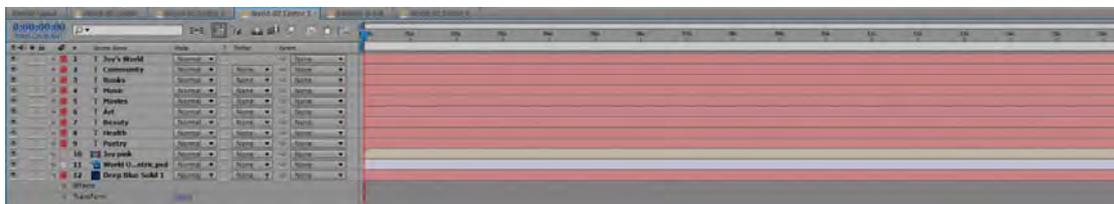
Amongst all the bits that make up a video effect, two concepts stand out:

- Layers;
- Key frames.

If one is going to understand video effects, one must understand these two concepts.

Layers

Layers add to each frame of a video by layering something over the top, or underneath, an existing picture. The layer then affects the existing picture or frame with the use of transparency, sometimes called opacity. Most of us understand timelines in our video editors. Most editors have more than one timeline. In the vernacular of video effects, these timelines are layers.

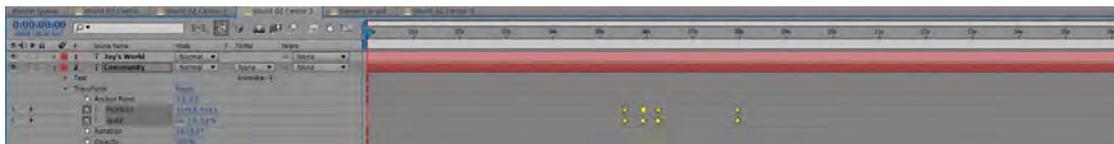


Layers can be thought of as pieces of acetate stacked on top of each other. The acetate is see-through and anything drawn on any sheet or layer can be seen looking into the

stack from the top. In electronic form, these layers can be moved independently from each other, in three dimensions, over time.

Keyframes

The second concept changes video over time. A keyframe is the point in time where a video effect starts, changes or finishes.



Path to Video Effects

Video effects begin in one's existing video editor. When its capabilities have been exhausted, it is time to think about getting a more sophisticated video editor (Sony Vegas Pro is a very good middle ground between editing and effects), or to go to a specialised video effects program.

Video Effects Programs

Once these concepts are understood, it is time to jump into a video effects program and learn how to make the effects work.

The main programs for creating video effects are:

- Adobe After Effects for Windows and Mac (I personally use After Effects, but probably don't use more than 1% of its capability);
- Apple Motion for Mac.

There are professionals who live their whole life inside these two programs and many of the ads you see on TV are created using them.

There are also higher end programs such as Maya and Autodesk, but they

are very specialised and beyond the reach of most of us.

Sony Vegas Pro has a good suite of video effects built in, Premiere Pro and AVID have some video effects capability built in and most of the beginner video editing programs have some bottled video available. Video effects can be created from scratch by using layers containing different pictures or words, and keyframes to move them about the video screen.

Instead of creating effects from scratch, there is a whole industry making “plug-ins”. Plug-ins are available for almost any effect that can be dreamed up. Lower end NLEs generally have fixed plug-ins to create a limited array of effects.

What Can We Do?

The effects that club members’ videos contain seem to be:

- Titles;
- Moving lines on a map;
- *Explosions.*

Two other effects that are talked about are “day for night” and colour correction.

Simple titles can be done easily in most video editors. More complex titles, such as 3D moving titles generally required a dedicated effects program.

Similarly, moving lines on a map can be created in a video editor, but they are generally limited. More sophisticated lines can be easily and quickly be created in main stream video effects programs.

Explosions can be purchased as plug-ins, or can be created from scratch in a video effects program.

“Day for Night” requires colour correction and the ability to add lighting to an existing video.

Colour correction is a whole science in itself. Tools of varying quality are found in most video editors, but the high end is dominated by a program called “da Vinci”, now owned by BlackMagic in Melbourne. As with video effects people, there are professionals called “Colourists” who spend their whole life just altering the colour of movies and videos.

Focus Night

We will work through these five types of video effects, as time permits, on Focus Night. I will use Adobe After Effects, but the lessons and ideas may be applied using your own software.

Kent R Fry

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