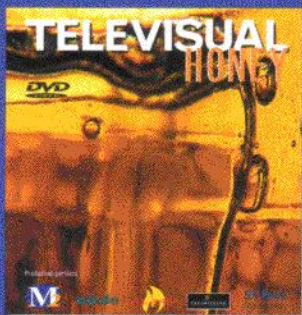


# TELEVISUAL

ENTERTAINMENT **THE EDIT**

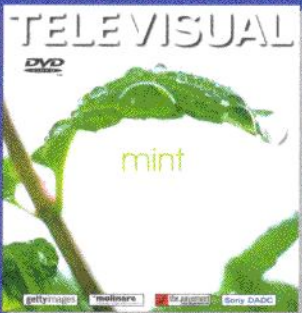
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Minimising time-consuming and expensive edit work in post means co-ordinating and controlling every camera, keeping shots tight and the overall style consistent

Of all the current TV genres, entertainment probably encompasses more styles and techniques than any other.

From the OB and single-camera work of comedy drama or sports show, through the multi-camera studio work of the current affairs programme, to the hidden camera work of the documentary, LE has appropriated them as its own and is ironically perhaps the most complex genre of all.

## **Being pre-prepared**

For any producer coming into entertainment for the first time, the challenges are as daunting as the genre is wide. But with techniques as old almost as television itself, there is the reassurance of a long

production history and tradition for any new arrival to draw upon.

"I've always seen entertainment as a fairly unique sort of television," says editor John Sillito, who has worked on every kind of entertainment show you can think of, from straight comedy shows like *The Two Ronnies* (both the original series and its current revival) through to Tom Jones' and Shirley Bassey's music shows to the classic and long-running game-show *The Generation Game*.

"Every other sort of show – drama, even sitcom – is very largely pre-produced in the sense that the producer has already got the script together, the cast together, arranged the situation, the lighting,



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waited for the right weather and can shoot it till he gets the shots he wants.

## Just one shot

So the amount of post-production compared to pre-production is much less in those sorts of genres. In entertainment," he adds, "the post-production work is much greater – you only get one go at telling a joke usually – and the producer

has to allow for that."

Within the genre of entertainment, there are various sub-genres, each with their own styles and techniques and incorporating reality shows, comedy shows, music shows, live events, game-shows and panel shows. Virtually all of these need to capture far more footage than is ever used, but not through reshooting,

as with drama, but during the first – and only – take.

Perhaps the one exception to the rule is comedy shows, which will often have scripted OB work. Since multiple takes are possible, it is far easier for the producer and director to get the shots they want.

However, with many sending out a DigiBeta camera for the main shots

and a production assistant with a DV camera for secondary shots, it is still possible for the importance of the second camera's footage to be overlooked during the progress of the shoot.

Sillito warns against this. "They need to be directed just as much as the main camera does," he states. "I get an awful lot of stuff in where the DV



## CASE STUDY: THEY THINK IT'S ALL OVER

From Talkback Thames for BBC1

Series producer Jim Pullin, producer Simon Bullivant, Talkback Thames; online editor Nick Griffiths, editor Nick King, sound engineer Ian Marriott-Smith, Evolutions Television

Presented by comedian Nick Hancock, the comedy sports quiz has been running for 17 seasons and is about to embark on its 18th. Evolutions Television's Nick King has been editor on the show since its second season.

"It's recorded on Monday night, I edit it on Tuesday and Wednesday and then it's transmitted on Thursday," he says. "But, at its briefest, it was going out on Tuesdays and it was a day-of-transmission edit."

For each episode, King gets a paper edit provided by producer Bullivant, created from VHS copies of the studio output. This paper edit incorporates comments from BBC staff watching the recording and aims to ensure potentially libellous material does not make it into the programme.

"My job is then to stitch it together and make the joins work, trimming out any stuff in the middle that's not necessary," says King. Additional requests to remove potentially offending output may come later in the edit, but usually, judiciously removing a couple of words from a contentious comment can render it less damaging.

King gets tapes with vision-mixed output from the studio, as well as a set of iso feeds – one for each team and one of Hancock. "Just by shuttling up and down on the iso tapes, I can get lots of reaction shots. Otherwise, I just reuse shots that have already been in somewhere else." If necessary, he can reconstruct the vision-mixed tape from the individual iso feeds, since he also gets separate audio feeds for each panel member, as well as the audience and Hancock. The final conform is done on a Symphony, although earlier series had a linear conform.

King enjoys editing *They Think it's all Over*. "The whole team has been very professional and it's always been very funny – which makes it a joy to edit."



camera's flying around all over the place and it's virtually useless."

### As it happens

However, these kinds of shoots remain the exception. The bulk of entertainment shows need to capture events as they happen – and so have more in common with news reporting than drama, even though they are typically filmed in studios.

But unlike news, where the single-camera perspective is accepted and editing is almost entirely

confined to trimming for length, entertainment requires mixtures of shots for reaction, variety, rhythm and pacing (close-up for the gag, wide-shot for the reaction). This means that the decisions of where to position cameras and what material to capture can be some of the biggest choices that producers have to make. They should also be taken in conjunction with the editor.

Graham Hutchings, managing director of Editworks, an edit house that has a long history of

work on entertainment projects, says that typically editors at his company will want to have met clients in the studio to look at the set-up and sort out these issues. "Our experience tells us that if you sort it out in the beginning, you don't have frustration later on and things knit together more easily," he says.

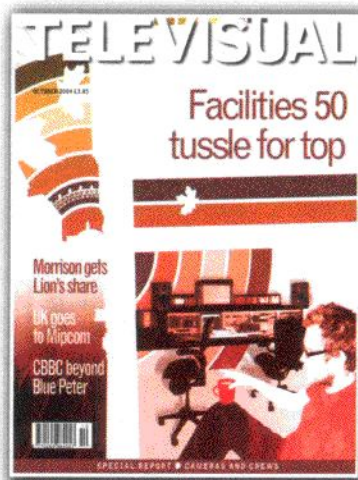
The simplest set-up is probably that of a panel show, where isolated camera feeds (isos) of the host and the panels are the only typical requirements in addition to the vision-

mixed output.

Slightly more difficult, paradoxically, is an interview show. Since there are usually only two people being filmed, the number of possible cutaways and reaction shots is severely limited in comparison to a panel show, where there is usually always someone to cut away to.

While there are a number of solutions to this conundrum, most of which involve having more cameras, a simpler approach has been taken by

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shows such as *You Only Live Once*. These shows have chosen to position a camera behind the presenter and interviewer that looks out at the audience. Since the camera can't see what the presenter and the subject are saying, there is always something to cut away to, even if the isos are bad.

#### **A moving target**

A game-show, where the host is frequently mobile

rather than seated, can be more complicated. Being able to acquire clean shots of contestants when they're interacting with the host can be hard in the age of 16:9 acquisition. Camera positions need to take account of this additional problem. "In *The Generation Game*, for instance, if you stand a contestant next to Jim Davison," says Sillito, "it's extremely difficult to get a close enough shot of the

contestant that doesn't inevitably include Jim.

"When Davison is interviewing a contestant at the beginning, that 30 seconds needs a lot of editing and you need a lot of shots – you can't cheat the sound if you can see people's mouths moving in the corner of the shots." This means clean, tight shots that don't include even the hands or chin of the other person are extremely important if

continuity issues are to be avoided.

Another caveat for game-show edits is the tendency of vision-mixers to over-cut. Since editors will generally have to trim parts for time, or to make cuts for dialogue, the frequency of edits will appear to increase and become too rapid.

This means that the editor will then have to insert iso shots into the vision-mixed sequence and



#### **CASE STUDY: DEAD RINGERS**

**Produced in-house for BBC2**

**Producer Gareth Edwards, editors Pete Drinkwater, Nick Peto, Mark Lawrence and John Sillitto, BBC Post Production, London**  
**TX November 2004**

The topical impressionist show returning for its fourth season in November has three different kinds of video acquisition, each of which requires a different editing approach: location and stage shooting; hidden-camera shooting; and multi-camera studio shooting. One editor normally cuts the location sketches plus the main show, while another is responsible for the hidden camera.

The scripted comedy is shot on location or on a sound stage using single-camera DigiBeta. Ideally, the assembly edit is conducted near to the location so the director and

producer can oversee its progress. The filming finished, the director fine-cuts the assembled inserts with the editor. One of the offline editors track-lays the sound, which is then taken to a dubbing suite to be balanced for a single stereo soundtrack. The vision is conformed in an online Avid and graded in a grading suite. Effects and captions are added in a linear online suite.

The hidden-camera shooting requires several concealed DV cameras and mikes. The rushes are loaded into an Avid and an hour of footage is cut down to two minutes of finished material. This is then dubbed and conformed in the same way as the stage material.

Topical sketches are shot the day before transmission in a multi-camera studio using five cameras and then vision-mixed. In the evening, everything is shown to an audience to record their reaction. The main studio output and two isolated cameras are recorded on DigiBeta and loaded into an Avid overnight.

The next morning, editors construct the final show in an offline Avid. Topical sketches are tightened, repaired and placed in the show. Earlier sketches and hidden-camera material are also edited into the show, which is then sent to dubbing to smooth audio, add music and effects. After some picture tweaks, the show is ready to be conformed and have credits and name supers, CSO keying or video effects added. Sound is then laid back to tape.



remove the vision-mixer's cuts either side of the edit. However, this will only be possible if the editor has appropriate iso shots. Asking vision-mixers not to cut at all for certain sequences and to leave everything on the isos will avoid this, as well as reducing the overall amount of time spent on the edit.

Panel shows and game-shows share a common problem with comedy shows: the acquisition of clean audio. The panels of most panel shows are

comprised of comics and most game-shows are hosted by comics as well. Anyone with comic timing will usually not wait until an audience has finished laughing before telling another joke, to make sure the second joke gets a bigger laugh than it would otherwise. If that second joke then gets edited out, the editor will need to remove the comic's voice from over the top of the laughter.

But since most studios play the audio feeds from the stage microphones over

speakers to the audience so that they can hear what's being said, cutting to the audience's mic will not get clean laughter – it will pick up on the output from the speakers as well. So getting a clean "tail" to the audience's laughter from some other point in the programme – perhaps the warm-up – is of crucial importance.

#### **The common touch**

Since many panel shows and game-shows are well-known by their viewers and long-running, most

producers will want a common style of editing for each show. That will mean either having the same editor on each show or ensuring that all the editors involved confer. Often the editor of the pilot or first episode will set the style in conjunction with the producer and director and those that follow will imitate that style as closely as possible.

However, many producers feel that keeping the same editor throughout the series is the best and only way to ensure

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consistency, primarily because the editor will know what to do without too much hand-holding by the producer. If a new editor comes on board, it will usually be some time before the producer is confident enough to leave the editor without direction.

### Speed up the edit

Many panel shows are now filmed quite close to the time of transmission, primarily is topical. That means that, as with awards shows, live events and reality shows, they need to be turned around as quickly as possible.

Typically, there is one major obstacle to this: the amount of footage acquired is usually far greater than the time allotted for its broadcast. Despite this, there are various ways of increasing the speed of the edit.

Editing can be done on location to bypass the time involved in getting tapes to a suite. Linear editing is still possible with a suitably experienced editor; and the new generation of hard drive recorders, such as Grass Valley's Profile system, can record feeds straight to disk. This means

that the editor can be editing without having to digitise the tapes, even while the cameras are still recording.

It goes without saying that each of these techniques can benefit from good process, just as they can suffer from bad process, so producers and editors alike have to be clear in advance how the edit will go and exactly what conditions are needed.

### Suites for the sweet

A suite with good acoustics and speakers is crucial, or else the editor is likely to miss background noises that will still be picked up on the broadcast. This means that a hotel room is probably not a suitable environment for editing many shows. Some post-production houses, such as Resolution, offer a solution, having their own mobile suites, as well as being ideally-suited for location-based editing.

Linear editing may be a dying art, and many post houses no longer have linear editing suites except for online conforming. Getting an editor who is experienced in linear editing is far more difficult than getting a similarly-experienced

non-linear editor.

Equally hard (or perhaps even more so) is getting a good PA who has the timing skills necessary to make sure each shot is the right duration for the edit – with linear editing, there's no going back to correct mistakes.

And while hard-drive-based recording can save time, many producers are unwilling to accept that going back to correct things as more exciting events unfold is counter-productive – time savings are lost if the editor has to keep re-editing completed material, so perfection cannot always be achieved with a short turnaround.

A professional presenter can also help reduce the edit time. Many become less disciplined as a series goes on, and often start "messaging round" (in the words of one editor). "They start thinking, 'I've done this for 13 shows: it's easy.' In a tight-turnaround situation, you're desperate to get stuff on to tape, while they just want to have a good time."

With a show such as *Big Brother*, where 24 hours of footage from multiple cameras need to be compressed down into half-an-hour, proper process is

the only way to get the edit done on time. In common with other entertainment edits, keeping a list of "scenes" and making notes of which are good and which are bad will enable the editors easily to find material to work with for the assembled show.

Having several PAs monitor the footage from the cameras throughout the day, making notes of interesting events and shots, ensures that the vast amount of dull footage from a 24/7 reality show can be waded through relatively easily by the editors. This means there is less need for the producer or director to have to stay conscious and alert the whole time.

*Big Brother* is in a sense the ultimate hidden-camera show. But the contestants know the cameras are there, cameramen can stay by the cameras, pointing them at events, the cameras can be large and use broadcast-quality tapes.

### Out of sight

For hidden-camera shows such as *The Jamie Kennedy Experiment* and *Experimental*, this is not always possible. Often, unattended mini-DV cameras and microphones secreted around a location



or the star are the only possible ways to get the footage. This means that there is no cameraman to point the camera in the right direction and no PA to monitor the footage as it comes out to highlight the bad and good takes.

#### DV devoid of sound

"Being DV material, timecoding is non-existent and I get an awful lot of DV recordings, even from professional cameramen, that are absolutely devoid of sound from beginning to end," says John Sillito, who

has now had many years of experience working with hidden-camera footage.

"It's extremely important to me that some sound is recorded, just as a guide track, so that I can sync it with the sound from the mikes." Another tip he gives camera crews is to keep recording footage for as long as possible.

"Once I've found a sync point, it won't come out of sync till you stop recording. Once that happens, that's two more syncing operations I've got to do with other cameras and

getting it all back into sync is a problem."

Although that generates more footage, Sillito says the way Avids handle material means that it's easy for him to scan through hidden-camera footage to find good soundbites and visuals.

Although more editing work is done in entertainment post-production than in many other genres, producers coming into entertainment for the first time will find that, by putting in as much planning as possible in

advance of the shoot, many problems will disappear or at least become easier for editors to deal with. Even after the shoot, through good process, the edit can be quicker and smoother, even on fast-turnround material.

But whatever happens, don't just leave it to the editors to "fix it in post" – they might not be able to.

*With thanks to: Graham Hutchings, Editworks; Nick King, Evolutions Television; John Sillito, BBC Post Production*



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