

LAUGHING BUDDHA

Enlightened editing

Start small but aim big is the motto of a new editing boutique set up by some familiar Soho faces. Rob Buckley ventures across Oxford Street to meet the not-so-new kids on the block

Every start-up has plans to get to the top as soon as it can, and Laughing Buddha is no exception. "We want to be one of the big players in the next five years," says facilities manager Nicola Whitehead. High ambitions for a company that's only just moved into (and is still building) a purpose-built facility in Little Portland Street.

Laughing Buddha (initially launched on Regent Street earlier this year) is the brainchild of creative director Justin Annandale, one of the founders of The Mouse and Keyboard and ex-senior editor at Blue. While freelancing, he was offered a "giant" editing job from Pearson TV (five episodes of editing, together with graphics) but decided he didn't want to take it to Happy Fish, for whom he was freelancing.

After mulling it all over with Whitehead and money-marketeer Nico Demitriov (owner of the mothballed Laughing Buddha production company), Annandale decided that, combined, they had enough resources and contacts to start a new facility.

Whitehead's six-month



Laughing Buddha's four editing suites, available for both online and offline work

stint with Happy Fish has led to 50% of the staff coming from the facility, though she maintains that's not deliberate. "It's just a coincidence. But it does mean we all know each other and go out together a lot."

The main exceptions are Mitch Baker (who helped Whitehead get her first job as a cinema usher), formerly of 124 Facilities, who'll be in charge of the recently-purchased Editbox Fx; and new recruit Ron Ganbar from Blue, who'll be joining Baker for Editbox work. "We got a big job from the BBC (*Shaker Maker*) and



MARK TYNAN

decided that, rather than do a single-Avid job on it, we had enough sources of Editbox work to make a go of it," says Whitehead, reckoning that Ganbar's promo background (including Henry work in Israel) will be a draw.

A Softimage XSI workstation will complete the set-up - until Laughing Buddha's expansion plans take the company downstairs...

Whitehead says the team is looking to do complete jobs, rather than just the online. "Justin is an online editor and that's his first love, but if we

think the job is worth it, we'll do the offline as well. A lot of places take on jobs like factories - get them in, get them done, get them out. But we look at them project by project."

Whitehead is clear about where the company's going. "Over the next two years, we'll take over downstairs, get sound in and start thinking about whatever the high-end is in two years' time. With 4MC buying everything up, it's a perfect time for a smaller facility to thrive - most people would rather not put their work through big outfits." ■

KIT SPEC

Laughing Buddha is built around four suites, two containing MC 1000XLs for online and offline editing and one containing an Editbox Fx with two hours of uncompressed storage capacity and 5D effects. All the suites can access DigiBeta, BetaSP, DV, D3 and D1.

For graphics, the company is also planning to install a Softimage XSI workstation into the fourth suite over the next month.