

OZONE

Something in the air

Why use your own costly fire-power for those dull jobs when someone else's will do? Robert Buckley visits as Soho's "first on-line dry-hire" outfit opens up to freelancers and facilities

Anyone with a couple of spare Macs is doing off-line dry-hire, it seems. But on-line? That's something else: Flame, Henry and the like don't come cheap. So when Ozone claims its London's first digital on-line dry-hire company, you believe it.

"We spent well over £2m," says md Martin Hicks. 25 years an operator at the likes of MPC and Framestore, he spent three months getting his new firm ready for its April opening. "Essentially, we're overspill for facilities with more bookings than they can cope with. Clients currently split evenly between freelancers and facilities."

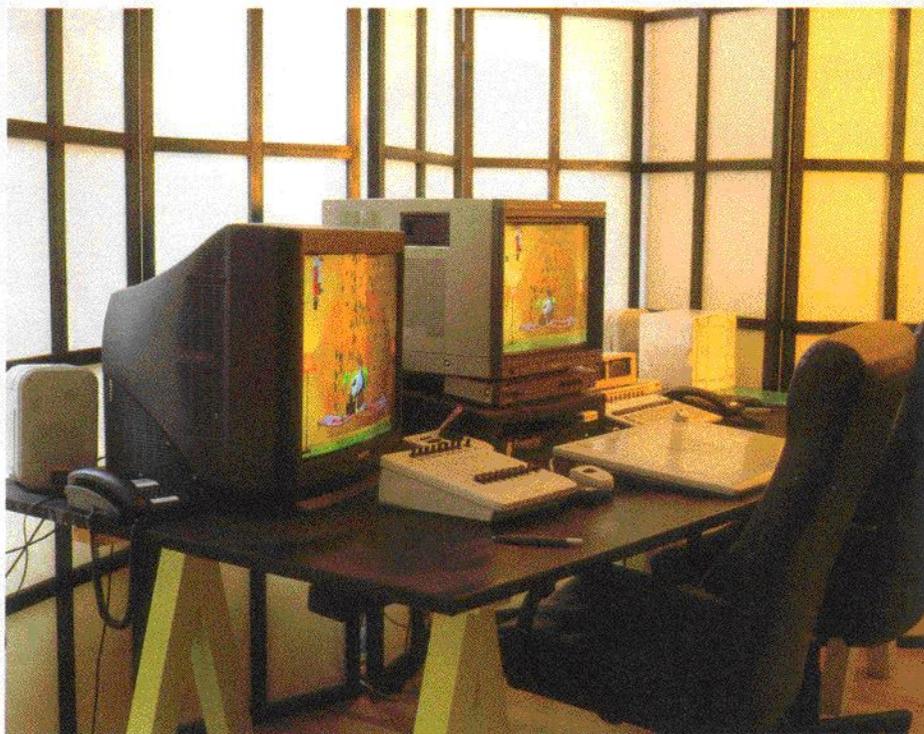
Ozone and sister-company Mozone, which rents out kit (one facility has had a Mozone Flame for six weeks), grew out of equipment reseller Planet Xtreme. "They had a Henry sitting waiting for shipment, and thought why not hire it out?" Hicks says. Initially one suite, the operation expanded to three with the launch of Ozone. The link with Planet Xtreme eases the way to buying and selling kit, replacing yesterday's technology at far less cost than normal.

Ozone's Flame and two

Henrys suit it to both film and broadcast work. But, with distinctions between off- and on-line blurring, why on-line-only? "The on-line advantage is disappearing. You can do 70% of things you do on-line with off-line but, for that extra 30% - sparks, speed of rendering - you need on-line."

With a staff of four, including manager Corinna Hartwig and engineer Mark Openshaw, Ozone brings to London's post business the US concept of four-walling: in place of a permanent set-up with permanent staff, an overloaded facility rents space for a specific job. Openshaw built into the facility the ability to swap suites. "Being dry-hire, everything has to be simple and flexible." And, since clients may be using the facility because machines elsewhere have crashed, he's also had to recover footage from dead hard-drives and DAT tapes as part of the service.

Hartwig, who managed her father's facility in Germany before coming to Xtreme, then Ozone, puts emphasis on client-comfort - down to Playstations and satellite TV in every suite



High-end kit like Henry for dry-hire on Berwick Street



for the "long boring jobs." And it makes more sense, argues Hicks, for facilities to hire on-line kit for mundane jobs like matte-rendering than use their own equipment overnight, or when it could be doing other work.

And if the idea of on-line

dry-hire makes facilities suspicious ("they may think we'll steal clients they bring here"), Hicks says he's "not in competition. I want people to feel comfortable coming here. And to dry-hire during the day - and lead a normal lifestyle - is a big advantage." ■

KIT SPEC

Suite 1: Henry V8 with two hours of storage.

Suite 2: Flame 6 running on an SGI Octane workstation with one hour of storage. Sparks include 5D Monsters and Sapphire.

Suite 3: Henry Infinity with two hours of storage. All three suites have access to DigiBeta, D1 and DAT facilities, plus Photoshop on NT workstations and email. Mac access also available at the facility.