P3 OUTPOST

The last outpost

If an idea's any good first time round, why not use it again?
Rob Buckley talks to P3 Post, which is reviving its separate
offline facility but with a twist: this time, it's under remote control

2001 may be nearly upon us, but HAL 9000 isn't going to appear any time soon. Yet P3's Outpost is an idea straight out of science-fiction: the remote-controlled facility.

P3 md Paul Hutchings and facility director Martin Price met in 1982 as stills rostrum operators. In 94, Hutchings sold his BetaSP kit to buy an Avid; he then enlisted Price's help to launch the three-suite P3 Post the following February. Since then, the firm has stayed non-linear and claims to be "the first Soho post-house built solely on a new generation of affordable non-linear technology." After moving from Berwick Street to Kingly Street, P3 finally settled in its Lexington Street offices.

Now P3 is full up again. "We have online kit being used for offline. But to get online work, you have to offer offline," says Hutchings. To cope with the demand, the company has resurrected an old, but long-cherished idea.
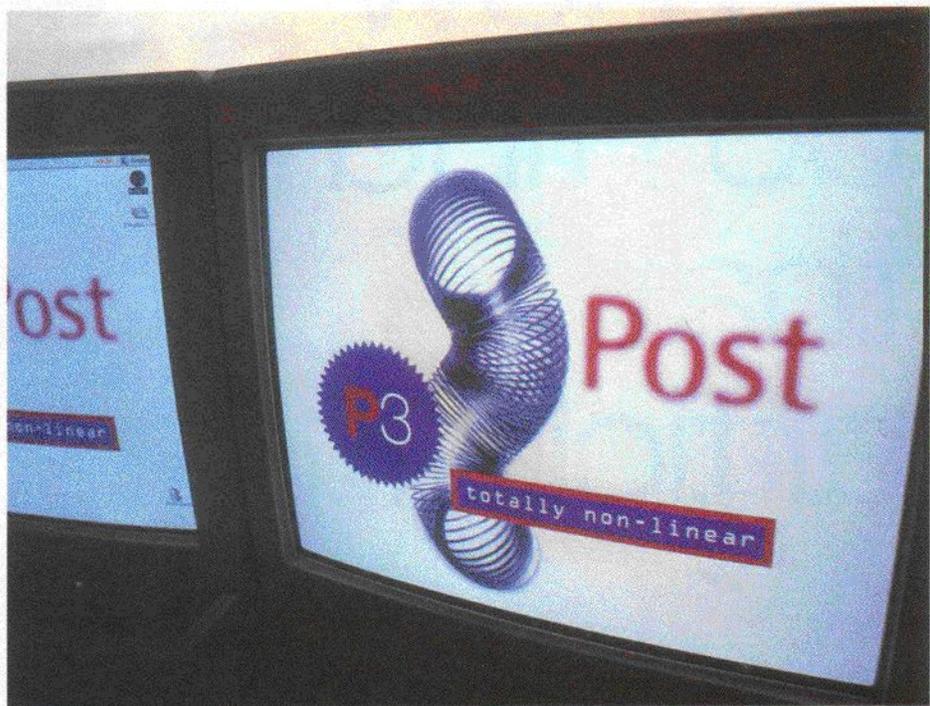
Back in February 1996, P3 had an "Outpost" in Ganton Street dedicated to offline. Following in its footsteps, the new P3 Outpost is designed to be a small, cost-effective facility where long-term projects can be offlined almost independently of P3 itself. "We give everyone swipe cards so they can get into the building and their suite whenever they like," says Price.

The company found out about the site off Great Marlborough Street through audio partner Video London, whose offices are below it. Once the lease had been signed, the firm soon had the road up to put down fibre optics to Lexington Street. "It gives you a great feeling to know that all those roadworks are for your benefit for once," says Hutchings.

At either end of the link sits an Avid Unity. If a client needs more space on the server or to access media stored elsewhere, P3's engineers can make changes on the Outpost's Unity from their own offices. Once the project has been offlined, it can then be transferred to the main office to be onlined.

An additional kink in the set-up is the use of Unique ID's Cakes for media management, which provides previews of media on the system through a web browser. Says Price, "we never felt completely comfortable with it, but now they've written a special module for facilities like ours."

The firm is using the Outpost's opening as an excuse for some redecorating back at home base, reception being top of the list. And, with offline relocated, P3 is aiming to trumpet its online NT Media Composers back at HQ. But it's the Outpost that represents one of the lynchpins of the facility's strategy: to be the most IT-literate and best-networked set-ups in town.

P3's Ramillies Street Outpost is an offline haven where latch-key clients can work whenever they like

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