

Rising Sun Pictures

www.rsp.com.au

November 2003

Interview with Gail Fuller on Rising Sun's use of the Internet as a business tool.

1. The business

Rising Sun Pictures (RSP) is a visual effects company with a staff of forty, working in offices in Adelaide and Sydney. It was founded in May 1995 by an architect, Gail Fuller; a cinematographer, Tony Lewis; and an animator, Wayne Lewis.

RSP provides a comprehensive range of visual effects services. They provide previsualisation using their own custom software tools to make sure that everything captured by the camera will lend itself to the post-production process. They use the most advanced 3D animation software available (Softimage XSI and Alias Wavefront|Maya) and are highly experienced film compositors, having worked on films such as Final Fantasy, Lord of the Rings and the Matrix.

Research and development is vital in this very competitive industry so RSP formed a development company, *Rising Sun Research*. The research team is continuously developing tools to assist the other teams in the creation of unique visual effects techniques. The development company created cineSpace, film colour-calibration software used the world over by top vfx facilities such as the Moving Picture Company.

RSP has undertaken work for the internationally renowned visual effects supervisors Jeff Okun (Red Planet, The Last Samurai) and Greg McMurry (Queen of the Damned, The Core). They have an established relationship with Warner Brothers, Paramount and Walt Disney Studios.

2. The idea

When it first began in 1995, the business focus for RSP, was split across producing CD ROMs, developing websites and producing visual effects for film and television. As the visual effects industry grew, they could see the enormous potential market for their skills in that area and decided to concentrate their focus on that industry. They got their first large vfx job in 1997 working on The Macaw. In 2000, they secured their first US vfx project and since then have been working for US based visual effects supervisors.

3. The e-business

The Internet is an essential business tool for RSP, both for managing their business and managing their clients.

RSP has forty staff working in offices in Adelaide and Sydney. Teams in each office are often working on the same projects and therefore require effective and efficient communication channels. The project managers in both offices also have to work closely together to ensure the most efficient use of resources across the organisation. In addition, the directors need to keep in touch with everyone and everything that is happening in the business day-to-day.

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In order to meet these needs, RSP developed an intranet and a set of workflow procedures and practices that everyone in the organisation follows. The project managers in each city post their day's progress report on the intranet and the various teams report on their progress in the prescribed manner on the intranet. This enables the directors to monitor the overall use of resources and progress against schedules and helps to ensure the right hand knows what the left hand is doing.

The Internet, and the nature of the business they are in, has meant RSP can win and conduct business in the US without having to establish a physical presence there. Email enables them to communicate with clients in a cost-effective manner, and the establishment of test websites, through which US clients can view and sign-off on production work, has meant RSP's clients are always kept informed and able to contribute to the creative process. The different time zones mean that an RSP team can finish its daily work and post the updates to the test site in time for their US client to awaken to view and comment in a timely manner on the work.

This level of client interaction requires discipline by the RSP teams and places extra burdens on the project managers, but it is excellent for client relations.

4. The challenges

The biggest challenge for the organisation is to continue to win work from the US. Special effects is a specialised field but there are sufficient players in it to make it very competitive and being in Australia makes it even more difficult to compete.

Keeping up with changes in technology, software and creative trends is also a challenge. These are all changing rapidly, as are the expectations of cinema audiences for bigger and better special effects, so they are always pushing the boundaries of technology and imagination.

Some of the files dealt with are many gigabytes in size and so have to be shipped to clients in the US via courier. However, a good deal of the work is able to be transferred to clients via the Internet, so there is an ever increasing need for greater bandwidth and faster computers.

5. The results

Using the Internet as a business tool to run the two offices has meant they have been able to sustain a high level of productivity across the two offices. They simply could not effectively manage projects across the teams and cities using a whiteboard or faxing each other documents. The Internet, and sticking to in-house procedures, have enabled them to meet deadlines and keep within the budgets. The project managers are better able to do their job effectively and the directors sleep a little more comfortably because they have a good handle on each project.

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The other very important outcome of using the Internet for RSP has been achieving a high level of client satisfaction. Clients appreciate being able to view progress on their projects any time it suits them by logging on to the password protected test site.

6. The future

It is expected that quantum leaps in the speed of computer processing and methods of compressing and storing data will fundamentally change the way they do their work. New software will be developed to take advantage of the improvements in the technology and so they must keep their eyes on developments in that area. The other thing that they think will change will be heightened expectations of audiences regarding the quality and sophistication of special effects.

7. The advice

While technology and bandwidth are important, RSP believe that these are merely enablers. The main ingredient in their continued success will be the quality of the internal management processes and their ability to create an environment in which their staff can work productively, creatively and effectively. It is true to say the their work is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration. So their advice is: get the management of your workplace right and use the Internet as an aid in this wherever you can; and be sure to use the Internet (eg test sites) as a means of communicating with your clients and keeping them happy.