

MARKEE

By Christine Bunish

L. Thomas Nador, executive director
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Markee: Laszlo Rain, a motion picture and commercial production company and a Red Car postproduction facility, has developed a new shooting format, LR4K. What exactly is it?

Nador: LR4K is a live-action animation capture system with variable independent resolutions that records 300 dpi images for special digital cinematography applications, visual effects and medium-format print output.



LR4K uses a digital SLR camera with software and hardware modifications. In one configuration the camera is operated remotely from a laptop. The camera cables feed FireWire drives; we transfer and process the media converting it to motion at whatever speed the client wants to see played back. In another configuration I shoot with a short pack and the camera writes to smart cards. A 22-foot custom Airstream remote lab, called The Lair, is included for on-site processing and editorial.

Every frame of LR4K is a high-resolution print image that you can blur with the shutter or keep as crisp and clean as a 2K shutter can. If you're capturing a snowball fight with snow falling you capture every snowflake crisp and clean in a motionless image, but when you roll the images into a sequence your eye sees what you've never seen before: It's almost like watching strobe photography. It's a pleasing, artistic experience that always elicits a 'Wow! What was that?' from clients. They've never seen this kind of photography used in a motion sequence.

Markee: How did you get the idea for LR4K?

Nador: Two years ago my seven-year-old daughter and I were shooting pictures with our digital SLR on multi mode. We kept the button pushed and did things in front of the camera then went back to review the pictures. When we were flying through a sequence of images I saw the potential of motion. If you could do this with a series of stills, why not with animation sequences? After some serious software writing and hardware modifications I reworked the camera to output animation sequences. The rest happens in post: You take 10-12 fps image sequences and turn them into whatever the client wants in postproduction.

Markee: Are special tools required in post?

Nador: The format works on every platform from After Effects and Combustion, which

we use here in San Antonio, to the Discreet products at other Red Car locations. We convert 4Ks to TARGA files which are just like other animation sequences people are used to working with. No one has to learn anything new.

Markee: Clients who also want a print output really gain an advantage with LR4K, don't they?

Nador: The ability to produce a print output is one of the major drawing cards when we pitch the format. Almost every job awarded to us was because the client wanted stills to use for billboards and print. With LR4K they could eliminate their print photography budget or combine their resources.

Markee: What advertisers have been the first to use LR4K?

Nador: We want to market LR4K as a strong, artistic application. But it has turned out to be a low-budget cost option for some clients. We shot four :15s for the Abilene Regional Medical Center in three hours for under \$10,000 and the agency said we created the best thing around.

Our first true application of LR4K for motion was CPS Energy's Windricity spot where we shot a series of illustrated elements as stills then processed the animation sequences in post. And we first stepped out of the box for IBC Bank's commercial, Spots, which we convinced the agency to let us shoot on film and with LR4K. When we played back the LR4K at full broadcast resolution right on the set, the agency owner said 'Why aren't we shooting all our 35mm spots on this?' They were almost able to see an edited version of the effect on location; they were amazed!

Markee: What's ahead for LR4K?

Nador: The format can be used in any way you can imagine: as a pickup format, for projects you wouldn't consider film for, for time-lapse -- I'll never shoot film time-lapse again! LR4K is basically a camera, shutter and viewfinder, so it's worked in every situation we've thrown at it at this point. It is an MOS camera, though; it's not lip-synchable yet. We're about to shoot our first music video with it, and if LR4K works with sound, you could use it for anything.