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ORLANDO ESPONDA RAMIREZ , MEXICO CITY, FREELANCER AT PiXABLE

Shotgun: How long are you using shotgun and why did you choose it?

Frank: I started evaluating new project management options about autumn last year. I heard about shotgun before but I thought it was a kind of elite tool for big studios that we could never afford anyway. So I looked for other options but nothing fit.

After some weeks of evaluation shotgun popped up again in the softimage mailing list and I had a closer look at it. I applied for a trial and it took me about two weeks of hard work with shotgun to see and understand the depth of the system and to be really able to unlock the power it carries within. After I had the first asset page setup I presented it to a small group of trusted artists. They were just freaking out of excitement. All information was right there: status, notes and thumbnails. There was no need for digging, no missing details and no emails getting lost.

Shotgun: What did you use before?

Frank: Some years ago we started with a message board. But when a thread grows to more than two pages you can't find any information there, not quickly. The next step was the beloved excel sheet. There are lots of functions in excel that we were able to unlock. But in the end it is a one-way-system. People can look at published excel sheets but they can't interact. All the other project management software was too slow or limited.

But the features of shotgun and most notably the mindset of the brains behind the software convinced me. I am constantly looking for ways to simplify our day to day work. But that doesn't mean that I only search for sensational brand-new features. I am searching for workflows and that's the point where shotgun can really shine.

Shotgun: Do you use it with your freelancers?

Frank: Of course we are using it with our freelancers. The real power of Shotgun just takes effect when we bring all workers together that join a project. That the staff can interact with each other was one reason to choose a system like shotgun. Its workflow and powers can be bent to almost everyone's need in our pipeline. Shotgun can cater to all the different people in different ways and still unites us all. Our artists have access to all project-related information they might ever need. But I think Orlando, one of our freelancers, can explain it from the point of view of an artist.

Shotgun: Orlando, can you describe for us what you do, and what specifically you are doing for PiXABLE?

Orlando: I am a 3d generalist and that led me to work in compositing also. For PiXABLE I am doing mainly texturing, shading and lighting, ending with the comp stage.

Shotgun: What role does Shotgun play in the work that you do for PiXABLE? How do you use it?

Orlando: Shotgun is the key in the current pipeline: everything runs through it and that gives

me the ability of tracking every asset, shot, task and much else. It works like this: tasks are assigned to me so I can track the assets. I can see when the assets are ready for me to work on. I create versions and make notes regarding to my work. All the others who are working on that project add notes to my versions, too. I can read them and do the needed corrections. It's great because everything concerning a project is in the same place. People can comment on other's suggestions and discuss about the right way to go. The whole progress between the different versions can be easily tracked by everyone...

Frank: ... and everyone, everywhere has access to it. Nobody is bound by office hours or whatnot. When there is a new freelancer we give him a small introduction and a workflow document which explains how to use shotgun. Simply put, everyone who is working with us needs to do that through shotgun. And the feedback of our freelancers is great: they are crying when they have to work with another client who sends them excel sheets or PDF sheets.

Shotgun: Orlando, what would the job be like if you were not using Shotgun? What are the advantages of shotgun in your work?

Orlando: The work process would be definitely slower. It would involve lots of emails and there is always the danger that someone is missing an important note. The possibility to compare different versions of an asset and to know when it is ready for a certain task is a big advantage.

It's great to keep things organized and to be able to find anything in the right place. When you're living and working in another country – like me, it's hard to know what the status of certain things is. Without shotgun I would have to ask Frank or somebody else of PiXABLE via email or telephone. But the people who can answer my questions are not always available. That means I have to wait for my answer and can't go on with my work. Shotgun allows me to skip that part because I'm always up to date. I only have to call when it's a really special question.

Frank: Yes, that's an important point. There are much fewer questions because all information is right there for anyone to check out. That is a big help. The approval process is much more streamlined and we run into fewer problems down the road. We use shotgun even for client sessions to show them the status of their projects. The sole fact that we can do that leaves them very impressed!

Shotgun: Does that mean you give access to clients, too? How does it work?

Frank: Yes, but we do that only occasionally. Currently we are working on a big game animation project (2500 animations) where we give the client the possibility to look at a special page of shotgun which we prepared for them. There the client can check the status of our work. In a really big project like that it's very helpful for us and the client. But we don't give access to every client because it's not intended that they can read internal communication.

Shotgun: Which features of Shotgun do you use the most?

Orlando: I think I don't know shotgun in every detail but the features I use the most are following the versions, reading and making notes and tracking the status of the assets. Another useful feature is the RV integration: there is no need to go to the comp package and change the color space. It's done automatically and that saves a lot of time. I just create a version that aims to the rendered frames and it's ready for a revision.

Frank: Yes, the RV integration is godsend! Every artist creates his versions, links the movies or image sequences and on the management side we just need a right click to see the results. We don't need to dig in folder structures or prepare and collect movies to present.

Shotgun: How often are you accessing Shotgun?

Orlando: I am accessing shotgun all the time. When I start working in the morning, the very first thing I do is checking my emails and checking the notifications in shotgun. That's my starting point every day. Even when there aren't new notes or tasks I use shotgun and take a look at the tasks I already have. Later in the day when I'm ready to update something or when I need a revision I go back to shotgun. It's an awesome tool.

Frank: It's the same for us. We are using shotgun day by day for the management of all of our projects. Because of that we are able to do more jobs, more safe and more quickly. We probably save one or two salaries for a project manager.