Locomotive Pushes and Pulls Boston Post Production to Greater Capacity

When I first visited Executive Producer Michael Fallon and Colorist Owen Williams at their new business home in the Fort Point area of Boston, I asked the Co Founders of Locomotive how did you come up with the name Locomotive. Naming intrigues me and it’s a question I ask most businesses I encounter.

A new business start up needs a powerful name. No matter how you choose one a strong brand name accomplishes a multitude of objectives. So whether your naming a new light bulb or the power company that supplies it a name must have the power to make an impact and have a connection with the target audience, support business goals, and, here’s the toughie, endure.

It’s not a good idea to get caught up in the old rules about how to name a high tech company like beginning with the numeral 1 or letters early in the alphabet for the sake of a first listing. People don’t look at lists too much anymore. They just put a name into a search engine. And that brings up another rule for looking only at names that can turn into verbs like “I’ll Google it” for instance. Did Google Co-founders Larry Page, president of products, and Sergey Brin, president of technology think about their company name becoming a verb in 1998?

I don’t think so. Page and Brin originally nick-named their new search engine “BackRub”, because the system checked backlinks to estimate the importance of a site. Eventually they changed the name to Google, originating from a misspelling of the word googol, the number one followed by one hundred zeros, which was picked to signify that the search engine wants to provide large quantities of information for people. That’s the thumbnail of that successful naming. Their mission statement from the outset was “to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.” And you don’t even have to imagine that now.

These days it’s a good idea to choose a name that says precisely what you do, either. High tech companies are always boxing themselves in and then trying to chase a new business model when demands and technology change. Post production is changing fast. Michael Fallon and Owen Williams wanted a powerful name that signifies making things because that’s what they do. They built a list that included their first choice. The Foundry, as we all know that has already been successfully selected by a rather well known UK company with offices in NYC and LA.

Fallon and Williams had been talking about combining their talents and skills in a joint venture for about a year after the pair collaborated on a piece at Powderhouse Productions. For about two months they shared a Google document with name ideas, but when they got a call for a prospective job, Michael said, “I knew we had to agree on a name quickly. Locomotive came to mind and that is what stuck. It is industrial and forward moving. Locomotives also have a wonderful history of cutting edge design and innovation.”

They also like that Locomotive is reminiscent of Edison’s early innovation in film and locomotion while adding a connective romantic touch that you will also find in what Michael and Owen call the arrival of Boston’s newest Post Boutique in a most atmospheric section of the city. The Fort Point Channel District, named after the location of a fort which guarded the city in colonial times.

The Fort Point neighborhood was featured in Martin Scorcese’s 2006 film THE DEPARTED. An alley between Thompson Pl. and Farmsworth St. provided the setting for the fictional address “344 Wash.” Additionally, the dramatic views of downtown Boston from the rooftops of Fort Point were prominently featured in the film.

“We wanted to be in Fort Point because it is a fast growing community of innovative companies. It is also close to South Station and downtown Boston, easily accessible from 93, 90, as well as Logan. A quick fact: In March of 2010 the city of Boston had 41 million square feet of development under review, approved, or in construction, 42 percent in Fort Point. Lots going on!” Michael added.

They new they wanted to build a custom room. “So,” Michael told me, “we sought out a space that was open with high ceilings.” When they found this at 355 Congress Street; the soaring ceilings with tender beams, exposed brick, and lots of light, they got right to work. Michael continued, “We met with many contractors about the build-out and chose to work with a fellow named Eric Blasmer, whose family has an impressive background in the audio community, including designing and building spaces for audio performing, composing, edit, and mix.

“In fact, Eric and his brother are currently leading the construction of a state of the art audio facility, Soundscape, a floor below our space. The floor below that, the 2nd floor, is being built-out for a high-end web programming company, Bocoup. We have met with these two companies and we are all very excited about the synergy and collaboration that we’ll have here at 355 Congress.”

So, it’s fitting then, that Locomotive’s new address would be 355 Congress Street on the top floor, of course. A new bright and shiny post facility filled with the latest state of the art equipment and boasting enough digital storage space for 23 motion pictures.

While Locomotive’s new co-founders did have to seek and find their new name and new address they knew exactly what they would do and that is build the finest state of the art environment for color grading and finishing.

The Massachusetts Film Tax Credits were a compelling piece of their overall considerations with all signs pointing to a hyper move to digital cinema and the rising popularity of digital cinematography along with the exponential increase in the amount of digital content that needs the management and expertise they can provide, they believe it’s a case of supply and demand. Not too many post facilities in New England offer color grading forcing many clients to go to NYC or it obtain it remotely from an established New York company.

Locomotive believes they can not only provide superior color grading in New England, but also reverse the pipeline and be remotely available to provide producers in NYC and other places color correction that will qualify for Massachusetts Film Tax Credits.

Owen and Michael sketched out their physical space requirements with a huge emphasis on their Scratch Room also known as the Locomotive Theater and Edit A. Appreciating the acceleration of the digital cinema era, Owen/Williams believes they are building out

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the future now, Owen is specifically the house colorist and believes that their main tool for digital conform and color correction called Scratch signifies just how out in front Locomotive is as they are the first company in all of New England to purchase one.

Scratch includes state-of-the-art tools for color grading, finishing, compositing, and 3D-specific features, such as convergence, scaling, and versioning and more! Scratch is made by a company called Assimilate and both Owen and Michael agree they have selected the best mix of tools for what they do – digital conform and data management, real-time 4K playback, fantastic color grading and advanced finishing tools for compositing, clean-up and titling. Owen and Michael are committed to staying at the forefront of digital cinema technologies and the latest techniques for creating high-impact imagery.

A second work room they call Edit B is their conform suite. For storage Michael and Owen chose Terrablock from Facilis (a great local company according to Michael). All systems in their facility have access to this storage, which provides a connection speed of over 300 megabytes per second. Locomotive also has Avid Media Composer, Final Cut Pro, and a full graphics/VFX suite including Adobe After Effects, Maxon Cinema4D, and Nuke by the Foundry (there’s that word again).

Owen says a very important aspect of our Scratch suite is that it is precisely calibrated to achieve a near perfect degree of color accuracy. For this we use Cinetals’ Cinespace technology paired with a 50” Panasonic G20 plasma. “We are pre-wired for projection as well, and eager to add this during our phase 2 expansion,” they say in unison.

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