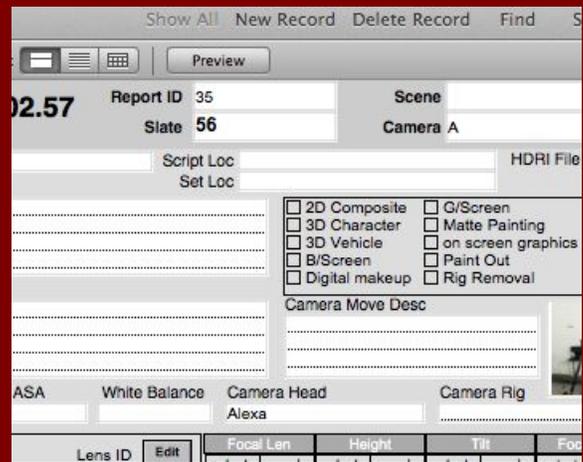


VES camera reports – one set of notes to rule them all

By Mike Seymour
December 12, 2013



Sam Richards at Sony Pictures Imageworks has been working away hard on coding and producing something so simple it is hard to believe we need it as an industry, and yet as most artists know, it is a vital part of production that is often lost: accurate on-set camera notes.

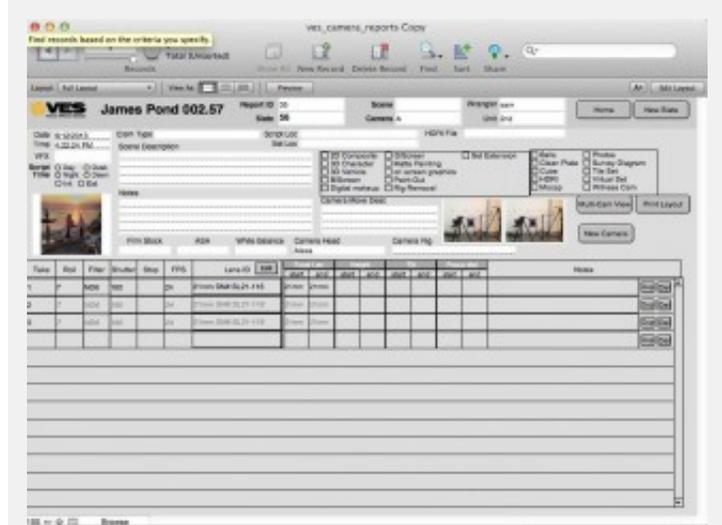
You might expect fxcg to be publishing a story about a new fancy app or automated system of passing complex data into the meta stream of say a Codex, but sadly as an industry we are far away from that right now. As Rob Bredow, the Chair of the VES Technology Committee and Imageworks CTO, had to explain to a group of understandably perplexed DOPs at the ASC, basic camera information rarely – in fact, almost never – makes it to post production at all. At an ASC event outlining the VES approach, and outlining how it is different from camera notes that the camera department might make, several DOPs were stunned to hear that for the 10 or so VFX companies involved in putting this new proposal together, none of them **ever** received reliable camera sheets and metadata.

The basic problem is two-fold. Firstly, camera footage with valuable metadata gets transcoded and in the process the metadata is lost, and second, there is no standard for non-encoded metadata. Not even a standard printed form – until today.

The VES has published a new file format for camera sheets – which is open to all and extremely flexible. The VES team, thanks to the hard work of people like Sam Richards, have even published a free Filemaker Pro doc to allow you to use this, either from paper, a laptop or an iPad.

The logic is simple. If we could all agree

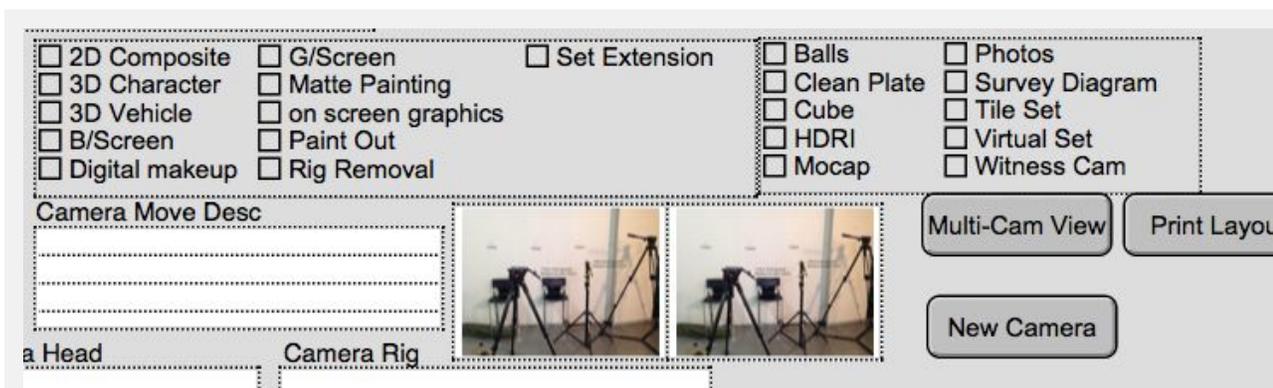
on a format and a standard set of facts we wanted from on-set (with the flexibility to add to it depending on your production) then people could exchange information easily, we would all know what was wanted and equipment suppliers could integrate it. This is exactly what is starting to happen. Already two key companies has become involved, Shotgun Software and 5thKind. These two companies, which work in the area of project, data and asset management, have been liaising with the group for over a year, as have some of the biggest VFX houses in the industry.



Laptop entry screen for VES camera report. Click to see a larger version of this image.

The project has been helped greatly by people at Weta Digital (Pete Wellington), Disney Feature Animation (Joel Eden), Rodeo FX (Jordan Soles) and people such as Charlie Clavadetscher. The initial system was built on a similar system developed at Rhythm & Hues (Bill Murphy and Gotham Krishnamurti).

Stage one is as simple as agreeing on this text, human readable, tab delimited file format. Once this csv file is adopted, then so much is possible. The key is just having a common base. The VES wants this open sourced and anyone is free to write a commercial iPad app or Android tool. There are no fees or restrictions. While it is from the VES, it is not limited to members and it is a full open source initiative.



A section of a sample PDF output.

Looking down the road, once a simple system like this is adopted there are a huge

range of great possibilities for advanced features, using the GPS of an iPhone or wifi timecode sync. But in reality today the aim is to move beyond someone jotting down some random lens info on a sheet of blank paper and seeing if anyone still has a fax machine to send it to the production office – where it will never be used!

“They are freely distributed with a permissive open source license... I’m optimistic this standard will take off–saving everyone a lot of time from day 1.” commented Rob Bredow SPI CTO.

For more information or to get free forms, software or download the full specs visit the [VES camera reports site](#).

VES Technology Committee

Mission Statement:

The Visual Effects Society Technology Committee exists to establish industry best practices to enable VFX clients and vendors to collaborate more efficiently. The Technology Committee works on several projects at a time and selects projects that are outward facing, increase the visibility of the VES, and items we can accomplish in roughly a 12 month time-frame.

Chair:

Rob Bredow

Membership:

Sam Richards, Dan Candela, Gautham Krishnamurti, Ray Feeney, Jordan Soles, Nick Cannon, Steve May, Andy Hendrickson, Sebastian Sylwan, Jean-Francois Morissette and Michele Sciolette.



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5 Responses to VES camera reports – one set of notes to rule them all

1. This would be an amazing way to share camera info with all the different vendors. It would be great if somehow this information would be just recorded from the camera itself. Something like metadata getting pulled into a database.

Posted by David on December 12, 2013 at 6:39 am

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- For the take information (and even some of the slate), data being pushed into the image header is absolutely the way to go. Sadly we rarely see that data since who-ever does the debayering conveniently strips that metadata out.

But more importantly, there is other information that will never make it into the file, like what other media was recorded (photos, set-survey, etc), not to mention any notes on what the rig was, or where you are (if GPS doesn't make it into the header). The hope is to keep refining this, and working to make it easy to accurately match this up to the image data (which is also a challenge).

Sam.

Posted by Sam Richards on December 12, 2013 at 9:39 am

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2. Once again... the VES is behind the ball and re-inventing a wheel in an inferior way. Sigh. Why not put their weight behind something that already exists, and is better than this?

We use setellite, and request that all of our camera crews and script supes at least try to do the same:

<http://planetx.nl/setellite/>

it does everything this VES worksheet does, and more. And it runs on an iPad so you don't need a laptop with filemaker (seriously? filemaker?).

Please tell the VES to take a look at Setellite, scrap this, and help the folks that make that app improve it even more. Let's build on things that exist and move forward together, rather than constantly having the VES try to reset

us by a decade or more.

Posted by Andrew Cochrane on December 14, 2013 at 4:14 pm

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- Just reposting what Sam said on the group list in reply to your comment there.

“The intention is not for the volunteers who make up the VES Technology Committee to create a tool that is superior to Setellite. Our intention is to define a standard for the interchange of on set VFX Camera Reports so the auxiliary VFX information can flow more smoothly from set to studio. In fact, we’ve been in contact with Frank van der Peet at Planet X since May and he was enthusiastic about supporting the interchange format with his app.

We provided the sample Filemaker database as an prototype, not a replacement for more fully featured app. For more details, and hopefully a clear explanation of our goals visit:

<http://camerareports.org/>

In the future, I think it might be a good idea for us to list apps (both free and commercial) that support the camera report specification so those looking for the best tool for the job will have a place to look.”

Posted by Peter Wellington on December 17, 2013 at 5:16 pm

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3. thx for the hint Andrew. i will take a look... we are developing a review and approval iPad / Web app and that satellite thing sounds the perfect fit to get the metadata from.

that’s the one we are developing:

copra.de

./ivar

Posted by [ivar](#) on December 17, 2013 at 3:55 pm

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