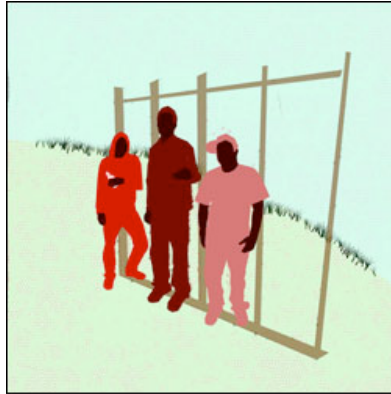


Windowseat Pictures

Crafting the View

By Bija Gutoff

There's no "I" in team. So committed is Windowseat Pictures to its collaborative approach that the partners — producer, director and editor — choose to be known here simply as John (not the real name of any of the three). "We try to make our work a true communal creative effort," says John. "We just want to talk about what we do."



Producer, Director & Editor. The three principals of Windowseat in silhouette.

What they do is grab your attention and make you laugh. In one noir-styled Windowseat commercial, a scuzzy-looking fellow creeps up on a car to steal gas. The camera zooms in on his rotten black teeth as he sucks the siphon to start the flow. When he slinks off with his prize, another close-up shows him grinning, his teeth now gleaming pearly white. The spot is for Pennzoil's Gumout engine-cleaning fuel additive.

"Our primary creative focus is telling narrative stories," says John, "whether it's a 15- or 30-second spot or a short film." Windowseat infuses passion in a form tainted by incessant exposure. "Most people don't enjoy advertising," admits John. "They're bombarded by commercials, and they need a break. We strive to create entertainment, especially advertising, that inspires — that they'll even look forward to seeing again."

The Windowseat team takes its tools of choice — PowerBooks and Final Cut Pro — everywhere. "We couldn't have gotten into the filmmaking business without Apple," states John. "We have grown up with Apple products, to the point where they are an extension of us. Our creativity happens on the move, and with these computers we are not anchored. We can work in the style we feel most comfortable in."

"Our primary creative focus is telling narrative stories. We strive to create entertainment, especially advertising, that inspires — that they'll even look forward to seeing again."

Original Perspectives

Windowseat conceives, directs, shoots and edits its work in the perpetual quest for a fresh outlook. "Sometimes it just hits you, but most of the time you have to work at it," says John. "In our global society, most of us see the same images. So what we do is look for the connections, and people seem to appreciate that — what we show them taps into something they feel."

The year-old firm has earned a following in action sports. "We go after clients we respect," says John; "we like their work and their products." These include shoe company Vans, boardwear manufacturer Volcom, wheel- and deck-maker Darkstar Skateboards, and a grassroots non-profit called SOS Outreach that conducts snowboarding programs for at-risk youth. Toss in a rock band like Hella and you have a roster hip enough to keep Windowseat's creative juices flowing.

One recent spot for Vans, titled "American Nightmare," features 2002 Olympic silver snowboarding medallist Danny Kass smashing a chair in a padded cell — and breaking gravitational bounds on a snowy mountain half-pipe. Edited with Final Cut Pro on PowerBook G4s, the commercial is running nationally on MTV, NBC, Fox and WB. It's also aired more than 40,000 times around the world via the company's website.

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Ahead: G5s and Shake

Windowseat is eager for the new Power Mac G5. "Our files tend to be huge," explains John, "and it's inevitable that they'll keep getting bigger. Right now, we store a lot of them on external hard drives, so we move things around a lot. We've optimized our current machines to their fullest potential, so we're ready to make the leap. The G5 has the faster processors to let us work with these big files much more efficiently." The partners also have their eyes set on Shake. They're especially enthusiastic about its ability to import layered Photoshop files for compositing. "We'd love to try Shake," says John, "and we're planning to."

Hardware

- ▶ 4 15-inch [PowerBook G4s](#)
- ▶ [Logitech](#) cordless keyboards and mice for PowerBooks
- ▶ Dual Processor [Power Mac G4](#) with 17-inch monitor and CDR/DVD combo drive
- ▶ [Harmon Kardon](#) speaker systems
- ▶ 3 [iPods](#)
- ▶ Multiple [FireWire Direct Slimline Ultra 3 120 GB](#) external hard drives

Software

- ▶ [Mac OS X](#) 10.2 Jaguar
- ▶ [Final Cut Pro](#) 3.0.2
- ▶ [QuickTime](#) 6.3
- ▶ [iDVD](#) 2
- ▶ [iTunes](#) 4.0.1
- ▶ [Adobe Aftereffects](#) 5.5
- ▶ [Adobe Photoshop](#) 7
- ▶ [Adobe Illustrator](#) 9
- ▶ [Adobe Acrobat](#) 5.0
- ▶ [Roxio Toast 5 Titanium](#)

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Editing Anywhere



In a Padded Cell, Olympic silver medal snowboarder Danny Kass appears in the Vans "American Nightmare" TV commercial created by Windowseat.

Powerful Mobile Platform

Throughout the creative and production process, Windowseat's mobile and collaborative approach is Apple-powered. "You never know what to be ready for," explains John. "So our PowerBooks are the resource for whatever we need. They give us the freedom and portability to manage the entire project wherever we are. And everyone — even the bean counter — has the same programs, so we can answer questions very fast."

A project begins with sketches, storyboards and scripts. Even now, the team still hand-draws story and set ideas because, says John, "You need the randomness of the hand, the human quirky stuff that comes out of your body." They scan the concepts into Photoshop for further development and toss script versions among their PowerBooks via email.

Clients are involved from the outset. "It's essential to be able to communicate with our clients about what we want to do," says John. "We email PDFs of our shooting boards, showing everything we plan to capture on film. If there are questions or problems, we work them out until our vision matches theirs — before we roll any film."

Laptop Editing

Once film has been shot and developed, it's transferred to MiniDV, a portable digital format well suited for laptop editing. "Using Final Cut Pro on our PowerBooks gives us the freedom to edit anywhere," says John. "And I love the ease of Final Cut Pro. I can immediately see what my clip will look like, or get an idea for timing it out. It lets me experiment quickly so I can decide what I want to do, and how."

During editing, Windowseat presents or emails QuickTime files to clients for feedback on different versions. "Our clients are busy, and they travel a lot," says John. "We may meet them in a hotel lobby, bust open our PowerBooks and show them the newest cut. We've even had final versions approved in that manner."

"It's easier to pack my entire editing suite than to decide what shoes to bring! I can throw my computer with the entire project over my shoulder and feel confident about getting the job done."

Forget relying on the client's equipment to show work-in-progress. "They always seem to have a DVD player with no remote, or a crummy old VCR, or a TV with the colour settings all wrong," sighs John. "But when we present on our PowerBooks, we play the QuickTime files full screen and they look exactly the way we want. We get the thumbs-up on a version and leave ready for the next step in the post process. When you're on deadline to get a project done, especially when the client has already bought and scheduled airtime, that's a lifesaver."

No More Rewinding

Windowseat doesn't miss the old days one bit. "It was very hard to show multiple versions of a project to a client," relates John. "We had to go to a separate facility to

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Essential Lunchtime Toys

All three Windowseat partners are surfers, and their boards aren't weekend gear but essential lunch break toys. Fittingly, the filmmakers have set up shop in a rented house across from the beach. "We're always watching the tide, waiting for it to get right," says John. "In the middle of a huge deadline, working hours on end, we can get refreshed by just running out the door and catching three waves. It's great for us creatively."

Useful Links

- ▶ [Windowseat Pictures](#)
- ▶ [Vans](#) — Client
- ▶ [Volcom](#) — Client
- ▶ [Darkstar Skateboards](#) — Client
- ▶ [Hella](#) — Client
- ▶ [Clairmont Camera](#) — Camera rental
- ▶ [Company 3](#) — Post production transfer and online
- ▶ [Chris Bell + Company](#) — Post production music and sound design
- ▶ [Art Center](#) — School where the Windowseat partners met

Editorial Bay

- ▶ 1 15-inch PowerBook G4
- ▶ JBL CM42 two-way 4-inch speakers
- ▶ B&W 600 Series with 8-inch speaker
- ▶ Kenwood KRVO-7040 amplifier for sound system
- ▶ 32-inch Toshiba DVD/VHS-TV combo player
- ▶ 14-inch Toshiba TV/DVD combo
- ▶ 13-inch Sony TV monitor
- ▶ Sony MDR-V600 Dynamic Stereo headphones
- ▶ Epson 1250 Perfection scanner
- ▶ Pioneer turntables

make tape dubs, which could take several days to process. Then we'd try to present them, and we'd always be rewinding the tape to find the right spot.

“Now, we can make a bunch of versions that range from riskier to safer, with several that are only subtly different, and based on the client's reaction we can decide to show — or not show — any of them, in any order.”

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Moving, Firing, Going Off

“We’re armed,” enthuses John. “Having all the QuickTime files on our PowerBooks, we can bounce in seconds from one cut to another. We can even take our entire editing bay to the client and do a modified edit at their office. That’s a pretty big deal, to not have to say, ‘I have to go back to the office to do this.’ It gives you a lot of confidence walking in. And if we make a new version, we can burn a DVD right there.”



“Apple gives companies like ours the ability to edit work in-house,” concludes John. “That wasn’t available until PowerBooks and Final Cut Pro. These tools are changing the face of our business.” That means not only losing the big production houses, but taking “in-house” along, wherever Windowseat happens to be. “Making revisions on-the-fly and on-the-go saves all of us lots of time,” he adds. “The cost savings are passed along to our clients, and in the end they get a great creative product at a competitive price.”



Extreme Grooming. The Yeti prepares for the SOS snowboard competition in these moments from the Snowboard Outreach Society commercial.

Packing for Success

Windowseat has learned how smart packing can save a business trip. John remembers one tense meeting with a Japanese client. “I was in a Tokyo conference room with a dozen people and an interpreter, and the communication wasn’t there. The fastest way to get on the same page was to crank out some storyboards on my PowerBook. I was able to share some solid ideas through the images — the PowerBook helped me break the language barrier.”

Muses John, “The Titanium PowerBook G4 allows us the freedom to see things and be creative. It’s an important tool for our business success.” He laughs. “When I’m getting ready for a trip, it’s easier to pack my entire editing suite than to decide what shoes to bring! I can throw my computer with the entire project over my shoulder and feel confident about getting the job done. I may not have a nice pressed shirt, but I have all the tools I need. We can’t live without this machine.”

“It’s essential to be able to communicate with our clients about what we want to do. If there are questions or problems, we work them out until our vision matches theirs — before we roll any film.”

Inspiration In Motion

Always, the Windowseat watchword is mobility. “To be inspired, your creativity has to be moving, firing, going off,” says John. “You don’t want to have to be sitting in a chair, forcing the ideas out. We’re motivated by the desire to not repeat ourselves, and we like that there’s not a lot of stability. You may be in another city, or on an airplane — and knowing that at any time you can modify your stuff, that’s really a pleasure.”

It was the team’s notions about movement and perspective that prompted the Windowseat name. “We get our cinematic inspiration from being on the road,” recounts John. “And we’re fascinated that people now use their TVs as their window onto the world. We’re making an effort to see new things, so as filmmakers, it’s up to us to create that view.”

From where they sit, the Windowseat team members relish the view. “In a sea of sameness,” says John, “to be able to stand out, to have people remember our work and come up and say they like it — that makes us happy.”

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Current Projects

Windowseat Pictures is keeping busy. Current projects include:

- ▶ :30 and :60 commercials and interstitials for the Dallas [Deep Ellum Film Festival](#).
- ▶ DVD for “Darkstar Skate,” featuring Darkstar’s pro skateboard team on tour from Barcelona to California.
- ▶ Music video for Sacramento-based rock band Hella, highlighting show footage.
- ▶ New DVD version of Volcom’s 10-year library of action sports films, adding features and cuts not found in its VHS movies.

Film and Video

Cameras

- ▶ Arri 35mm and 16mm cameras
- ▶ Super 8mm Beaulieu 4008 ZM2 film cameras with Schneider 6mm–66mm F1.8 lenses
- ▶ Elmo Super 8mm film camera
- ▶ Sony Mini DV Handy Cam Super Steady Shot (DCR-TRV900)
- ▶ Super 8mm EWA–Marine Water Housing
- ▶ Additional professional camera, sound recording and lighting equipment is rented

Still Cameras

- ▶ Sony digital pocket camera
- ▶ Canon Powershot S200 Digital Elph 2.0 megapixels with 5.4mm–10.8mm lenses
- ▶ 35mm Nikonos2 underwater still camera
- ▶ Nikkor 35mm F2.5 and 28mm F3.5 underwater lenses
- ▶ Sekonic Marine Meter ii underwater light meter
- ▶ Sekonic 508 Cine light meter
- ▶ 35mm Ricoh XR10 with 35mm–80mm Tamron