

12 Inch Design — Single frame from the ProductionBlox Motion Graphics Library

That's especially true at **TriLab Productions**, the Shreveport, Louisiana, creator of the aptly-named Digital Hotcakes, a series of high-quality motion graphics in 11 volumes. Founder and Chief Creative Officer Diana Teeters describes TriLab as a company devoted to providing royalty-free, professional-quality stock animations at an affordable price.

Digital Hotcakes features digitally-created motion graphics compatible with all popular nonlinear editing systems. The volumes include themed art such as animated backdrops, organic shape-shifting backdrops and fiery Pyromations which feature 56 combustible animations. "There is no other product like it on the market at our price point," says Teeters. Digital Hotcakes customers include wedding videographers, TV broadcasters, music DJs, major corporations, churches, advertising agencies, rock bands and theme parks.

At BackSlaps, Streb reports that in addition to large corporations, he's working with increasing numbers of religious organizations that want to modify existing backgrounds. Some of the more progressive churches and synagogues using videos in their services — yet lacking the editing capabilities to create what they need — have become a big part of Streb's business. Often a BackSlaps team will modify its backgrounds with different colors and shapes, adding elements and logos specific to a congregation to customize the art.

ProductionBlox functions as a designer for companies without in-house graphics departments by producing generic, multi-purpose backgrounds that are not theme specific. Napp says the multiple uses, convenience and quick on-line delivery of its motion backgrounds make it a growing field. "Once you purchase the product you can be up and running with it within a couple of minutes. Clients with urgent deadlines like the opportunity to buy individual clips, so they buy it and download it right away."

For those without urgent deadlines, ProductionBlox provides an extensive library of motion graphics in Standard Definition video and HD. A new volume,

containing all fresh content, is released every three months. Individual volumes contain 35 sets of elements: full-screen animated backgrounds with matching static left, right, and lower thirds.

Art to go

At Digital Hotcakes, the in-house staff primarily uses Newtek's Lightwave

3D and Adobe After Effects with third-party plug ins to craft content. "Our products are offered on CD, data DVD, and master-quality MiniDV tapes," says Teeters. "The CD version contains QuickTime movie files that are JPEG compressed."

BackSlaps produces generic and custom backgrounds available on DVD with motion backgrounds produced in three different formats: Photo-JPEG Sequence, QuickTime and Flash Video (SWF).

The company's design team works with clients to tailor stock backgrounds to meet specific needs. "Defense organizations need radar/shooting-looking things, but the religious groups need more subtle, flowing types of animation," Streb explains. Animators use Lightwave and Alias/Wavefront Maya and various compositing tools like After Effects and eyeon's Digital Fusion. "We also use Gentex, which generates random patterns that give us ideas, and a particle program called Particle Illusion," he adds. "We use combinations of packages to create new images. Whatever puts an image out, we'll look at it. Even if an image doesn't put out motion, we'll still look at it for ideas."

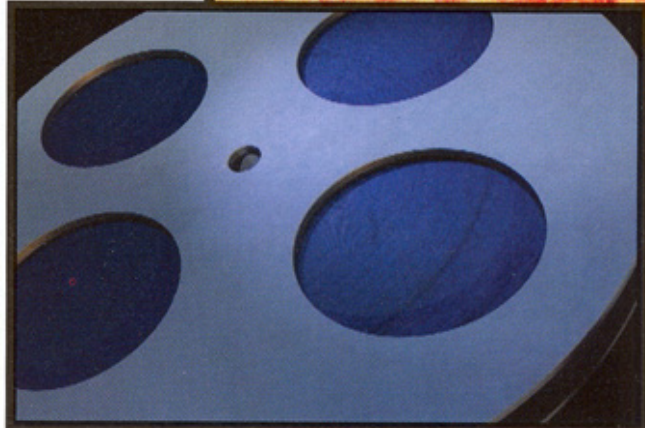
ProductionBlox delivers animated backgrounds as industry-standard QuickTime files and static elements in multiple formats (including PAL/NTSC and HD) for broad compatibility. A team of in-house artists and a network of contractors generate material using "everything they can lay their hands on," says Napp, including Lightwave, Discreet Combustion, Maya, and After Effects.

The challenge for stock background libraries is to create material that's different and exciting and which can enhance the client's message without competing with it. "It's hard to come up with something unique but, at the same time, usable," Streb says. "It's

a fine line between getting too crazy with stuff and having something that's unique [and] stands out from the competition."

Napp agrees. "Everyone wants a new style and look; that's why we're continually refreshing the library with a quarterly release schedule that features an entirely new content. We try very hard to make sure that each volume has a broad range of material on it, from things that are complex with multiple layers to something without a lot of things going on."

Complex or simple, one thing remains clear: The background must be appropriate for the client. "You don't want something out there that looks like what a competitor or an uncomplimentary business might be using," Streb says. "If you've got a restaurant, you don't want to have the same background as a funeral home." That's why customization is often required to make a background truly a client's own.



TriLab Productions — top: Digital Hotcakes Pyromations; bottom: Digital Hotcakes newest product FilmFX

Napp emphasizes that besides being unique, the right background also must look professional. "There's a wealth of material out there that's not high quality, so we've found that people have an initial reluctance" to use stock backgrounds, he says. "But once they get ProductionBlox in their hands and start playing with it and recognizing its high quality, they see that it can save them time and effort. These backgrounds are a great and simple way to make clients very happy." ■