

# Post

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## SPECIAL REPORT: REMOTE COLLABORATION MADE EASY

By Christine Bunish



SAN FRANCISCO - BYBnnPIX, the new Internet collaboration service from PIX System ([www.pixsystem.com](http://www.pixsystem.com)), took on its largest-scale project to date with Sam Mendes's latest feature, *Jarhead*, which opens next month.

PIX facilitated communications between Academy Award-winning director Mendes and film editor Walter Murch, himself a triple Oscar winner (best picture editing and best sound for *The English Patient* and best sound for *Apocalypse Now*). PIX enabled Mendes to review and comment on Murch's cuts while he was still shooting and while Murch was shepherding the film through post.

PIX (Production Information Exchange) simplifies information flow by providing a digital platform where filmmakers and producers can collaborate efficiently and productively on casting, locations, edit approvals, sound and music with complete security and control. Important information, schedules and media are centralized

and can be shared among crew and executives in realtime. There's no need to transfer and ship DVDs and videos or print or fax notes, databases and reports. And since PIX uses basic point-and-click logic, it requires only a minimal amount of training for new users.

PIX was developed when sound editor Eric Dachs (*The Talented Mr. Ripley*, *Chocolat*) was assisting sound designer Ren Klyce on *Panic Room*. Identifying the need for an efficient way for geographically-scattered crews to exchange spotting notes, Dachs "cobbled together" an admittedly "crude" Web-based central note-taking environment that actually worked quite well for the film's audio post production.

When *Panic Room* music producer David Gleason was about to supervise the scoring of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* in New Zealand, he told Dachs he'd like to try using the new note-taking system. Dachs worked out a prototype to help Gleason link his New Zealand home base with composer Howard Shore in New York and Abbey Road Studios in London.

The system was subsequently used by Academy Award-winning sound editor Michael Silvers for spotting *Envy* and by Ren Klyce again, primarily for spotting *Stay*.

It wasn't long before Dachs was considering how an expanded system could handle communications inefficiencies in every department from prepro to production through to post. He teamed with supervising sound editor Larry Schalit and former lighting designer/computer scientist Jules Bowie to form PIX whose V.1 software was released last summer.

"PIX is an application service provider; there's no hardware or software for clients to buy," explains Dachs. Customers sign up for the secure, realtime service, which is accessible 24/7 through Web browsers like the recommended Firefox.

"There aren't a lot of companies doing this kind of thing right now," says Dachs. "There are solutions for various components of filmmaking but they don't integrate; information isn't shared among different departments. [Until now] there hasn't been a single, Web-based system to tie everybody together."

PIX includes modules for general project management, such as a shared Calendar, File Manager, Contact List and Task Manager. An email alert system makes it easy to notify users when creating or changing any item. Other tasks such as spotting, location scouting, casting and scoring have their own specific modules. "Users can tailor their own system from the modules," Dachs points out. "The *Newshour with Jim Lehrer* uses PIX but, as a smaller-scale production, doesn't need all the modules."

One of PIX's core components is a very rich application program interface. "It allows Filemaker and other existing programs to share information with PIX so users can work with what they love," notes Dachs. All communications take place with bank-level encryption for "very secure content."

### JARHEAD

In 2004 Dachs and his colleagues visited Walter Murch and his associate editor Sean Cullen before *Jarhead* got underway. Murch and Cullen examined the potential for PIX to facilitate communications between editorial and production, as well as with other departments such as sound and music, which would be based in California, three time zones away from Murch's rooms in New York.

"PIX has been an extremely valuable tool for setting up a secure but very efficient link between Sam and myself during shooting," says Murch. "Sam was on location in Mexico and El Centro [California] and I was editing at Skywalker Ranch [in San Rafael, CA]. PIX allowed

me to send Sam cut footage, which he could stream or download, comment on, and send back to me. It was an effortless and transparent means of communication, and that was particularly important because Sam and I had not worked together before, and Sam was shooting a film unlike others he's done. PIX enabled us to close the loop and make Sam feel confident about editorial so he could push his shooting style even further."

During post Murch's PIX-enabled picture editing department became the hub connecting various post functions with Cullen distributing cut material to sound, music, VFX (ILM), and DI (Efilm).

Murch is known for embracing new technology. "I've been keeping a networkable database on every film I've worked on since the mid-'80s," he reports. "For every film, I tweak and improve that database which is one that that I developed using Filemaker."

Murch was the first to use Apple's Final Cut Pro on a large-budget feature film, *Cold Mountain*, for which he received an Academy Award nomination for best picture editing. He edited *Jarhead* in Final Cut Pro HD. "The image was about as clear as you'd want it to be," he notes. "For editing, the main requirement is to be able to see enough detail so you can tell if something is slightly out of focus. That wasn't possible in the previous resolution of Final Cut or Avid."

Final Cut Pro has "reduced the cost of a new station [to the point of being] negligible," he points out. "So we were able to have six or seven stations with people working on different aspects of the film." In addition to Murch, Sean Cullen, Pete Horner and Pat Jackson worked on the *Jarhead* assembly while Mendes was still on location.

Murch has also found Final Cut to be helpful "in teaching people how to edit. If one of my assistants or apprentices is interested in editing I can, with the director's permission, give them scenes to work on. In the old film days you couldn't do that because of the cost of workprint. And with Avid, it was too expensive to dedicate a station for an apprentice to learn on."

While Murch is a Final Cut proponent he says "if something better came along, I'd use that. But given where I am now and where the systems are, I feel very comfortable working with Final Cut. Also, Apple's decision to use open code means Final Cut is just at the beginning of an explosive development curve."

Murch has been pleased with PIX's performance on *Jarhead*. "It was a vital part of the creative process at the picture and post production ends," he says. "And it has a whole other [suite] of applications we didn't use."

#### THE WILD

PIX is also being used on an animated Disney feature *The Wild*, set for release next April. Sound designer Andy Newell of Ripe Sound is employing PIX to help supervise a sound crew who are often working in multiple locations simultaneously. "PIX helps to keep my entire crew on the same page, allowing me to distribute notes and tasks to the various editors and review their sessions," Newell reports. "We're all looking at the same central calendar and being alerted of any changes as they happen."

PIX continues to evolve and expand its capabilities across all facets of filmmaking. "We can capture almost any production element starting with a copy of the script and images from the art department and location scouts," says Dachs. "The complete version history of every scene is immediately accessible. All the director's and editor's notes for that scene, from the beginning of the project, are available along with supporting material."

As budgets decrease, deadlines tighten and work continues to be distributed over a wide area, PIX stands at the ready. "Our goal is to help with the administrative functions so filmmakers can shift more time to the creative side," Dachs concludes.