

Introduction

This document provides information about research interviews undertaken to collect data about records and archiving practices in the film and television visual effects (VFX) industry. The interviews were conducted from 2018 to 2020. The interviews are part of a doctoral research study based at the University of Technology Sydney led by Evanthia Samaras. Findings from the interviews are featured in the International Journal of Digital Curation (IJDC)'s paper entitled: 'Futureproofing Visual Effects: Challenges and Strategies for Preserving Digital Assets and Records'.

This document is intended to provide information about the interview approach, data and questionnaire used in the research and featured in the IJDC paper. The interview data contains commercially sensitive information and is archived with restricted access by University of Technology Sydney:

<https://data.research.uts.edu.au/publication/6a86ec7f6a1f6f0d46593d331d86f4c9/>

Interview Approach

Sample

A 'convenience' type of nonprobability sample design was adopted, whereby companies were selected based on their availability for the study. To apply the convenience sample, a large range of disparate visual effects (VFX) companies in English-speaking countries were contacted and all of those that agreed to participate were included in the research. Six companies agreed to participate in the research, as well as practitioner from the VFX professional body.

Interviewees

Interviewees cover multiple areas of VFX production, including artists, producers and specialists in pipeline development, IT and information and data management. Most of the people interviewed are experienced, senior-level VFX practitioners in managerial positions. As outlined in Table 1 below, 17 interviews with 21 VFX participants have been conducted in the research, with two of the interviews carried out over multiple sessions. One interview was conducted via email as the interviewee preferred to prepare written responses in their own time.

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Table 1 Summary of the VFX practitioner research interviews

Interview No.	VFX specialisation of interviewees	No. of people interviewed	Manager/staff level	Interview length (mins)	VFX Company No.
1	Artist/Pipeline	1	Manager	*123	1
2	Production	1	Manager	59	1
3	Pipeline	1	Manager	60	1
4	Information technology (IT)	1	Manager	46	1
5	Data	1	Staff	*189	1
6	Training	1	Manager	51	1
7	2D Artist	1	Manager	59	2
8	Data	1	Staff	33	2
9	Pipeline	2	Manager, Staff	46	3
10	Pipeline	1	Manager	55	3
11	Production	1	Manager	73	3
12	IT	1	Manager	35	3
13	IT, Pipeline	2	Manager	72	4
14	3D Artist	1	Manager	65	5
15	Data	1	Manager	#NA	5
16	Information and data management	3	Manager, Staff	53	6
17	Production	1	Staff	104	VFX Professional Body
	Total no. of people interviewed	21	Total interview hours	18.7	

* Interviews were carried out over two separate sessions; # Interview conducted via email.

Interview style

A semi-structured style of interview was adopted in the research, which used a standardised set of questions (see the Questionnaire on page 3). However, the questions were delivered flexibly to allow for more informal conversation, which most VFX participants responded more favourably to. This approach helped VFX industry participants to express their opinions candidly and in more detail.

Interview Data

Data analysis

Each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed into a text document. Then the text data was uploaded into a spreadsheet where analysis was undertaken using Grounded Theory memoing and coding techniques. The coding was undertaken in two rounds for each interview, until saturation was achieved and theory was formed across the data set.

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Data security

Each VFX company required the researcher to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement, which is standard operating procedure for any visitor to a VFX company. As a result, the interview data in this research has a 'Confidential' security classification, because it contains commercial-in-confidence/commercially sensitive data pertaining to film and television VFX projects and clients. VFX companies and interviewees and their employees requested to be anonymised in the research. As a result, the interview data has not been made available.

Interview Questionnaire

The below questionnaire formed the basic structure of the VFX practitioner interviews.

1.	Assets
	ASSET MANAGEMENT
1.1	Please describe your asset management system. <i>For example, what is it called? What purpose does it serve? Was it created in house or purchased?</i>
1.2	What metadata fields do you use to describe and search for assets in your asset mgmt. system? <i>[If possible, please provide a list of fields and/or a screen grab]</i>
1.3	What types of functionalities does your asset mgmt. system have to support asset browsing and selection? <i>For example, does the system produce thumbnails and turntables for assets? Is this done automatically for each asset?</i>
1.4	Please describe when and how the metadata about assets is captured into your asset mgmt. system. <i>For example, is this process manual/automated? Are there any key events that prompt metadata capture?</i>
1.5	Is the metadata captured in your asset mgmt. system also used in other areas of the pipeline? <i>If yes, please describe how and why?</i>
1.6	Are the metadata fields you use in your asset mgmt. system based on an existing/ established metadata schema? <i>Yes/No/Don't know. If yes, which one/s?</i>
1.7	Are there any features that you think work particularly well in your asset mgmt. system? <i>If so, please describe.</i>
1.8	Please describe your approach to arranging and naming your assets during production. <i>For example, do you use standardised file structures and naming conventions? Is the same approach used for each production? [If possible, please provide documentation to support this, e.g. production template]</i>
	RIGHTS MANAGEMENT
1.9	To what level of detail is Copyright stipulated when you engage on projects with clients? <i>Please describe. e.g. do clients request specific assets such as models as well as final shots to be delivered to them? Do they request material to be deleted off your systems?</i>
1.1	Does your company assign Copyright status at the asset level? <i>Yes/No. If yes, is this done during/after production? Who enters this information? What system is it entered into?</i>
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2.	Records

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	TYPES OF RECORDS
2.1	Which of the following do you keep and manage? behind the scenes photos or videos instructional web pages or videos pipeline development/management reports/flowcharts/architectures crew lists/information client and project lists/information technical stats/reports, e.g. render, software and storage stats. Other. <i>Please describe.</i>
2.2	How/why is this information/records/data used? <i>For example, do you refer to info and data sets when you are forecasting future projects?</i>
	RECORDS MANAGEMENT
2.3	Who manages these records? <i>Please list department and/or positions.</i>
2.4	Where do you keep the records/information/data? <i>Please describe the system/s, hardware, location, e.g. document management, file share, online wiki system, onsite/offsite etc.</i>
2.5	How do you search and retrieve these types of records? <i>Please describe.</i>
2.6	How long do you keep these records for? Do you have defined retention periods? <i>Please describe.</i>

3.	Archiving
	PROCESS
3.1	What types of information do you archive? <i>For example, project assets and/or other information and data about productions, systems and/or infrastructure.</i>
3.2	Please describe when do you archive information? <i>For example, do you only archive at the end of a project? How soon after a project completes do you archive?</i>
3.3	Do you have a consistent approach and/or business rules for selecting the types of information required for archiving? If so, can you please describe the process and who is involved in developing the selection criteria? <i>[If possible, please provide example documentation, e.g. archiving request/template]</i>
3.4	Please describe how you collate the information required for archiving? <i>For example, do you have a system/software/scripts that you use to prepare information for archiving?</i>
3.5	Do you store accompanying descriptive information (metadata, report etc.) about the archived materials? <i>If so, do you keep this information with the archived material or in a separate location?</i>
3.6	On what format is the archived information stored? <i>For example, LTO.</i>
3.7	Where is the archived information stored? <i>For example, onsite/offsite or both?</i>
3.8	How long do you generally store archived information for?
3.9	Do you have a migration strategy to maintain archived information? <i>If so, please describe. For example, do you migrate to a new LTO format?</i>
3.10	Do you produce a summary/manifest of your archived information? <i>Yes/No. If so, where do you keep this?</i>
	RETRIEVAL
3.11	Please describe how your archived assets are searched and retrieved?
3.12	How often are you requested to bring old project assets online?
3.13	Who generally requests assets to be brought online and why?
3.14	What are the challenges/barriers that affect your company's ability to archive and restore information?

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	How would you improve on this?
	PERMANENT ARCHIVING
3.15	Do you think it would be a good idea for archived records/assets to be kept long-term to provide future users an idea of how VFX practice occurred over time? <i>Yes/No. If yes, what types of records/assets and associated info should be kept for the future and why? If no, why not</i>
3.16	Who do you think would be interested in accessing/researching VFX records and assets in the future and why?
3.17	Who do you think should be responsible for storing and managing the long-term VFX record/asset archives and why? <i>e.g. Studios / VFX companies / Visual Effects Society / institutional archives (e.g. National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, UCLA Film & TV Archive) / libraries / museums (e.g. Academy Museum or Lucas Museum of Narrative Art.</i>
3.18	What do you think are the challenges/barriers to archiving and preserving VFX records/assets long-term?

4.	Resources
4.1	If there was a resource that could help with managing assets/records, what type of content would you like this to contain? <i>For example, list of suggested retention periods, explanation of processes, example metadata models?</i>
4.2	How would you prefer this content to be presented? <i>For example, website, guideline document, manual, via VES?</i>