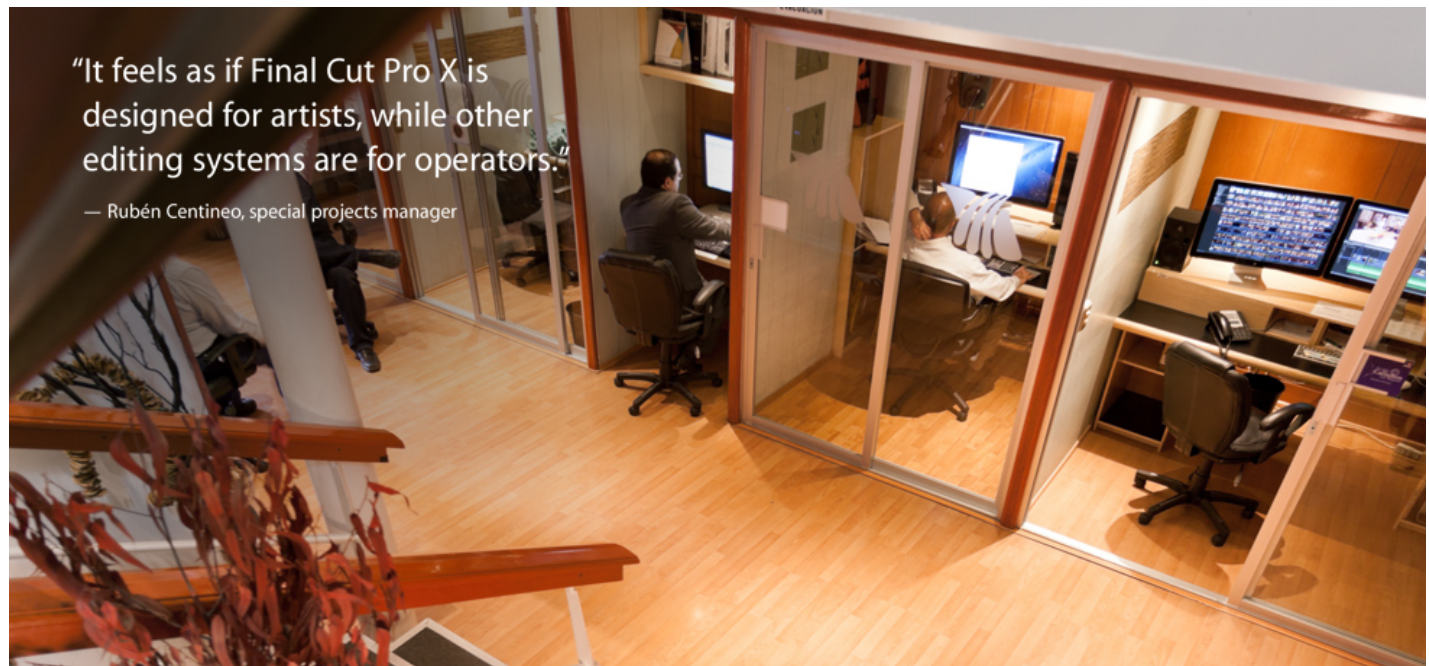


Final Cut Pro X

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Azteca

Prime-Time Passion

While it's hard to know what a nation might collectively be thinking at any point in time, it's easy to see what it's watching. And on any given day, millions of Mexicans are watching telenovelas, the Latin American equivalent of U.S. soap operas that draw even more ardent viewers.

Some of the most popular Mexican telenovelas are produced by Azteca — one of Mexico's leading broadcasters and its second-largest mass media company. These telenovelas are broadcast through four television networks — not just in Spanish-speaking markets in the U.S. and Central and South America, but in countries as far away as Russia and China. One of the station's networks, Azteca America, reaches 89 percent of Spanish-speaking households in the U.S.

Miguel Angel Cristante, Azteca's technical director of telenovelas, says, "Our mission is to be the best broadcaster in the world. The vision is to not only entertain and inform our national audience but also people in foreign markets. Ninety percent of our product is exported to other countries."



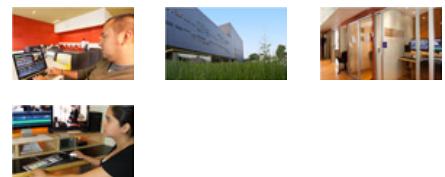
Azteca's technical director of telenovelas, Miguel Angel Cristante, says

At a Glance

Azteca

- Second-largest mass media company in Mexico
- Operates four television networks: Azteca 7, Azteca 13, Proyecto 40, and Azteca America
- Airs edgy telenovelas that appeal to a younger audience
- Won a TVyNovelas award for Best Telenovela of the Year for the popular show El regreso
- Distributes telenovelas for Spanish-speaking markets in the U.S. and Central and South America, as well as in additional languages across the globe
- Reaches 89 percent of Spanish-speaking households in the U.S.

Gallery



Shows Edited with Final Cut Pro X

- Lo que llamamos las mujeres
- A cada quien su santo
- Corazón en condominio
- La vida es una canción

episodes get at most a 24-hour turnaround. Photo credit: Héctor Macín

To help satisfy growing worldwide demand for their shows, Azteca recently rolled out a fast-paced, all-digital workflow based on Final Cut Pro X.

A Different Voice

Telenovelas began airing in Mexico in the 1950s. Azteca joined the market in 1996 with their first production, *Nada personal* (Nothing Personal). Just one year later they released the hugely successful *Mirada de mujer* (The Gaze of a Woman), based on the 1994 Colombian telenovela *Señora Isabel*. Considered one of the best telenovelas in the history of Mexican television, it launched Azteca as a major force in Mexican telenovela production.

The network has gained ground in the marketplace by airing telenovelas that are perceived as being more edgy and appealing to a younger audience. “Really, the thing that sets us apart is the content,” says Cristante. “We want to do different products that open up new perspectives for the country. It’s not the classic love show with the poor girl that loves the rich boy. That’s not us. We’re doing something more realistic with real people.”

Nonstop Production

Unlike U.S. soap operas, which feature story arcs that run across multiple seasons, telenovelas are self-contained stories that rarely continue beyond their initial nine-month broadcast. Azteca also produces *unitarios*, which are separate, nonserial episodes. In a typical week, Azteca creates episodes for three new novelas and three new *unitarios*. Depending on their programming schedule, that’s more than 200 novela episodes and 1000 *unitarios* per year.

Cristante emphasizes that production quality is never sacrificed for deadlines. “To make a novela and entertain people for many months, it’s important to have the maximum-quality video and audio. All of our shoots are entirely in HD. And we’re the only studio doing all shows in 5.1 surround sound.”



Special projects manager Rubén Centineo says Final Cut Pro X helps his team produce 10,000 hours of content annually. Photo credit: Héctor Macín

Faster Turns

In order to produce so much content, the network has a significant in-house telenovela unit that includes production and post-production facilities. Multiple shows are produced at the same time, with production and post-production running in parallel for each show. Because of the large number of shows produced, Azteca’s editors ingest huge amounts of footage and require a very fast turnaround in the editing process.

Says Cristante, “We’ve gotten to the point where every day we need to make a show in the morning and air it at night. At most a 24-hour turnaround.”

The need to automate digital production is a key reason why Azteca is introducing Final Cut Pro X into their workflow. Supported by local Mexico City integrator Simplemente, they’re using a phased approach that began with the editing of the unitarios.

New Workflow

Among Azteca shows being edited in Final Cut Pro X are Lo que callamos las mujeres, A cada quien su santo, Corazón en condominio, and La vida es una canción. Production for these shows takes place on location and on the novelas’ recording stages. Whether on location or in the studio, the directors live-switch between multiple cameras and record a single-switched master.

The editors work from this master in the post-production process. Given the need for fast turnaround, effects are added during editing. Audio is sent to Pro Tools for final mixing and returned to the editor for reconform and export.

Immediate Benefits

Rubén Centineo, special projects manager for new technology, reports that they are already seeing impressive workflow improvements right out of the cameras: “Ingest is much faster with Final Cut Pro X because it’s not a sequential process. You can use the same machine for importing while editing at the same time. This is really important, because so much editing work has to be done. If you have to wait, you feel unproductive.”

As soon as the footage becomes available, the editors make quick changes using the Magnetic Timeline. “I learned to edit using a flatbed film editor, where you had to make many manual edits and count frames in order not to lose sync,” says Centineo. “But the Magnetic Timeline is always in sync. That’s a powerful principle.”

A Natural Fit

While Centineo was initially surprised by the changes in Final Cut Pro X, he now embraces the new editing model and features. “I came to see that Final Cut Pro X is for people who work with a visual language,” he says. “Other nonlinear editors have too many presets and are better suited to making a purely mechanical edit. Final Cut Pro X lets me organize my media the way I want to in the application and then gets out of the way. It feels as if Final Cut Pro X is designed for artists, while other editing systems are for operators.

“For example, if you need to, you can add an effect directly in Final Cut Pro X. And you can do it in an artisanal way. With fades, you construct your fade in and fade out just the way you want to do it. The application doesn’t force you to do things a certain way.”



Advantage, Editors

The rollout of Final Cut Pro X has introduced advantages across the editorial group. “I love the interface and the way everything is within close reach — you can do anything with a drag and drop,” says Azteca editor Perla Martinez. “When you first look at the interface, you fall in love with it, and you’re eager to play and experiment.”

For editor Jorge Silva, Final Cut Pro X provides a straighter path to realizing his editorial vision. “The real-time effects previews make it much easier to choose a particular effect because when you have an idea, you can see it immediately,” he says. “That’s one of the most powerful parts of the program.”

Denise Luna Del Rivero, an experienced Final Cut Pro 7 editor and technical support specialist, found significant new efficiencies in Final Cut Pro X. “Once I started editing with Final Cut Pro X and saw how easy it was to use, I really liked it. One of the biggest advantages is that I can continue working without waiting for renders.”

“The software has also made it easier for all the editors to incorporate effects directly into their cuts. Experienced editors create effects templates in Motion and pass them to others in the group, who can drop the titles and filters directly into their Final Cut Pro X projects.”

In the Field

Azteca tested their new Final Cut Pro X workflow in the field, editing the show *Lo que llamamos las mujeres* on a 15-inch MacBook Pro with Retina display connected to a PROMISE Pegasus Thunderbolt RAID.

“This worked really well,” says Centineo. “We ingested natively from Canon XF cameras using the Canon XF plug-in. Final Cut Pro X does a great job using hardware resources, so you can edit with it even on a modest system. Final Cut Pro X changes the paradigm of a field editor because it’s such a fluid experience. You get the same performance as you would on a workstation in the studio.”

Next Steps

Encouraged by their rollout, Azteca is looking at Final Cut Pro X across telenovela production and even other divisions. “We’re a really big corporation,” says Centineo. “So we’re looking to establish an all-digital workflow that other groups can use as well. And the products that Apple is offering today are the products we need to get there.”



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