



COURTESY DAVID WESTPHAL

Rolling With a Still and Video Production

A large production shooting stills and video for GMC required **David Westphal** to make the most of every moment of California sunlight.

CLIENT: Leo Burnett, Troy, Michigan
ART DIRECTOR, PRINT: Julie Swartz
ART DIRECTOR, DIGITAL: Mat Balcer

IN THE COURSE OF a 12-day shoot in 11 locations for an online and print campaign for Chevrolet City Express vans, David Westphal captured both stills and video of the van being used in a variety of ways. In each scenario, Westphal had to photograph the van, the backgrounds and talent to provide sufficient coverage for each element to be composited in post. Shooting both interiors and exteriors and mixing strobes with the bright sunlight of Southern California, he had to make sure the shadows and highlights in each element were consistent so the final composites looked believable to the viewer.

To capture multiple images as well as video footage in a short time frame, Westphal divided his crew up so that they would work on two setups at once; as soon as he was done capturing a set of stills, he could then step onto another set nearby, capture video, and then shoot more stills from the same angle with the same lights. Anticipating that clients would soon be asking him to juggle both still and video shooting, three years ago he did a test shoot “to see how they could work together, the issues that could come up, and how to address them to create a successful workflow.” Having shot print campaigns that accompany commercials, he had observed many video crews, “and I saw how the integration [of still and video production] did or didn’t work.”

LOGISTICS

The goal was to show the van in use by a variety of small businesses. Westphal prepared a treatment suggesting some scenarios he would shoot. Among the traditional users of a heavy-duty van, he suggested

featuring a plumber and a contractor. “Then thinking about relevance and demographics, I considered some nontraditional companies that people think of,” such as a bakery and a bike shop. “The treatment is like the audition,” he says. Once he landed the gig, he had two weeks to choose locations and work out a schedule for capturing all the assets the client wanted. “We had everything locked down two days before the shoot,” Westphal recalls. “That speaks volumes about having a good crew.”

Westphal likes to work with assistants and lighting technicians who are equally comfortable on still or video shoots. “I want them to know how I shoot stills. We can get things done quicker if they know what I’ll ask for,” he says, adding, “it’s critical that I know they can cross over and work on the video side.” While he had one gaffer devoted solely to lighting the video shots, most of the assistants would work on setting up whatever shot was next on the schedule.

To depict a baker using the van to make a cupcake delivery, Westphal planned to capture a “beauty shot” of the vehicle in front of the bakery, with the baker and her customer chatting nearby. While he worked on those shots, the prop stylist and some assistants were busy inside the store, setting up lights and the video camera. Once he had all the shots of the exterior he needed, Westphal stepped inside to shoot video of the baker scooping pastry into a bag. Then, placing his still camera nearby, he captured stills of the scene using the same lighting setup.

At the end of each shoot day, Westphal would meet with crew, “so we would know what we had to do the next day.”

LIGHTING

When planning an outdoor shot of a vehicle, he says, “The first consideration is the relationship of the sun to the background. I know that 7:45 is when the sun will pop through the trees and rake across the building,” he recalls. He set up his camera an hour and a half prior to be ready for optimal sunlight, and locked it into position on a tripod.

To illuminate the bakery window, his crew set up a Profoto 7b with a 7-inch dish inside the bakery, that was fired at a 6 x 6-foot muslin hung vertically on stands. Fired at 1200 w/s, this bounced light, Westphal says, was there “adding a hint of value, so [the window] didn’t look dead.”

Once the client had approved his shots of the façade, Westphal had the vehicle driven into position. “I’m looking at what the reflections are doing to the vehicle, and I’m looking at what the sun will look like in an hour,” as it rises in the sky and casts slightly different shadows around the vehicle. Westphal placed two 4 x 4-foot shiny boards, which are silver on one side, near the van. “We just wanted to add some value on the shadow side of the sheet metal to supplement the sun,” he explains. For the next 45 minutes, as the sun moved and he captured the vehicle in the changing light, the shiny boards were turned on their swivel arms, moved along the length of the vehicle or lowered closer to the ground, providing fill as needed.

The last step was bringing in the models, who stood near the rear



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ABOVE: While photographing the exterior, David Westphal modified the sunlight as it moved across the van, then lit the talent using a bounced strobe. **LEFT, BELOW:** Westphal shot video and stills inside the bakery. **INSET, TOP:** David Westphal.

doors of the vehicle. “The fill light for talent was a double-bounce fill,” Westphal notes. They bounced a strobe into a V-flat made of foamcore, which reflected the light through a silk that was hanging vertically near the models.

Westphal estimates that he captured all his coverage of the car in under two hours. “That’s why the sun is so important,” he

notes. “You have to rely on the sun to do a lot of work for you so you can be efficient in this type of photography.”

He then stepped into the bakery and checked his crew’s video setup, and shot the store owner across the counter, while the window was visible in the background. When the video was done, he set up his still camera and tripod to capture a patron in the shop. The strobe, set about 10 feet high at camera left, was again used to shine through the vertical muslin. On the right, he had a Magnum dish with opal glass set higher than the strobe, angling down.

CAMERA

Westphal shot stills with an Alpa 12Max and a Schneider Alpa Apo-Helvetar 5.6/60 lens. “The Alpa provided me a way to get an image that is rather large in pixel dimension,” and also helped him correct perspective on architectural elements, Westphal says. “This is in

addition to providing framing that fits nicely with the various online applications like banners that are typically long and narrow.” He shot tethered, which allowed the art director and Westphal’s digital tech to check the images—and approve them—quickly. For video, he used a Sony XDCam 200.

POST PRODUCTION

Most of the editing was done “on the fly,” with Westphal’s digital tech noting which shots the art director approved during the shoot.

On a job like this, where the client would be responsible for the compositing, Westphal says, “I try to provide TIFF files that have minimal clipping on both shadows and highlights as well as a histogram that has a nice shape that reflects the lighting of the scene. I give the files a slight look—whether it be warmer or cooler depending on the project and individual shots.”

When he is collaborating with the retoucher directly, he says, he’ll typically deliver RAW files. “I try to make a clean, neutral file that provides them as much data as possible without clipping.”

Westphal says that shooting stills in anticipation of what a retoucher might need to make a successful composite is comparable to shooting video in anticipation of what an editor will need during post. “I always make sure that I have plenty of coverage—of the foreground, the background, the talent in the scene—in case the client wants to add something in the postproduction editing.” **pdn**