

Is 'film' a brand?



by Graham Reed

In 2000 George Lucas announced he wanted to make Episode 2 of the Star Wars Prequel Trilogy. It was going to be about 90% CGI so he wanted to shoot the live action sequences using video. It is said that as he had just had a very expensive divorce and needed some money which is why he embarked on making these prequels! Then there was no video cameras that were anywhere near as good as film, so he turned to Sony for help. Sony produced the HDW F900 which was the first video camera that produced 'film like' images and shot at 24 fps. It was built around a 2/3rd inch chip. With this new type of camera Sony was keen to market it to the rest of the film industry and they badged it 'Cinealta'.

Now why did they call it 'Cinealta' with a logo that looked like a piece of curled film? Why not 'Super Video, Videoalta or Ulta Video? Was it because the clever marketing men at Sony knew about the powerful brand of 'film'?

Marketing people know about the power of brands. Consider BMW, Disney, and Adidas. Have you ever thought how Adidas has succeeded to get people to pay money to wear their clothes with their advertising on them? People pay money to wear clothes advertising Adidas, or buy shirts with the BMW logo on them. People are buying into the brand and want to be seen as having that athletic life style, Adidas, or up market life style, BMW. Disney goes to extreme lengths to make sure that all their staff conforms to the Disney Brand.

How many times have you been on a 'film' shoot when really you are using a video camera? When you think of video what do you think of: Wedding Videos, News, Home Videos, and Low Budget programmes? But when you think of film what images do you get? Big budget, large crews, show bizz, film stars, glitz and glamour? In other words film has a high production image whereas video has a cheap image lower quality. Sony knew this so badged their new video camera with a 'film' label.

As technology improved and video cameras became more able to produce better pictures with almost the same exposure latitude as film and in HD, camera manufacturers looked at the multi-million pound film industry and wanted to sell their cameras into this huge market. So they made their cameras appear more 'film' like and to appeal to those wanting to make a 'film' but without the cost of film stock etc. In their menus they talked about shutter angles, even though of course there are no shutters but it made 'film' people feel happy. They referred to the gammas as 'film like' or 'cine' all very filmic! Cameras became able to record in frame rates just like film as opposed to interlaced.

But of course there was the depth of field issue. After all, film cameras have a shallow depth of field because they have a larger image size compared to 2/3rd inch video cameras, so in order to get that 'film' look cameras have to have a large sensor size as well. To satisfy that demand Sony in 2008 brought out the F35 with a 35mm film sensor size and it had a PL lens mount. It recorded onto HDCAM-SR