

COMPANY

Free-D Workshop
www.freedworkshop.com

LOCATION

Hong Kong

SOFTWARE

Autodesk® 3ds Max®

Autodesk 3ds Max Optimizes Digital Effects Production

Creating Perfectionism in Hong Kong Cinema

“Autodesk 3ds Max is basically our industry standard. This application is synonymous with the production of visual effects. It can deliver engaging effects, producing very detailed objects, particles, flames and gas. Integrating these almost real visual effects into a movie can create more visually convincing effects and sophistication.”

— **Mr. Eric Lai Man Chun**
VFX Supervisor
Free-D Workshop



Image courtesy of Free-D Workshop

After under-performing in the early years, Hong Kong cinema is experiencing a rebirth by utilising its survival skills. Ever-changing ideas, outstanding actors and actresses, plus the help of passionate and sophisticated moviegoers, will take Hong Kong cinema to the next level. Free-D Workshop, a digital effects production agency, is using Autodesk 3ds Max to produce virtually real special effects, helping many Hong Kong movies to achieve unprecedented success.

Since its inception in 2005, Free-D Workshop has specialised in producing special effects for professional TV commercials and films. With a team of 25 people, this powerhouse was involved in the production of *Firestorm*, *Unbeatable* and *That Demon Within*, creating a series of impressive digital effects.

Autodesk 3ds Max offers greater appeal

“This is a very challenging industry, so we have very demanding requirements for production applications,” said Free-D Workshop’s VFX Supervisor, Eric Lai Man Chun. “This application not only offers outstanding features to allow creative people to realise their ideas, but its operational efficiency and ability to render 3D models are also equally important. Autodesk 3ds Max gets the job done and meets our goals.”

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the production of visual effects. It can deliver engaging effects, producing very detailed objects, particles, flames and gas. Integrating these almost real visual effects into a movie can create more visually convincing effects and sophistication. Also, the improved effects optimisation of Autodesk 3ds Max is significant. For example, when we were creating more complex scenarios, the Autodesk 3ds Max 2015 version can create over 200 frames a second more than the 2014 version, achieving a much smoother presentation of visual images.”

Eric also notes that one of the biggest advantages of Autodesk 3ds Max, after years of evolution and enhancements, is its “plug-in” that allows the generation of many different kinds of standard effects and texture details. Given the demanding requirements of the film and commercial production industry in Hong Kong, production agencies can still achieve fine-tuning and optimization by making use of such standard objects. “It saves us a lot of time,” says Eric. “If we did not have Autodesk 3ds Max and its plug-ins, and needed to create everything from scratch, we would need to spend far more time – which is not possible as we are working in such a time-conscious industry.”

Firestorm aims to make audiences more engaged

Firestorm is one of the most successful projects Free-D Workshop has worked on. Anyone who saw the movie



Image courtesy of Free-D Workshop

surely found the explosion scenes unbelievably intriguing. The shootout in Central District and gas explosion that culminated in scenes of land collapsing led to the film's breathtaking climax. After the movie, many audience members may have asked: "How could they do that?"

Apart from the actors' performances, the entire shootout scene, including explosions, was created through digital visual effects. Eric confirmed that it was never possible to film the whole scene, as the traffic in Central was always so heavy that it was impossible to find any "breaks" in a 24 hours period. In fact, they only shot some basic images. Afterwards, they immersed themselves in the studio, using Autodesk 3ds Max to gradually create a shattering Central.

Even though Free-D Workshop was allowed only seven months to complete the scene, their client was highly satisfied with the outcome. Apart from being highly detailed, their client also agreed that audience would be quickly engaged in the movie. Eric remarks that "making the audience fully engaged" is the ultimate goal in the movie industry, as if audience members say there are unrealistic computer-generated effects, they could not become engaged, jeopardising a movie's ratings. However, when audience members find scenes unforgettable even after the movie ends, this means the movie was a success.

In fact, *Firestorm* was the biggest movie in its first day and first week in China's box office. It was also the fastest Chinese crime movie to gross 100 million yuan in China's box office, and topped the Hong Kong box office.

In recalling the production process, Eric applauds the operational efficiency of 3ds Max. In fact, after presenting the first draft to his client for comments, he could quickly provide a second draft, saving him a lot of time required for the communication process.

That Demon Within - special effects appearing real

Free-D Workshop and 3ds Max had their deep involvement in another Hong Kong blockbuster – *That Demon Within*. Yee Kwok Leung, CG Director, says there were two major special visual effects in the movie. One is a petrol station exploding, and the other is a dream world gradually collapsing after the protagonist was hypnotised. Flame FX, a 3ds Max plug-in, delivered to its full potential for the gas station explosion scene; the flames are exceptionally stunning.

Yee Kwok Leung also indicated that there were hundreds of changing objects. The Free-D workshop teams had to work with and manage different objects and then integrate them. The multi-group collaborative functionality of Autodesk 3ds Max enabled different teams to work closely together to ensure the project was on track. In fact, it only took six months to complete the production of the special effects for *That Demon Within*.

Excel team's creativity by using the software

With Hong Kong's movie industry making increasing use of digital special effects, Free-D Workshop looks set to continue growing. Eric says that from a macroscopic perspective, Autodesk 3ds Max is important to their business. Because of the advantages of this software, they can undertake more and more projects, whilst reducing colleagues' pressures to achieve deadlines, and thus allow the team to try more ways of creating high quality products. He also notes that he is working on a project that requires creating many flowers and trees in the countryside, indicating it differs in complexity from urban scenes.

When Eric and Leung discuss these challenges, both are excited and confident. By making use of Autodesk 3ds Max, digital effects agencies in Hong Kong can focus on creativity, taking the Hong Kong film industry to the next level!



Image courtesy of Free-D Workshop

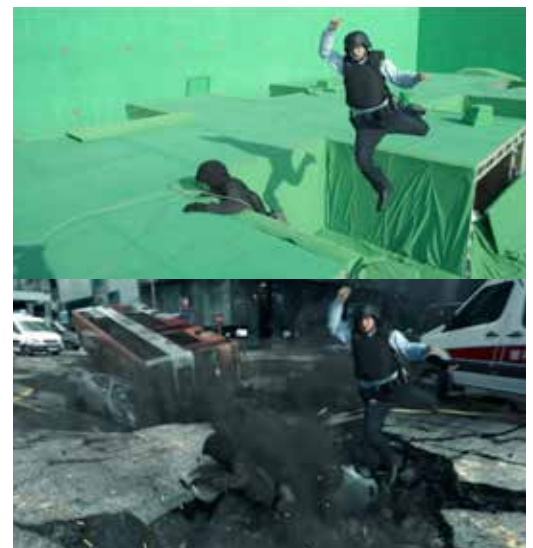


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