

Cinematographers Bring Movie-like Magic to Commercials



In advertising, image is everything. In today's competitive commercial production world, cinematographers are always looking for an edge. The buzzword is often "cinematic," and with the extremely high quality of television content, a spot must measure up or be lost in the shuffle. Makers of television content – both narrative projects and commercials – are turning to vintage glass and widescreen aspect ratios to lend their images the epic sweep of classic films.

That's one reason Panavision continues to up the ante on camera technology, most recently with the new 8K Millennium DXL2, designed from decades of cinema history and informed by strong relationships with the artists who used the DXL1.

Why would a television commercial require such tremendous detail and 16-plus stops of dynamic range? We put the question to professionals who craft images for some of the world's most carefully managed brands.

Max Goldman

Max Goldman, who shoots stylish and elegant commercials and short promotional films for clients like Ralph Lauren, American Express, Audi, Under Armour and Apple, has used the DXL and DXL2 almost exclusively for the past year.



“The DXL2 has several attributes that really help us in commercials, where we’re often moving very quickly,” he says. “The shallow depth of field looks beautiful, and it allows you to hide things in the background in a really elegant way. For the small screen, we’re always trying to make things immersive, to make you feel like you’re really involved with the actors and the story. The DXL2, with the large format, allows you to shoot very wide-angle lenses without much distortion. It’s more like the way your eye sees. It feels like you’re inside the image because the talent feels large, but there’s still a great falloff. We’re always trying to see a close-up, but also get the context – and the camera is a great tool for wide and tight cinematography.

“The camera has opened a whole new way of seeing and shooting,” Goldman adds. “You have the ability not only to use lighting and depth to carve out your subject, but also focus and fall-off. Wide shots feel more intimate and effective, like long lens shots. For me, that was a big leap forward.”

Today’s digital camera technology with additional resolution brings a rounded softness and pleasing, natural skin tones. In the DXL2, custom-made pro color spectrum filters result in significantly improved color separation and dramatically higher color precision. Light Iron’s LiColor2 color science has also matured, smoothly handling a streamlined 8K pipeline.

“The images look great to me,” says Goldman. “They have figured out the color science. I’ve been very happy with the latitude, the way the blacks read, the way the highlights roll off, and the way the colors render. It feels familiar. But the main reason I love the camera is how the big sensor interacts with large format Panavision glass – it’s incredible. And the post has been really seamless, with no struggles. The images are always ready for me as soon as I need them.”

Darren Lew



Darren Lew was an early adopter of Panavision's DXL technology and has since used it on commercials for the Super Bowl as well as on the forthcoming Netflix series *Maniac*, where he paired it with Panavision C-Series, E-Series, and T-series anamorphic lenses.

"I was introduced to the camera because director Cary Fukunaga and I were committed to using Panavision anamorphics," he says, "and during our first visit to Panavision to look at some new lenses, we were introduced to an early version of the DXL. After spending time with our selected lenses on the camera, we became convinced.

"The form factor of the DXL is unique. It's balanced better than any other camera on the market," says Lew. "You have more accessories to the top of the camera than ever -monitors, transmitters, receivers, sync boxes. A handheld camera with a lower center of gravity is always easier to operate, particularly when moving quickly. The DXL has an ingenious feature-- the battery elevator, which allows you to adjust the height of the rear mounted battery so that the camera wraps around and below your shoulder.

"And once I had the camera on set I realized the DXL had not only ergonomic benefits but also functional advantages. Being able to change all settings on both sides of the camera is huge. At

times, we'd have someone re-loading on one side of the camera and changing frame rates on the other."

Lew notes that he's able to take advantage of the camera's high resolution to aid in the storytelling. "At times we would vary the resolution to effectively change the focal length of the lens," he explains. "We might be shooting at 7K, and in a scene the 50mm would be too wide but the 75mm too long, so we'd drop to 6K finding something in-between. At other times, we wanted to get more optical dimension, so we'd go to 8K, use more of the sensor, get closer to the subject, and get a shallower depth of field. I love fine-tuning the optical rendering of what I'm photographing and now I have an additional tool in a variable sensor size."

Eric Steelberg, ASC

Eric Steelberg, ASC shoots high-end spots between features (*Tully*, *500 Days of Summer*) and television shows (*Billions*, *The Good Doctor*). Among his recent commercials are spots for Tissot, Dodge, Kraft, Chevy and Toyota. In May, he shot tests comparing the DXL2 with other large format digital cameras.



“The dynamic range and lack of noise associated with the sensor was really impressive,” he says. “I’m definitely seeing the benefits of the new sensor – it’s just leaps and bounds better than what I’ve seen in the past from older sensors. The DXL2 is the only camera that can truly give you an actual 4K anamorphic image, and the Panavision anamorphic lenses are perfectly matched to that camera.”

Steelberg also appreciates the DXL2’s advancements that grow from Panavision’s deep understanding of how cinematographers think and work – like the native ISO of 1600, ProRes 4K up to 60 frames per second, and a redesigned viewfinder.

“The viewfinder is light-years ahead of anything else available on any camera in the world,” says Steelberg. “It’s spectacular. It’s the closest thing I’ve ever seen to straight optical.”

Andrew Wheeler

Andrew Wheeler recently used the DXL2 on a tongue-in-cheek commercial for Trojan, directed by the duo known as Tim and Eric. The location was the Paramour Estate in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles, a 1910 mansion with classic architectural beauty and sumptuous furnishings.



“The spot was an opportunity for me to help them escape the very flat, two-dimensional frames that typically make up these comedic spots, and give them more of an edge photographically,” says Wheeler. “The bigger sensor gave me a lot more control over what we were seeing with

depth of field. The directors have always trusted me to deal with the technical aspects of the image. On the first frame of the day, they immediately recognized a difference and asked me to tell them about the camera and lenses. I think that some people think the DXL2 is reserved for big features, but after the success on this shoot we used it on our next commercial as well.

“The DXL2, for me, is a remarkable advancement over the first DXL camera release,” Wheeler continues. “The MONSTRO sensor is so much better in terms of low-light capabilities and skin tones. There are so many options out of the camera – you can assign different looks to different outputs, which can be a very useful thing to have in certain situations. The options seem infinite, but in a good way, not in a confusing one. Formatting the cards now takes a couple seconds. You can be making transcodes at the same time you’re recording in RAW. The workflow is well thought out, and it’s easy for me to take home and do some quick grading, which gives me something to show the agency in the morning to gauge their reaction.”

Watch for cinematic images coming to a television near you – courtesy of the Panavision DXL2 and the cinematographers who choose it.