

MOVIE MAGIC

When the producers of Harry Potter and Lara Croft needed realistic special effects, they enlisted the help of a small British company.

Film special effects have come a long way in the last few years and spearheading the development of new technology is the London-based Computer Film Company that is now part of Framestore-CFC.

It began as a conventional special effects studio working in celluloid, which worked successfully on over a hundred films and won two Oscars with its own home-built equipment. Then, as the digital market matured in the early-1990s, CFC joined the move to industry-standard hardware and software. Through EUREKA, it developed software to enable faster and more realistic special effects.

Its starting point was a specialised microprocessor developed in a previous EUREKA project involving another British company, Pandora. So CFC launched EUREKA project E!1683 with Pandora while drawing on additional expertise from the High Technology Centre, a research institute dedicated to the film industry in Babelsberg, Germany.

The aim was to demonstrate that it is possible to produce high quality effects at speed and this was achieved by creating the Key Light software package for film special effects.

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Peter Stansfield
Project Co-ordinator
UK

Film success

Key Light has since been used successfully in television and film production. As well as Harry Potter, its credits include Tomb Raider, Notting Hill and Mission Impossible 2.

Peter Stansfield, the co-ordinator of the project, says that "EUREKA gave the companies involved a safe structure in which to operate. Companies are sometimes reticent to work with others because they worry that their ideas might be stolen but, within the EUREKA framework, the companies involved in developing Key Light felt safe in discussing their ideas more openly. From CFC's point of view, EUREKA's credibility and networks also opened the door to a range of specialised technical expertise it lacked. The end result was a change in the nature of CFC's business.

With Key Light, CFC changed from being simply a service bureau to becoming a software provider," says Stansfield. "Their business model has changed and they are now enjoying the royalties of that software." So impressed were CFC and Pandora, in fact, that both of them have gone on to get involved in more EUREKA projects. CFC is now working as part of a larger effort in the area of digital cinema (as part of the ITEA Cluster project E!2023) and Pandora is developing a method of restoring old stocks of film so that they can be used for broadcast in the growing digital television market (E!2343 PICASSO).

EUREKA

Participating countries
United Kingdom, Germany
Budget: 1.1 MEURO

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