

# EdiTrace

Simon Leadley jumps onto this Australian-designed auto conforming tool.

Post production sound has always got the short end of the stick... and it seems to me that the short end of the stick is getting shorter and shorter. The schedules are getting shorter, the budgets smaller, all backed up by an immovable release date even though three temp dubs have been performed in the allotted time rather than one. The sound team – Dialogue, Music and FX/Foley – are being allowed less and less time and are having more pressure applied to come up with the goods than ever before. To make matters even more ‘interesting’, because of the flexibility of non-linear editing, it seems like the concept of a ‘locked cut’ has gone out the window. No longer does sound post perform its work to a cinema-release version of the film, instead we are working with a moving target. It is not only the editing process but also visual FX coming in later in the post process and largely we have the Americans’ penchant for multiple test screenings to thank for this.

Naturally, it'd be nice for things to be different. But it's hard to see how schedules will be dramatically more accommodating for audio post – despite best efforts and best intentions, audio is a comparatively small cog in a very large wheel. Be that as it may, when an audio editor learns of a tool that can automate the donkeywork created by the ever-changing cut, it's time to take a closer look. Enter EdiTrace.

Mark Franken, a talented Australian sound editor, has created a system to help automate the conforming process that occurs from one cut to another. More recently he's added a new tool that actually cuts the ProTools sessions (currently the system is ProTools only, but other platforms are to be supported shortly) and creates a conformed version of the new cut totally automatically. What would once take an editor hours and sometimes days to perform, can now be done in a matter of minutes.

## How it Works

EdiTrace is a software package that creates the new EDL [Edit Decision List] for you. You can then feed that new list into the EdiTrace Auto software that automatically cuts the ProTools session. You don't buy EdiTrace from the shops, it resides on the EdiTrace website. In fact, the new EdiTrace EDLs are generated on the EdiTrace website. The beauty of using the web is that the software resides on a server somewhere and is always up to date for all users no matter where they are in the world. It also makes payment for using EdiTrace pretty simple – you can pay as you go. As for the EdiTrace website, it gets full marks for its simple and elegant design. There are no fancy graphics to slow down the process (important if you're working on a modem connection) and the workflow design is well conceived and straightforward.

EdiTrace works with EDLs for video work and cutlists for feature film work (check the website for the full list of file

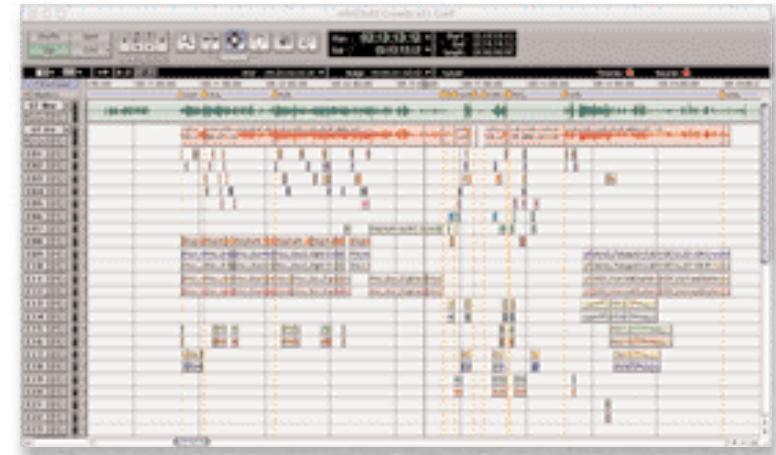
types it will read). It also accepts all types of timecode formats, so the software is equally applicable to PAL or NTSC work. In essence, any software that can generate an EDL or cutlist, like Avid or Final Cut Pro, will be all you need. The two lists get fed into EdiTrace, which then generates a ‘Change EDL’. So, for example, when the EDL that reflects the current state of the edit (say, Version 10) is updated to Version 11 these two EDLs (or cutlists for film) are fed into EdiTrace by first uploading the files to the web via your browser. The software does a great error-checking job – looking out for mismatched timecode formats or various other problems that can be a result of incorrect EDLs. If all is okay then you simply hit the Trace button, select the ‘Source’ and ‘Target’ files

and EdiTrace will generate a Change EDL. This can be viewed as a graphic that shows how the edit has changed in response to the new EDL/cutlist – very, very neat. You can even look at the final Change EDL to see if it looks like what you would expect, however, the source times are not shown as a measure of copy protection. It is then, and only then, that you pay for the trace.

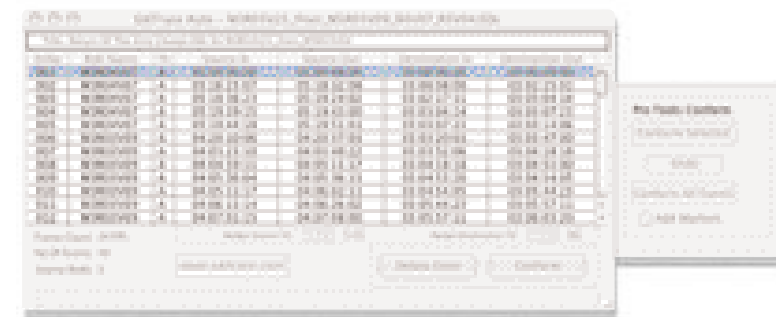
Having done this you can download the final EdiTrace Change EDL to your local computer to use with the EdiTrace Auto software. This software can be copied to all ProTools stations that need to use it as there is no copy protection on the software. However, each EdiTrace EDL has an embedded copy protection number that allows the user to use the software. The number is read by EdiTrace Auto to make sure that the EDL was generated by the EdiTrace website. If the EDL has no number or does not ‘match’ the contents of the EDL, the EdiTrace Auto program will not function. This is a simple and effective scheme, and possibly one of the best I have encountered.

Once the process is executed and the EDL loaded, you need to have your DAW running and the relevant session open. All you need to do is choose to have the original version of the edit offset (this will form the basis of the source data in the session) and whether the final conform will be offset or not. To give you an example, we offset the source data by +1hr so that a space is made in the timeline to create the conformed version – so the source audio will be moved from 1hr to 2hr and the conformed version will appear back at 1hr, for example. When you press ‘Conform’ the software takes control of ProTools, via OSX System Events (no need for any third-party products such as QuicKeys) and will move the source to the new location intact and then copy the data according to the EdiTrace EDL into the correct position. All this happily occurs with no user intervention. Some minutes later you will have a conformed session, and after comparison with the guide track I found all to be perfect.

For music editing, software such as this is less than perfect as it will cut the music according to the EDL and not musically. All is not lost though, as you can create an Offset List with EdiTrace that puts (into a more human readable form) the changes that occur between edits, making it possible for a music editor to quickly compare the numbers and where the music sits (often a picture



Re-conformed session. The markers shown are the change points generated by EdiTrace Auto. Note the waveforms match between the new guide track and the old re-cut guide track on tracks 1 and 2 respectively.



Purchased ‘Change EDL’ has been loaded into EdiTrace Auto ready to start conform of the ProTools session.

edit will play havoc with dialogue and FX but will be okay for music owing to the fact that there can be numerous small edits during a music cue which when combined have a small or no overall change in the length to the music). Having a list such as this makes the whole process much simpler. You could of course use EdiTrace Auto to cut the music and then see how to fix it – we are talking non-destructive editing after all.

All in all, the EdiTrace system is brilliant and I am sure that many a sound editor will be beating a path to the EdiTrace site to remove so much of the pain and drudgery from modern film and video making. Well done Mark Franken!

*Simon Leadley MPSE, was recently head music editor on ‘Master and Commander’.*



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