CONTINUITY IN THE COMPUTER AGE

Make-up record-keeping gets a digital overhaul

By Heather Wisner

The history of make-up continuity recording begins with handwritten charts; it segues into Polaroids, binders stuffed with paper printouts and digital photos encased in plastic sleeves. Husband-and-wife team Doug and Maureen McGavin (he's a computer software designer, she's a make-up artist) are hoping to write the next chapter in that history with their new program SavingFace, an electronic version of make-up continuity record-keeping.

Maureen seized on the software idea last fall when she returned to the make-up industry after a long hiatus spent caring for her young son. When she began researching changes in the industry during her absence, she was surprised by the lack of software for make-up departments. She thought about it while she was working on *Older Than America*, a film with a large cast and a small make-up department. As a make-up assistant, her job was maintaining continuity on the film using old-school methods.

"Most everybody has laptop on sets these days, so I just knew there had to be a better way," she said. "All the waste really bothered me—all the ink and the paper." Through the *Make-up Artist* magazine message board, she discovered a software program called Visages that was no longer available. She and Doug contacted its creator, make-up artist Sara Seidman-Vance, and told her they were thinking of creating their own continuity software. "Sara was incredibly gracious and helpful consulting with us," Maureen said.

Seidman-Vance had begun formulating Visages while she was working on *Dawson's Creek* in 2000. "They started rationing Polaroids, so I started taking digital photos," she said. "Digital color is better, it's instant and it's much easier to match color. I started thinking that if I was putting photos in the computer, it would be nice to put the notes with them." She worked with a programmer to create Visages, but he only knew how to create a system for Windows; eventually, she ran out of money and had to shelve the entire project. Her plea for colleagues to take over was answered by Maureen and Doug. "They picked up the mantle and I consulted," she said.

Following their conversation, Maureen and Doug began working on the design. "We looked at [Siedman-Vance's] framework, and she gave input, but ours is a completely different program; it does a lot more than hers did," Maureen said. SavingFace is browser-based program compatible with Mac and Windows Operating Systems. (Users need Internet access to install the program, but not to run it.) The program creates PDFs of reports and make-up charts that can be attached to email. If the make-up room has a Local Area Network, the software licensee can share his IP address with other make-up artists and hairstylists on the team. Artists can also copy information from scene to scene, or from multiple characters in a common scene.

Another feature is the Script Day View Report, which allows the user to type in a script day and scroll through all the photos for that day (for all scene numbers and shoot dates) and compare them for continuity. When the production wraps, artists can burn an entire book to CD and give it to production staff, as well as using it as a post-production resource. "At the end of the day, you can print out a report and have it available for anyone who needs it," she said.

The program is also designed to prevent hefting binders around or worrying about damaged photos and the maintenance of ink cartridges, photo paper and batteries. It could be a potential write-off for make-up artists, Maureen added, since it has the potential to reduce production costs. She envisions the system being used by make-up artists working in film, TV, new media and video—in short, anyone who needs to keep continuity records.

Sandra Orsolyak-Allen tried SavingFace when she was department head on the film *The Bleeding*. "I am not computer literate at all," she said, "but when you actually play with the program, it's easy. It's basically self-explanatory. Once you put in your characters, you just follow through. Everything is contained." She liked the program enough to use it again. "This is the first program specifically designed and set up for us," she said.

Based on conversations she's had with co-workers, Seidman-Vance believes that there's a hunger for digital continuity, and not just among make-up artists. Besides offering better quality, digital photos are more cost-effective. By her reckoning, the *Dawson's Creek* make-up department used 22-30 Polaroids per day, plus plastic sleeves to keep them in. At the time she created Visages, that cost approximately $30 per day, $200 per episode, as opposed to digital photos, which cost about $5 per day and $35 per episode (based on the cost of paper and ink at the time). And it was much easier to share among colleagues both on-set and off.

That includes crews in different locations. "What I didn't know was that the East Coast tended to be PC and the West Coast tended to be Mac," Seidman-Vance said. "Sometimes we have West Coast and East Coast people working together. I needed to send things via Internet without going to FedEx, spending the time shipping and worrying about things getting lost. I wanted to create something streamlined so that make-up artists and hairstylists could move into the digital age."

The McGavins rolled out SavingFace in June. They provide tech support via email within 24 hours, and the program comes with a help file. The software is available for download on their Web site: www.savingface-software.com. *MA*

Saving Face screenshots courtesy of Doug and Maureen McGavin. Steve LaPorte photo by Michael Spatola