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Recommendations on the Use of EDL
Digital Preservation Class
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The EDL is a tool that is used by artists and creators for various reasons and in different ways. It was created in the 1970's for linear tape based editing and a simple search for them on the net returns multiple message boards where professionals and students help each other through the complications and questions arising from the use of EDL's. Various institutions look at and archive EDL's for two main reasons; as a primary source for researchers looking at the process of an artists; and second as an item of preservation which can be utilized to help recreate a piece if the file is corrupted and no hard copy exists.

With regards to the first reason the EDL is useful. It could be interesting and of value as a primary source document in the long term giving the researcher an idea of how that creator was working with the medium, their workflow, and their interaction with online editing systems. (if they had one) An example of this could be seeing if they used a Drop Frame or Non-Drop time code, (assuming 29.97 fps NTSC) since drop frame time code is standard for the broadcasting world. Also, there are various formats, with the most common being CMX3600, that indicate the system that will be used in the final online edit. When exporting an EDL there are options as to how the information is organized. It can reflect the timeline of the piece, the source material, or transitions can be withheld to simplify it. If exporting into another nonlinear system a *generic edits* format can be chosen, which can be easily read by the other systems. With this

knowledge a researcher would have some clue as to the choices made by the creator, but only if the EDL they are looking at was exported by the creator. If it is an EDL exported by the collecting institution this should be noted so the researcher is aware that the indicators found in the decision of what kind of export do not reflect the actual process of the artists. If the institution is exporting the EDL I suggest using the most common CMX3600 and having it organized to reflect the timeline of the piece. (This is usually the default for Final Cut Pro. Details can be found in the manual).

The usefulness of an EDL to the archivist, as a back up for the failure of a DAM system and lack of a hard copy, is questionable. It is incredibly dependant on the creator being very detail oriented and thinking ahead when naming the files and creating the piece. It also requires them to be clear about the hardware used since one common problem with EDL's arises from the use of a fire wire to transfer data instead of a capture card. If a fire wire was used to capture the material instead of a capture card there will most likely be time code error. If the institution isn't aware of the time code error and then goes to re-create the piece they will end up with a very time consuming and messy endeavor. That of course is assuming that the artist had accurate file naming, which either is the same as the source reels or is accompanied by a document that matches up the EDL file names with the labels on the source reels; and of course that the institution has archived and preserved those original source materials. An example of file naming issues found in offline systems like Final Cut Pro is that while working offline in a nonlinear system you can pull multiple clips from the same source tape/reel the at which point the EDL will automatically create and name a b-reel to conceptualize this in the report; since in a tape to tape setting a b-reel would have been created. This needs to be kept in mind

when inputting reel names at the initial time of ingest so the new B-reel has a file name that is still readable and accurate. Other issues can arise for the institution collecting an EDL most prominently that for any one project they may need to export multiple EDL's to ensure accurate collection. This can come about for multiple reasons the two most prominent being the audio tracks and the nature of the offline systems when using it for longer works. An EDL only captures/ recognizes up to four audio channels, which was the standard when they were first utilized. If a piece uses more than this than separate EDL's need to be created for each grouping of tracks. Also for larger pieces there will be multiple EDL's (one for each sequence) with an over arching EDL that simply references the other lists. All of these are subject to the problems that can arise from inaccurate labeling.

Once an EDL has been exported and collected there is still the issue of it being a format meant for machines to read not people. With this in mind I suggest the following resource (outside of the manual of course) to help both archivists and researchers read an EDL; <http://www.scottsimmons.tv/blog/2006/10/12/how-to-read-an-edl/> . Also the EDL refers to the "out point" as the first frame not recorded, so if you are attempting a re-creation of a piece you need to be aware of that or you would end up including extra frames.

For the institution that is requesting projects the following guide might be useful for their creators. Obviously you can't really require people to follow these guideline but they could be given to them as a suggestion with the explanation that it will help with the long term preservation of the piece. The guide can be found at <http://www.edlmax.com/maxguide.html> . Ideally all creators would follow at minimum

this basic checklist. That would make an EDL accurate for an archivist, and somewhat readable; especially if they create it using the lowest common denominator. Because if they input all their files assuming a CMX format exported at the end and then when the archive receives the files they export a GVG or SONY format the EDL will be impractical and fairly worthless.

A few final thoughts. If an institution has storage space issues then it should be noted that all the information found in an EDL lives within the XML file. So in the interest of storage capacity, time, resources, etc. if an archive chooses to collect any sort of file from a nonlinear editing system, I would recommend simply collecting the XML. As a record of an artist's process or workflow an EDL stands as it is. For an institution looking to have a record that will allow or aid in the re-creation of a work the EDL is only as valuable as the details within it.

Sources

Chapter 10 of the Final Cut Pro 6.01 User Manual

All information pertaining to the actual functions of an EDL was taken from this source.

The Following web sources were used to get a better understanding of the way in which creators utilize and EDL, and the issues they have come up against with them.

<http://forums.creativecow.net/viewforum/8>

<http://www.scottsimmons.tv/blog/2006/10/30/final-cut-pros-bad-edl/>

<http://www.scottsimmons.tv/blog/2006/12/11/offline-to-online-what-formats-can-i-use/>

<http://www.lafcpug.org/phorum/read.php?11,167441,167441#msg-167441>

Time was spent reading the lists, and the user base was found to be professional editors and student film makers.

The two web sources mentioned in the paper were determined to be accurate when compared to the information in the User manual. However I felt the lay out and explanation within these two web sources was clearer and more easily understood than what is given in the manual.

<http://www.scottsimmons.tv/blog/2006/10/12/how-to-read-an-edl/>

<http://www.edlmax.com/maxguide.html>

All web sources have been accessed between November and December of 2007.