

# Soderbergh creates look for *Traffic* in digital intermediate suite at Cinesite



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**Traffic** is the hit film from USA Studios that is a snapshot of America's war on drugs and a dark look at the seamy world of drug smuggling. It's also another example of the use of digital intermediate techniques being used to enhance a visual style. Director/cinematographer Steven Soderbergh worked with Cinesite to alter the color and contrast of a variety of images to render a distinctive look to parts of the movie.

**Traffic** captured Best Picture honors at the 2000 New York Film Critics Circle and a Best Supporting Actor award for Benicio Del Toro. Soderbergh received recognition as Best Director for his work on **Traffic** and **Erin Brockovich**. Cinesite also collaborated with Soderbergh on **Erin Brockovich**.

Based on a 1989 British mini-series, **Traffic** stars Michael Douglas, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Don Cheadle, Dennis Quaid and Amy Irving. Douglas plays a conservative Ohio Supreme Court justice who is appointed drug czar. His daughter is a drug addict.

**Traffic** follows three interlocking storylines. One of the three stories is centered south of the Mexican border in Tijuana. These scenes are tinted a pale brown color. Cinesite Colorist Julius Friede worked alongside Soderbergh while he digitally manipulated color in the approximately 40 minutes of the film that take place in Mexico. The director wanted a hot, dry look for the sequences. The relevant scenes

were digitized using the Philips Spirit DataCine™. The resulting digital intermediate file was displayed on color-calibrated 24 fps monitors using Cineon software. Soderbergh was able to accurately adjust colors to his liking, emphasizing golds, browns and yellows, and bringing down cooler tones.

"The custom color correction process went very smoothly," says Pat Repola, Cinesite's vice president of Digital Imaging. "Steven knew what he wanted and we were able to work very quickly. It was a matter of a few days in the suite. He was also the cinematographer on the project, so the images were his to begin with. The monitors give an accurate, real-time rendition of what will appear on the projection screen and that confidence was crucial to our success."

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Many of these same sequences required subtitles because much of the dialog is in Spanish. Since the scenes were already digitized, it was relatively simple for Cinesite's 2-D Technical Director Steve Wright to add the approximately 255 subtitles using digital compositing techniques, thus avoiding the extra optical steps



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inherent in traditional subtitling techniques. Once the color correction was done and the subtitles were composited, the images were written back at Cinesite to Eastman EXR color intermediate film 5244.

"We knew **Traffic** would be put through a number of extra generations because of the special lab processing techniques that Steven Soderbergh planned to use for the film," says Wright. "That's another reason why digital subtitling was perfect for the film—because it saved a couple of generations of duplication."

Cinesite President and COO Ruth Scovill adds, "Digital intermediate is quickly becoming a valuable tool in the filmmaker's kit. We look forward to helping filmmakers perfect and expand its use. It's our job to help filmmakers achieve their creative vision and digital intermediate is a giant step toward that goal. **Traffic** is a great example of how this technology can add to the value of the film." 