

Why Editing Your Footage is a Benefit

By Steve Douglas

I've met and known a great many divers who've bought themselves camcorders and housings, shot hour after hour of footage from the Cocos Islands to Thailand and back. All around the world they went filming everywhere and everything. Many of them were really quite good as videographers, but, alas, the world will never know because they have never taken the time to learn the basics of editing. They have never collated their footage into a short, viewable film to share with others. Sure, I've seen them view their footage on their little camcorder LCD screens, with their cams half out of the housing, their hair wet from the dive showing that great shot of an eagle ray gliding by, but aside from their husbands and wives, often back home, not many will benefit from their shooting skills.

Prior to the day when non-linear editing first appeared, most non-professional underwater shooters merely hooked up one VCR to another and made copies of copies for one and all. The quality was poor and the excitement of that special dive didn't always carry over to the finished product on film. Discouraged by the poor quality, perhaps this is why so many videographers never tried their hand at seriously editing what they had shot.

There are great many benefits to be had by editing your underwater footage. It's one thing to make your significant other sit through hours and hours of unedited footage but both friends and family would appreciate your efforts far more if you would remove those shaky shots, delete the unfocused clips, and cut the 30 minutes of the same turtle eating coral to 20 seconds. Keeping your audiences attention and applause will be far easier if you have edited down your tapes. Speaking of applause, there is nothing like the feeling of hearing others applause when

your film is showcased in a film festival. As one of the founders of the San Diego UnderSea Film Exhibition, I have witnessed many novice to advanced videographers smile broadly as they watched their films on a large screen. Their smiles only get bigger once they hear the crowd's applause. However, most film festivals and competitions do have time limits for submissions, usually 3 to 5 minutes. Editing your footage is a must in these situations.

If you have a business such as a dive shop, what a great way to promote the dive classes you teach! A video playing on the front counter as the students and potential customers walk in is a real eye catcher. Comments will abound, as they see the clip of the whale shark, the close up of a beautifully colored nudibranch and the excitement of the shark feed. Are you promoting a dive trip to some exotic destination? A video of the live aboard or resort coupled with some of your best underwater footage is sure to encourage sign ups. Videos for the dive classes demonstrating some of what is being taught will keep your student's interest and provide variety in the class structure. New products, their uses displayed on video certainly have a better chance of selling than a simple brochure. There is a whole milieu of ways to utilize your topside and underwater footage. Learning how to edit will also greatly enhance your videography skills as well. Taking a close look at your footage and being unafraid to appraise your clips honestly will better prepare you for your next underwater shooting adventure. From viewing and editing your own clips you will learn more efficient ways to light your subjects, and to achieve a steady hand when holding your housing. You will gain more insight as to when auto focus really doesn't work to your advantage and when it does, as well as the benefits of white balance and what you can and cannot achieve in post- production (the work that is done within your computer's editing application). Editing forces you to make

decisions. It makes you choose between shots. Which shot is the better of the two, should I use this clip or that before the next, does a night shot go here or there? What position should/could I have been in to achieve a better composition? All of these decisions will stay with you the next time you are filming in the water and make you more conscious of what and how you are filming. Thus, learning to edit your footage will greatly increase your skills as a diver, shooter and post-production specialist.

In my next article, I will focus on the basics of editing for the novice or advanced shooter. In the meantime, take out your Light and Motion housing, jump in the water and get that footage. Then we will learn the many diverse ways we can use it to enhance our films and ourselves.

Bubbles Up,
Steve