



Bringing Feature-Quality Action to Small Screen

Big-budget action on the small screen is not as elusive or as expensive as you might think.

When it comes to action sequences in scripted series, television directors and producers have historically felt that feature-quality, blockbuster action was out of reach. In television, where the demand for rapid turnaround is high and budget considerations are a top priority, heart-stopping action sequences have been thought to be extremely labor-intensive, time-consuming and, as a result, prohibitively expensive.

Television viewers are entitled to experience Memorial Day Weekend box office action every week. All it takes is a change in the paradigm.

Traditionally, it works like this: The concept for a high-octane action sequence is established, then a stunt professional is hired to execute it. If you have about eight days to put something risky (to say the least) on screen—say your protagonist jumps three police squad cars on a motorcycle, commandeers a helicopter and ejects from the aircraft a split second before it goes propeller-first into a skyscraper, then dismantles a nuclear bomb in mid-air—why would you bring in your stunt professional on day four

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or five? Wouldn't it make more sense to involve the action professional earlier in the creative process to maximize every second of time you have to ensure this is carried out safely and on budget? As television moves at the speed of light, shooting schedules prohibit extra rehearsals and allow for only a narrow window separating success from disaster.

In a TV series where action is an integral part of the show, hiring a stunt coordinator to execute a sequence as initially envisioned, with only a few days of notice and/or preparation, is not the optimal use of that individual's talent. The stunt professional's job is not to design



FIRE! Continuity is key to creating complex effects like this "Heroes" scene.

action—it's safety. The stunt professional is brought in simply to perform what's on the page. If what's on the page is flawed, how can he be expected to do it?

When it comes to writing and choreographing action for television, why not go directly to the source—a specialist who understands all aspects of action, from creation to execution? What if you could bring this individual in on the ground level—into the writer's room on day one, at the inception of the creative process, where he could immediately tell you what can and can't be done, factoring in safety parameters, time constraints and budget? There is no more appropriate setting than the TV industry,

action component of an episode and entrusting it to one qualified action professional, you are effectively allowing for more spectacular television, all without paying overtime for multiple individuals.

An action specialist who has experience performing stunts can foresee what problems might be encountered when attempting to execute a sequence, and is the most qualified to prepare for all the logistics required. An experienced specialist also has the skill to prepare for a sequence in as expedient a way as possible, cutting down on the overall number of takes required and thereby significantly reducing costs. He or she will have reliable resources in place, and will be able to provide immediate access to the right people and materials to pull off the stunt within the desired price and time constraints.

Action is its own animal. In order to understand this often unpredictable animal, it takes years of experience in conjunction with a finely honed sense of instinct and some innate talent. Nowhere is this more relevant than in TV production, where razor-thin deadlines could equal disaster without a professional at the helm.

By tightening up the process and eliminating the extraneous cooks in the kitchen, it is definitely within reach to bring feature-quality action to the small screen—on budget and, most importantly, safely. ■

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