Griffith Observatory: Showtime on a cosmic scale

The nearly 100-year-old Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles, California, is well-known for its dazzling planetarium shows. Drawing casual public audiences and stargazing aficionados alike, these productions are impressively intricate: animations and visual effects unite art and science to educate, create a sense of awe and inspire viewers to learn more about the cosmic world.

Griffith Observatory's shows are as beautiful as they are complex. To successfully produce and manage their largest ever project—Signs of Life, a planetarium show conducted on the 75-foot Samuel Oschin Planetarium dome—they established a satellite studio that would build its foundation entirely on ShotGrid. ShotGrid's streamlined, out-of-the-box functionality and ability to integrate with industry-standard applications made it the natural choice.

The results

- **30% communication streamlined**
- **40% asset organization approval**
- **An awe-inspiring, 8K, 60fps planetarium show**
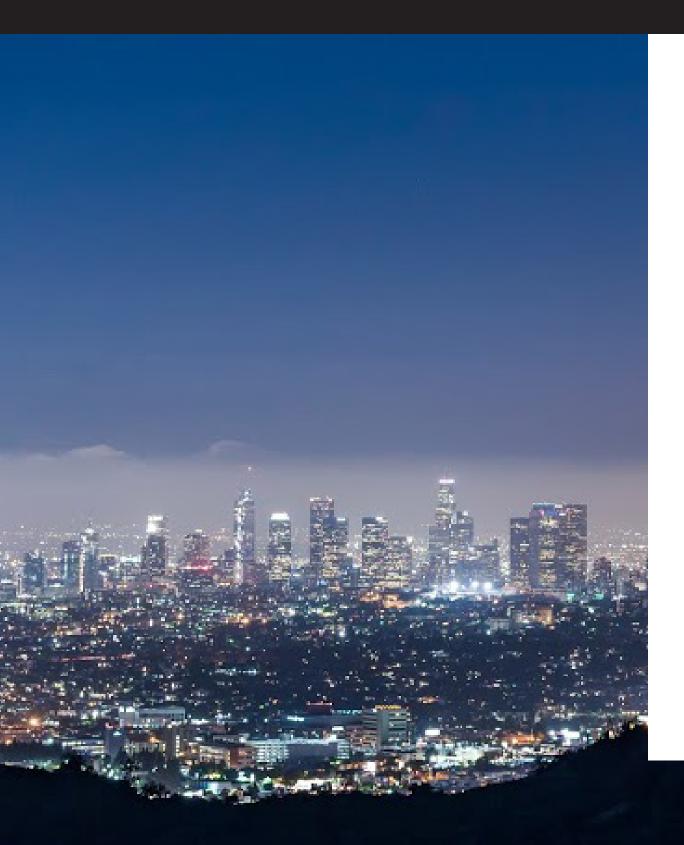
> "ShotGrid's ability to automate processes is one of my favorite features. It saves the team a lot of time and effort from having to manage repetitive tasks. It's what computers are great at, so why not let ShotGrid handle it instead of me?"
>
> Dawn Fidrick, Producer, Griffith Observatory

How they did it

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Strong foundations

From the ground up to the stars

Establishing a new animation studio with limited resources means choosing a pipeline development solution that can work out of the box. Griffith Observatory's satellite studio needed one that a single pipeline supervisor could implement, operate, and manage on their own. Knowing ShotGrid was widely used by larger visual effects and animation studios, the team opted to use ShotGrid Toolkit to build out their pipeline. After integration and onboarding, Griffith Observatory built Signs of Life entirely in ShotGrid and used the production management platform to track everything: final deliverables, assets, shots, tasks, and review notes.

Tailored tools

Integrations and custom code

Efficiency is a must for studios working with limited resources. Griffith Observatory saved time and energy when it mattered most with ShotGrid's industry-leading integrations. The team seamlessly worked in Maya, Nuke, Houdini, AfterEffects, and Photoshop, plus created connections to AWS Thinkbox's Deadline for rendering. Any project rendered on the farm automatically triggered a post process and was automatically uploaded to the ShotGrid project.

The ability to automate tasks frees up creative resources for animation studios, especially when time is at a premium. Signs of Life was to be projected onto Griffith's Observatory's massive and immersive 75-foot planetarium dome, by six synced Christie projectors. Slicing and distributing each domemaster image into 24 segments (4 to each projector) seemed ripe for automation. Slice Ticket was born: a custom image management tool within ShotGrid. A script built by planetarium tech partner Evans & Sutherland communicates with AWS Thinkbox's Deadline and ShotGrid to make it run on the observatory's render farm.

Streamlined communication

Staying on track and on task

As productions ramp up, steady, easy-to-track communications between different teams and members becomes critical. ShotGrid provides Griffith Observatory's satellite studio with a single place to browse versions, see the latest work, make annotations, and prepare for next steps. Unlike email and spreadsheet-based communication systems, ShotGrid records communication in the context of assets or shots, making it easier to see the details where they're at.

The bottom line

01
Easy-to-develop pipeline base

02
Automated processes

03
Better communication

> "Using ShotGrid on Signs of Life helped our team implement best practices for production used by larger studios, which ultimately elevated the quality of our final output. I love the creative process and working with artists, and with ShotGrid managing the cumbersome and technical aspects of production, our team was able to harness ingenuity and develop a truly impressive show."
>
> Dawn Fidrick, Producer, Griffith Observatory

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