



GETTY IMAGES

stock options

Danny Edwards delves into the archives of the companies whose stock-in-trade is so much more than just black and white news footage or shots of planes taking off...

A brief but insightful word association game was played prior to writing this article. Unusually, the starting point wasn't a swear word but instead the term 'stock footage'. Responses to this ranged from, 'the war' and 'black and white' to 'cheesy' and 'cheap' through to the less helpful 'I'm not playing if it's not a swear word'.

Ignoring the last comment, it seems that stock footage has something of an image problem. Or at least, it did have. Over the last few years and certainly since the advancement of the internet, with its high-speed connection and downloading capabilities, the business of stock footage has somewhat reinvented itself. No longer is black and white archive news footage and



Images from UK channel
More4's US Election
Season campaign



Stock answers:
from coastal scene
to trading floor

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clichéd shots of harassed stockbrokers the stock footage norm (though the latter may have come in handy recently). In fact, even the term stock footage is now frowned upon by some in the industry.

"I think we need to stop calling it stock footage," insists Paul Maidment, business development director at BBC Motion Gallery. "Well, I suppose some of it is stock footage... you know, like if an agency needs a shot of a heart beating or the sun setting in a particular way. But what we're really supplying to the industry is a range of creative content. We're a creative content owner and content partner."

A QUESTION OF 'CREATIVITY'

Just lofty ideas above their station, you might think. Maidment believes not, and he's not the only one. More than that, he's also got a very good point. "What we've been trying to do over the last few years," continues Maidment, "is attempt to be more proactive and approach agencies earlier so that we're able to work with them when a brief comes in and we can look, creatively, into the archive."

And there's the rub; that word, 'creativity'. Whether you refer to it as creative content or stock footage, for too long its use was seen by many as either a last resort or a budgetary necessity, and not as something that could actively add to the creative integrity of a piece of work. BBC Motion Gallery is just one of the companies working to make what Maidment now calls creative content a more integral part of the creative process.

"We are working with creatives from many different industries to try to change their perception of what stock footage is," agrees Wolfgang Jaiser, a freelance creative director at stock specialists Framepool. "I think they sometimes see it as boring, or think it looks weird or old, but all that's changed dramatically over recent years, because the footage we have now is fresh and modern. Unless, of course, you're looking for old footage."

LOW RESOLUTION, SPEED OF THOUGHT

There's a tendency nowadays for agencies to use the services of these companies to create mood reels, and that's exactly the sort of thing that the likes of Framepool and BBC Motion Gallery are after. The talk of getting to agencies earlier in the creative process starts with exactly such things as mood reels, and this is also something that can be done for free, as most companies, including Framepool and BBC Motion Gallery, allow users to download low resolution, watermarked content to create such reels and alert clients to the possibilities that archive shots provides.

Getty Images is another company that allows low resolution footage to be taken from its site and it's the internet that has propelled its business into the creative foreground. "The internet has had a dramatic and positive impact on the stock footage industry," comments Vanessa Lewis, manager, national events, at Getty Images. "It has dramatically improved the ease and timeliness of searching, reviewing and purchasing stock footage. A customer can now easily search, preview, purchase and download [from our library] in



E166 saving based on a customer with a typical annual consumption (3,900 kWh Electricity & 20,500 kWh Gas) reducing it by 17% over 12 months



Energy saving measures sourced by Energy Saving Trust

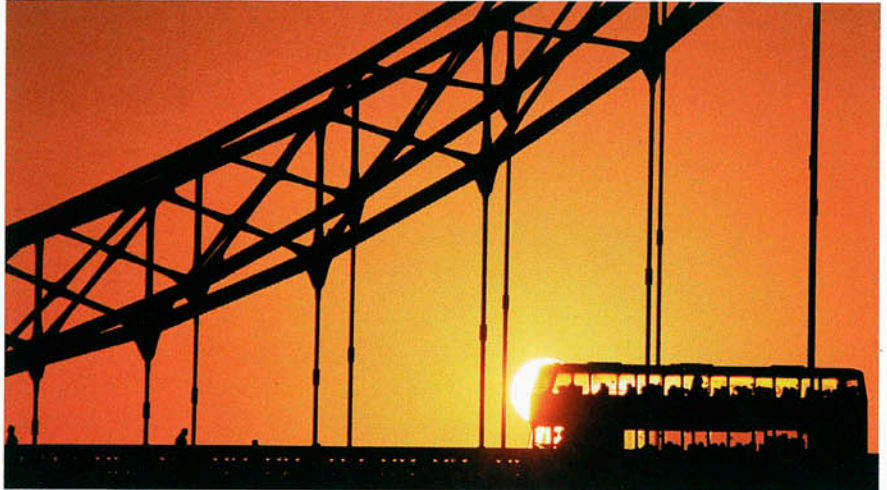
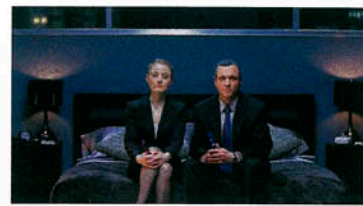


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EDF Energy's Click, created from 'recycled' footage



Mother New York used stock footage for their KY Jelly campaign



Classic footage: a London bus crossing Tower Bridge

a matter of minutes from anywhere in the world. The days of waiting for a response, overnight tape delivery and wading through screeners are thankfully a thing of the past now."

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Of course, archive shots companies aren't able to replace production companies and become a one-stop-shop for any and all footage, and nor are they trying to. What they can provide is both production value and creative inspiration for a project. "We try to support the users of Framepool," says Jaiser, "so they can get more value into their projects because you don't have to shoot everything yourself."

If, as Jaiser suggests, you want a two second establishing shot of London, it could cost tens of thousands of pounds and a whole lot of time to shoot that yourself. "But if you bought that [footage] at Framepool," he says, "then it could cost just two or three thousand pounds, saving a lot of time and money that you could be using for other things."

In terms of creative relevance, Maidment references BBC Motion Gallery's work with JWT on an HSBC campaign from a couple of years ago which involved using a lot of natural history footage. "We took [the creatives] to the BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol," explains Maidment, "where we sat with them in what admittedly is a slightly archaic setting but which has a huge amount of amazing footage." The creatives found exactly what they needed for the campaign and Maidment and his team were then able to work

with the agency on how they could be as creative with the footage as possible. "We're trying to let agencies know that they can access footage really easily," he says. "They know it's going to be cheaper than shooting the material themselves, but we want to convince them that they can get the right shot and still be creative with it."

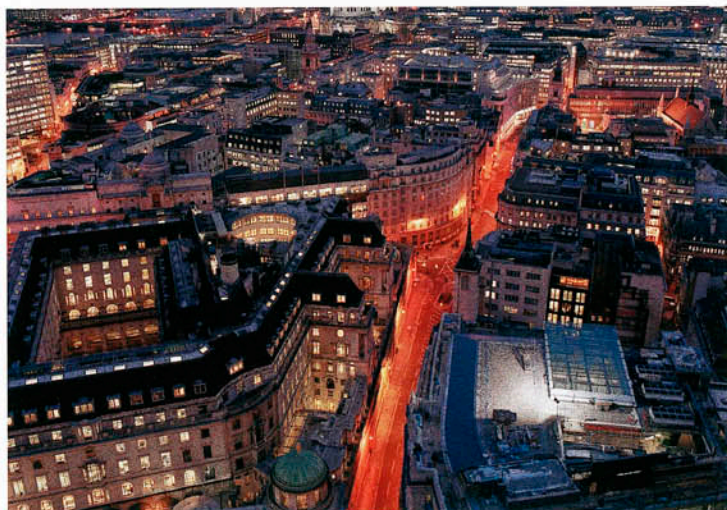
Use of stock footage in the commercials world seems to be on the increase and that, in part, has to do with the evolved technology now available to support its use, as well as the increased financial pressure put on commercial makers. "We definitely believe that [the use of stock footage] is on the increase," says Getty Images' Lewis. "And we see this as being a result of the improved depth, breadth, quality and accessibility of stock footage, along with the creative community being given increasingly demanding budgets and time constraints."

QUALITY OVERTAKES QUANTITY

Demanding budgets are certainly one of the reasons people might turn to archive shots. As Framepool's Jaiser has already mentioned, the cost to an agency or production company of procuring a piece of stock footage could be much less than if they were to go out and shoot that same footage themselves. That's a point not in debate, however. What is in debate, is the creative offerings that stock footage can provide and this is where companies like Getty Images, Framepool and BBC Motion Gallery are all singing from the same hymn sheet. 🎵



More stock imagery employed by More4



"Stock footage is still an invaluable resource for clients to produce a project within tight budgets, but the depth, breadth, quality and accessibility of today's stock has led to it becoming a critical part of the creative process for many customers..."



Stock take: from the city streets to heart surgery

"Being honest and realistic," admits Maidment, "there is still a perception within agencies, traditional and digital, that using archive footage is somehow less creative than they need it to be... [So] we're trying to let agencies know that they can not only access footage really easily; we want to convince them that they can get the right shot and then still go on to be as creative with it as they like."

SOMETHING BORROWED, SOMETHING NEW

Framepool recently worked on a spot with director Ben Dawkins of Stink London and agency S-W-H Amsterdam for confectionary brand, Truly Candy, and Jaiser explains that, although the spot was made up entirely of stock footage, its creative integrity was in no way compromised. "It was a brilliant idea for a spot," he explains, "but it's really hard to go out and film a squirrel, which the spot required. And they did an amazing job because they have all this 3D animation over the archive shots so it's like a collage. Sometimes you want to paint something yourself but other times it's nice to take something already in existence and make something new out of it."

Another Framepool job was carried out for that bastion of schoolboy humour, KY Jelly. Shot by David Shane, a director at O Positive, the spots only briefly use stock footage to represent the moment of climax, but the creatives at Mother New York thought it would be more interesting to use stock footage than to shoot it themselves, and Shane was in complete agreement. "We could never have achieved the overall strangeness and

texture of the stock stuff without throwing a lot of money and time at it," says Shane. "The thing we also wanted to do, and this was an agency decision before I ever even got involved, was to deliberately avoid the kind of default setting metaphors for sex; trains going through tunnels, cigars, and that sort of thing." So the choice to use archive shots was, for this commercial, integral to the look and feel of the final commercial? "Yes," replies Shane, "it was obviously more playful to find stock than to go out and try to shoot these images."

MOTHER OF INVENTION

What the current crop of stock footage, or indeed creative content, companies seem to be proving, is that with the right guidance and the right planning, the images that they can supply need not be simply ones to accommodate tight budgets and even tighter schedules. "Stock footage is still an invaluable resource for clients to produce a quality project within tight budgets and time constraints," says Lewis, "but the depth, breadth, quality and accessibility of today's archive shots has led to it becoming a critical part of the creative process for many customers."

"We're really like a second-hand store," sums up Jaiser with a sartorial analogy. "You might be able to find the perfect jacket that, if it were bespoke, you'd pay a lot for. If that second-hand jacket fits you then great, but if it doesn't fit, well, that's when maybe you have to think about getting it made bespoke after all." 🕒