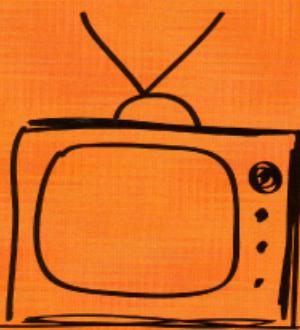


CINEMA EDITOR



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Above: Steve Carell as Michael Scott in NBC's comedy *The Office*. NBC Photo: Chris Haston

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INSIDE

the office

A TALE OF 2 EDITORS

By Scott Essman

In a nondescript warehouse section of Van Nuys, far north of the chaos of Ventura Boulevard, the stages and offices for one of TV's funniest shows sit scattered on a small lot which ironically doesn't seem to garner a great deal of attention considering its otherwise lite industrial surroundings. Security seems lax at best, and the vibe is quite casual. Yet just inside the doors of the main stages, one is immediately transported to the familiar locales of the Scranton, Pennsylvania-based Dunder Mifflin Paper Company.





Top Salesmen of the Month

Emmy Winning Editors
David Rogers and Dean Holland
NBC Photo: Chris Haston

Based on a British TV series of the same name, the US series "The Office" was developed for NBC by executive producer Greg Daniels, and stars Steve Carell, Rainn Wilson, John Krasinski, Jenna Fischer, and B.J. Novak. Unique in that it has a single-camera documentary-style approach (characters will even acknowledge the camera as if they were in a mockumentary format show), the show relies on improvisation and many takes of its scenes to create the unmistakable humor for which the show is known and has won top prime time ratings while racking up a trove of awards.

Originally a mid-season replacement in the spring of 2005, "The Office" is now preparing for its fifth season of network broadcasting and has joined the ranks of other successfully syndicated comedies. Not relying on a laugh track or studio audience, all of the humor is inherent in "The Office's" many comical characters and situations.

Putting this all together are two East Coast-born and bred editors who have become the show's true champions, each winning an ACE Eddie Award and Emmy for his work on "The Office" in 2007: Dean Holland and Dave Rogers. Both have been TV editors for most of this decade though they are still notably young. Without any undue arrogance, the two come across as humble, informal craftspeople

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who are unquestionably and firmly focused on the pulse of what makes their show tick and how to best achieve the goals of the show in post.

Both men have been with the show most of the way; Rogers came in just after the pilot while Holland came on in the second season. Six episodes were done for the first season, which were shot in Culver City, all edited by Rogers. Then, the show moved up to Van Nuys and Holland was brought in to edit every other episode during season two, which featured 22 episodes. Season three consisted of 25 episodes while season four had 19. By the end of July, shooting will have commenced on season five. In addition to their regular duties, the pair will edit syndicated cut-downs and DVD material, so they hardly got a summer vacation this year.

Since the outset of the show, Rogers has noted several changes. "The scripts are getting longer and more packed, so we're getting more footage," he said. "My executive producer has developed more of a trust with us. He asks, 'What do you guys think?' He doesn't have to tear the guts out of stuff and ask us to try a million things then go back to what we have. He knows if these editor guys have chosen this, there's a reason for it."

Holland concurs, "There is definitely that element of trust that Greg Daniels has with us now," he said. "Not as a credit to us, but very often what will happen is that we string together everything, so our first cuts tend to be really long. Then a director will come in, and a writer will come and do all of this stuff. Then, Greg will come back and work off of our 40-minute editor's cut. Maybe it was the first time he saw a version of the show, and it was the first time he liked it."

Ideally, if the show starts shooting on a Monday, the editors will start getting dailies on a Tuesday and



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Rainn Wilson as Dwight Schrute
and Ed Helms as Andy Bernard
NBC Photo: Byron J. Cohen

will keep getting them through the next Monday. They will deliver an editor's cut that Tuesday night or more likely Wednesday. While production is shooting, the editors are locking the previous episode or working with the director or writer of that episode, so Wednesday might get pushed to Thursday. Then, it will get to Daniels for review before it goes to the network, after which the editors will usually do a polishing or a tightening.

Normally, Holland and Rogers will be simultaneously working on two or three different episodes in different stages of completion.

"Honestly, the hardest part is the first pass, the editor's cut, which is really an assembly," said Rogers. "After that, the director or writer is sitting with you. We've laid out the road, and then we are repaving. The hardest part is making the road the first time."

Since they have had the challenge of first looking at all of the footage that an episode comprises, often 40-60 hours worth, Holland noted that the rest of the cuts are easier. "You are finessing what already exists," he said, "and it's getting shorter too."

Most of the show involves shooting many takes of each line of dialogue—up to 84 takes of a talking head and 30 takes of a full scene. "We look at everything," Rogers said. "It's lots of takes, but it's also enough material for nearly an hour-long show. In season two, we did many super-sized episodes, with more air time than usual. The first thing that Greg does when he calls the network about an episode is to ask for more time."

With Daniels, the editors will go through the writers' and directors' notes and use elements while going through all of the scenes on separate note cards. From the 38-40 minute editor's cut, the three will pare down an episode to 21:30 including the main title and end credits—which means that they are taking out nearly half of the show with Daniels' input.

Due to the scripts getting longer, the editors take on a new function to get down to their locked cut of less than 22 minutes. "We rewrite the episode in the editing room," said Holland. "Because you have so much material, you end up re-telling stories. The

episode completely changes from the written script to what the final product is."

Certainly, the editors deem the overabundance of script (approximately 38-pages per episode) and filmed material as a reason why "The Office" has a winning formula. "That's the brilliance of our show: that we do get to remodel it," Holland said. "We have all of this amazing material. The stuff that we cut out is not bad at all. It's really good stuff. You struggle over what gets cut out. Because there is so much of it, you can't just take stuff out because then the stories are incomplete. So you kind of have to refocus the stories to fit into a 21-minute episode. It is all funny—it is all good. I feel like that's how we make such great shows. If they were to write 25-page scripts, we'd have an awesome 15-minute show."

After the editors do their pass in which they stay loyal to the script, even if they know certain sections work better than others, they show it to the director and writers so that they can see for themselves which items work well and which less so. "It's all part of Greg's process," said Rogers. "He wants to see what everybody has done. If we do something great with the director or writer and Greg wants to go back to the editor's cut, I'll still say that we did something in this pass that he should check out. Sometimes it's much better. Especially in our show, things are modular where this scene takes place after this scene, but we can take this scene out—it's like a big puzzle."

Given the nature of the show, the editors enjoy the writers' input.
"That's why it's helpful that the writers come down," Holland added. "They all get a day, typically, in the edit room. And they come back because it is a big team process—while we're in the edit room, the show changes."

Regardless of editor-director-writer input, "The Office" is ultimately Greg Daniels' show, and the editors fully justify his position. "Greg has final say, and I have to say that he is really incredible in the edit bay," said Rogers. "That has also changed from season one. A lot of his background came from animation, and he'd make those kinds of requests. Now he comes up with solutions. Here's the story and it's 24 minutes now—we have to take three

Caught in the Act

Below: Jenna Fischer as Pam Beesly and John Krasinski as Jim Halpert
NBC Photo: Byron J. Cohen



YOUR MAMA
DOESN'T
WORK HERE.
PLEASE PICK
UP AFTER
YOURSELF

Office Hottie

Jenna Fischer as Pam Beesly
NBC Photo: Chris Haston



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minutes out. He knows what to do from the beginning—he blows you away.”

“He’s one of the best people in the edit room I’ve ever worked with,” Holland continued. “He has turned me into a storyteller in the edit room in the three years that I’ve been here. He’s really talented. Everybody’s worked with someone who sits in the chair behind him where the guy doesn’t know jack. It’s nice to know that Greg does, and 99.9% of the time, I agree with his decisions. I can’t even think of one where I didn’t.”

With their executive producer in sync with the post team, the editors both feel they are much better for all being on the same page. “Dean’s the same as me—we are both very blunt,” said Rogers. “We’ll say that something’s no good, and Greg will go with it.”

“I’ve locked an episode,” Holland said, “and he’s been walking down the hall, and I’ve called him back to make changes. He trusts us—he asks what we think we should do. He doesn’t want to, but you keep him here for two more hours just to make that small change. Our show is so tight that if you want to add something 30 seconds long, you have to lose 30 seconds, and how do you do that? That’s what becomes really hard.”

After Daniels does his producer’s pass, which can take one to four days, an episode will be sent to the network, and then there will be a notes call with network executives, on which the editors are invited. A further printout from Daniels’ assistant will be handed to the editors. Sometimes the notes from the network (who, according to the editors, “get” the show) are implemented at Daniels’ discretion, provided that the footage exists. Other times, the notes will not be used, but the editors agree that the network and Daniels never battle as they are all working towards the best possible version of an episode. For the internet, the editors will also create a longer producer’s cut which now includes 4:26 of deleted scenes that often go on NBC.com or iTunes.

To wade through the mounds of footage, the editors share two assistants—one works during the day and another at night. One of their main responsibilities is to cut out useless interstitial material from “The

Office’s” unusual practice of not turning off the camera between takes. Of course, the assistants also mark the takes—achieved with two on-set cameras—and organize the footage into scenes. The night assistant has four Avids into which he loads material so that when Rogers and Holland—who divide editing duties by taking either all of the odd or even episodes—come in to edit in the morning, they have new material to cut. Then, the day assistant continues organizing the material in the morning. Sometimes, Rogers and Holland will share an episode such as a super-sized one or a season finale, at which time, they split the workload.

“*The Office*” shoots on 24p HD video and is down-converted to DVCAM tapes by UDS (Universal Digital Services). The show’s assistant editors will receive the tapes which are then digitized into the Avid. “If they shoot something in the morning that has to get to us,” Holland explained, “they can send it to UDS and a couple hours later it can be back here, where film is not that fast. Later, we do a full online edit that goes to air.”

Source music typically fills the show as there is rarely any score. As a result, most of the editors’ work on sound is in manipulating dialogue. “I’m always blown away by what our sound team does with background and ambiances,” Rogers said. “We only work on dialogue, and they clean up all of our dialogue. Our audience is always the group of writers, so it needs to be as smooth as possible. If you do have to do ADR, you do it the next day with the actors on the set.”

Both editors and the assistants are networked on the Unity and utilize G4 running Macintosh OS9 Meridian with Avid System 11.26. “When we started on season two and we knew that we had multiple Avids, everyone said that the OSX Unity was buggy,” Holland and Rogers both stated. “We have just stayed with Meridian. Adrenalines are much better now with Mac. We keep all of our shows online throughout a season as we might use different scenes or shots for cutaways.”

In contemplating the art of their series, the editors reflect on how they achieve the best possible show. “You have to watch everything and let stuff



breathe," Rogers said. "It's not about cutting out a little of each scene to make it fit. Some scenes have to be sacrificed. You have to take a whole scene out because you have to play a whole other scene and give it air—give it beats."

Holland agreed and added, "Part of the brilliance of the show are these moments that are long and may seem boring as you're cutting them, but it's this really dry long pause that makes it funny. We had one talking head that was 1:05 long. That's 1/20 of our show. How can you leave it that long? But it was hysterical. That's what I love. You need to know when to salvage those moments and when to sacrifice others. And a lot of that comes from Greg—it's his call. It's all about the pace."

Not everything comes as easily as letting a one-minute scene play uncut. "We have to hunt a lot of times," Rogers said. "People say 'that reaction shot was perfect. Did you line that up and have the camera there ready for that person to react?' No—we stole that from five scenes before. It happens all the time—at least once an episode. The nature of the show is to have these cameras zipping around. But I need a shot of someone reacting. I have a camera on the person for 17 frames, but that's not long enough. You have to steal it from somewhere. There are times where we have stolen reactions from an entirely different episode!"

One time Holland remembered a reaction shot from a different episode than the one he was working on, so he stole a shot and used it. However, the character's shirt was different, so the production had to send the shot out to visual effects to change its color. "There is so much footage, I don't know

how you could remember all the shots," he said. "The reason that this show is so funny, is because every step of the way, funny happens: from conception, to the writers, to the camera work and directors and then us. It's this team of people who are trying to make this show funny. Our part is getting a scene and carving the best specific moments in the footage."

"Instinctually, our cameramen always go to the action," Holland said. "So even though they are supposed to be getting this reaction pass, they are afraid that the actors are going to do something that they are going to miss. So our reaction passes tend to be the same as the rest of the passes. Unless it's a really big scene and they officially do a reaction pass, you have to steal five of your reactions throughout the episode from other shots."

So, in a comedy such as *"The Office,"* how does an editor know when to cut on a moment and create exactly the same tone on every show? "It comes down to a feel—what makes me laugh," Rogers said. Holland added, "Dave and I can watch a take and decide when to cut right at the same time. I don't think you can tell the difference between episodes that he cuts and episodes I cut. Our pace and our feel for the show is the same. Greg once said, 'I don't know how they cut the way they do, but they do it and it's great, so leave them alone.' It's this rhythm where you just know when to cut. 10 frames more or 10 frames less can kill it. I just go with what I think is funny."

Perhaps Rogers summed up the *modus operandi* on the editing of the show: "It's definitely a different animal to make people laugh—to cut something that brings out the funny." ☐

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Working well with others

David Rogers, Steve Carell, and Dean Holland
NBC Photo: Chris Haston

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