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Quibi



► *Dummy*, the first scripted show Quibi put into production, follows an aspiring writer (Anna Kendrick) who befriends her boyfriend's sex doll. ►▼ Cinematographer Catherine Goldschmidt uses the Artemis Prime viewfinder on the set of *Dummy*.

Hold the Phone

When using a smartphone to text, talk, or browse social media, people typically hold the device in the vertical orientation. And according to mobile-advertising firm MediaBrix (as reported by “explainer video” production house Breadnbeyond), when users don't have to rotate their device horizontally to watch a promotional video, those videos see a higher rate of completion. And though there's a clear difference between watching a vertical ad or social video on TikTok or Snapchat and watching a widescreen feature on Netflix or Amazon, social platforms command wide attention and influence user behavior — making this viewing preference a necessary part of the streaming-content conversation. As a result, more production companies, news agencies and direct-to-consumer digital media platforms are experimenting with the vertical format.

The biggest industry commitment to integrating a vertical component into filmmaking arguably came with the April 2020 launch of Quibi — originally intended as a mobile-only streaming service — that offers original narrative and unscripted series in “quick bites” of 10 minutes or less. When viewers rotate their device, Quibi's app uses a technology called “Turnstyle” to dynamically switch between concurrently downloading horizontal and vertical video streams. In an interview with *The Verge* ahead of Quibi's unveiling at CES 2020, founder Jeffrey Katzenberg called this “the third generation of film narrative.”

Though Quibi has since announced plans to allow viewing of its content on compatible TVs, the service's mobile-viewing raison



“A lot depends on the story you're telling. I can't imagine making the same framing choices for, say, a nine-person ensemble cast. Luckily, *Dummy* is mostly a two-hander, a buddy comedy about a woman and a sex doll. That fact alone made framing for the vertical aspect ratio easier, but it was still something that kept us up at night.”

— Catherine Goldschmidt on *Dummy*

d'être remains. High-level filmmakers and A-list casts collaborating on productions specific to mobile devices is a concept that's just now taking shape, and AC sought the perspectives of cinematographers working on these heretofore unconventional projects.

Dummy, the first scripted show Quibi put into production, follows an aspiring writer (Anna Kendrick) who befriends her boyfriend's sex doll. “They showed us some in-house camera tests and shared their best practices for how to shoot two aspect ratios at once: Keep the cameras hori-



“Interesting genres take interesting means.”
— Peter Levy, ASC, ACS
on *The Fugitive*



▲▲▲ Kiefer Sutherland plays LAPD Detective Clay Bryce in the Quibi series *The Fugitive*, photographed by Peter Levy, ASC, ACS. ▲▲ From left: B-camera operator Andrew Jeric, Levy and B-camera 1st AC Toby White. ▲ Gaffer Jeremy Graham and Levy.

zontal, frame for 16:9, shoot wide and crop-in in post,” says cinematographer Catherine Goldschmidt, whose credits include *Doctor Who* and additional photography for *Spider-Man: Far From Home*. “My approach was to frame for a square, then take both aspect ratios out of that. Since both frames have the same dimensions and resolutions, a medium close-up stays a medium close-up. A two-shot can stay a two-shot, essentially.”

Goldschmidt shot *Dummy* with two Sony Venice cameras — capturing X-OCN LT/ProRes 422 — and Panaspeed and modified Primo 70 primes rented from Panavision Woodland Hills. The Venice was chosen for its 6K sensor’s 4K vertical resolution in the 3:2 full-frame mode, so lenses didn’t necessarily have to cover the full width, just height.

“My first instinct was that our frame lines should be common top,” Goldschmidt recalls. “I scouted with [a Chemical Wedding] Artemis Prime viewfinder — which allows you to draw multiple custom frame lines — and realized that with a common top, the 9:16 composition showed too much floor, so I offset the frames into a kind of ‘crucifixion’ orientation. We couldn’t take it for granted that we’d never see the floor, but it was an improvement when it came to balancing the vertical frame.”

As the Sony Venice firmware supported a maximum of two frame lines, DIT Peter Brunet ran each camera through a Convergent Design Odyssey7Q to generate the necessary guides, then back to the camera for operators Brian Fresh and April Kelley.

Goldschmidt and director Tricia Brock checked the cropped frames on 7" monitors to emulate the experience of watching the show on a mobile

Middle image by Richard Foreman. Bottom image by Andrew Jeric.



"I wanted [Quibi's #Freerayshawn] to look cinematic on a phone, so we shot wide open and used wide lenses to make it feel like you're closer to the characters," cinematographer Maz Makhani says. Close-focus diopters were used with the Leitz primes for an added sense of dimension.

Shooting this way, Makhani saw that when a vertical shot was framed from the waist or chest up, like a portrait, "it felt almost better than a horizontal frame, where framing wider for the vertical created too much floor and headspace. By shooting with a high-res image, the editor could punch in and tell the story the way they wanted to."

device. Quibi requests UHD 3840x2160 and 1080x1920 deliverables, and *Dummy* was able to provide 4K assets in both orientations. Light Iron handled the dailies and final color workflow.

"Editor Lee Haugen [would find] what we were looking for in the vertical, and when he didn't, I worked in the grade with Nicholas Hasson at Light Iron to make the framing right for both versions," the cinematographer says. "The grade was designed to work for both versions, but we had to see how the



▲▲ #Freerayshawn follows an Iraq War veteran, Rayshawn (Stephan James), who finds himself in a showdown with the New Orleans SWAT team and tries to negotiate his way out of the situation. ▲ Crewmembers prep a motorcycle-mounted camera.

different framing would affect our perception of color and the parts of the frame that we hadn't seen before.

Remarking on *The Fugitive* — a show that tracks wrongly accused Mike Ferro (Boyd Holbrook) and his action-packed effort to evade apprehension by LAPD Detective Clay Bryce (Kiefer Sutherland) — Peter

Levy, ASC, ACS notes, "I didn't realize that Quibi was exclusively for the phone when I took the job, so I planned to shoot it like I would anything else for television: 1.78:1, using wider lenses when I could." Once he learned of the mobile priority, he opted to put a premium on "composition and contrast," he says,