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CASTING & CREW CALLS / FILM & TV PRODUCTIONS IN PREPARATION



# Scenchronize Bringing Production Management into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

By Robert Latham Brown

I recently attended the Digital Day conference at the Directors Guild of America in Hollywood. After spending the day being dazzled by presentations on the new digital image technology that's available, I wandered out of the auditorium and walked over to the display that *Scenchronize* had put up ([www.scenchronize.com](http://www.scenchronize.com)). A production board image was glowing on a flat screen monitor that was connected to a minitower computer. Oh, I thought, a new scheduling program. Let me explain how spectacularly wrong I was.

As Darren Ehlers, COO, demonstrated a few of the features of the program, I learned that the application runs completely within an Internet browser off servers located in San Francisco. It's so fast that I thought it had been installed on the computer in front of me. Rather, I was looking at how film productions will be managed in the future — via enterprise level software available to anyone. The company that produced *Scenchronize*, CleverMachine, has written software applications for a financial services company that manages over \$10 billion in assets. Any concerns that I had about security were quickly allayed.

## Getting Started

Getting started couldn't be simpler. You can log on to [www.scenchronize.com](http://www.scenchronize.com) using almost any browser and begin your own trial project as you read this article, and it won't cost a cent. (The only browser it has problems with is *Internet Explorer 7*, and *Scenchronize* isn't alone in this. I was using *Firefox* but *Internet Explorer 8*, *Safari*, *Opera*, and *Google Chrome* also work.) Once on the site, click "Sign up now for Free," and you are taken to a page where you can create an account for your project. At this point,

as a single user, *Scenchronize* is free. Costs are incurred as you add other people to the project, and costs scale up with the viability of your funding.

The *Scenchronize* folks are well aware that production managers and/or line producers are often asked to put together a schedule and budget long before any money is available. For that reason, you can assemble a schedule and begin planning your project without spending any money. *Scenchronize* doesn't have a budgeting module at this time, but it enables you to generate a schedule and manage all of the documents and information that planning a production entails.

Once you have created your account and verified that you own your email address, *Scenchronize* asks you to upload your

print the script as a PDF. Choose this option over *saving* it as a PDF.

For this article, I uploaded an ordinary PDF script without scene numbers. *Scenchronize* recognized that it didn't have scene numbers and asked if I wanted it to add them. When I responded "yes," the program asked me what to do with the title I had written on the first page (since it had not recognized it as a standard script element), split the script into breakdown sheets and presented me with sheet #1 (fig. 1) with the set, time of day, page count, and cast already filled in.

All this happened in less than 40 seconds from when I clicked "upload" using my standard residential DSL connection that purportedly has speeds up to 768 Kbps. It was conducted over a secure connection

(https), just like when you make a credit card purchase via the Internet. And I hadn't used *Final Draft Tagger* or the script breakdown function in *Movie Magic Screenwriter*.

I don't like using the script breakdown functions of *Tagger* and *Screenwriter*. All of them, including *Scenchronize*, use the slug lines to divide the script into shooting sequences, and very often shooting sequences do not start and stop with each slug line. Sometimes a shooting sequence may be part of a scene or may include several scenes. With all software breakdown tools, you must go through the breakdown sheets and edit them. This includes adding elements, splitting sheets, combining

sheets and generally cleaning up the software's mistakes. I find this a painful process. I'd rather do it by hand. You often have to be meticulous in how you select elements from the script page to tag them, and the software is clunky and sometimes unresponsive. Splitting breakdown sheets

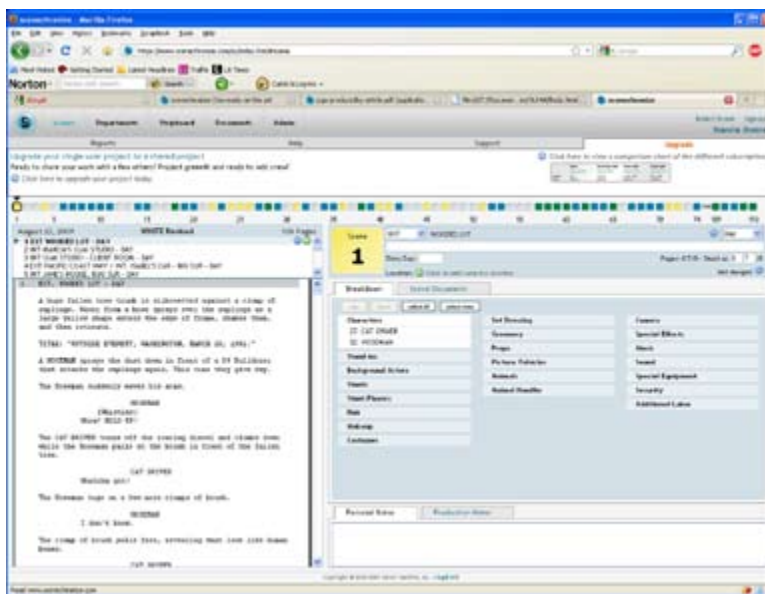


Fig. 1 Breakdown sheet

script. If you don't have a script and simply want to learn more about the program, you can use a script that the program provides. I found the easiest format to upload the script is PDF, but make sure that it's a searchable PDF and not an image PDF, so that *Scenchronize* can analyze what is written. Most scriptwriting programs allow you to



or combining them has to wait until you get the file into your scheduling software and that involves laborious copying, more editing, and renumbering.

Scenechronize makes this painless and kind of fun. Adding an element is as simple as highlighting it on the script page (fig. 2). I wanted to add “huge fallen tree” to set dressing so I dragged my mouse over “ge fallen t” and the software knew what I wanted. It highlighted “huge fallen tree,” opened a dialogue box with the element allowing me to pick “set dressing” from a drop-down list, and as soon as I clicked “Create New Element” it added it to the breakdown sheet. If you’d rather just type in the elements rather than dragging your mouse over them, you can do that in the same window. This doesn’t have to be done in any special order; just add the elements as you come across them on the page.

Combining two or more breakdown sheets into one is just as easy. For instance,

in the script I uploaded, I wanted to combine breakdown sheet 8 with sheet 10. I clicked on sheet 8 in the list of scenes, and then clicked on “Not Merged” in the upper right corner of the breakdown sheet. That brought up a window that allowed me to click on the sheets that I wanted to merge (fig. 3).

Splitting a scene into two or more breakdown sheets is done by clicking on the green plus button to the right of the scene in the scene list. This opens a dialogue box and allows you to split the scene into two parts (fig. 4). Repeat to split it into more parts as needed.

### Scheduling

Once breakdown sheets are completed, you can click on the “Stripboard” tab, which takes you to a graphical representation of your board (fig. 5). Sorting is as easy as clicking on “Sort and manage day breaks.” When you click, you’re taken to a screen that allows you to enter as many sort terms as you

like such as Locations, Sets, Time of Day, Int/Ext, or pretty much any information on the breakdown sheet. An especially nice touch to this screen is that it tells you exactly what will happen if you click on “Proceed.” This same screen will put in day break strips based on how many pages you wish to shoot per day. Obviously, you’ll want to adjust the days it creates once the sort is finished. That’s easily accomplished by dragging and dropping strips.

When I sorted the board I’d created for a feature script, it took less than five seconds. I continue to be amazed at this application’s speed, even though it’s running over the Internet.

The strip board also allows you to set up your calendar with a start date, choice of five or six-day weeks, and you can manually select holidays or days off. Once you’ve got a schedule finished, you can publish it. After publishing the schedule, you can get all of the standard reports such as

*Continued*

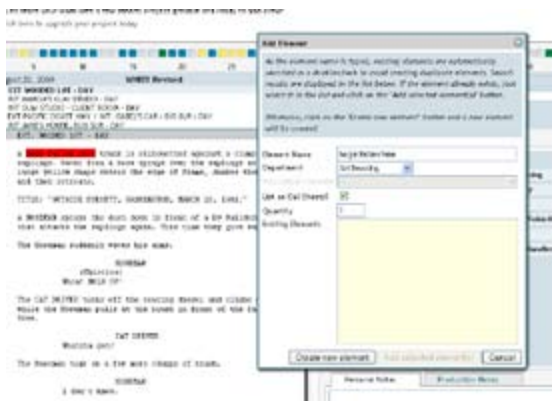


Fig. 2

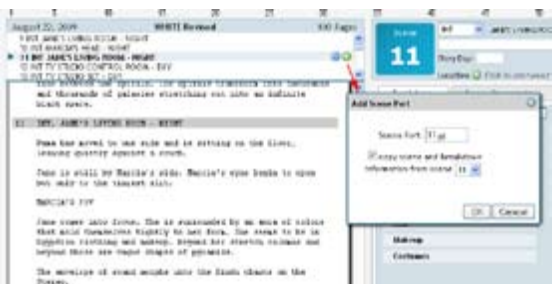


Fig. 4

Fig. 2 Adding an element to the breakdown sheet. Fig. 3 Combining breakdown sheets. Fig. 4 Splitting scenes into more than one shooting sequence. Fig. 5 The stripboard.



Fig. 3

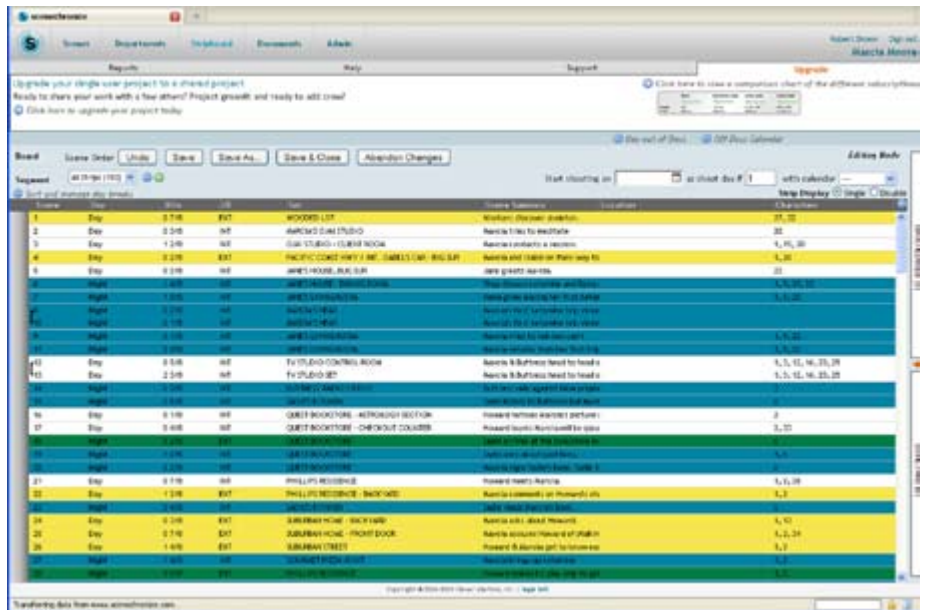


Fig. 5

shooting schedules, one-line schedules, day-out-of-days, stripboards, individual strips, department breakdowns, call sheet information for any given day, etc. The call sheet information is downloaded as an Excel spreadsheet and can be copied and pasted into any customized Excel call sheet form.

The day-out-of-days is interactive and can also be downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet. This caught my attention because I often copy the computer generated DOD by hand into an Excel spreadsheet I devised which helps determine if I can meet the SAG Diversity in Casting requirements, number of dressing rooms needed each day, the number of above-the-line checks I'll issue each week, and much more. With *Scenechronize*, I can just copy and paste the DOD into my form, which saves a huge amount of time and prevents human error (on my part).

### Additional Units/Segments

Second units, visual effects units, aerial units, location based segments (Paris, London, Tunisia, and Nassau for those of you doing the next James Bond film), or any other type of schedule division are all handled brilliantly. Each segment or unit is given its own calendar and production board. You can move strips between boards, and if you have a scheduling conflict between various boards, you're given immediate notice. You can print or view boards as a whole, and where there is overlap, it is denoted on the board. This is continually being improved. A permissions hierarchy will soon be available that will allow, for example, the first assistant directors of two separate units on a film to view but not edit each other's schedule.

### POCs Will Love This Application

All reports can be set up to have a light gray watermark with the user's name printed across the page (fig. 6) This is one of the powerful aspects of this application. You can use *Scenechronize* as a repository of documents much like Entertainment Partners' VPO. You can set up users in their respective departments with different levels of permissions so that the entire crew can have access to some documents while other documents are restricted. Each time a document is printed, it has a crewmember's name watermarked across it. This way you know who leaked your schedule to *Variety*. (Note: the watermarking can be turned off if you like).

Along with document storage, *Scenechronize* can generate actors' sides, create crew lists, handle script revisions,

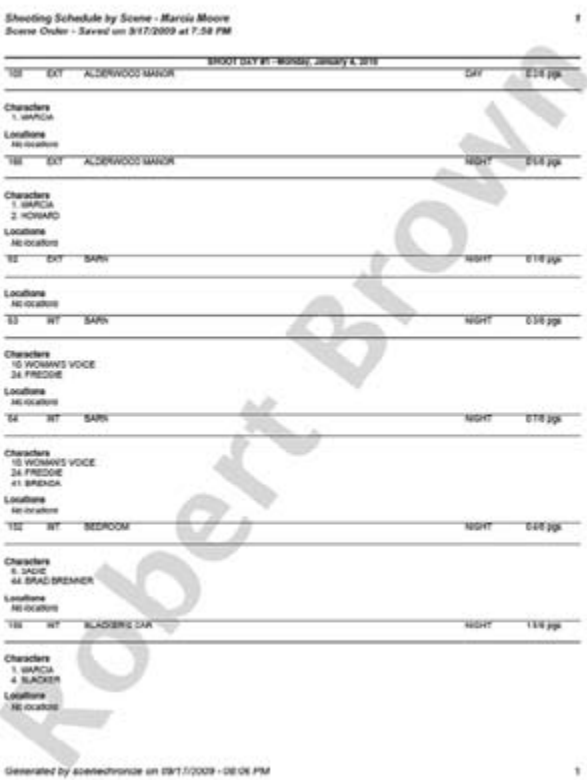


Fig. 6 A watermarked schedule page.

and distribute any document you like to any list or sub-group of a list. One production office coordinator remarked that it used to take her four hours to prepare the actors' sides and she can now do it in a few mouse clicks.

Casting directors can put up photos of various candidates for each role. Once the part is cast, all of the actor's information can be made available to specific departments such as Production, Costume, and Makeup.

Location managers can keep photos of possible locations on the site and make them available for viewing by the director or anyone else. Production managers can have all of the pertinent information about each location such as address, contact, phone numbers, restrictions, etc. at their fingertips.

### Pricing

As mentioned previously, *Scenechronize* can be used for free indefinitely by a single person doing a preliminary schedule. You can even have several projects on line at the same time. Once your film moves into what the company calls "Development," you can add two additional users. The Development stage subscription costs \$150 per month but can be suspended at any time for any length of time. Once the project is funded and progresses to the "Greenlit" stage, the subscription for a non-union independent

feature ranges from \$200 to \$500 per month for budgets up to \$5 million. Above \$5 million, the company asks that you contact them. Shorts are priced at \$50 per month.

All of these prices and categories are being reconsidered and may be adjusted. In fact, if you have special needs or problems, I encourage you to contact the company. The *Scenechronize* folks seem more than willing to accommodate productions in any way they can.

All filmmakers owe themselves a look at this intelligently designed application. The thinking behind it is a shift from the current paradigm, the interface is intuitive, the help file is detailed, and the company is accommodating. As Rhys Ryan, producer for *Scenechronize*, told me, "We're all about support." You can't ask for more.

Robert Latham Brown has over 30 years of experience in film production, is an adjunct professor at USC's School of Cinematic Arts, and is the author of *Planning the Low-Budget Film* (a double finalist in the 2007 Benjamin Franklin Awards and a first place winner in the 2007 Hollywood Book Festival). [rlbrown@chalkhillbooks.com](mailto:rlbrown@chalkhillbooks.com).