

The Impact of High Resolution Media on Makeup

By Suzanne Patterson

What is HDTV?

High definition television (HDTV) is basically an arbitrary term that applies to any digital television production, transmission, or reception technology with a scanning rate that exceeds the 525 lines of the present U.S. NTSC standard or the 625 lines of the PAL or SECAM standards.

When viewed on a large television monitor or projected on a screen, HDTV images are patently brighter, sharper, cleaner and more life like than those of present video systems because of the increased pixilation in the image. Therefore, HD is the highest quality digital format available over the present NTSC standard format, which has been in existence for over 60 years.

Why HDTV?

The FCC has mandated through the Telecommunications Act of 1996 that all "terrestrial" (meaning broadcast "over the air") television stations must convert from analog to full digital broadcasting by an imposed deadline. All major hub television markets such as Los Angeles, New York, DC, etc., were expected be phased into full HD signal format by the end of 2008.

The FCC had initial plans for U.S. broadcasts to simulcast digital HDTV signals in conjunction with conventional NTSC transmissions until the year 2009, at which time the old conventional system will be terminated. Not since video first began has there been such a rapid pace of refinement in technology, with the introduction of the digital format in the early nineties and the onset of HD in early 2000.

There are also more frame rate choices available (24p, 30p, 25p, 50i, 60i, or 60p) that will also dictate which kind of camera will be used. These frames per second (fps) formats allow tape to have more of a look and feel of film and be transferable to 16 or 35mm film with full HD fidelity.

Anything shot in 24P or 25p can be scanned to film for theatrical release without any motion disturbances being introduced in the transfer itself. The quest for tape to be more film like in character is the driving force behind the technological refinements, and some believe that someday it may even jump species!

So how does all this affect makeup taped in HD format?

The increased pixilated image is so clear that you see down to the pores of skin, including blemishes and wrinkles. It is exceptionally authentic in that a person's true quality of skin, bone structure and features, and hair are on sharp display.

HDTV can provide images nearly 5-10 times sharper than those on broadcast on NTSC

standard television sets. Thus, heavy or layered makeup is painfully evident, and powder can end up looking very obvious. Many makeup artists (and talent) are still somewhat inexperienced to the harsh reality of the high definition format and that skin imperfections are extremely obvious.

Some skin issues you can clearly see are blemishes (especially acne problems), overly ruddy skin, overdone concealing under the eyes (the raccoon look), thickly applied base, and over-powdered skin. With these obvious flaws prominent the viewer ends up looking at the makeup rather than be drawn into the drama.

How were skin issues dealt with in the past?

On standard definition (analog) television sets the signal conversion is at 704 x 480 of pixilated resolution in the viewing. This was extremely advantageous to talent because the low resolution helped makeup to visually smooth out and hide skin flaws. With special makeup effects applications analog also helped prosthetics to look very realistic, or lace hair fronts to be undetectable, and blood effects look alarmingly real.

Pancake, or heavy cream makeup and concealing had been the norm in analog to create the flawless look on talent seen in these formats, such as soap opera actresses who look seemingly looked ageless over the years. Many studios were also using strong overhead track style lighting which also necessitated the use of stronger concealments or products to bounce light.

In the beginning transmissions of HD, and before makeup artists and talent became truly aware of the makeup ramifications, the realism of skin flaws, wrinkles, and less than perfect symmetry brought home the reality that "beautiful" celebrities are not so beautiful after all. Our American culture has been visually and mentally programmed from the media over the prior decades to demand and accept an unrealistic standard of beauty. The harsh reality is that HDTV "sees" and projects better than some people can visually assimilate. The magic of this increased technology also brings with it the stark reality of flawed human skin and the standard image of "beautiful" in the minds of the viewing public will eventually have to be redefined.

There are still some inherent problems in HD cameras that still need to be overcome, particularly control over the nuances. Tight shots on talent require extra lighting techniques to soften the blow of the resolution, and are often avoided for that reason. There are filters that can be used to make aged or blemished faces look better but they are not always effective and can end up looking over or under saturated in post production.

So how does media makeup keep up with the pixel revolution?

As more broadcasts are being done in HDTV, makeup artist must refine their technique and product usage for a screen resolution that has as much as 10 times more picture detail than analog television. Camera formats have changed significantly as well as the lighting configurations and makeup artists will need to stay informed as the science continues to progress.

Overall, makeup needs to be undertone precise and lightweight in application while delivering the coverage needed to make the talent look clean and natural. In HD, the emphasis is greater on clear color selections and clean application for eyes and lips. Even set designers are using colors (like lavender) in their wall paintings that will help flatter skin tones when lit for in this medium.

What are some of the issues makeup artists will contend with in HD makeup?

As makeup artists we are responsible for making the less than perfect skin look like perfection, and HD presents a host of challenges to our skills. HDTV is still causing a major revolution in media makeup techniques that were originally perfected over the years for film. This included handling the different lighting conditions and creating the visual image of actors that is significantly different than their in-person look.

There are two main issues now that are influencing how we do makeup for this medium. First are the techniques and tools we have refined to ensure that we reproduce a flawless real life appearance. Second is the pressures placed on talent because the appearance of celebrities in HD might not always be as perfect as the public perceives them. The first issue is in our control as we are professionals that have skills that can greatly improve and correct appearances with cosmetics. That makes the second issue somewhat in our hands as these celebrities will be turning to us more than ever to give them more confidence in how their looks will translate to this medium.

What are the major factors in creating the correct image for HD?

I believe that proper technique and product formula usage has always been the biggest factor in high quality makeup work and that will continue at even a higher level in work for HD. This medium requires even greater attention to detail, and not just the face but the body as well. It means that you will need adjust how you apply the makeup, and to blend it out even further.

You will have to keep your eye tuned on the monitor to catch flaws that need correcting because in HD recording the results are immediate! For instance, mascara clumps are very obvious. Colors that don't stay true on darker skin tones are painfully obvious, so be careful in how you choose products and prep skin.

To deal with the less forgiving electronic eye of HDTV, makeup artists are turning to airbrush makeup for certain skin types to achieve the balance they need in covering skin to look more natural in high resolution viewing. In other words, they are bringing their own "pixels" to the game through "pontillistic" painting.

Airbrush provides a way of depositing base onto the face through a conical spray pattern of thousands of tiny dots or "pixels" at a very low pressure that gently overlaps on skin, and from a distance the eye perceives it as a smoother, natural looking complexion.

Some skin discolorations and imperfections, scars, and puffiness are visually blended out more successfully under airbrush makeup. Depending on the micronization of the pigment contained in the airbrush product, these tiny "pixels" of base on skin gives

somewhat the same effect as what the digital camera sees, and the natural tone of the talent's skin comes through giving a smoother and natural looking appearance. Airbrush makeup simply dovetails with HD nicely, and helps fill the need for makeup that looks like part of the skin tone instead of creating unwanted texture by sitting on top of it.

In Summary:

A good working knowledge of how all photographic and recording vehicles work, and how makeup impacts the finished product are hallmark technical skills for the professional makeup artist working in HD. The competence and proficiency in this area is part of having a total package of superior skill ability in expertly rendering makeup for these mediums.

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