Tips for effective chroma key shots

You've seen TV meteorologists standing in front of animated maps and other graphics. They are actually standing in front of a solid blue or green wall. A production person electronically removes that solid color—*keys* it out—and inserts the graphics in its place. You can do the same thing with Adobe Premiere Pro CS6. Blue and Green Screen key effects are your best bets for accurate, relatively low-budget but professional-looking keying. To use these effects you need to shoot your video in front of chroma key blue or green backdrops. These use specific colors that Premiere Pro's Blue and Green Screen keys can readily remove.

Chroma key video shoots don't always go smoothly. For the Blue and Green Screen keys to work effectively, you should follow these tips:

- Use flat lighting—two lights at 45° angles to the screen—to avoid creating hot spots. No need to overdo the lighting; simply make it even.
- Use controlled spotlights or lights with barn doors for the actor's lighting, which does not need to be flat.
- For keying in an outdoor background, use daylight-balanced blue gels over your lights to re-create outdoor lighting. If you're working with live actors, blowing their hair around with a fan will enhance the illusion.
- Avoid chroma key spill—keep actors at least four feet away from the backdrop to avoid their picking up its reflected color. A backlight on the actors minimizes spill.
- Use tight shots to make the finish look more realistic.
- Avoid fast-paced action. It's harder to key right to the edges of your subjects.
- Use a wide-open iris on your camcorder to limit the depth of field and to throw the green screen a bit out of focus, making it easier to key out.
- Use chroma green with consumer camcorders. These less expensive camcorders generally record less color information and do not key as well as professional camcorders. However, they give more weight to green to correspond to the color sensitivity of human eyes, so green screens key more cleanly than blue. Also, you have reasonable assurance that no one will have clothing that matches chroma green well enough to key out.
- You can also use chroma blue, which has been a long-time production-studio favorite because it's complementary to skin tones.
- Use the Adobe Premiere CS6 *Ultra Key* effect, located in the Video Effects/Keying bin in the Effects panel. The Ultra Key effect is ideal for fast, accurate keying on challenging footage. The Ultra Key is optimized for DV and HD footage that includes uneven lighting, wrinkled backgrounds, and frizzy hair. Ultra Key preserves shadows and can achieve complex keys on smoke, liquids, and transparent objects.

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