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AROUND THE WORLD IN A BACKPACK

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A man from Ecuador steals a backpack and takes it to his estranged family. Later, a homeless man carrying the same bag, dies and ends up in a New York morgue. The backpack is then accidentally mailed to a house in Dublin where two little boys are expecting a gift. It is then spotted in Mumbai on a bullock cart that gets pulled over by a cop. Capturing the journey of the backpack are 25 independent filmmakers from 14 countries across five continents collaborating over the internet to make one film *The Lost Backpack* (working title).

The bag's bullock cart ride has been directed by Mumbai-based Neha Raheja Thakker who used a Canon 7D to shoot her 4-minute sequence. "We've all shot on different cameras and formats from DV to HD," says Thakker. "The intention is to celebrate the difference in styles, rather than fit everything uniformly in one genre."

Conceptualized by Detroit-based Marty Shea and Ian Bonner, the idea of Collabfeature—which is what the project is called—was possible because of the internet and recent advances in low-cost, high-quality HD cameras.

"I love the idea of musicians responding to the each other in a band," says Bonner. "Each member contributing their own personality and vision to the songs so that the result is bigger than the sum of its parts. That very idea excited me and got me thinking about how the concept of a band could apply to filmmaking."

Delhi-based director Varun Mathur first tread about Collabfeature on mandy.com – an online directory and jobs website for film and TV technicians. He sent them a few links to his previous work, after which he was invited to be part of the project by signing up on the internal web-application system built by Bonner that was specially designed to assist director collaboration.

Why didn't they collaborate on a Facebook or Google group? Wouldn't a mailing list suffice? "Email can be a kind of chaotic way to communicate with a large group of people," says Bonner who took about a month, working part-time, to get the basic site in place. He still writes code to customize and update the online application as the project evolves.

The site itself is fairly simple. Technically, it utilizes a MySQL database backend and some PHP scripts.

"Collaboration over the inter-

In a world's first, 25 filmmakers who have never met, are working collaboratively to shoot one movie – and making it all possible is the internet and digital technologies...



Top: Dubai-based filmmaker Fahad Shaikh looks on as his director of photography mounts the Canon 7D to shoot the segment titled 'Chat Away'. **Above left:** Back in Mumbai, the film crew sets up the scene for the 'The Bullockcart' segment, wherein a naive bullock-cart driver is pulled over by a cop as he tries to negotiate his way to the traffic. **Above right:** A scene from Hottie Lollie, a segment directed by Berlin filmmaker Xavier Agudo, wherein a spoiled wannabe actress makes her millionaire sugar daddy get her a vintage backpack featured in a French magazine

task to organize shoots where filmmakers had to share props and actors.

Fahad Shaikh, contributing director from Dubai, has never met Thakker, Shea, Bonner or Mathur, although he's made a few minor and major tweaks in their scripts.

"The collaboration tool helped us check the progress board of each director, unload pitches and

Since the film's segments were bound to be shot on a variety of cameras, early on in the process minimum specifications for resolution, frame rate and aspect ratio were decided. All of the other variables were allowed to enhance the eclectic style of the film. Each of the filmmakers will deliver a polished final edit of their segments so the final editor's job will be to put the



net requires a little bit more patience as it lacks the immediacy of a real-time conversation. Without the system, we would never have been able to have an efficient organized exchange of ideas between 25 people on five continents. It's something that would have been impossible five or 10 years ago."

One of the major challenges the directors faced was dealing with time zones, especially during switches into and out of daylight savings time. It was also quite a

screenplays, and give feedback to the others," says Shaikh who used a Canon EOS 7D for its simplicity and high-quality images. "The new range of digital SLRs has revolutionized filmmaking at least in the independent film industry. It's cheap, easy and gives a sharp output. They're even used to shoot commercials sometimes," he informs. While shooting, Shaikh used a shoulder mount, tripod and tiny tracks customized for his small camera.

pieces in the right order; insert transitions and play with colour correction.

"It's like we all cooked dinner for you – multiple courses, but one meal; or like we all painted this one canvas – a lot of colour, but still one painting," says Mathur.

The film, which will release next year is all set to enter the Guinness World Record for having the most number of directors. It will beat *Paris, Je T'Aime*'s record of 22 directors for one film.

