

## Articles

### Interaction Design For Live Action Experiences

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*Rather than re-purposing content, let's push the boundaries of interactive storytelling to see how we can capture the hearts and imaginations of our audience.*

At Tool of North America, we have been putting a major focus on interactive live action productions. We believe the most compelling interactive live action storytelling is accomplished when you have the ability to creatively and technically oversee all aspects of production - from live action to post to interactive development. This provides the opportunity to create content specific to the story and platform that you're targeting.

To help launch our new website, the goal was to show some of the ways you can have fun with interactive live action content. Immediately when we thought about creating interactive characters to open the Tool site, we decided to reach out to Olivier Otten. We've been admirers of his work, particularly "Self Control Freak." We really respect the fluid nature of his interactive character design. Rather than "choose your own adventure" interaction design that has the typical start and stop you're so used to seeing in interactive storytelling, Olivier really focuses on fluid interaction that offers playful surprises that rewards the user for their interactions.

For most of our interactive live action projects, we pair one of our live action directors with an interactive director like Olivier Otten. We've found this leads to very interesting collaborations as you bring together storytellers, each bringing a different expertise in storytelling. For this project, we paired Olivier with director Erich Joiner to create playful interactive videos that open up our website. Otten conceived a story starring two characters: a monkey and a businessman. Joiner then added to the story by working with Olivier on the interactions + deciding how to best frame and shoot it.

Otten and Joiner wanted to show how interactivity and live-action storytelling can blend. We didn't want to set up a lot of back-story, it's more about playful fun and offering simple interactions that hopefully result in quick entertainment. We created outlines of interactions for each character. The trick with these types of projects is figuring out the balance between being a director focused on delivering a story and giving up control to the viewer. For interactive content, we believe the user wants to play an active role, which in the case of our interactive characters, means the viewer becomes responsible for the acting.

What resulted is what we hope are two fun interactive characters that open the Tool site. For the monkey, as you put your cursor closer to him he eats it and then spits it back out. We shot several different instances and reactions to this, as well as some easter egg content if you click on the monkey. For the businessman, Erich wanted to make him "snarky," the kind of guy who just looks slimy. If you take your cursor back and forth near his face, you can have fun slapping him back and forth. You can also click on his forehead to have a plastic arrow shot at his head. Watch out though - if you don't slap him in exactly the right area he may slap away your cursor. In both instances, it was about shooting enough actions and reactions to keep this entertaining without overwhelming the user.

From a pre-production and production aspect, what we find unique about these types of productions is the amount of planning. We've found that it's vital to have a clear picture of the story and interactive layer that brings the story to life. This allows our storyboard team to create a story tree that shows all of the different options (wait states, reactions, etc.). This story tree becomes our bible on set and is handed off to one of the most important people on set - the script supervisor. It is their responsibility to make sure that we get each shot in exactly the position needed so that the video and story is seamless.

Once we have the footage, I've found that no matter how much we've planned, the post and web development process needs to be fluid and iterative. At this point, our director, interactive director, design director + lead developer are going back and forth tweaking how to present the best user experience. With all of our projects, we find that sound is just as important as the visuals. To get the desired effect, we work with sound designers who understand interaction design.

As we got into design, Olivier put a major focus on creating a one-to-one interaction without making use of interface elements. We always like the idea of going beyond "traditional" interface cues in these types of projects. In this case, the interactions happen by clicking on the elements within the video rather than creating Flash overlays and buttons.

It was a fun process and something we're refining with each interactive live action project that we're producing. We believe this is an exciting time in the creation of live action content. There is a major opportunity to leverage the unique interactivity of digital platforms such as the computer, iPhone/iPad, smart phones, installations + video game consoles. Rather than re-purposing content, let's push the boundaries of interactive storytelling to see how we can capture the hearts and imaginations of our audience.

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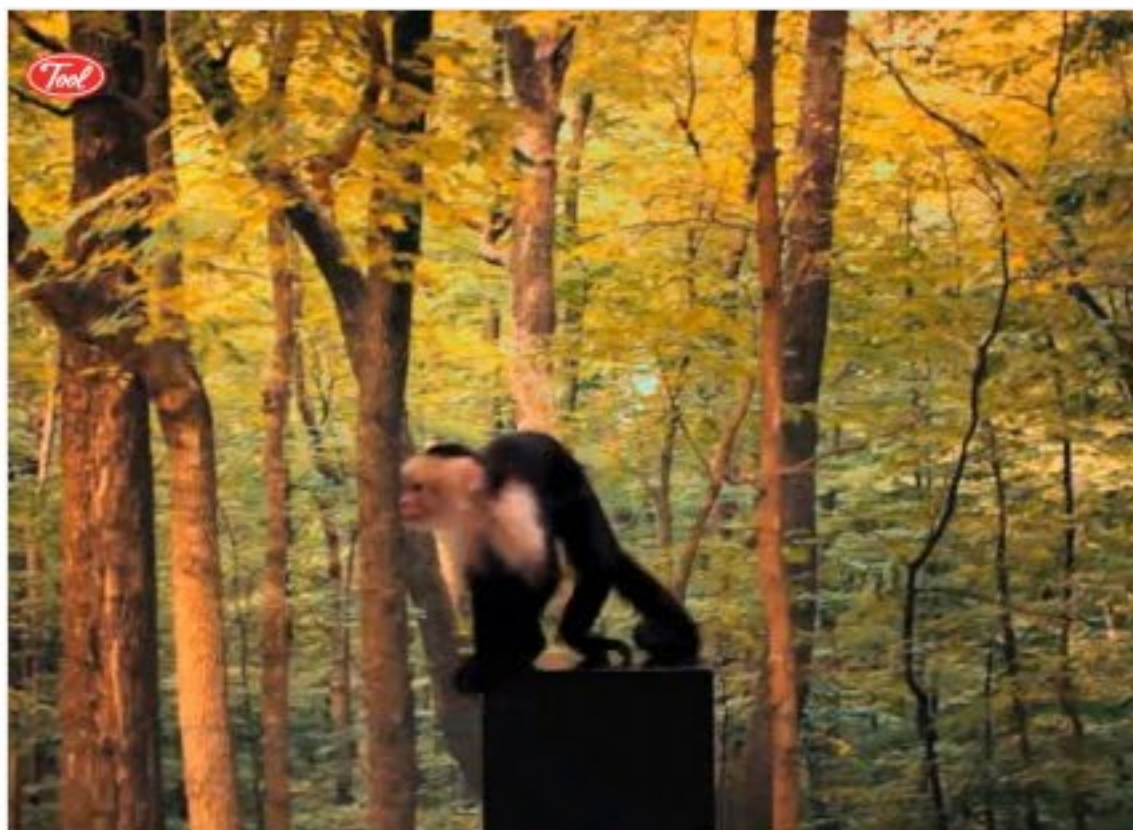
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→ Erich Joiner - Director Page

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