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EXCEPTIONAL MINDS

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Young Adults with Autism at Exceptional Minds Studio (EMS) Feed Movie Industry's Visual Effects Appetite



Sherman Oaks, Calif. – With the movie industry's growing appetite for better and more complex visual effects, a new Head of Production has been hired at Exceptional Minds Studio (EMS) to develop talent from an unlikely source: young adults who happen to have [autism](#).

"This is a population with a keen sense of timing and movement that they use to their advantage doing animation and rotoscoping," said Craig Seitz, who assumed the new title of Head of Production at EMS this month.

EMS is an offshoot of [Exceptional Minds](#) digital arts academy located near Los Angeles that was established last year to provide post-production services by professionally certified young men and women who have high-functioning autism. Exceptional Minds students, all in their 20s and on the spectrum, have performed post-production work for a half-dozen movies, including Oscar-nominated motion picture *American Hustle*.

"The industry and consumers are wanting of this kind of talent, and in too many cases, they've had to go offshore to find it," commented Seitz, who has a background in digital visual effects for post-production houses, including Dream Quest Images and Rhythm & Hues. In his more recent years as a digital supervisor, Seitz said he worked with more and more overseas post-production crews in "many different time zones."

EMS is able to offer competitive pricing and tax benefits in some cases as part of Exceptional Minds digital arts academy for young adults with autism, which is a non-profit 501(c) (3)

charitable organization. For *American Hustle*, for example, Exceptional Minds talent applied compositing and pre-comp techniques for both simple and more complex 2D work at a competitive rate.

"I'm really glad to finally be able to build that talent here locally," said Seitz, observing that Exceptional Minds students "have the level of perfection and attention to detail that are required in the visual effects industry."

Roughly 750,000 young adults with autism are expected to reach adulthood in the coming decade, many destined for unemployment or underemployment. Exceptional Minds is the first and only three-year vocational program for young men and women with autism who are pursuing careers in the digital arts. EMS operates independent of the vocational school to provide 3D film conversion, visual effects cleanup and other graphics and animation post-production or digital design work in demand by the industry. Post-production houses, web developers and others contract directly with EMS for skilled talent on a project-by-project basis.

"EMS gives us a way to pool the collective skills of our graduates and manage projects as needed for the industry," explained Yudi Bennett, the Director of Operations for Exceptional Minds who, like most of the others on staff, has experience in the movie industry. Bennett is a recipient of the Frank Capra Lifetime Achievement award; Exceptional Minds staff and instructors have worked for Disney, Universal and Nickelodeon, for example. Actor Ed Asner is on the Exceptional Minds advisory board.

"For some of our students, contract work may be more suited to their skills and the way they like to work. Even for our students who go on to full-time employment, EMS will give them an opportunity to specialize in areas and gain experience in a managed, controlled environment before they commit to a career or company," added Bennett.

Graduates of the Exceptional Minds program are proficient in at least six software programs considered to be the gold standard in the digital visual effects industry; all graduate with Adobe ACA certifications.

About EMS and Exceptional Minds (<http://www.exceptionalmindsstudio.org>): Exceptional Minds is a non-profit vocational center and working production studio for young adults on the autism spectrum. It was chartered in 2011 to provide the training necessary for creatively gifted individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) who may not otherwise be able to make the transition from high school to careers. Located in Sherman Oaks, California, Exceptional Minds is both an instructional learning facility and a working studio with hands-on student involvement in production projects, many for the film industry. Operating separately and independently, the Exceptional Minds Studio (EMS) provides contract services in web design, animation, rotoscoping and visual effects cleanup on an as-needed basis.

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