



Happy Mushroom Becomes Narwhal Studios With An Expanded Scope Of Virtual Production Services

By Noah Kadner, American Cinematographer Magazine

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Industry-leading Virtual Art Department studio Happy Mushroom is becoming Narwhal Studios to commemorate the team's expansion into new creative waters. Led by CEO and co-founder Felix Jorge, Happy Mushroom honed its virtual art department and asset development pipeline via cutting-edge virtual productions, including *The Mandalorian*, *The Book of Boba Fett*, *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, *The Suicide Squad*, and *Black Adam*. Narwhal Studios will continue evolving the virtual art department into more than a starting place for production.

"We focus deeply on creating processes to support complex, challenging projects," says Jorge. "Traditionally, content creators are siloed and unable to share assets across vendors and distribution channels. By leveraging high-quality assets holistically, you can increase the value of your IP, amortize it across different pipelines, and reduce creative waste."

After several successful years as a concierge-level virtual production service provider, Narwhal's team looks forward to sharing its bespoke toolset and remote-first pipeline with new endeavors, including movies, broadcast, animation, educational initiatives, interactive experiences, world-building, video games, and custom IP. Narwhal will focus on supporting creatives and their storytelling process. This effort includes building inclusive relationships and delivering the best possible development experience.

A Bespoke Toolset

Narwhal offers an extensive library of collaborative tools developed over six years of working on time-sensitive projects with uncompromising rock star creatives. "We focus deeply on the creative process and support it by customizing leading off-the-shelf tools and developing our own," notes Jorge. "We work with key creatives from the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC), the Art Directors Guild (ADG), and others. Their needs dictate how and why we customize the tools to fit their workflow. Our tools empower the talent to complete their projects on time and budget, no matter how complex or challenging the work."



The team collaborated on several Disney+ *Star Wars* properties by developing environments for use with LED volume/in-camera VFX for virtual production. Cinematographer Baz Idoine, ASC, worked extensively on those efforts, photographing many episodes of *The Mandalorian*. "The team always presented amazing work for me to review, but the working process was also incredibly respectful of my approach to lighting the environments," says Idoine. "That close collaboration meant they could give me as the director of photography whatever lighting scenario I asked for. That relationship and their strong knowledge of Unreal Engine and other complex tools enabled me to be a better DP."

The Digital Backlot

Narwhal offers a massive digital backlot of high-quality assets. Key creatives retain complete control over their assets and story. This control leads to more informed decision-making and a great final product. The backlot pipeline helps to leverage efficiencies and jump-start the development process.

"My experience with Narwhal was everything I wanted and more," says production designer Todd Cherniawsky, ADG (*Obi-Wan Kenobi*, *The Polar Express*). "I had an incredible team where nothing had to go through a traditional art department/VAD filter. Instead, it was pure and seamless. They're also great at creating a transparent remote collaboration workflow with excellent quality control."

Remote-First Pipeline

Narwhal is a virtual production studio built from the ground up to leverage remote collaboration. A remote-first pipeline emphasizes the quality of the experience in mission-critical meetings and bypasses the limits of geographical location. Remote-first also enables Narwhal to tap into a global talent pool and work with world-class talent from wherever in the world they choose to live.

Cinematographer David Klein, ASC, worked closely with the team on *The Mandalorian* and *The Book of Boba Fett*. "To successfully shoot on an LED volume, you need to take a portion of the post-production decision-making and budget and move it up front," observes Klein. "Happy Mushroom took the concepts from storyboards through mocap and techvis. It's a wonderful tool to have as part of our process, and we often got incredibly close to the final look of a shot. They always do a hell of a job."



"The Happy Mushroom team was incredible and nimble," says Stephen Bowman, producer of the Paramount+ original series *Why Women Kill*. "They created a wonderful environment for us and worked with our visual effects companies to create life-like set extensions. It was a wonderful experience and saved us so much money."

Conclusion

A convergence of filmmaking, virtual production, and video games is transforming all types of entertainment. Creating high-quality assets engineered for repurposing is more critical than ever. Narwhal Studios is well-positioned to empower artists to be more than film or game talents so that each artist can contribute as a pure storyteller.

"The key is leveraging multidisciplinary experience," says Jorge. "You don't have to touch a computer to problem-solve and maximize your visual effects. There's a great tradition of artists like Steven Spielberg, Jon Favreau, and James Cameron who make incredible movies because they work closely with a team who makes sure even as they're writing the movie that it's attainable."

Pivoting into its identity as Narwhal Studios is the beginning of a new journey. The long-term goals include a full-fledged multimedia studio that serves productions across multiple industries. Using its expertise in virtual production on original IP is also on Narwhal's horizon. The proven process of thoughtful design, budget control, and creative vision can apply to every project.

ABOUT NARWHAL STUDIOS

Narwhal Studios is an industry-leading virtual production hub supporting the creative process. Narwhal deploys battle-tested, bespoke collaboration tools across movies, broadcast, video games, and custom IP. For press inquiries, please contact press@narwhalstudios.com. For more information, please visit <https://narwhalstudios.com/>.