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## Avid already big winner at the Oscars

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War Horse, directed by Steven Spielberg, is based on a childrens novel from... (AP Photo/Disney, Andrew Cooper)

There was a time when film editor Kevin Tent would spend months in dark suites in Los Angeles, piecing together movies such as 1992's "Guncrazy" from reels of film.

But for "The Descendants, a contender for this year's Best Picture Oscar, Tent and director Alexander Payne spent two weeks working on laptops in an Italian villa owned by George Clooney, the star of the film. The difference? Tent now cuts his movies with software made by Avid Technology Inc., a company far from the glamour of Hollywood, in the unlikely entertainment hub of Burlington.

"I started out cutting film," said Tent, "but as soon as I got the opportunity to work with an Avid system, I never looked back."

If you like to pick Oscar winners, Avid would be a safe bet to make a good showing at this Sunday night's Academy Awards ceremony. The company's editing tools were used on seven of the nine Best Picture nominees this year, including "The Help, "Moneyball, and "War Horse. For the past 11 years, every nominee for a sound editing Oscar has used Avid tools.

**"Avid is the firm that is most associated with high-end editing," said Douglas I. Sheer, chief executive at DIS Consulting Corp., an entertainment media research firm in Livingston Manor, N.Y. "And you can't get any higher than major motion pictures."**

Avid, which has 600 employees in Massachusetts and 2,000 worldwide, was founded in 1987 by former Apollo Computer executive Bill Warner, now a Cambridge-based angel investor.

The company pioneered a method for copying videotape footage to digital hard disks in real time. Instead of fast-forwarding or rewinding through hours of tape, editors could quickly get right to any single frame in a film or video without having to pore through all the footage surrounding it. That changed the way videos and films are cut.

Avid also gave editors and directors the ability to cut film without altering the master elements, so they can easily go back to the original shots if they have another idea or something does not work. It laid the foundation for the digital revolution in film, migrating most movie editing to video systems.

Avid also makes dozens of other hardware and software products in the broad audio-visual sector, ranging from headphones to broadcast newsroom management software to electronic keyboards.

In recent years, Avid has suffered from competition, particularly from Apple Inc.'s Final Cut Pro editing software, which was embraced by many independent filmmakers. (Adobe Systems Inc. also makes a professional editing software suite, called Premiere.)

But in 2011, Apple released a new version of Final Cut Pro that removed some of its professional capabilities. The customer backlash may have helped Avid as it struggles to grow again.