

SMPTE 2015 ... The Serious Side of Entertainment

While there a lot of opportunities to say WTF when high visibility folks in the M&E (media and entertainment) industry make the news, the truth is it's a damn serious set of careers that a lot of committed people pursue.

I know ... *gawd, that's dull!*

Addressing the challenges of diversity, next-generation/breathless content and bringing along tomorrow's visual storytellers; the SMPTE (Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers) 2015 Conference showed there's a lot of progress taking place behind the scenes.

Women in Tech

Since I live my life on the techie side of the business, I'm big on acronyms and often refer to Women in Technology as WIT.

But they have to have some WIT or their lives would be "a little strained."

The luncheon has become a SMPTE mainstay where women discuss how they got into the business and their experiences in the male-dominated industry.

That's fine for ladies but a little awkward for guys. But being a big part of the problem, getting the subject out in the open may help us be part of the solution.

To give attendees a lift, Cheryl Boone Isaacs, the third-term president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS, or as the in-crowd calls it "The Academy") discussed her winding path to the top.

She's the first African American and third woman to head the organization, so some progress is being made.



Source – SMPTE

Women in Tech – At the Women in Technology luncheon, Cheryl Boone Isaacs (r), president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, recounted her winding path in the industry and highlighted many of her industry inspirations. Shown with

Isaacs are Barbara Lange, SMPTE executive director, and Robert Seidel, SMPTE president.

The late '80s, early '90s seemed to be open season for female executives in the small, closely knit entertainment industry such as Sherry Lansing at Paramount; Dawn Steel at Columbia Studios; Lucie Salhany at Paramount TV; and other female executives who influenced Isaacs.

Isaacs said that was a period when the door started to close. Now, the shift/emphasis is on diversity and “normalcy.”

“We all work in a pretty tight and small world,” she noted. “And when you’re on the set, in post ... you’re hyper-focused on what needs to be done.

“Sometimes, it takes a bit more effort to look outside your normal space ... at those outside of your circle,” she added.

Her current mission is to go beyond the producer and director and make people understand the other options in the industry — editing, sound, visual effects, etc. — that keep the industry moving forward.

On the positive side, Isaacs said that the M&E business is getting the message that women exist — even over the age of 30, 35. She sees a lot of opportunities to shine the light on a wide range of issues and it’s not about the message but that people really like a good story.

She was optimistic that the newer content delivery systems will accelerate both the diversity across the business and the different genres of film to emerge and prosper. But she added, *“If it’s not going to make any money, the studios are not going to make it.”*

Isaacs also touched on two areas we have been thinking about — nurturing the next generation of filmmakers and the challenge of preserving digital content.

However, most of the attendees focused on technology for tomorrow’s content (*Show me the money*).

HDR, 4K

There are a lot of people who like to say 4K really isn’t here yet and adding things like HDR (high dynamic range) will only complicate and slow the process because it can’t be smoothly delivered except in a theater.

At NAB (National Association of Broadcasters), IBC (International Broadcasting Convention) and SMPTE, I have yet to hear of a project or pilot that isn’t done in 4K

Dudes you’re blowing smoke!

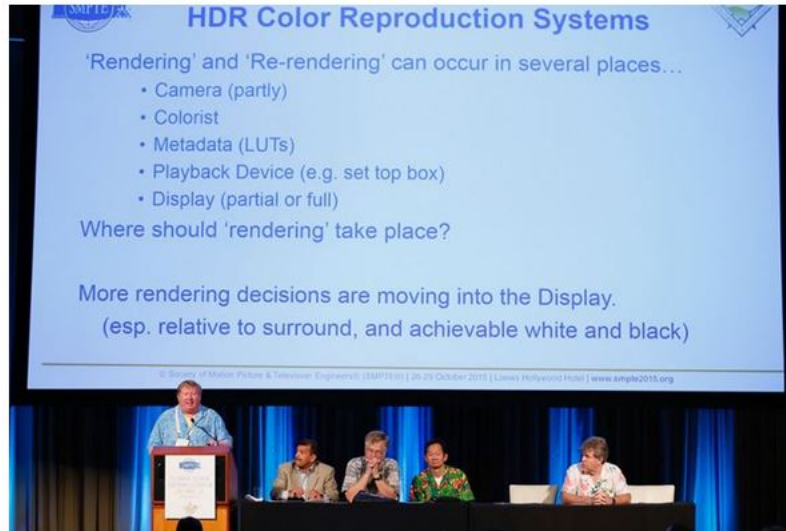
4K is already delivered over the cable and OTT (over the top) with the right preparation over pipes delivering 10-25Mbps ... every day.

And if Tveon, a small company in British Columbia, is half as good as they claim, we could be getting 4K/UHD content streamed to our devices at below 2Mbps, and ‘true’ 1080p images at below 200Kbps. And there are others making significant strides in the encode/decode processes.

They claim they're in discussions with telcos, cable companies and anyone offering Internet television, IPTV or mobile play.

Blinding quality could be coming to a device near you as soon as mid-2016.

Most of the SMPTE sessions focused on higher frame rates (HFR), high dynamic range (HDR) and wider color gamut for 4K and beyond.



Source - SMPTE

***It's Complicated** – While most of the SMPTE attendees agreed HDR is the next great opportunity to enhance filmmakers' stories, almost everyone agreed ... it's complicated.*

But for the SMPTE event, it was loudly proclaimed that HDR is already ready to be released into the world for you.

Pat Griffis, vice president of education for SMPTE; and Alan Lambs, head of the standards group, were two of the biggest cheerleaders at the event.

Panelist after panelist agreed that HDR will enhance the viewer experience and proposed a complete HDR ecosystem which will ultimately mean filmmakers will have to learn another (they say efficient) workflow to deliver even more natural-looking content to consumers.

HDR will have the greatest impact for filmmakers and viewers but add on HDF and colorimetry and content could be more real than real!

I thought it was great because it meant that they'd produce more and more pixels that would need more and more storage; ***so it's all good!***

The biggest challenge seems to be settling on video codecs for capture, production, delivery and archiving.

Of course, that probably means we'll have to replace our 4K UHD screens in the next couple of years; which is good news for TV, computer, tablet, smartphone manufacturers.

That's up to techies in the SMPTE organization to solve.

All this technology is great, but I found the organization's new initiative to reach out and nurture/recognize tomorrow's visual storytellers one of the highlights of this year's event.

I have nothing against the boring reality TV fare or the golly gee/look at me YouTube, AOL and Yahoo videos that are bombarding the screens today; but I think most folks are interested in (and will pay for) what professional professionals are doing.

That requires more than just a cheap camera and dumb luck. It requires a solid understanding of the fundamentals and execution techniques of visual storytelling.

This year SMPTE-HPA made a concerted effort to turn the spotlight on the future of content creation.



Source – SMPTE

***Best of Show** – The entries in this year's SMPTE Student Film Festival showed there is a lot of great talent coming out of the schools around the globe; but ultimately, only one could be tapped as Best of Show. At what should be a mainstay of the conference, this year's festival winner was the team from NYC College of Technology/CUNY.*

The organization held a Student Film Festival with submissions from around the world.

The event, which could grow to become a major part of the organization's annual conference, was open to full-time students enrolled in an accredited college, university or film school. You know, folks who take this stuff serious!

Barbara Lange, SMPTE executive director, said the festival received entries from students majoring in areas that would prepare them to ensure great M&E content will be available tomorrow.

Lange noted that they had received submissions from Canada, Hong Kong, the U.K., Dubai, Australia and the U.S this year and they included dramas, documentaries, animation, a special effects short and virtual reality.

Some of the leading executives in the industry served on the selection committee that chose the *crème de la crème* for the Student Film Festival evening.

It was exciting to see what these kids (O.K., they're kids to me) could squeeze into five- minute and even 30-second films. They were so cool!

Even more interesting was watching the young filmmakers earnestly cheer each other's work in the three award categories -- best creative use of technology to engage the audience in the story; best portrayal of entertainment technology in the film — documentary format; and best creative use of virtual reality in storytelling.

The Best in Show winner was ultimately "*Building for the Future: A City Tech Tale*" by Jonathan Burcin, Nicholas J. Burt-Miller, Diana V. David, André Gabriel, Jean L. Garcia, Joseph Larsen, Jeffrey N. Lawrence, Anjali Rawat, Gregory A. Scott of NYC College of Technology/CUNY

It was inspiring to hear the how and why behind the project after the SMPTE conference when Larry Jordan had two members of the crew on Production BuZZ -- <http://tinyurl.com/nvstnw3>.

That's all great; but because I love storage, my concern is the same one Isaacs asked at the Women in Technology luncheon, "*How do we preserve the next generation of content without film?*"



Source – SMPTE

Preserving Yesterday – Maybe it's fitting that the film industry's clapperboard was used to unveil the 100-year retrospective of visual entertainment. The film's trailer was shown at SMPTE but major funding is needed to complete the project.

Pannon Entertainment's Howard Lukk showed the trailer for the documentary '*Moving Images*,' which he's been working on for a year and only lacks one thing to be completed ... **money!**

Lukk has already amassed more than 48 hours of interview footage and archival materials from the past 100 years that explores the art/science, engineers and artists behind the scenes, craftspeople who made a difference in our media consumption and the potential future of visual storytelling.

He has collected interviews with industry leaders and never-before-seen footage of people and things that shaped the industry.

He's only slightly optimistic that he will be able to complete the production of the full feature. Perhaps it's indicative of the challenge facing every filmmaker that is focused on making money today while very little attention is paid on how we save and preserve yesterday.

It'll be hell if we lose the past!

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