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DIGITAL DEMONSTRATORS

Barco, Boeing, Christie, Digital Projection, NEC Technolgoies, Panasonic and Technicolor Preview Their ShoWest Activities and Talk About the Future of Digital Cinema

HARRY MATHIAS
Director of Digital Cinema
Barco

What will Barco be demonstrating in its digital cinema suite at ShoWest?

First of all, we'll be demonstrating the additional engineering and the added features to our projector. Barco is committed to adding original engineering and additional value to the projector whenever we can. That will be a continuing, ongoing process, and we're going to show that at the show.

What is the most important topic that Barco will be discussing with conventioneers at the show?

The single most important question is the future. The direction that digital cinema is heading is primarily to give more options to cinema owners and to give them solutions for additional sources of revenue. We're working on providing as many options as possible for that.

Barco is committed to the long-term solution. We intend to be here for years to come, and we intend to continue to contribute engineering and technology to digital cinema.

It's also important to us to bring the current cinema community of dealers, technicians and installers into digital cinema and leave no one behind. We're very committed to working within the system, to working with existing vendors and to take the skill set of cinema into the future.

What advances have been made in digital cinema technology in the past year, especially from Barco's point of view?

We've been working on dependability- and engineering-quality attributes of the projector. There are plenty of places within the optical assembly of the digital projector where dust can accumulate and either be visible on the screen or reduce contrast by scattering light. The optical unit in the Barco projector is sealed, and there's a micropore filtering system and an airflow filtering system in the projector head.

We've added our own digital diagnostics, our own interface to theatre automation and a touch-panel system that allows control without a laptop of projector functions. We also have a two-lens turret.

What advances will be made in the coming 12 months?

We're ready for the implementation phase. It's much sooner than people think it is. This requires the selection of a common file format, and within a theatre chain and distribution organization, you've got to have the input equal the output. That's fairly simple to do, and it doesn't require worldwide standardization—it requires over-the-desk standardization.

One [argument that implementation will take a long time] is that it's expensive. But "expensive" is a relative term. Computers are expensive, too, but if they give you an increase in productivity or an advantage, it's only too expensive if you can't make a return on your investment. If there is a return on your investment, then the expense is a prudent business risk.

One can demonstrate with digital cinema that there is a return on the investment, and it's not just the cost of prints. Alternative content is a big advantage for digital cinema, but in addition to that, we've seen a year where re-releases have done very well. For example, "The Exorcist" did better than five films that I can name that were first-run, major movies. That being the point, the cost of doing the re-release on film is restoring the negative and then making the prints and doing the marketing. But making the prints is a big cost factor. In a digital world, all you have to do to do a re-release is first of all make a high-quality master. You need a high-quality master for DVD pressing anyway. Then what you need is that master on a server, and you do a test market or you do a wide release, but it is simply a download operation, which is fairly painless. And if the film doesn't do well in the first week, you pull it, and you haven't made 1,000 prints. So that right there is an argument for digital cinema—the easy and relatively painless re-release of a movie.

In addition to that, there's art-house releases. There's only one print of "Planet of the Apes," and it's pink. In a digital world, you put one good copy of "Planet of the Apes" on a server, and revival theatres can call it up, give their account code and load a copy. And that doesn't only apply to art houses and revival houses—it could apply to screen number 13 in a megaplex that's dark for a week.

I believe where digital cinema is going is to a broadband, high-quality theatre network. Think of it as a privately owned, high-quality broadcast network.

FRED MEDINA and DAVID BAKER
Co-Directors of Digital Cinema, Boeing

What will Boeing be demonstrating in its digital cinema suite at ShoWest?

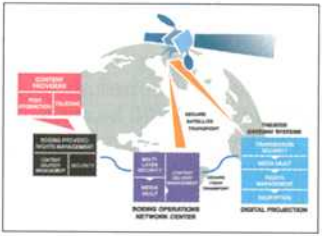
Boeing's digital cinema demonstration will be providing an overview and education of the fundamental elements that make up the complete distribution process. This will include content submission, Boeing network operations, Boeing content management and security and an emulation of digital theatres.

What is the most important topic that Boeing will be discussing with conventioneers at the show?

Our objective is to provide an understanding of the tools, benefits, simplicity and security offered by digital cinema.

What advances have been made in digital cinema technology in the past year, especially from Boeing's perspective?

Boeing is pleased to have participated with Miramax Films in the first digital transmission over satellite and fiber of a [major] feature motion picture: "Bounce." This milestone event proved the ability to send films securely and without degradation. This same technology can be used to send digital film to one or 1,000 theatre locations simultaneously.



What advances will be made in the coming 12 months?

Product and service rollout in the first quarter of 2002.