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Buzz builds home for 3-D

Digital Cinema Summit looks beyond glasses

By DAVID S. COHEN

LAS VEGAS -- Audiences are becoming interested in 3-D television, and the industry must satisfy that demand for 3-D movies to thrive.

That was the message from a series of panels Sunday morning at the Digital Cinema Summit held at the Las Vegas Convention Center.

Phil Lelyveld, a strategy adviser for the Entertainment Technology Center at USC, hailed the momentum behind 3-D movies but warned, "If we don't show visible progress now (on 3-D in the home), this momentum could die and move into a niche environment."

Lelyveld led a panel offering the studio perspective on home 3-D. Others on the panel were Darcy Antonellis, Warner Bros. president of technical operations; Real D co-founder Josh Greer; and Nandhu Nandhakumar, senior VP of advanced technology at LG Electronics.

Antonellis said Warner has identified 40 titles in its library that are candidates for conversion to 3-D. "We're working on both new titles and on trying to revitalize our library," she said.

But that effort depends on being able to tap into homevideo revenues that aren't available because 3-D TV is in its infancy, with multiple incompatible formats and almost no penetration of the home market.

"We want to move it into more of a 'long tail' experience," Antonellis said. "It changes the whole economic model."

At the corporate level, Warner has been somewhat reticent on 3-D as it is still negotiating deals for virtual print fees, but the studio had a surprise 3-D hit in "Journey to the Center of the Earth."

Antonellis and other panelists agreed it is essential that the industry make buying a 3-D TV simple so that consumers know what they need, understand what they'll get and enjoy the experience once they have it.

"I need to be sure," Antonellis said, "and our marketing folks will ask this: Will the experience be the same across all devices? Will the features be the same across all devices? Those are reasonable questions to ask."

She added that Warner expects to see "a fair amount of movement in (the 3-D TV) space" in 2010.

For now, homevideo 3-D releases such as Warner's "Journey" are going out in anaglyph format, similar to the old red/green glasses method that almost everyone wants to put behind them.

"I would call anaglyph a necessary evil right now," said Greer. "For people who've never seen 3-D, it's kind of like the gateway drug. It lets you know there's a possibility." However, he added, many viewers don't like it.

In an earlier presentation, Entertainment Technology Center executive director David Wertheimer presented research showing that audience interest in 3-D is growing and is strongest among people who've seen 3-D movies.

"I guarantee if you did this survey in the '50s or '70s and '80s," said Wertheimer, "you would have gotten the opposite response: 'I have no interest in seeing another 3-D movie; I have no interest in having it in my home,' because those earlier versions of 3-D were so uncomfortable to watch."

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For example, the ETC's statistics show that half of consumers overall would pay extra for a 3-D television, but among people who've seen a 3-D movie in the last year, that number climbs to more than 60%, with 30% willing to pay \$100 extra.

Moreover, ETC research shows consumers who've seen recent 3-D movies are undeterred by the prospect of wearing glasses at home to watch 3-D.

The strongest interest in 3-D, said Wertheimer, is among the 18-29 demo, especially those with children in the home. It's unclear, he said, whether that's because younger auds like 3-D or because so many 3-D releases have been aimed at children and families.

Wertheimer also said that consumer interest in 3-D is similar to the response to high-def TV. Consumers were skeptical at first, but "they'd see content in high-def and say, 'Wow, I've got to have that.' The same thing is happening with 3-D."

There will be a separate 3-D Techzone at the 2010 Consumer Electronics Show to display 3-D home electronics.

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