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INTERNATIONAL

Technology News

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Lukk is on a master project

Disney digital guy seeks format to preserve media on all platforms

By DAVID S. COHEN

With digital files making tapes obsolete and new video platforms seeming to spring up every week, creating masters for all those platforms has become a thorny problem.

"In the old days, we'd have to make a master, put it on tape, store it on a shelf. But we're trying to get away from making individual masters for all these distribution channels. We just can't keep up anymore," said Howard Lukk, Walt Disney Studios VP of digital production technology.

Lukk has been spearheading a volunteer team working on the Interoperable Master Format project for USC's Entertainment Technology Center. Lukk said the IMF means to creating a single format that can be used to share masters among various facilities and to create deliverables for pretty much every viewing platform except cinemas.

"These things are always a no-brainer from a 10,000-foot level, but the devil is always in the details," Lukk said.

In this case, he said, the difficulty is striking a balance between interoperability and flexibility. A strictly defined specification might have great interoperability, letting the master work on many devices and standards, but might not be able to adapt to future innovations.

After the better part of two years, the project is moving toward conclusion. Lukk hopes to have a specification that can be turned over in the spring to SMPTE, which would write standards implementing it for the industry.

The ETC has been so impressed with Lukk's efforts that last month the org gave him its first Technology Leadership Award.

"Many industry initiatives that have been led by the ETC, such as the digital cinema lab or the 3D home lab or the IMF format, have been led largely by individuals from within the member companies," David Wertheimer, executive director and CEO of the ETC, told Daily Variety.

Since the IMF is an especially important project for the ETC, Wertheimer said, "Howard was a natural choice for the first award."

Most consumers have yet to upgrade their TVs to full 1080p hi-def, and U.S. broadcasters aren't even transmitting in the format yet, but the next generations of super-sharp screens are in the pipeline. Stores already carry 3D TVs, Toshiba demonstrated 4K flatscreens at January's consumer electronics show, and next up appears to be Super Hi-Vision, which offers 16 times the pixels of HD (7680 x 4320 to be precise). Radio Netherlands Worldwide reported the BBC transmitted a concert in the format to Tokyo, with Japan's NHK providing the Super Hi-Vision technology. The RNW report said the Beeb intends to test Super Hi-Vision at the 2012 Olympics and NHK plans to be broadcasting in the format in 2020.

That would put some pressure on the the movie business to improve its capture and projection systems rather quickly or risk lagging behind television. Jim Cameron and others have been asking for higher frame rates. That might be a good place to start. On the other hand, since Super Hi-Vision has more resolution than 35mm film, it could become the standard for movies, too.

Bits & Bytes

Moving Picture Co., Technicolor's visual effects studio, has officially opened its purpose-built studio in Bangalore, India. Studio is within Technicolor's existing Bangalore facility and houses 150 artists. MPC Bangalore topper is Akhauri Sinha, formerly head of filmed entertainment of Nimbus Communications ... XPand universal 3D glasses are on presale through Amazon.com ... A PriceScan report said prices on 3D Blu-ray players have dropped 26% since April ... Rental house Geo Film Group will carry Kernercam 3D camera rigs starting this month ... Hollywood post-production house Chainsaw has launched a visual effects department and hired former Prime Focus vfx supervisor Boyd Stepan to head the unit. Stepan's credits include "Inglourious Basterds," "Desperate Housewives" and "Avatar." ... Legend3D's 2D-to-3D conversion technology has been named a finalist for the 2010 CONNECT Most Innovative Product award. ... Visual Data Media Services is providing editing and "sanitizing" services for "Weeds" as the skein heads for rebroadcast on TV Guide Network. VDMS is trimming the episodes to fit in shorter time slots and editing content to pass standards and practices. ... Vancouver-based vfx studio Image Engine has adopted Tweak Software's RV as its playback and review system ... Flatscreen/HDTV maker Vizio will be presenting sponsor of the Rose Bowl game through 2014. Company also will have its name on the 2014 college football BCS championship game ... AlphaDogs Post of Burbank has completed its work on TVOne reality show "K-Ci and JJo Come Clean." ... Time Warner Cable has launched authenticated service that enables subscribers to watch ESPN and ESPN3.com on their computers ... Look Effects of Hollywood has launched a new website at lookfx.com. Tobin Interactive handled the design. Digital archiving provider XerData is expanding its



Lukk

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