

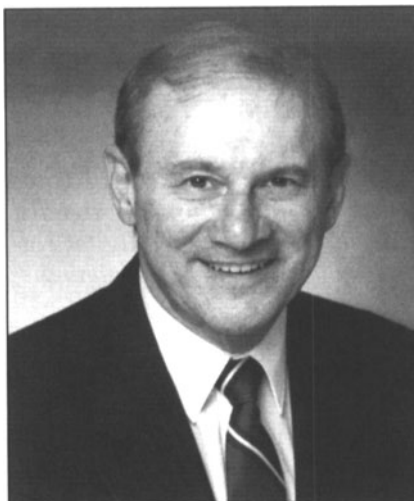
Film, Television, and the Multimedia Age

Almost every day, I am treated to an article by someone who has discovered that the world of entertainment imaging is entering the "Multimedia Age," the "Digital Age," the "Age of the Information Infrastructure," or some variation on those themes. Depending upon the author's background, this new age will revolutionize the way we are entertained, educate our children, receive medical treatment, communicate with our government, and interact with each other. The hypothesis is that this new age (the choice of name is yours) is already upon us and will define the role and prospects of the entertainment and information industries in the next century. The hypothesis assumes the convergence of the various forms of communications through the shared use of digital technology and concludes that this digital convergence will play a major role in the construction of a creative and active economy and society. The view presented also assumes that this convergence will result in a highly competitive environment, in which the current list of players in the communications media will change. It is this competitive environment that is receiving the focus of the media attention.

New Approaches

The Society sees this coming event as simply one in a series of new approaches to the creation and distribution of content that it has embraced and supported. All new innovations have resulted in changes in the competitive playing field. Some have been more profound than others, but the issue is not one of a competitive environment or simply a new experience for the consumer, but how each of us participates in the experience.

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Stanley N. Baron

SMPTE's role is to provide a path that allows its members to understand and participate. The Society has always approached new innovations from the point of view of educating our members in the application of the technology, providing a defined interface to the use of the technology through standards (and thereby sustaining that technology), and assisting the industries involved in responsibly managing the technology.

Revolution or Evolution?

The second issue is the question of "revolution." Digital imaging and distribution is by no means a new phenomenon. This author has been involved in the field of digital television for over 30 years. Revolutions that take over 30 years result in all sides being depleted of energy and resources, with the victor, if any, left with nothing. The reason for the current interest is the fact that the potential market appears to be rich — very much the opposite of depleted.

From the Society's point of view, we are not involved in a digital revolution but an evolutionary process. Begun approximately 30 years ago, developments in the field of digital creation, processing, and distribution of content have greatly assisted the film and television industries in

bringing new experiences to their audiences. Starting with digital graphics and special effects, later with digital recording, and now with digital distribution of content using compression technologies, great strides have been made in creating new experiences for the audience in both film and television, in bringing news events into the home, and in providing information services.

The newest step in this evolutionary process is the ability to distribute to the viewer a virtually flawless copy of the creation over a variety of media formats. This allows the content creator an unprecedented level of control over the quality delivered to the consumer. Digital distribution technology essentially delivers the product consistently as placed upon the media or not at all. It is neither dependent on the quality of the film projector at the particular theater nor on the distance of the antenna from the broadcast station.

Boundaries of the Technology

In order to benefit fully from this new opportunity, the content creator needs to understand the limits and boundaries imposed by the technology. The theme of the 137th SMPTE Technical Conference is "Moving Images — Meeting the Challenges." The sessions cover, in sequential order, the issues of "Capturing the Images" in this digital environment, through multimedia authoring tools, processing and storage, and "Delivering the Images." The issues are the very ones the content creators need to understand about both "Moving Images" and "Moving the Images."

Are we entering the "Multimedia Age," the "Digital Age," or the "Age of the Information Infrastructure"? Come to New Orleans and decide for yourself whether we are entering a new age or just dealing with new tools that help us create and deliver the content.

— Stanley N. Baron