

Digital Cinema: A Beginning

By Michael Karagosian, President, MKPE Consulting

After years of experimentation with trial systems and hesitation over financing plans, the stars have aligned and digital cinema systems are being installed today. Behind the alignment is the significant work of Digital Cinema Initiatives with the release in July 2005 of version 1.0 of its Digital Cinema System Specification, the February 2006 release by the National Association of Theatre Owners of its Digital Cinema Systems Requirements, and, last but not least, the tireless work of the many who are behind the forthcoming standards of the SMPTE DC28 Technology Committee for digital cinema.

I call this a beginning to emphasize that while we're off the ground and running, there's more work to be done. DCI is pursuing a test plan for its system specification. NATO is pursuing standards per its system requirements. The industry is calling for comprehensive equipment certification to underwrite the investments

made by both users and manufacturers. As we gain more field experience, there will likely be further work to add to that already in DC28, as well as to future testing and certification.

The reports written by our authors, Russ Wintner, President and COO of AccessIT Digital Media, and Tim Partridge, SVP of Dolby Laboratories, discuss the real-world issues encountered as this new technology is introduced into the theatrical business environment. Today and in the future, as we watch pristine images in our neighborhood cinema on day 19 after the movie has been released, we have the efforts of these gentlemen and their companies, their competitors, the many technology providers and manufacturers, and the organizations behind the requirements, specifications, and standards on which this work is based, to thank and remember.

Time to get out and enjoy the (digital) movie!

Transition to Digital Cinema: A First Look

By Russ Wintner, President and COO, AccessIT Digital Media

After years of activity, including several initial attempts to begin a meaningful rollout, digital cinema is finally here. The DCI Technical Specification, published in July 2005, gave the industry a stable foundation upon which to begin the implementation of digital cinema in a planned way. The rollout of commercial systems backed by the major studios and using equipment with long-term serviceability began when AccessIT and Christie Digital Systems formed a strategic partnership, Christie/AIX, around the same time as the DCI Specification was being completed. By the end of January 2006, Christie/AIX had completed installation of the first 150 screens of their 4,000-screen rollout, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2007. What these initial installations demonstrated is that the fundamentals defined in the DCI Specification are indeed viable, but the real learning from this experience is just beginning. Digital cinema will inevitably continue to evolve. A benefit of new technology over the mature

100-year legacy of 35mm film is that the industry is at the base of a new maturation curve that has yet to see the many benefits that will come from creative content providers and talented technical developers using this new and exciting platform of digital technology.

Of course, there comes a time in every new technology when planning and anticipation inevitably yield to the forces of commerce. DCI has done a remarkable job of providing a forward-looking specification that will ensure a high level of performance, coupled with the capacity for ongoing developments. SMPTE has been hard at work codifying the immense and formidable quantity of technical specifications that are designed to ensure interoperability and dependability. But it is in the movie theaters where pioneers will discover the meeting point between what makes sense economically and what can be done technologically, and from which point the industry can continue successfully to realize the full promise of the age of digital cinema.