



Barbara H. Lange

## Is This the Future of Storytelling?

**I**n 2016, under the generous support of Bud Mayo, SMPTE embarked on a program to explore the future of storytelling for the cinematic experience. One goal of the project was to address these questions: Would viewers be intrigued, or disturbed, by the inclusion of a second screen in their movie-going experience? Could a story be told effectively by incorporating both the big and the small screen, at the same time?

Mayo has been an evangelist of new technologies and new business models for cinemas. His vision is rooted in his career in the movie theater business. He fully endorsed the emergence of digital cinema, back in the early 2000s, seeing its potential to drive new business and provide alternative content to help fill theaters during traditionally low periods.

A tech fan, Mayo has a passion for ensuring the future viability of the cinematic experience. He watches as his grandchildren learn, and are entertained, through use of mobile devices. At very young ages, these kids can create worlds that tell stories, play games, and yes, even educate. He worries that young people growing up will gradually spend less time in the theater because it doesn't call them.

Mayo's idea is to create an environment where theaters regularly show "movies" that require a second screen. He wants to engage with today's young generation to capture their methods of content creation, complementing the traditional storytelling methods.

Coming to SMPTE, Mayo believed that we could help bring



(Left-Right) Barbara Lange, Shane Murphy, Jonathan Navarro, and Bud Mayo.

young filmmakers together with technology to create a new movement for future storytellers.

The VISTA program was announced at the SMPTE Annual Technical Conference, seeking submissions from young filmmakers. The best content would be screened at the 2017 CinemaCon convention. Mayo personally supported and subsidized the filmmakers' work, and SMPTE provided staff support.

Another partner, TimePlay, a social media application, was also involved in the program. The TimePlay platform, installed in many theaters, allows audiences to engage with games during movie preview periods. TimePlay worked closely with the filmmakers to enable technology for the experience.

During the CinemaCon 2017, two finalists, Jonathan Navarro from Brooklyn and Shane Murphy from San Francisco, screened their work at the TimePlay pavilion.

I had the chance to experience the two projects. Both Jonathan and Shane presented thoughtful stories.

In each case, the movie included "decision points" where the audience was asked to choose from decisions provided, using the TimePlay app running on our phones. The decision of the group forced the direction of the story, making three decisions in each of the movies. It was an interesting experience. The phones did not disturb the movie-viewing experience, as I had imagined. I kept wondering what would happen if I had made a different decision. The filmmakers both described the storytelling process as exciting. Each movie ran for just about 10 minutes, yet they had about 20 more minutes to cover the other decisions. This made for more creative thinking and exciting anticipation on which decision the audience would make.

This might not be the future of cinema, but it certainly has the potential to offer intrigue to filmmakers and audiences alike.

Congratulations to Jon and Shane for their work, to TimePlay for their support, and to Bud Mayo for his generosity.