

# From the Foundation to the Evolution of our Industry— Let's Build SMPTE's Future Together

BY RICHARD WELSH



**W**hen SMPTE was founded in 1916 by Charles Francis Jenkins, he had been concerned with the standardization of film while simultaneously working on early television. His film work includes technical specifications for frame rate, gauge, perforations, and, of course, aspect ratio. What would C. F. Jenkins have made of 9:16 aspect ratio and watching stories chopped into 90-second fragments on a TV you kept in your pocket? As aspect ratios widened over the decades, differentiating the theatrical experience from the home viewing, it would have seemed unthinkable to suggest that a tall, narrow aspect ratio would one day become the most frequently viewed format. Vertical videos, a staple of platforms like TikTok, have become an increasingly important part of the media business, with services such as Crazy Maple Studio's Reelshort already starting to prove the subscription market for vertical dramas. The success of verticals is not just a function of form and format. At the Cannes Film Festival this year, much of the conversation centered on the economics of traditional filmmaking and how the models can and must change. Verticals are typically one and a half to three minutes

long, consisting of 60 to 90 episodes with a cliffhanger at the end of each. Their runtimes are comparable to a typical episodic show, with budgets in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars. This high turnover content is also creating new opportunities for actors, production, and post-production teams to take advantage of technologies such as virtual production, cloud production, and AI, thereby reducing shoot costs and complexity.

The pace of technological change is faster than at any time in my 25-year career, during which I've witnessed film and broadcast television transition from analog to digital, the internet evolve to gigabit speeds over mobile networks, and content shift from tape to disc to streaming. However, the nature of content production has remained somewhat familiar during most of that time, but now it is changing dramatically and at a pace that mirrors the technology enabling it. With AI poised to profoundly disrupt traditional workflows and expand creative possibilities, and the inexorable march towards more immersive, interactive, and personalized content, the media industry is at a true inflection point. Creativity is now in everyone's hands, and the ways we tell stories are becoming increasingly varied and flexible, allowing us to create new narrative forms, musical genres, visual languages,

and innovative ways to connect audiences more closely than ever to live events, sports, and news as they happen. It is an exciting time to be in the industry, though it can sometimes feel a little scary and chaotic.

At SMPTE, we have been there from the beginning of film and television, helping the industry navigate transformative new changes in both technology and the audience experience. Through standards, education, and our community of members, we have and will continue to support, nurture, and advance the industry. Imagine if we were to remove all the SMPTE standards today. Without them, much of the technology that underpins our media technology simply wouldn't work, interoperate, or allow us to deliver. If you're reading this, of course, you're already a mem-

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ber and a believer in the mission of SMPTE. So why talk about all of this? I want to ask you personally to reach out. If you are a member but your company is not a sustaining member, encourage them to join and support the SMPTE mission. If you know an up-and-coming engineer who would benefit from being part of our amazing community and who could help

bring their fresh perspectives and ideas to a broader audience, please support them in joining SMPTE and building our future. Together, we can grow and strengthen SMPTE as we move forward into an exciting future for our industry.

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