

Protecting Our Purpose, Building Our Future: Why SMPTE Matters

BY SALLY ANN D'AMATO



In this month's Journal message, I want to do something a little different and maybe even a bit radical – I want to level with you.

I'm a big believer in honesty and transparency, and I've tried to bring both to my role as Executive Director. From the beginning, I've made it a priority to be candid with our Board, our members, our partners, and anyone else I speak with about SMPTE—not only about what we are accomplishing, but also about the challenges we face.

So, if you've heard the whispers or conjecture about SMPTE—that we're in danger of becoming irrelevant, or that we're facing financial challenges—I'm here to tell you there is truth behind those concerns.

Our industry is going through enormous change. Budgets are tight. Companies are consolidating and reevaluating where they invest. And, of course, this trickles down to non-profit organizations like SMPTE. As an association, we rely primarily on membership dues, sponsorships, and philanthropic support to fund our work. Those are often among the first expenses to be cut from budgets in difficult times.

But I don't believe the answer is to retreat. Organizations don't remain relevant by protecting the way things have always been done. They remain relevant by protecting their purpose



while changing how they fulfill it. SMPTE has to adapt or be left behind.

And when I become overwhelmed by the challenges and the road ahead, I remember that my longtime vocal coach used to tell me that a house isn't built all at once—it's built brick by brick. Sometimes I need to remind myself to stop and take stock of just how much adapting we've already done.

In just a couple of short years, we've replaced a member portal with limited functionality with a new system that provides a better member experience, and which continues to evolve. We've launched new training courses and workshops and, with generous support from our partners, created a practical lab for hands-on SMPTE ST 2110 learning.

We've opened access to the entire SMPTE Standards Library, with support from our Diamond members and donors, making the technical foundation our industry relies on more accessible to everyone.

We've revised our Corporate Membership levels and benefits and introduced our Corporate Member Engagement Specialist program to provide more personalized, dedicated support to our sustaining members.

We've launched SMPTE's Substack, creating a more accessible and conversational channel for sharing technical knowledge, industry perspectives, and Society content.

We've strengthened our partnerships and collaborations with allied industry organizations, recognizing that the challenges facing our industry are too big for any one organization to tackle alone.

We've launched SMPTE's first major fundraising campaign in a decade. We are working to build a culture of philanthropy that can sustain the Society for years to come, including developing a planned giving program.

And yes, we've introduced the SMPTE Color Bears—because sometimes we need to remind ourselves that it's okay to have a little fun!

As I look ahead to all we'd like to accomplish over the next three to five years, I am genuinely excited by the possibilities. Our strategic priorities include creating new pathways and tools for standards development; expanding accessible, practical education and professional development for learners at every stage of their careers; building a robust digital knowledge platform; strengthening mentorship and community; establishing SMPTE as a leader in trusted AI for media and entertainment; and investing in the organizational capacity necessary to make all of that possible.

And then I remember one of my catchphrases: "Anything is possible... with money."

SMPTE exists to support this industry through standards, education, and community. But today, we need

the industry to support SMPTE—not simply to keep doing what we have always done, but to evolve to meet what comes next.

In these uncertain times, I've been thinking about the "what ifs." What if SMPTE closed its doors? What if SMPTE could no longer provide conferences, the *Motion Imaging Journal*, courses and training, or even the infrastructure that supports standards development?

Dr. George W. Arnold, former ISO Vice President–Policy, said: "Standards provide the 'invisible fabric' that allows modern society to function." For more than a century, SMPTE has helped weave that invisible fabric for media and entertainment. When standards work, most people never think about them. The picture appears. The sound plays. Systems connect. Content moves around the world. Technologies created by different companies simply work together. That is the point. But what happens when that framework isn't there?

What happens when proprietary technologies can't work together? What happens when there is no neutral place for competitors to come together to solve shared technical problems?

And SMPTE's role extends beyond standards. What happens to the communities that have been built around this Society? What happens when those professional networks aren't there to connect and support our industry? What happens when the mentorship, education, and outreach that helped generations of people find their way into careers in media technology are no longer there to make those often-invisible career paths visible?

Those questions are bigger than SMPTE as an organization. They are questions about what kind of indus-

try we want to build for the future.

So I reached out to our members and asked them to tell me their stories. How did they become involved with SMPTE? How have their careers been impacted? What might have been different if SMPTE hadn't been there? And perhaps most importantly: Why does SMPTE matter—and why is it worth supporting?

These are their stories.



Fernando Bittencourt, Past President of SET (Brazilian Society of TV Engineers)

Brazil

A Lifelong Connection

I have been a member of SMPTE for nearly 50 years. Through this organization, I have learned about the latest advances in television, film, and, more recently, media as a whole.

Driving Technological Progress

SMPTE has played a decisive role in the industry's transition, from analog to digital, composite video to component video, and SDTV to HDTV and beyond. More recently, from SDI to IP and from SDR to HDR.

Throughout these changes, SMPTE has set the standards that guided the industry and educated the market through technical papers, its journal, conferences, and study groups.

Long live SMPTE!



Laquie TN Campbell, M&E and Emerging Tech Strategist
United States (New Mexico)

SMPTE gave me more than a professional network. It provided me with a community where authentic relationships grew into opportunities, leadership, and a broader sense of where I belonged in this industry. Over time, I went from learning from people who welcomed me into those rooms to helping shape educational programming and making a point to be that same welcoming presence for someone walking into the room for the first time. I want new faces to know there is a place for them in media technology and to see people they can relate to already participating, leading, and helping shape its future. Without SMPTE, my career might have been narrower, but more importantly, I would have missed the opportunity to help widen that path for others.



Jeff Cohen, Partner, Jeff at Cohen Reps
United States (New York)

I've been a member of SMPTE for my entire working life, and I honestly can't imagine my career without it.

SMPTE turned my working life into a profession, not just a succession of jobs. Over more than 40 years, it has given me far more than technical knowledge. It has given me a community of colleagues, mentors, and lifelong friends.

The technology and the industry have changed enormously, but SMPTE has been a constant, giving me the knowledge and perspective to keep up with those changes, while staying connected to the people who make this industry so special.

Looking back, so many of the people, experiences, and opportunities that have meant the most to me have come through SMPTE. I'm incredibly grateful to be a part of this community for more than 40 years.



Dagmar Driesnack, Senior Solutions Engineer at Appeal
Germany

When I joined the media and broadcast industry many years ago as a student/young engineer, SMPTE was always something out of reach for me—geographically (as I'm based in Germany) and also knowledge-wise. I never imagined that, with time and the help of my colleagues, I would become involved in SMPTE's work, let alone serve as a Member of the Board! It's still unbelievable. SMPTE is not unreachable—ask questions, join discussions, and be brave. SMPTE members are willing to help, united by a shared goal of moving the media industry forward for 110 years. Every (even silent) voice is needed. Share ideas, share your knowledge, and be part of SMPTE.



Eric Gsell, Staff Engineer at Dolby Laboratories
United States (Hollywood, CA)

SMPTE is so many things to me: a platform to learn about new and complex technologies; a place to understand the intricacies of a Standard; a network of colleagues and friends all working towards the same goals and dreams. I wouldn't be where I am today without the support and help of SMPTE.



William T. Hayes, Media Consultant & Mentor
United States (Iowa)

In the early 1980s, I was a radio engineer when a crazy station owner with a construction permit to build a UHF television station in Hawaii hired me to do the job. I was just as crazy and said yes. I knew I had to get up to speed on television technology in a hurry and joined SMPTE to learn about television, initially from the *Journal* but also by attending SMPTE conferences, where I met industry giants who willingly shared their knowledge, guidance, and friendship as I grew. Now, some 45 years later, I cannot imagine my career or the industry without SMPTE providing education, standards, and stability amid the chaos of media businesses.



Tony Ngai, Founder and Director at Society of Motion Imaging, Ltd.

Hong Kong

I joined SMPTE in 1974 as a student member in Hollywood. The first SMPTE meeting was in a Hollywood studio, and I immediately felt that the SMPTE community was full of passion, professionalism, kindness, and willingness to share, even with me, who was only a very junior student member at age 24. Now I am one of the founding members of the Hong Kong Section and have been with SMPTE for 52 years already and going strong; the same feeling is there and best described by SMPTE's Slogan, "We ARE ONE!"



Allan Schollnick, Business Development Executive at Hollywood Film Company

United States (Hollywood, CA)

SMPTE Standards have been part of my career for as long as I can remember. In 1982, a computer with 8-inch floppy disks, made by RA Gray Labs—the same company that made timecode generators and readers—provided automation for the variety of projection devices at the Strassburgh Planetarium in Rochester, NY.

At Lorimar Technical Service near LAX, the QC, audio, and telecine suites followed SMPTE specifications for maintaining 18% gray ambient light around the display monitor to balance the light and reduce eye fatigue.

Later, as Quality Control Manager at The Walt Disney Company, I was tasked with writing video mastering specs. Industry engineers recommended I find the SMPTE RS-170A, which became the basic standard for horizontal and vertical blanking burst, front and back porch, where vertical line captions fall, VITS and VIRS fundamental elements that helped drive the formats and standards we have today.

The DCP is a great example: without it, every projector manufacturer could have created its own format. SMPTE standards helped make DCP a common theater standard, much as film had been.



Sara Seidel, Marketing Manager, the Americas at Riedel Communications

United States (New Jersey)

SMPTE has played a defining role in my professional journey. It took an introverted software engineer with a passion for technology and a few ideas and gave her a platform to share them—through technical papers, presentations, standards work, and conversations with others who shared that same passion.

More importantly, SMPTE gave me a community. It connected me with colleagues, mentors, and friends who challenged my thinking, encouraged me to contribute, and opened doors to opportunities I

never could have imagined. Through SMPTE, I found opportunities not only to participate in our industry, but to lead, contribute to its technical direction, and help shape its future.

Over the years, SMPTE became much more than a professional organization to me. It became a community, a source of inspiration, and ultimately, a family. It helped give me the confidence to find my voice and the opportunity to use it in service of our industry.

I would not be the engineer, technologist, leader, or advocate I am today without SMPTE. Much of what I have accomplished in this industry began with the opportunities SMPTE gave me—and I am deeply grateful for that.



John Shike, Key Account Manager at Advanced Systems Group, LLC (ASG)

United States (San Francisco)

My introduction to the depth and breadth of video technology came at the SMPTE Annual Conference at the Hilton in New York. In the years that followed, as Head of Marketing for the Americas at Snell & Wilcox, I made it a priority for our company to exhibit at the SMPTE Fall Conference each year.

Today, as Director of Membership at SMPTE, I am delighted to support SMPTE Student Chapters and help students explore the important role standards and technology play in the creative world of media.



Rachel Romero, Technical Account Manager at TAG Video Systems United States (Washington, DC)

Growing up as the firstborn in a Spanish household, my life had a clear path: study hard, go to college, make money, start a family. That's it. I never, ever expected to become an engineer. Maybe a doctor, scientist, or even the next Indiana Jones. Never an engineer, though. Why? Because the "engineers" in school were the boys in the AV club. The girls were the "talent" in front of the camera. It was never presented as an option to me.

So, I did what I had always done so well: be a good student. That somehow landed me in LA for the American Society of Cinematographers Master Class and, as they say, Bob's your uncle. I was completely hooked. The camaraderie, the science, the engineering! I was beyond curious about how it all worked to create the magic I saw onscreen. But how could I keep pursuing this passion when I couldn't afford to move to LA? Then, I learned about SMPTE.

Grade school teaches you the basics, college prepares you for a paycheck, but organizations like SMPTE? That is where I actually got to pursue my real interests. The SMPTE ST 2110 Boot Camp gave me the foundational knowledge I needed to jump right into the latest broadcast tech and gain access to amazing jobs. But the real magic of SMPTE? Learning side-by-side with industry leaders who took me under their wings and championed me. I remember thinking, Wait, is this normal? As a woman navigating a male-dominated field, that mentorship was everything I'd never had before.

Now, it's my turn to give back to this community. I want to keep these doors open and build that same bridge for the next generation of engineers, dreamers, and avid learners coming up behind us.



Paul Whybrow, SMPTE Regional Governor – Asia-Pacific Australia

I may have only been involved with SMPTE in the last eight years of my career, but I know many for whom SMPTE has been in their blood for 40 years or more, guiding their technological, operational, and innovational journey from junior engineer through to CTO. The passion and collaboration around the globe to bring audiences the best viewing experience are at the heart of the organization. Being 110 years old is a mere steppingstone for SMPTE's next 50 years!

Conclusion

In this new era, I'm channeling my

inner Mr. Rogers—or, more accurately, his mother—who famously reminded him in times of trouble to "look for the helpers."

SMPTE is full of helpers. People who give their time, talent, and treasure to this Society. People who serve as ambassadors for SMPTE and strive to pay forward the support, mentorship, and opportunities they received along their own journeys.

Now, I'm calling on all of our helpers.

There are so many ways to help strengthen SMPTE and ensure its future, and no act is too small. Make a personal contribution to our fundraising campaign. Explore whether your company has corporate giving opportunities. Talk to your organization about the value of Corporate Membership. Join the Standards Community. Bring a colleague or student to a Section meeting. Share information about the SMPTE Summit, our courses and training, or a local event with your network. Write a blog post. Get involved with your local Section or Student Chapter. Volunteer at an event. Share your story. Offer your skills, your ideas, your connections, or simply your voice.

It all matters.

For more than a century, people have stepped up to build this Society, support one another, and help move our industry forward. Now it's our turn to make sure that continues for generations to come.

Calling all helpers! Help us strengthen SMPTE and build what comes next.

Sign up to Help: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HELPSMPTE>



110 Campaign: <https://www.smpte.org/110-anniversary-campaign>

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