December 2009

Hollywood AMWA-SMPTE Seminar Successful

The AMWA and the SMPTE co-hosted a seminar in Hollywood on October 26th, the day preceding the SMPTE Technical Conference. The audience of about 200 heard studio executives and industry consultants describe their experiences with digital workflows. AMWA meetings have often focused on broadcast but when in Hollywood, film is king.

AMWA Executive Director Brad Gilmer led the discussion with panelists:

- Gordon Castle, Managing Director Meadowdale Group
- Christopher J. Cookson, President Sony Pictures Technologies
- John Footen, Vice President National TeleConsultants
- John Hurst, Chief Technology Officer CineCert
- Tim Padilla, Executive Director Digital Media Systems, Warner Bros
- Leon D. Silverman, General Manager, Digital Studio, The Walt Disney Studios

Questioning whether media organizations are using file-based workflows today and really taking advantage of the technology, MC Brad Gilmer asked, "what can you do today?"

Simultaneous global release across platforms is now common, and the need to create multiple versions in multiple languages can only be achieved efficiently with file-based operations. Leon Silverman provided an example of the accelerated workflows expected today.

Flash Forward (from ABC) has French subtitles ready five days after it leaves the dub stage (the same day it airs in the USA), and it airs in a number of countries around the world fully subtitled and dubbed one week after US air.

Accelerated workflows enable producers to contract timescales, and can be more important than the cost-savings that accrue from file-based production. Chris Cookson said, "it improves accessibility to the content" and referring to the old tape dubbing and courier distribution processes, "what used to take three days now takes minutes" with media files.

The panel moved on to the cultural aspects of moving from film and tape to file-based production. Job roles are changing, new jobs has been created like the "data wrangler". The move from the tried and trusted workflows that have served the film industry from its inception is not without issues. Leon Silverman said "culturally, we are going through the notion of doing new things in new ways; there will be new jobs, a lot of change and a lot of turmoil" as new technology introduces new workflows.

John Footen stated that "some of the biggest problems that occur with file-based projects are cultural or business problems, not the technological ones." John Hurst added, "it's not the definition of the metadata that is the hard part – it's getting people to use it."

Gordon Castle's experience is that "anytime you change the workflow and use technology after the fact to support that workflow, things work better."

All speakers talked about efficiencies that result when media is no longer physically transported around the lot of from the shoot to post production. Chris Cookson hoped to "touch the content the day it's shot and make that the last time I have to touch it in the production process". He described some benefits Sony accrued in their first two films produced with file-based workflows – *2012* and *Zombieland*.

Brad Gilmer raised the question "where is the edge of the facility?" Files can be transferred between production partners who may be located anywhere in the world. Chris Cookson described how the creation of effects films requires the collaboration of many (effects) houses in many places. "In the production of a film like 2012, it was critical to move material between places wherever they may be. There is the need to unite FX, shooting contributions, post production, review" and that needs an open architecture which allows plugins. "We envisage a service oriented architecture (SOA) to support this."

Discussion also included the use of SOA in media production, and business process management and optimization, all common in other industries but slow to find acceptance in the film and broadcast sectors. As an introduction John Footen said "SOA moves the interface up to the business level, at the level of a work order." The panel talked about advantages that the architecture can offer to the media industry and some described their experiences of actually using an SOA, the others expressed the intention to deploy them in the immediate future.

Seminar Interoperability Demo

The panel session was followed by a technical demonstration of sample media production processes to show how different vendors could interoperate using AS-02 and AS-03 MXF files. MC Mark Horton of AmberFin guided the audience through the demo, which showed how processes from acquisition, through editing, to distribution can all be linked with the new AMWA mastering and delivery specifications.

Thirteen vendors participated in the demo and anyone who has participated in a "plugfest' knows that showing thirteen different systems interoperating **live** is a major challenge. Thanks to sterling efforts from everyone and especially Ascent Media for technical implementation, it was a great success. The demo showed ingest of HD-SDI video and DPX files, and then flow through a number of typical operations like editing, QC and transcoding, before final delivery to the web, phone, VOD, as HD-SDI, and finally to be archived to data tape.

The video essence was wrapped as AS-02 and AS-03 in different parts of the workflow, successfully demonstrating support for the specifications from the demo participants:

- Adobe Systems
- AmberFin
- Ascent Media Group
- Avid Technology
- Cinegy
- IBM
- Metaglue
- Omneon
- RadiantGrid
- Rhozet
- SAN Solutions
- Signiant
- Sony

Mark Horton said that "to show such a complex workflow with so many vendors is confirmation that the work of the AMWA to create the AS-02 and AS-03 formats of MXF has achieved its goal. Media companies are looking for simple file exchange between equipment from different vendors. AS-02 and AS-03 provide features and flexibility that far exceed anything possible with videotape. The improved efficiencies will be welcomed by users across the spectrum of media production."

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AMWA AGM held Santa Fe

The AMWA Annual General Meeting was held May 2009 in Santa Fe, NM, along with a series of business seminars and technical working sessions. The seminar featured presentations from leading broadcasters who shared experiences with file-based workflows.

An issue surrounding the development of AS-03 has been to further constrain the specification to meet the need of a single broadcaster. The solution has been

found in the "shim", which can be used, for example, to define a specific video codec.

BXF 2.0 and BXF to MXF mapping were introduced by Ian Wimsett of Red Bee Media who gave a description of their use of AMWA specifications in their role as a playout service provider. Chris Lennon of Harris gave a detailed update of the new features proposed for BXF 2.0.

Oliver Morgan of Metaglue leads a technical discussion with the audience of members and non-members.

The final two days were devoted to technical sessions on AS-03 MXF Program Deliver, AS-05 AAF Effects Protocol, MS-06 BXF-MXF Mapping, IS-03 Media Authoring with Java and an update on the AAF Toolkit. Jean-Pierre Evain, of the European Broadcasting Union led a session on networked production.

Several broadcasters gave presentations on file-based workflows, including CNN, Discovery Networks, Lifetime Television, PBS and SPEED, the motor sports network.

New AMWA Members

The AMWA Membership continues to grow and is currently at 67, which compares favorably to 58 members at year-end 2008 and 41 the previous year. New members joining since the last newsletter are:

- 3T Technology Co. Ltd
- Aspera, Inc.
- Quantum
- RadiantGrid Technologies
- SAN Solutions
- Signiant
- Snell
- Storer TV
- Four Individual Members

AMWA Member Resources

♦ *AMWA Forum*

Want to receive periodic general member announcements? Need to find the AMWA Member Resources? Interested in AMWA Committee communication?

If you haven't yet registered for the AMWA Forum, you're missing out on all the above. There is no limit to the number of employees of AMWA Member companies that can register for the AMWA Forum. Go to http://forum.amwa.tv, click on Register, and follow the prompts. You'll receive an email notice when you've been accepted.

♦ *AMWA Membership Logo for Web Sites*

Show your membership pride by adding an AMWA Member logo to your company web site. Available in two styles, as indicated below, the art can be copied from the Member Resources file on the AMWA Forum.

  For all Principal Members

  For all other Members

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