

First of a new generation

It became obvious from feedback received from our last couple of 'projection' training courses that the industry has changed and that our long-standing BKSTS CTC training courses needed to change to reflect this.

Most of our cinemas no longer have full-time dedicated specialist projection staff, and projection has become just one of the many tasks that are carried out by the new generation of management and operational staff.

Their technical skills need to range from the programming of the cinema's movies via a Theatre Management System, through the ingestion of the digital cinema packages into the individual screen servers, to ensuring that the results on screen are as good as they can be.

They also need the flexibility to deal with the management and operations relating to bookings, ticketing and concession sales as well as those all-important 'front of house' duties where meeting, greeting and satisfying the needs of the cinemagoing public is so vital to the success of any cinema.

Although some projectionists will never understand it, I have actually heard from some of the younger ones who have made the change from the projection box to 'operations and management' and they tell me that their new life is actually more interesting and more fulfilling than when they were constrained to 'the box' - they now feel that they are more fully involved in the whole business of running a cinema rather than just looking after the technical stuff.



Presentation Training Course at BFI

Jim Slater reports on a brand new course with a difference!

A new generation of training course, and of presenters!

So over the last six months CTC members sat down to discuss and think about the best format for a new series of courses aimed at this new audience of cinema employees, with the primary aim of giving these people the information and skills that they need to ensure that the pictures and sound that they present to their audiences

are the very best that they can be. We weren't trying to train them on operating projection equipment - they have all received basic training from their employers on that - but our aim was to provide some

'added value' extra information from experienced experts from all around the industry, with all this 'know-how' focused on presenting the very best images and sound.

CTC members are always keen to ensure that the movie material from the studios is shown on screen as the Director would have wanted it to be seen, and we were fortunate to obtain some funding from Creative Skillset to help run these courses. Industry veteran David Kerr was involved with the CTC team throughout the course planning and organisation, and he ensured that the design of the course met its targets. His colleague Geraldine Moloney took on the administrative burden of dealing with the bookings and payments. On the day of the

course we were also delighted that Sandie Caffelle from Jack Roe came along to handle the welcoming of guests and the administration, in her usual unflappable way.

In our planning we decided that we wanted to get away from the 'Powerpoint' presentations that have become traditional, and to do everything possible to involve the audience members at all times. Lead presenters for this course (the new generation!) were our ever enthusiastic Peter Knight, of www.madcornishprojectionist.co.uk fame and the vastly experienced West End projectionist Dave Norris. They adopted a relaxed, informal style, sitting on the edge of the stage, involving the audience in their 'conversations' all through the sessions. This worked





Richard Boyd and David Kerr



very well and, almost without realising it, the audience found themselves participating in everything from shows of hands to questions and answers.

BFI - a great venue

We were very fortunate that for the first of the new generation of courses we were able to use BFI Southbank's NFT1 and NFT3 cinemas, as well as to make use of the expertise of NFT's Technical Director Richard Boyd and his expert technical team. Sponsorship from Christie, who have provided much of the projection equipment at the NFT, meant that they effectively paid for the theatre rental on the day, for which we are truly grateful. It was also fantastic to have the help of Richard Boyd throughout the planning of the course, keeping some of our wild ideas within the realms of reality as we decided exactly what would prove possible to achieve technically on the day, all the time bearing in mind that we need to take this course to other venues around the country in the months to come.

Cinema as it should be, cinema at its very best...

After breakfast in the BFI Atrium we sat comfortably in NFT 1 and the tabs opened to display magnificent digital images and wonderful 5.1 sound from a series of carefully selected clips, first from Warner Bros. and then from Universal, showing the magic of cinema as it should

be, cinema at its very best. It showed the audience just how good cinema presentation can be, left them wanting more, and provided a great example of what all cinemas should be striving for.

Master of Ceremonies David Kerr then welcomed the delegates and explained the aims for the day. He told how in a recent 'secret shopper' exercise there had been too many instances of customers finding things to be less than perfect at too many cinemas, with presentation problems ranging from poor sound and pictures to light spilling on the screen, as well as pictures being shown in the wrong aspect ratio, pictures being shown in 2D via 3D lenses, inappropriate ads and trailers, and even a fire alarm which the cinema staff effectively ignored! David explained that the course had been designed in response to valuable feedback from those attending earlier courses (it was noticeable that quite of the few of the delegates had been on previous courses) and explained that the aim of the day was to help their cinemas to 'improve their image'. I was interested and a little disappointed to see that of the 45 registered delegates, some of whom had come from as far away as Edinburgh, Belfast, and the Isle of Man, hardly any came from the big cinema companies; nearly all were from small cinemas, their keenness to learn reflecting a real desire to show their cinema pre-



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sentations at their very best. Richard Boyd then welcomed us on behalf of the BFI and provided the usual 'housekeeping' information and explained the objectives of the day. He told the delegates that they would be welcome to visit the BFI projection rooms at the end of the day, an invitation that many eagerly accepted.

A message from the media!

Well-known film critic and broadcaster Mark Kermode has been a good friend to the CTC in recent years, as well as valiantly supporting the cause of keeping skilled projectionists in the cinema industry.



He had been kind enough to record a special video clip welcoming delegates to the day's course, re-iterating his regular message that first class projection is vital if the hard work of everybody involved in the film-making business is not to be wasted; the projectionist is the last link in the movie-making chain, and hundreds of millions of investment in the making of a movie can be ruined by clumsy or careless projection. It was great for the delegates to see this very 'personal' message directed to them, and proved a good start to the day's presentations.

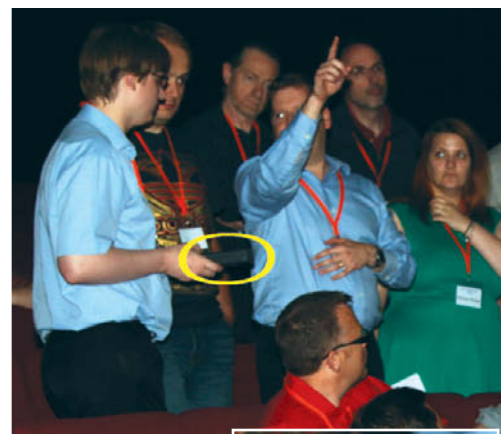
Getting the picture right - and watching it on screen

Peter Knight and David Norris then did a double act, talking the audience through numerous visual issues which can affect cinema pictures.

They discussed aspect ratios, focus, 2D / 3D issues, and light levels, but rather than using the



L-R: Peter Knight and David Norris' double act. Peter Knight told the delegates that most of what they needed to know about Digital Cinema is contained in the BKSTS projection handbook, which was provided free of charge to each attendee. Chris Connett shows delegates how to get the best from the TLS handheld meter (circled) when measuring screen luminance.



usual Powerpoint / Bullet-Point 'lecture' technique they had taken enormous trouble to provide on-screen examples, using a new movie trailer to actually show the effect of various problems that the projectionist might come across.

We saw a clip of what happens when a 2D trailer is (wrongly) shown with the projector in 3D mode, and the audience members were asked to guess what the problem we could see on screen (totally wrong and garish colours with ghostly images) was caused by. This led to various suggestions from the audience, and it was encouraging that some came up with the correct answer. There was then a useful discussion as to what a projectionist should do if this happened in their cinema, and it was noticeable that the audience members really got involved with this. Peter and David then showed projected examples of the same trailer shown in turn with the correct and incorrect aspect ratios, and in the example where a 'flat' trailer was wrongly shown in 'Scope mode, it was easy to see where the tops of heads were missing and titles and logos at the bottom of the picture were clipped or disappeared. Once again these real life on-screen examples were a great way of involving the audience, rather than just subjecting them to lots of 'slides'.

Getting the sound right or wrong - and hearing the effects

A new movie trailer was then shown several times, with different sound faults applied each time, and the audience was asked to say what they thought the problems they were hearing were caused by. The separate demonstrations included a total loss of the dialogue channel, a loss of the right hand sound channel and right hand surround channel, and we then saw the effects of watching a picture with 'out of sync' sound. All these examples led to lots of audience interaction, and we learned that the 'out of sync' examples had sound just eight frames out of phase, representing one-third of a second at the 24 frames per second image rate. But it was still very noticeable in some parts. Whereas the first demonstrations were followed by suggestions of what the projection team might do to find out what was causing the problem and attempt to solve it, the 'out of sync' problem was most likely to be caused by a fault on the incoming material so there wouldn't be anything that a projection person could do to correct it - but it is an important fault to be able to recognise and describe.

'non-sync' too

Moving swiftly from 'out of sync' sound to what is colloquially

called 'non-sync' - the sound that is played in the auditorium or around the cinema before and after the movie and during intermissions - Dave explained how a suitable choice of music can really enhance the movie-going experience. A show of hands as to who made use of non-sync music indicated that most people did, generally using CDs as the source, although others used iPods and other digital media. We heard cautionary tales of cinemas still playing Christmas music at Easter, but I was particularly impressed by the non-sync music that had been carefully chosen by Richard Huhndorf for use during our training day. On each occasion the music was totally appropriate and really added to the atmosphere of the material that was being shown or talked about. I was particularly impressed by the non-sync music that was used to accompany the 'sound' section of our course - Cole Porter's 'Stereophonic Sound' from 'Silk Stockings'. How could you find more appropriate lyrics for a cinema technology course than "Today to get the public to attend a picture show, it is not enough to advertise the famous star they know. If you want to get the crowds to come around, you got to have glorious Technicolor, breath-taking CinemaScope and Stereoscopic Sound..." Sheer genius!

Testing, testing....

Michael Denner from Dolby (picture right) then introduced the audience to the importance of using appropriate test materials to ensure that pictures and sound are at their best.

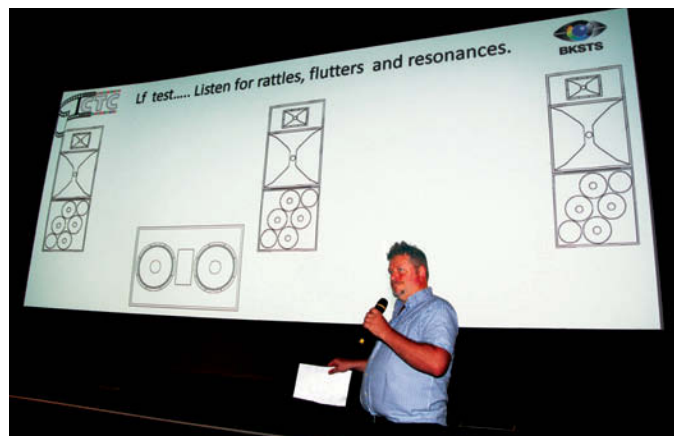
An innovation for this course was that Michael had produced and duplicated (thanks to Dolby!) a special USB memory stick containing a DCP (Digital Cinema Package) of custom-designed picture and sound test materials, and each delegate was given one of these to take away at the end of the course. Michael took us through each of the tests in turn.

The guys in the projection room had done a great job in trying to make sure that all the test charts appeared 'perfectly' on screen, but lack of time (the test sticks only arrived that morning) meant that there was an odd occasion when the image alignment on screen wasn't quite perfect - we will do better next time!

There were some excellent demos of how important focus is, and the sound tests were most impressive - many delegates were looking forward to using this test material when they returned to their own cinemas.

Brightest and best..

After an explanation from David Kerr about how the recognised



screen luminance measurement units of foot-Lamberts came about (actually named after 18th century German physicist Johann Heinrich Lambert), and its relationship with foot-candles, Peter and Dave then showed us white screen examples of different brightness levels on screen. We first were shown the significant difference between the standard 14fL DCI spec for 2D and the 3.5fL that is commonly used for 3D. After the white screen demos we saw a 2D trailer first at 4fL and then at 14 fL, and even those who had considered the lower-level images to be OK had to admit that the 14fL images were so much better. Then a real hands-on session began as half a dozen of the low-cost (around £250) TLS light meters were handed out to small groups of people who,

after minimal instruction, found that they were able to take measurements of the screen luminance for themselves. This gave rise to much interest, and I guess that TLS will be selling a few more of these little devices to some of our delegates in the coming weeks.

What's in a name?

After lunch Peter Knight got the audience to learn all about the DCI Digital Cinema Naming Convention in a completely novel way that will certainly prove memorable to many. Displaying the complex name code of a Disney 'Pirates of the Caribbean' movie on the screen he then persuaded fourteen 'volunteers' from the audience to come and help (below). Each was given a large sheet of paper displaying the code, and

then each was given another sheet containing an example of how that particular code item related to the version of the movie.

Peter moved along the line, explaining clearly what each item meant, and the remaining audience members were soon able to anticipate the correct answers.

A very good way of telling people that they needn't be frightened of what initially seems a complex system, and that by breaking it down into simple groups they can easily read all the detailed information about a movie that is shown on the hard drive label, for instance. Peter told delegates where to get more information: www.digitalcinemanamingconvention.com and pointed out that a look-up file to make the conversion easy is available on the web.

Practical Stuff

Nick Constable of Odeon gave an enthusiastic presentation explaining how programmes that arrive on hard disk (and also from satellite) can be 'ingested' into the Theatre Management System and then into individual screen servers.

He explained about files, KDMs (Odeon generally receive a KDM for every auditorium at a multiplex in order to provide the





required flexibility) and showed how playlists are built. Nick was asked numerous questions from the audience and demonstrated his immense experience by being able to answer them all as well as providing a wealth of detailed information and practical anecdotes. He discussed the time taken to ingest typical movies and the practicalities of overnight ingestion.

Tales from the NOC

Charles Gilson (picture below), an engineer from dcinex who has worked at their Network Operations Centre in Belgium and who has recently moved to Salford to a new engineering support centre, went through the process of starting up a digital projector and its server, explaining what happens at each stage.

He took us through a 'what do I do if the film doesn't play?' scenario, providing lots of helpful hints and tips. Charles had anticipated a whole list of tech-



nical questions of the 'what do I do if the image is out of focus?' variety, and gave helpful and detailed answers for them all, carefully explaining which problems were within the capability of the cinema operator to put right and which were not.

He told the audience when it was sensible to call the NOC, and explained how the engineers at the NOC have vast experience of many types of fault and would be able to advise the projection person on the best way to overcome any particular problem.

If necessary the NOC can take remote control of the cinema software and hardware, which can enable them to get more detailed information about a fault and enable them to make necessary changes. Although switching projection equipment off and on again can frequently resolve a problem, it was pointed out that having to allow some projectors to cool down can mean that such an action would cause a 10 minute break in the show, so this should be avoided. Similarly, software updates can sometimes be used to overcome technical issues, but these should only be installed when there is plenty of time to test them before a show. Charles was asked which were the three most common problems or questions that cinemas present to the NOC, and I was surprised that he didn't come up with these easily - evidently there are a whole range of different faults that affect the many cinemas that dcinex deal with so it isn't easy to pick out just two or three.

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The course is sponsored by Creative Skillset and the Film Distributors Association, enabling costs to be kept to a minimum.



Thanks are also due to the following companies for their generous support:



Ask an expert...

In what was billed as a 'Clinic' session, the various speakers and several CTC members came to the front to deal with what turned out to be a wide range of topics raised from the audience. KDM problems are less of a hot issue than they were a year ago, but several of the smaller cinemas said that they still have regular difficulties with getting keys in time to allow them to rehearse shows, as had been recommended on the course. This was perhaps understandable to ensure the security until the last minute of the latest blockbuster movie, but our distributor representatives agreed that there should be absolutely no need for this to happen at small 'second run' cinemas - perhaps ways of reducing the bureaucratic procedures need to be found.

Questions were asked about whether it is better to leave equipment on overnight (servers, yes, projectors probably no, although some have 'standby' settings which use little power and yet allow the projector to awakened remotely for tests or software upgrades if necessary.) A couple of people had suffered lamp explosions in recent times, and this highlighted the advantages of the Barco projectors in having easily replaceable lamp-houses.

Discussions took place about the future of cinema distribution, with one asking how long it would be before the big multiplexes do all their programming and playlist building centrally and remotely. Surprisingly, the



"Today to get the public to attend a picture show, it is not enough to advertise the famous star they know. If you want to get the crowds to come around, you got to have glorious Technicolor, breath-taking CinemaScope and Stereoscopic Sound..."

answer came that there are currently no plans for this - it is considered valuable for each cinema to be able to have local ads to suit its audience. Questions were asked about how many small cinemas have maintenance contracts, and it was interesting that quite a few

did not. This gave an opportunity for the dcinex representative to extol the merits of its service offering and I noticed several discussions going on later! Interestingly, one small cinema was having problems of too much light from its newly installed digital projector (45fL was quoted!) so there were some good suggestions and discussions about the causes and cures for this, ranging from defocusing the optical system (deprecated!) to smaller lamps, to the installation of a mechanical 'iris'. As in many other cases during the day, the people with the problem were able to make contact with experts who will be able to help them practically - something that always turns out to be a big incidental advantage of attending our courses!

Hands on...

In the adjacent BFI Green room several servers and other equipment had been set up and these were manned by experts from the companies concerned. Some of the more 'techie' attendees took advantage of the chance to see how the kit is operated, and I noted some fairly in-depth discussions continuing long after the course had officially ended.

Richard Boyd's team had kindly arranged for small groups to visit NFT's projection rooms, and many people took advantage of the offer and found this added a lot of extra interest to the day.

Thanks

The CTC would like to thank absolutely everyone involved in making the day such a success. Numerous CTC members had put in a vast amount of time and effort both behind the scenes and on the day. First class pictures and sound were essential to the success of the day, and without Richard Boyd's 'backroom boys' pulling out all the stops to make sure that we had every technical facility there would have been no show. As well as engineer Ed Mauger, the BFI team included Chris Clarke, Mark Kennedy, Romano Pena Samboy, Sam Wilkin, Russell Would, and Dominic Simmons. Thanks to Creative Skillset for sponsoring the course and enabling costs to be kept to a minimum, and thanks to the CEA, to Christie, to Dolby and to the BFI for their tremendous support.

The next CTC 'Making the best of your Image' course has been arranged for 17th October 2013 at Cineworld Glasgow. See previous page. Other courses are planned for Newcastle and Bristol during the winter. Keep an eye on www.bksts.com and www.bkstsctc.com for details.

