First impressions

A Mad Cornish Projectionist's view of CineEurope 2014

Peter J. Knight provides a personal 'blog-style' view of his first visit to CineEurope

Normally CineEurope falls the same week as the Glastonbury festival, so I have never been able to attend. However for a combination of reasons, including being a week earlier I was able to attend this year.

This article is about my first experience of CineEurope and also Spain - and as Jim has described it, is really a blog style write up. Barcelona is a beautiful city and I even managed to go out and spend some time exploring, thanks to sightseeing buses, which I highly recommend.

Anyway, this was my first experience of CineEurope, although I'd been to other Trade events over the years. I was there to help Jim Slater and Bob Cavanagh on the Cinema Technology stand within the trade floor area. CineEurope is made up of a number of different events (seminars, conference and trade stands) - I mainly saw the trade floor area and I know there are other articles in CT about the other parts of what was going at CineEurope.

I arrived in Barcelona on the Sunday, with the Monday being spent helping to setup the CT stand before the trade show part of CineEurope opened on the Tuesday.

The trade floor is not the largest one I have ever seen - but there were more than 110 stalls, including ones from CT friends JackRoe and Harkness Screen. One of the things which struck me most was the large number of stands selling either cinema seats or popcorn - more than any other area of products.

Upstairs there was a demonstration area where companies such as MasterImage, Sony and Dolby were able to show off their equipment in makeshift screening rooms.

I spent two days visiting as many trade stands as I could, to learn about the products on the market. Below I have written about some of the products and things which I saw at CineEurope which either impressed me or which I think may have a significant impact on the future of the industry. It is by no means meant to be an extensive list. At the end I have also written up a summary. It was noticeable, though, that the entrance to the conference centre looked more a cinema like than most cinemas, with all the large displays and standees around the space.

Top things from CineEurope

Barco

Like NEC and Christie, Barco had a significant display with a whole range of products on display. I was lucky enough to be invited to a personal tour of the Barco stand to see their latest technology and developments. I was able to talk directly with Product Managers of the different bits of equipment and there was much enthusiastic discussion from both Barco and myself around a number of the different products.

Barco interactive display

One of the most exciting areas for me was the advancement of the displays for the cinema foyer. Rather than just being a simple advertising display replacing a poster bill board it allows for interaction with the audience and for that interaction to be customised. This is not necessarily the latest piece of technology; there have been variations of this around for a number of years now. What this was more about was the amount of opportunity there was to receive active and direct feedback from the interactions which were taking place with the audience. This sort of interaction in the foyer will increase the amount of time a member of the public will stay there, which in turn will help the cinema to sell more concessions, especially if there was link between the displays and discounts available. This product has a lot of real potential for both cinemas and for advertisers as well. I think we will definitely be seeing more of this type of product very soon.

Barco Alchemy Module

The new Barco Alchemy module is an Integrated Cinema Media Process (ICMP) for the Series 2 DLP projector. The ICMP merges the functions of an Integrated Cinema Processor (ICP) and media server into a single board. According to Barco the idea is that reducing the required hardware increases both the simplicity and reliability of the projectors. The module also turns any Barco Series 2 projector into a fully fledged projector and media server, and includes onboard storage. This means that there is therefore a complete onboard server. When the module is added to a single 4K digital cinema projector, the Barco Alchemy technology enables 4K 2D at 60 fps and 4K 3D images, supporting all standard and 2K 3D HFR DCI movies.

Barco DP4K-32B - Ultra-bright 4K Barco Alchemy DLP Cinema projector for screens up to 32m (105ft). The DP4K-32B combines media server functionalities with cinema processing electronics which can show 4K movies

at 60 fps and 4K 3D content, along with a simple intuitive 'Barco Web Commander' user interface. Without instruction I was easily able to create a playlist.

DCI 4K 2D up to 60 fps

DCI 4K 3D (24 or 30 fps per eye)

DCI High Frame Rates 2K 3D up to 120 fps (60fps per eye)

I notice that Barco are celebrating their 80th anniversary this year as well.

Philips LightVibes

For me this was one of the highlights of CineEurope and something which I think is really exciting (although it did cause a division with a number of the CTC members who also saw the demonstration and thought it was the worst thing in the world!).

It is an opportunity for cinemas to both provide something extra and differentiate themselves from their competitors along with providing their customers with some real additional value which they can really see. Philips LightVibes is a set of panels which goes into the cinema auditorium - they have are black when they are off, and are acoustically designed so that they don't negatively affect the acoustics of the theatre. However, what they do when they are switched on is produce a soft focused image, or lighting effect. This is also linked to a set of moving heads and some other more traditional lighting which is also put into the auditorium.

There were three main elements that the LightVibes help to enhance - pre-show walk-in effects, making the auditorium more welcoming and being able to customise the space in a flexible way, which may be useful if there is a theatre let or for special events. The second part is that it can be used to enhance advertising. During the demonstration we were shown an advert where the panels changed colour to reflect what we were seeing on screen.

Finally, and this for me was where it got really exciting, was for 'Event Cinema' - the show reel consisted of a mixture of rock concerts like Led Zeppelin, big band singing such as Robbie Williams, classical concerts from Venice and pop like Beyonce. For all of these event clips the panels and additional lighting were added in. Sometimes these were variations of the images and graphics on screen plus the additional lighting in the auditorium. This is all very difficult to describe in words when it is such a very visual thing. It really did bring an extra 'immersive' experience to the content on the screen, in a good way, and started to make you feel that you really

were there at the event, in a way that I've not experience watching this sort of material previously.

I'm really excited by this development as I think that it really can enhance the cinema going experience and it is a technology which the audience can really see and can be aware of. You can find out more here: http://www.lighting.philips.com/main/subsites/special_lighting/cinemalamps/lightvibes.wpd.

I would only want the lights on for Event Cinema type material and for walk-in, rather than during a screening, however, as it would otherwise detract from what was on screen.

Christie Sound

Christie where keen to show off their audio system in a local cinema which had been equipped with Dolby Atmos and made use of their new audio ribbon system speakers. I think it is fair to say that the jury are still out on whether it was an improvement on conventional installations.

NEC laser

Laser technology was always going to be a hot topic at CineEurope. NEC had a couple of laser projectors on display with one of them having the entire laser module built into the projector, just like a xenon lamp house. I went to see a demonstration of the NEC laser projector in a cinema across from the convention centre and I thought the picture looked great in the auditorium. Of course I'm not an engineer so I may have missed something obvious and we didn't see any content in 3D, but the 2D image I saw looked really good. NEC, Christie and Barco have all been announcing the installations for laser projectors in various cinemas and venues across the world recently.

XPAND 3d and display

Many will know XPAND as being a company who manufacture 3D systems, but they have just entered the visual display software environment. Display technology has been developing over the last few years and the way in which it is being used has been developed along with it. The XPAND software allows cinemas to easily manage a number of different screens right across a cinema or an entire circuit, whether it is for advertising or the display above the door of an auditorium or another display. Having the software demonstrated to me it looks like a fairly simple system to use, one you know your way around it. It means that it is possible to schedule different content on different days of the week or different times of the day.

Of course XPAND aren't the only company who do this sort of thing, JackRoe Cinemas

have a similar type of system linked to their comprehensive ticketing and EPOS system. One of the things which sets the JackRoe system out from others is their use of using individual graphics for each of the film titles on the display.

CIELO

With the slogan of "Manage Your Cinema from Anywhere!" the new software from Cinevise is a piece of software which has taken remote monitoring to a new level as it provides an overview of each screen in each cinema easily and clearly using an iOS device. There is no need to have to interpret complicated file naming conventions or KDMs as these are all displayed in easy to understand menus. (http://www.cinevise.com/cielo).

New 3D

Are we about to see a new revolution in 3D in cinemas? Masterimage, Volfoni & DepthQ were all showing off a new piece of 3D technology which uses liquid crystal technology to produce the image and which are also able to produce more light on screen (claims of 28-33% depending on screen size) and all with motorised systems to move the 3D filter out of the way of the lens when not in use. This combined with Harkness Screen's new screen technology meant that the demonstrations which MasterImage and Volfoni provided of the new 3D technology did look really good. Because the demo rooms were quite small and not real world conditions I intend to go and visit a couple of screens in the UK where this technology has been installed to see if it is as good as is claimed.

4DX

Fashion tends to go around in circles as does technology and certainly technology in cinema - 3D to name just one such technology. A few years ago D-Box was introduced to a number of cinemas which was the start of the immersive experience, and of course for many years there has been 4D at theme parks and funfairs (sometimes now as called 5D). It was interesting therefore to come across a product called 4DX developed by CJ 4DPLEX. Unfortunately the stand only had a promotional video to explain what 4DX was all about (you can find out more via their website: http://www.cj4dx.com).

CJ 4DPLEX a company from Seoul, Korea was exhibiting their 4DX immersive cinematic experience technology for the first time in Western Europe. Unlike the 4D or 5D which we have become familiar with seeing in theme parks the 4DX product is designed to work with major Hollywood titles. Each 4DX

auditorium incorporates motion-based seating synchronised with over 20 different effects and allowing everyone in the theatre to experience special effects through motion, wind, bubbles, fog, lighting and scents which are designed to enhance the visuals on the screen.

Speaking with the lady on the stand at CineEurope it is my understanding that there is a separate control system which is linked to the cinema server which receives a data file for the 4DX and it is this which makes the effects work which means that the system just requires an 'ordinary' DCP rather than have a whole new version created.

At CineEurope the company were due to sign their first Western Europe contracts with Arena Cinemas of Switzerland (the third biggest cinema chain in the country) 'and other major players in the European film industry' (although the press release doesn't state who or where). According to CJ 4DPlex, Arena Cinemas is a perfect partner for 4DX brand as it has high interest in advanced technology and widely opened to innovation in movie platform. "The Swiss market is relatively very conservative and demanding with high standards. Therefore, we are very lucky to have a partner like Arena Cinemas, who pursues ceaseless innovation just like our brand", said Byung-hwan Choi, CEO of CJ 4DPLEX.

However 4DX has been around for nearly half a decade having launched in 2009 with screens in Korea and then spreading around the world with partnerships in Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Venezuela, Russia, Hungary, Poland, Czech, the Philippines, Indonesia, Japan and later this year Live Regal Cinemas in L.A. By the end of June 2014 the company expects to have expanded to more than 16,000 seats in109 theatres in 25 countries (which is around 4 per country). Unlike a system such as D-Box the whole auditorium has to be turned over to the 4DX system rather than just a few rows, with an auditorium size of about 150-200 being the preferred seating size.

The first film to experience the 4DX technology was Avatar there are now more than 140 movie titles with 4DX including: Frozen, The Amazing Spider-Man 2, Gravity, The Avengers, Iron Man 3, Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug, Ice Age 4: Continental Drift, Captain America: The Winter Soldier, X-Men: Days of Future Past and Transformers: Dark of the Moon. 600,000 members of the audience experienced Frozen and the Amazing Spider-Man 2 in 4DX.

But it is not just Hollywood titles which are having the 4DX experience added to them

with a number of Event Cinema concerts in China, Taiwan and Indonesia seeing 80-90% occupancy.

Looking the 4DX promotional material their is reference to advance negotiations in various countries and the UK is listed as being one of them, so in a year or so it maybe possible to judge for ourselves whether the extra effects can truly immerse you into the movie/story more.

Display of old equipment

Slightly hidden out of the way, along a corridor outside of the trade floor was a display of old cinema technology that the Projected Picture Trust would be envious to own. This was a selection of items from the famous Josep M. Queralto Collection, one of the most important in Europe on the technology of the cinema. A show called "The Magical Experiences of the Cinema" held in the University of Barcelona tells the story from the earliest days of cinema to the appearance of the Lumiere brothers and its connections with the sciences and art.

In Passing

Companies I spoke to or saw in passing which are worth giving mention to:

BeckerBillett (http://www.beckerbillett. de) - a ticket printing company - they print the tickets you sell and have been since 1945 when the British military government allowed Germany's cinemas to reopen again after the war.

Trinnov Audio (http://www.trinnov.com) - don't tell Dolby but there are other cinema audio processors on the market, including one from Trinnov Audio, although mainly based in France and USA.

Doremi Fidelio (http://www.DoremiLabs. com) - used in one of the demonstration rooms so that the staff didn't have to listen to the same trailers for three days, the Fidelio is a wireless audio system that delivers descriptive narration for the visually impaired (VI soundtrack), and amplified sound for the hearing impaired (HI soundtrack) in theatres. The system consists of a compact audio receiver with a plug-in head set, an audio transmitter which connects to any server via audio and USB connections, and a charging station accommodating ten (10) receivers. Auditorium and channel (VI or HI) can be easily configured from the touch screen tablet.

Airscreen (http://www.airscreen.com) - if you have been to an outdoor or pop-up cinema in the UK or even elsewhere in the world in the last few years, the chances are that the screen being used was an inflatable one and there

is a large chance that it was one which was supplied by Airscreen. Airscreen was invented in 1994 and now has customers in more than 75 countries and can can cope with up to 24mph wind speeds and are manufactured in Germany.

Jukebox & LANSat:I don't really need to introduce you to Motion Picture Solutions' LANSat and their new Jukebox product. I mention it here because there was an event to help launch them.

Summary

There is another article which I need to write in the near future around 'Immersive Cinema'

What CineEurope showed me was that there are a whole range of tools and technologies available to the cinema exhibitors to help provide a fantastic cinema going experience and it is up to the individual chains to achieve that.

For me two products stood out more than any other on display - Lightvibes and the Barco interactive advertising screen. With Philip's LightVibes product I would happily pay extra to go to a cinema/auditorium with the technology installed and running as I really do think that it adds something extra to the experience overall, especially with the Event Cinema concert events (both classical and pop), and it goes away from my massive dislike of cinemas which are nothing more than black boxes with no character. Lightvibes helps to change that and to a degree brings the auditorium back to the days when it was live theatre as well and there was additional lighting installed to provide something extra to the experience.

My second favourite product was the Barco foyer interactive display technology. This is technology that has been growing in other areas for a number of years, advertising on bus stops having had interactive elements for a while now. However, I think that the product which Barco is marketing is really interesting. It ultimately means that a customer may spend more time in the foyer of your cinema which in itself has to be a good thing in terms of helping to encourage the sale of more product. The added benefit of course is the ability to capture the statistics in such an interesting way to provide the additional data.

I had a fantastic time at CineEurope, exploring the trade show, the area and catching up with friends and collegues from the industry and it was also great to meet the legendary Bob. I can't wait until my next visit!

Peter J Knight