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Manufacturers Bring Out Their High-Tech Gadgets

By Mark R. Madler - 10/15/2007

San Fernando Valley Business Journal Staff

Panavision Inc. showed its commitment to both the film and digital formats with the new cameras, lenses and recording equipment recently unveiled for industry professionals.

Panavision CEO Bob Beitcher, assisted by actors dressed as Marilyn Monroe, Austin Powers and Chewbacca, presented the equipment to a crowd of about 60 people at a VIP lunch Oct. 11 at its headquarters in Woodland Hills. An all-day invitation event for industry insiders took place on Oct. 13.

In the past, Panavision had debuted new equipment at industry trade shows, but this year took a different route because of the especially advanced offerings.

The company's new XL2 35mm film camera is already in use by filmmakers. The other products displayed are in the final stages of testing and tweaking as the company does not want to risk the money or reputation of its customers until the equipment is fully tested.

"That is the Panavision way," Beitcher said.

The audience was also treated to looks at a series of new anamorphic lenses for film cameras; on board battery brackets for film and digital cameras that eliminate the use of battery belts or cables attached to the camera; a compact zoom lens for digital cameras; and a solid-state recorder for digital cameras that is half the size and weight of the previous model.

Brought in to Stage One was a new camera crane that Beitcher said was specifically designed for use by the NFL.

"Look for us on [Oct. 21] when the Cowboys beat the Vikings," Beitcher said.

The event was also used to announce the new name for its global lighting business.

Panalux puts the company's European and Asia Pacific lighting businesses under one banner.

"Panavision's focused investment in lighting enhances our position as an organization committed to meeting the needs of the global production community," Beitcher said.

\HOLLYWOOD SEES RED

Nearly 200 people turned out Oct. 6 at California State University, Northridge for a demonstration of the new RED One digital camera by Jim Mathers, a cinematographer and president of the Studio City-based Digital Cinema Society.

Mathers admitted he hadn't anticipated such a large turnout but certainly shows the interest that filmmakers and camera rental companies have in this new high definition camera of which only 40 have so far been made.

A similar event in Chicago for DCS members drew a crowd of 300.

Those in the entertainment industry are eager to find out about it because it is going to shake up the business, Mathers said.

The RED One records on a Flash memory card at 4K resolution, which makes the resolution nearly the same as 35mm film. The camera fixes a problem of earlier model HD cameras in that the depth of field is similar to that of a 35mm camera.

The body of the RED camera costs \$17,500 and the addition of lenses and gear puts a working package at

nearly \$50,000, Mathers said.

"It is making accessible high-end technology to people with limited means," Mathers said.

Another benefit of the camera is the time savings for cinematographers, who can create a specific look for a film immediately on the set.

Mathers filmed with his RED One at Upstage Studios in Van Nuys, in San Francisco and Chicago. Fotokem in Burbank turned the digital content into a 35mm print shown at the CSUN demonstration.

Orange County-based RED Digital Cinema Camera Co. is anticipating manufacturing 3,000 of the cameras. Peter Jackson used an early version of the RED One to film the short "Crossing the Line" shown at the National Association of Broadcasters trade show in April, and director Steven Soderbergh is using the camera for two 2008 releases.

With so many new cameras on the market, it will be interesting to see how the entertainment industry adapts, Mathers said.

"It's very exciting to a lot of the people in independent film production who will now have access to better quality tools to tell their stories," Mathers said.

EQUIPMENT EXPO

Interested in seeing how a film shot with a RED One camera looks?

A demonstration takes place Nov. 7 as part of HD Expo at the Burbank Marriott.

Ballrooms at the hotel will be converted into a 4K theater for a presentation by Ted Schilowitz from RED Digital Cinema Camera Co. and a showing of Jackson's "Crossing the Line."

HD Expo organizer Kristin Petrovich said the set up in the hotel will not be ideal but that the demonstration will be "beautifully" projected and heard.

New to the expo this year is "Q," an invitation-only pavilion of cutting-edge equipment geared toward those in the entertainment industry cutting the checks to purchase it.

The separate show is the best way to create an environment to look over emerging technologies, Petrovich said.

Exhibitors include Microsoft, Sony with its new F23 digital camera, Vision Research and its Phantom high-speed digital camera, and 3D television sets from Mitsubishi and Samsung.

"We will even things that have not had impact in this industry yet because they are still in the development phase," Petrovich said.

The two-day expo features 120 booths with equipment and services, and a panel discussion from industry professionals on the importance of editing in the filmmaking process and the impact of 3D filmmaking.

Steve Schklair, of North Hollywood-based Cobalt Entertainment, is slated to take part in one of the 3D panels on Nov. 8. Schklair shot a 3D concert film of rock group U2 that is expected to see theatrical release.

Clips of the U2 concert film made a believer out of Petrovich that 3D film can find an audience, once moviegoers realize how sophisticated the films are, no longer requiring the headache-inducing green and red lens glasses of the 1950s.

"If 3D is done right it will save theaters," Petrovich said.