



The Filmmaker and Multimedia

This four day conference and technical symposium, organised by the AFC and AFTRS from October 6 - 10, was aimed primarily at filmmakers - a 'how to' approach to getting into the much-hyped new multimedia industry.

A major focus of the conference was finding a way through the marketing hype to establish just what multimedia is, where is it up to and its likely impact on the film and television industries and producers.

The first day of the conference was dedicated to the marketing hype. All-day technical demonstrations wound up with the AFTRS's impressive studios looking more like a Time Zone - only the computer-game players were wearing suits! The following three days, however, provided an opportunity for filmmakers to question the product-pitchers about digital imaging technology, and a range of speakers tackled important issues such as where the government agencies stand in relation to multimedia.

Lynn Gailey, Director of Film Development at the Australian Film Commission, explained that the AFC can support multi-media projects because the funding constraints in the AFC Act 1975 are not based on delivery technologies. Broad definitions of 'program' and 'recording' cover CD-Rom and Laser disc productions. The AFC aims to support a 'small diverse body of work' in this emerging field. Gailey also said she hoped the new medium would make documentaries more financially viable through re-use of source material for educational interactives.

The Film Financing Corporation on the other hand cannot directly fund multimedia productions. FFC Investment Manager, David Noakes explained that the FFC can only support Australian programs as defined under section 10BA of the Tax Act, which requires exhibition on TV or in Australian cinemas as the *primary output*. Therefore multimedia as a form can be only *indirectly* funded, in two

ways: a package deal for a pre-sold TV doco which can be on-sold as a CD-Rom interactive; or ongoing use of FFC-funded documentaries as archival material for interactive work.

Managing Director of Film Australia, Bruce Moir, predicted that the 'digital future' for Film Oz was as publisher and stock library. He said that while Film Oz has co-produced one interactive work on laser disc (at a total cost of \$600,000) they are now doing only fully commissioned jobs. He also mentioned that Film Australia, Department of Arts and Administrative Services and the National Museum are conducting a feasibility study for a national museum based on transmission in the form of a network of telecommunications and multimedia, drawing on all aspects of Australian heritage.

The Department of Industry, Technology and Regional Development (DITARD) is particularly interested in the multimedia, and sees Australia as a site for the development of multimedia and some of its research and development and industry funding programs allow for support of multimedia projects.

Other conference highlights included demonstration and discussion of some exciting and creative interactive multimedia productions including Portraits of People Living with AIDS, by American artist Hazen Reed, and Ralph Wayment's Mnemonic Notations. There were also some particularly unexciting multimedia works, which came as an anti-climax after the techno-hype! The challenge of creativity and content was raised in a surprisingly lyrical presentation by Jonathon Delacour from Firmware Design. Addressing the subject of *Form and Content: the missing elements in multimedia development*, Delacour inspired his largely film-maker audience with an exemplary multimedia presentation incorporating snippets from diverse sources such as Hollywood film noir classics, Japanese film, 1000 year old Japanese women's poetry and

Joseph Cornell's boxes to get across his message that whatever the tools, the challenge is to communicate ideas and emotions imaginatively; and that 'gee wizz' technology is no substitute for creativity.

The conference also addressed the 'nightmare' of the legal implications of multimedia, which require a convergence of media, entertainment and computing law, or, as Peter Leonard from Gilbert and Tobin said, 'the techno-heads meet sin-city'. In his keynote address David Court, Editor of *BRW*, revealed the reasons for this nightmare, predicting that multimedia will open up a 'spare parts market' for audio-visual materials. The recycling of audio visual materials will involve complex negotiations about moral and intellectual property rights.

The only down-side to this event was that the main issue off the program was access for (and portrayal of) women in new media. Out of over 50 speakers, only eight were women, and the only paper specifically addressing gender - Julie Cunningham's *Off with the Pixels: gender and engagement in the computer worlds*, was squeezed into a lunch break. After the cumulative impact of product demos which excluded women, (and one unbelievably offensive demo on the final day), it was regrettable that this interesting paper was not given more prominence. □

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