INFOCOMM 1998
AV, an industry in transit

SPECIAL ICIA CONVENTION REPORT BY JULIUS GRAFTON

DALLAS: While the Corporate Theatre market in the USA alone is worth an estimated US$6 billion each year, it alone doesn't actually drive INFOCOMM.

AV or audio visual is also called multimedia, or it was before the computer trade snagged the name. But it also includes system integration, and INFOCOMM is full of control products and concepts.

You may think of a video wall as a retail tool or a presentation device. In fact that technology is found in high technology control rooms, as are video projectors.

I was told that the 'corporate theatre' market only accounted for a quarter of sales at INFOCOMM, so this would mean that those technologies shown there amount to a somewhat mega market.

It's a trade exhibition with a powerful support programme. The trade show floor stretches off into the distance with big names like Sony, Toshiba, Sanyo, AMX, Crestron, Barco and NEC all staging very, very substantial displays.

Commitment is the thing. As a student of how trade shows work around the world, I've yet to find a show that matches INFOCOMM as a package. The picture below provides some clues: plush carpet in the lobby, custom decor pieces, big signage, manageable crowd density.

These are all part of the 'black art' of professional trade show management, but in the case of ICIA, the non profit trade organisation who operate INFOCOMM, they put back plenty. Which benefits the visitors, which in turn benefits the exhibitors.

You find vision products there, the most obvious being video projectors in every shape and iteration. The 'Shootout' is a famous event where almost every video projector is grouped together in a darkened hall the size of a jumbo hanger, and fed the same signal.

In the 'low rent' (or cheaper LCD projector) hall, the screens stretch off into the distance, offering differing hues and contrast. Colour tolerances are easy to compare, less simple is the actual ANSI lumen output - it is measured and posted on the ICIA website - but side by side, it is actually hard to discern *which* is brighter than *what*.
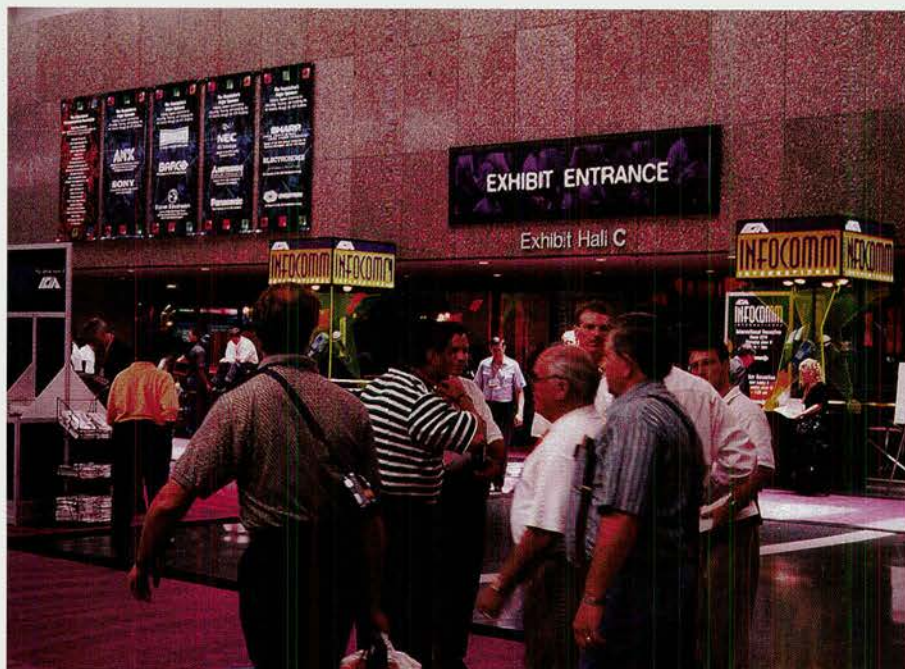
More power to the ICIA.

This show is a venue where you can browse quality exhibits for three days, attend exhibitor functions, and if necessary find a seat and a coffee without hassle.

These people understand how delicate their market position could be, and so they work hard to maintain and build it.

I can only compare with another show I recently attended where the chairman called a press conference to congratulate himself and his acolytes, who all nodded and 'hear hear'ed' into their cocktails and canapes, oblivious to their shrinking place in the world.

At INFOCOMM you've got emerging technologies, and the experts on hand to help explain them. That's what it's all about.

The Projection Smorgasboard

By Michael Hassett

DALLAS: Hughes-JVC positioned a 12kw ILA device as a replacement for film projection in cinemas.

This was done very effectively with the source being generated from a High Definition source. They were showing excerpts from Titanic, Jurassic Park and 5th Element as transfers from 70mm to HD, as well as recordings that were acquired using HD cameras.

The imagery was amazing - particularly the HD stuff, I have not seen levels of Black on black that has so much detail and contrast. The sound was DTS with Meyer suppling the Grunt.

Overall I would prefer to view movies in this way rather than putting up with the jittery images from film. The definition and detail were there along with a very bright image. Two thumbs up for the potential of digital projection in cinemas.

Projector shoot out

As expected a vast array of LCD devices based upon XGA chips, a number of 3 chip DLP devices and a new offering by Hughes made up the compact arena.

There was a sneak preview of Barco's future mid range device.

As I was on the hunt for a device to fit our mid range and main market needs I paid no more than a passing glance at the new large venue offerings. It appears that all the major manufacturers are heading for the top end 5,000 lumens- and at A$100k plus, big is not necessarily beautiful. Ever heard the term: better faster, cheaper - think about it.

Digital Projections came out with 3 new devices. The 7GV, 5GV and 3GV, all based upon the TI XGA 3 chip, performance was impressive in video, and DATA very adequate at 1024 x 768 - but as with the previous chips, it is recommended to use only the native resolution XGA as the scaling up or down isn't great. Switching between sources was less than acceptable, and pricing (particularly due to the dodgy Aussie Buck) was on the high side, from $68k to $120k US.

Barco had no moves on the Reality series, just some enhancement in colour balance.

Sony had nothing to add to their stable except in the low end with a very cute tiny little LCD thing.

Electrohome brought out two
(continues over)
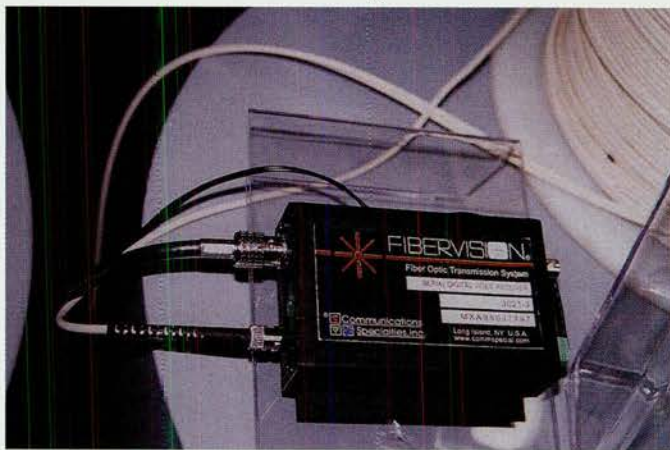
2km cable run with Fibrevision

NEW: Communications Specialties showed the Fibervision Serial Digital (SDI) Video Transmission System at INFOCOMM.

Ideal for integration into a huge range of applications, including broadcasting, videoconferencing and video production, Fibervision SDI Video Transmission System equalizes the SDI input and provides two (2) re-clocked SDI outputs at the receiver, in accordance with SMPTE 259M, 293M and other similar digital video standards, with speeds up to more than 360 Mb/s.

Consisting of a transmitter and receiver (each priced at about A$2500), this system is designed for use with multimode optical fiber. Fibervision SDI Video Transmission System supports distances up to 2 km with no degradation of signal. The system is adjustment free and built-in regulators allow both the transmitter and receiver to operate from low voltage, unregulated DC power sources, providing unparalleled versatility.

"With the evolution of new video standards comes the need for reliable transmission of SDI signals over great distances," explain John Lopinto, President and CEO of CSI. "Fibervision SDI Video Transmission System meets the challenges of this new era by providing a high quality, *affordable,* solution for the transmission of serial digital video."

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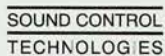
interesting offerings but again concentrating on the large arena market. Their couse de gras, their piesta resisitance is, wait for it, THE ROADIE, marketing guru's these guys!

Based upon the TI XGA DLP running at 5,000 lumens we are away for again a 3 figure sum. This unit is fully package ready for the road, complete with bumper bars and hanging points all wrapped up in a very nice flight case - hey: were they orange day glow safety wheels I saw?

It suffers from the same scaling problem as all TI (DLP) devices in Data, but Electrohome have still not got it right with being able to have a video and a data image fitting the same size screen. This has been a software problem from the very first Vista
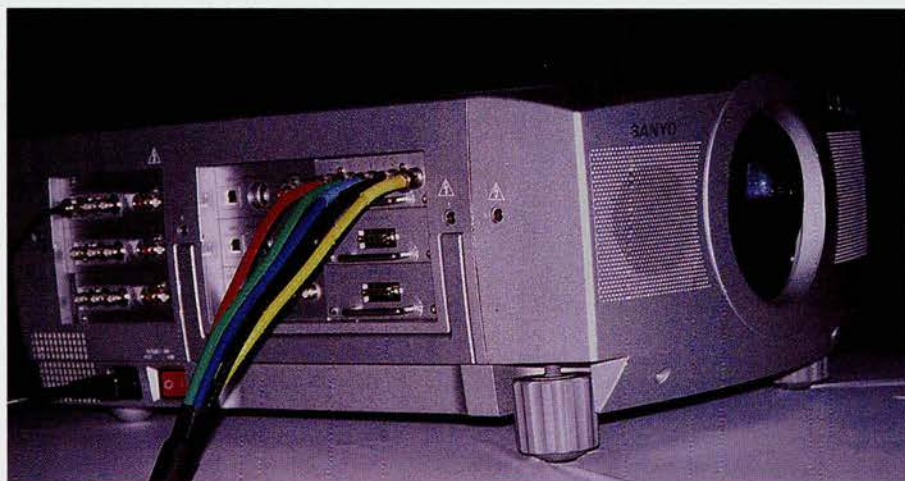
pro series and with going through the market research to develop the Roadie someone should have thought about how it should work, 10 points for construction, 5 points on operation and - 10 for the name.

Hughes, I generally ignored but their new little LCD / ILA hybrid looked very sweet at 1000 lumens. Compact size, smooth video performance and very good XGA Data - it is supposed to do a lot more resolution but I will wait until I get one to play with to comment further.

SANYO have rebadged a device for Proxima and Eiki (above) and this is certainly something to look out for. Native XGA, very good video performance, 2 x composite or component or S inputs and 2 x Data. This things has BNC connectors on it, a wired remote and 1500 lumens of performance.

This was proudly sitting in the big boys shootout between a The Roadie and a Digital 7GV - and let me tell you, there was not 6 times the difference, cause that's where they price difference is as they are running at about $16k US.

This machine has great potential but has a slight problem with switching as you have to toggle through all the inputs to get to the one you want. Some designer did not think it was necessary to have random acces through the remote but it is wired as well as Infrared.

You cannot go say from video 1 straight to data 2 you have to go through video 3, data 1 and back again.

Oh one other thing - you can't invert hang it, you must put it on a cradle, as inverting causes the thing to overheat and shut off.

Michael runs Technical Direction Co, a Sydney based AV firm who operate Barco Reality projectors amongst others.
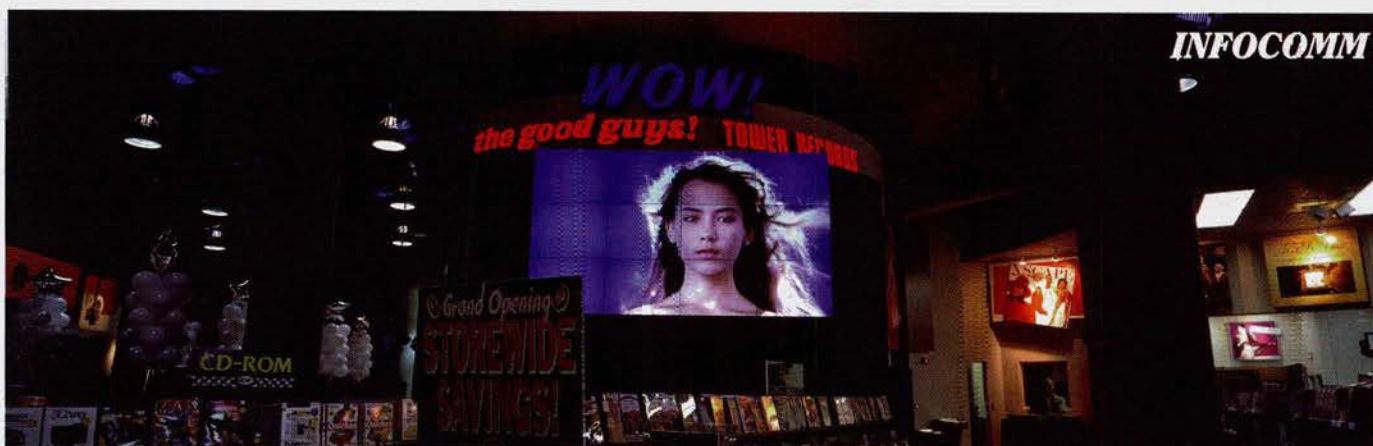
IMTECH typify the leading edge of videowall technology. The wall above was installed at a Wow! store in Glendale, CA, and is the first full high definition television (HDTV) 16:9 videowall in a retail store in the USA. IMTECH also supplied the control electronics, including multi laser disk players and advertisement inserting software.

TeleVoter Audience Voting system

This shows how broad the AV business actually is. A TeleVoter software update is now available for Windows NT and Windows 98. The TeleVoter update includes a "Quiz show Wizard" and some new Tally and new graphics features. The critical differences between TeleVoter is the really nice software that runs under applications like Power Point (rather than other systems where you have to get a specialist programmer to write the questions).

Also with TeleVoter you can have up to 4000 wireless keypads per control unit rather than 200 or so with other systems, they say.

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Flat Panel PDP Displays are here

Plasma Display panels have well and truly arrived, if INFOCOMM is a bellwether. Fujitsu have released a new 'series four' glass with an improved contrast ratio of 400:1.

Other manufacturers like Eiki, NEC and Philips are using the Fujitsu glass, and so the latest generation of 16:9 flat wall panels are all way ahead of the previous models using the 70:1 glass.

In the USA at least, Pioneer have been selling a 4:3 ratio product, with a 150:1 contrast ratio while Mitsubishi have apparently hit a production limit of 400 units per month.

Price is the issue, and Fujitsu are driving the market by virtue of controlling much of the raw material. Panels are currently costing more than mid range LCD projectors.   *-Buck Freeman*

AMX Ethernet Gateway

DALLAS - AMX Corporation announces the introduction of the AXB-NET Ethernet Gateway, the world's first network/Internet link for advanced control systems. Providing a 10 base-T network connection, the AXB-NET uses TCP/IP protocol to distribute systems control via AMX AXIink over a local area network (LAN), wide area network (WAN), or the Internet.

Australasian AMX distributor Kevin Chatfield *(hands pictured)* showed me the AXB-NET in Dallas, it will be available next month.

AMX AXCESS systems use the versatile AXIink data bus, capable of managing up to 255 devices, and supporting cabling runs up to 3,000 feet. With the AXB-NET, systems can now be extended across multiple buildings, between cities, or around the world. The central system would use a single AXB-NET as a TCP/IP Server, linking to an Ethernet network via its 10BaseT connection. Each remote site
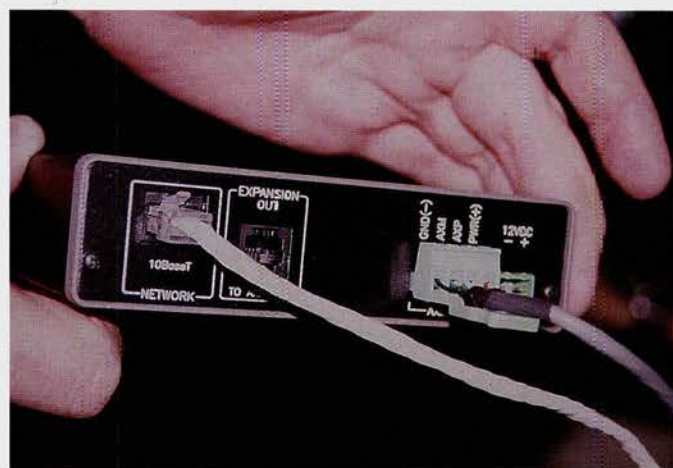
would use an AXB-NET as a Client, communicating to the Server unit over the network. A server AXB-NET can support up to 16 remote client AXB-NET sites at the same time. WAN- and Internet-linked applications will need a full-time TCP/IP gateway to connect remote LANs.

AMX Director of Engineering Ron Barber explains, "While the AXB-NET is a new product, we have extensive experience with network connectivity, and TCP/IP has been a common solution for linking multi-building AMX Synergy systems. Based on feedback from our dealers, we wanted to include integrated network TCP/IP operation as an option, without losing the benefits of local AXIink operation. AXIink has been a superior, flexible control network for many years and most of our dealers have a great deal of experience with the ins and outs of AXIink wiring. By creating the AXB-NET, we have the best of both worlds-advanced, long-distance network connectivity and proven, high-speed local AXIink control."

• **www.amx.com or call AV Technology +61 7 5531-3103**

Interactive Audio Visual Displays

By Norbert Schmiedeberg

The 90's have become a decade of interactivity. For many applications we hear request for 'some sort of interactive multimedia' display. Often however these type of displays, centred around a single computer, lead to frustration all around and in particular by would-be-users, who have to wait until the person behind the keyboard have completed their exercise.

Many designers have not considered that it is possible to create interactive AV displays using low cost media, such as 35mm slides to great effect. Modern control systems, which allow the program segments to be carried within the control unit can be connected to viewer response systems and therefore give the audience the desired interactivity.

How does that work?

Assume you have a story to tell, but would like to give the audience the opportunity to choose a different ending. Using any number of slide projectors, preferably P-Bus controllable units, you create the program and load it into the system memory or on to a PCMCIA card. At a certain point you pose a question to the audience, offering, say, 3 options.

Depending on the majority selection, the system will call up the relevant show segment, select the sound track from a CD and complete the presentation. If no one response, the show finishes with a predetermined close.

Compared to a few years ago, these type of shows can be produced at much lower cost and the 35mm slide medium puts it into the realm of lower budget productions.

Interactive display options, may also be ideal for exhibitions and trade displays, competitions and they are fantastic for education and entertainment, since not only the visual element can be controlled, but sound effects and lighting and the trigger of displays can form part of the display.

For more information contact Norbert Schmiedeberg +61 2 9477 5709

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ASIA PACIFIC MEMBERS FEATURED AT INFOCOMM

By Brett Bower

INFOCOMM International in Dallas attracted over 25,000 attendees this year, from all over the globe. I had serious work to do manning the ICIA booth, explaining the many benefits of being a member of ICIA to visitors and promoting INFOCOMM ASIA, held in Singapore in September next year.

INFOCOMM always attracts a huge interest from overseas delegates and there is always a good number of Australian, Asian and New Zealanders at the show.

This year was no exception. The International Reception on the second night provided a wonderful opportunity to meet ICIA members from around the world. Guests included **Alan Hay** from Haycom Staging, **Gary Hackett** of Staging Connections and **Michael Hasset** of Technical Direction along with **Peter Blackmore** from AVDEC.

The International Committee meeting chaired by Gary Hackett of Staging Connections, saw a strong aussie showing with **Peter Worth** from AVD and **James Cunningham** from AVA offer support for the formation of an Australian Advisory Committee for ICIA.

This committee will assist steering future ICIA activities in Australia and the region.

If you are a techno geek and would like to see the results of the 'Projector Shootout' and other technology announcements made at the show, check out the ICIA web site at www.icia.org

INFOCOMM always comes with lots of industry parties, including the AMX party on Friday night. Special guests included the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders and other fine entertainment including racing Armadillos. As you do when in Texas!

• ICIA will host an **industry conference** in Singapore on 14 September this year. The conference will report on past business successes and forecast future trends and opportunities for the audio-video industry in the Asia Pacific region.

Industry experts from major video manufacturers, dealers and distributors from Hong Kong, Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan and Australia will offer their insight to the future of the AV industry in each country.

- Brett Bower, ICIA International Marketing & Membership Representative Pacific Rim Region

Peter Blackmore (AVDEC), Gary Hackett (Staging Connections), Brett Bower, Alan Hay (Haycom Staging), and Michael Hasset (Technical Direction).

Electrosonic Systems were exhibiting at InfoComm to find distributors for their Australian made Lectrum brand lecturns. **Claire Waddingham** and **Trevor Buck** are pictured *(below, left)*. **HirePoint** (Sydney) had a busy booth *(below)* to promote their Windows 98/NT rental tracking software. The interest was intense, probably generated by the fact HirePoint is 32 bit code, rather than a DOS shell or based on Win 3.11. HirePoint report doing many demonstrations for Australian and regional rental production companies at InfoComm, many of whom thought HirePoint was a US origin product.