

Dale Miller, Christie Digital

Keep on pushing the bar

With a strong presence in LCD, DLP and film projection, and applications spanning digital cinema, control rooms, education, attractions and events, Christie is a giant in visual technology. **Adrian Pennington** spoke to the company's vice president, EMEA to discuss current performance and future trends

Christie Digital operates in a large number of technologies and application sectors. What is the common thread that pulls everything together? Can you think of any areas that Christie wouldn't contemplate being involved in?

Whatever we do, it's about putting high-quality images on a screen. While we operate in many verticals and application areas, it's the quality of the image that's paramount – and the products and services that we put around that.

We continually evaluate all sectors of the market, considering whether there are already quality offerings and asking whether we can add value to it. We don't for example operate in home cinema or at the lower end of the education market.

What is the key to managing such a broadly based portfolio?

Relationships – with the supply chain, Christie partners, consultants, distributors, end users – are key. For relationships to work, it's vital you have people who understand the market, and fortunately our people have a genuine market knowledge enabling us to sell into many different verticals. We don't tend to change staff or go through a succession of different management structures, so that really does allow us to develop solid relationships right through to the end user.

Against the backdrop of the economic downturn, how has Christie performed in Europe this year?

It's definitely a tough environment, but I'm pleased with our response in which we're looking at between 15 to 20% growth year on year. Digital cinema is an exploding market, and has significantly supported our growth. We've been active in it since the start, eight years ago, but the last 18 months have seen the fruits of all our hard work come through. Within digital cinema itself, 3D is driving a lot of sales as Hollywood movies with 3D options are released in volume. I don't see that demand going away in the short term. We have 70% market share in Europe and unlike most other areas of the industry we are supply constrained rather than demand constrained. We can't build equipment quickly enough.

Territorially, every region has been hit by the downturn, although the UK has found it toughest. France and Germany are now coming out of that recession and the Middle East, which dipped at the beginning of the calendar year, has now started to return quite strongly.

The events business has definitely been slow this year as if companies are reticent



Dale Miller – biography

➤ **Prior to joining Christie Digital**, Dale Miller worked for Hewlett Packard, Reflex, and Xerox in various sales and marketing roles.

➤ **He joined Christie in 1990** as marketing manager. Through his career with the company, he has held positions in sales management and marketing, and general management roles.

➤ **In 2001**, he was appointed vice-president for Christie EMEA and is responsible for business development and the management of sales in this territory.

about being seen to spend money – but business will return. The rental and staging community has had to sweat their assets perhaps longer than they would like and are eager for a technology refresh, so that's another positive.

Apart from the economic situation, what are the major external factors that could influence the European projection market over the next few years?

The emerging markets of Russia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East are catching up fast and we're seeing some very strong

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creative elements in the opportunities coming from there. Investment is across the board – from medical and education to business and cultural applications.

Will ISE continue on its growth path over the next three to five years?

ISE has been hugely successful to date and this February will be a great show for which we expect record attendance figures. Trade shows themselves are an important means of communicating with the market for us. While others have reined in their activity during 2009, particularly at regional events, we continue to increase our presence.

While ISE is the strongest AV show in EMEA, we feel it's important that

regional shows are supported – and I believe they'll flourish during 2010.

Christie organises a lot of customer training. Do you see this growing in importance as technology develops?

We've historically provided free technical training and now our training facilities, in both Christie's UK and German HQs, are available to all. Our Envision Events give people the opportunity to get hands-on with new products, to learn new ways to create compelling visual communication and to get to know us.

We put a lot of emphasis on working with key educational providers within our training activities. We initiated a sponsorship programme with London's NFTS, another with the Saint-Petersburg State University's Department of Film and Television and we're looking to do the same with institutions in Germany and France. As technology becomes more sophisticated and the scope of creativity grows, then education become even more of a priority which providers like ourselves must take a lead on.

Outside of digital cinema, where do you see the strongest demand for 3D over the coming years?

There's strong activity in education, where we've recently completed several flagship projects. Teesside University, for example, has created a new visualisation environment centred around four Christie Mirage S+6K stereoscopic projectors within an Antycip Yview customisable CAVE-like VR system. The University of Reims in France is also benefiting from a Mirage HD6 projector, in partnership again with Antycip Simulation, while similar projects have

been created at London South Bank and Birmingham City Universities.

We're also seeing some interest from the events market where corporates are looking to use 3D data in house and externally. 3D in broadcast is the next big thing. We're already doing a lot of work to fulfil visualisation needs on set, in playout and post production.

Outside of Hollywood, regardless of the application, there's a fundamental need for education with regard to the production of stereoscopic content. There's an awful lot of poor-quality 3D in the market.

Do you see the demand for ever-increasing resolution continuing unabated? What are the barriers to be overcome on the way to achieving this?

I've never met anyone who doesn't want more pixels. The desire for greater resolution at larger form factors will continue unabated.

We've been pioneering LED in control rooms and simulation where we see a huge opportunity. But LED does bring technical hurdles – brightness being the biggest – which we are addressing by, for example, introducing Entero, the world's first LED-based SXGA+ and WUXGA resolution display system.

Our partnership with Texas Instruments means we now support the 4K DLP chipset for D-cinema (the Solaria series projectors will start shipping in early 2010) but there are some challenges to making 4K repeatable and economic at a yield level. 4K pushes the bar but we're always looking for ways of pushing it further. **IE**

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