



Sixth Annual VES Summit Is A Success

Pam Hogarth attended the VES Summit and prepared this special report.

At 8:29 AM on the first morning of the Sixth Annual VES Summit, I disembarked from the subway car on the LA Red Line, climbed the stairs to Hollywood Boulevard and walked into the patio restaurant at the W Hotel. The place was bustling in preparation for the summit. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and the forecast was for a temperature in the mid-70s. It was a going to be a perfect day to spend with 149+ other entertainment production professionals having spirited conversation and hearing great speakers. I grabbed my first-of-many cups of really good coffee and made sure everything was ready for the 14 Roundtable Moderators I was hosting for the day.

Although this was the sixth annual Summit and our committee had most of the kinks worked out in pulling this all-day event together, we had made some changes in the format this year. We were all sure it would go well, but we wanted everything to be as prepared as possible.

The day was starting with a real bang; our keynote speaker was Victoria Alonso, Executive Vice President of Visual Effects and Post Production at Marvel Studios. Not only is Victoria a woman to reckoned with on the job, she is a no-holds-barred speaker who is not shy about telling it how she sees it.

Our format for Victoria's keynote was a little different, also. Rather than standing at a podium, giving a speech, Victoria would be seated on stage in a comfortable chair being interviewed by VFX Supervisor Randy Starr.



Victoria Alonso Interviewed by Randy Starr

Victoria brings many years of extraordinary experience to her role at Marvel, beginning in-house at Digital Domain and Rhythm & Hues working in pre and post production. Since joining Marvel, she has shepherded 10 of the top-grossing films to the screen, a role she continues.

As you can imagine, Victoria is a strong woman, but she is also exceedingly warm. When I greeted her this morning, she took my hand, looked me square in the eye and made me feel as if meeting me was an absolute joy. I believe I beamed. I watched her have the same effect on everyone else she greeted.

When she and Randy took to the stage, she directly and easily moved the podium out of the way, sat down and made herself comfortable. Randy has known Victoria for many years and you could tell he looked forward to this conversation.

Victoria began by explaining that she is, "not a comic book fan." She quickly went on to say that, "Guardians [of The Galaxy] is winning me over."

When Randy asked her about visual effects, she said, "We can create what isn't there. The fact that you people have that power, this is amazing power to have. You look at a series of performances that have no context and turn them into a story."

In talking about the challenges of film production she stated, "Time is the enemy. It's the four-letter word in every movie." And when Randy asked what her to name her favourite part of the process, she exclaimed, "All of it. I love all of it!"

She believes that it's vital to remember that, "The movie is the one thing in the room that is the ego. When you protect the story, you are fine. You have to protect the storyline."

Midway through the conversation, Victoria warned us that she was going to digress because she wanted to make sure she was able to make one thing very clear. "You have to get the girls," she said. "It's better when it's fifty/fifty. Its OK to let the ladies in. They bring a balance. We are all better when there is balance. I came here this morning because, for me, it's important."

"The Geena Davis Foundation says, 'If you see it, you can be it.' Empower the girls who have the talent and are smart. I urge you to invite us, because we will come."

Much of Victoria's message today could be summed up with her call to "Fill the gap. Stop letting your ego get in the way. You will become what you are meant to be."

Her passion for visual effects and the people who make them shined through when she explained, "We are creating things every day that we don't know how. Your butt should be on fire. The amazing creativity that comes from visual effect makes worlds that don't exist. Remember you have the power. Fill the gap! The fire in your belly will drive us to beautiful imagery."

Over the years, one of the most popular components of the Summit has been the roundtable discussions. These have been so popular, in fact, that we have two sessions. This year we had 14 tables, each featuring an expert in a specific subject guiding the discussion for up to 10 people. This year I was struck by the intensity of the discussions. In years past the decibel level in the room has been deafening. Not this year. This year the volume was lower, but the energy was a force to reckoned with.

For the first session, I wandered from one table to the next and caught snippets. Frank Hartman of the Mars Rover Project at JPL explaining the image on his laptop, "We go into some Rover-eating sand. We tried a few times and then back-tacked and went another way."



Bob Wong of the Economic Development office in British Columbia, a participant at Debra Blanchard-Knight's table on Freelancing, explained how the income tax works between the US and Canada. There were several relieved artists at that information.

Dr. Paul Debevec of USC's Institute of Creative Technology explained how the research they are doing finds its way to the silver screen. As you can imagine, Stephen Beres, VP of Media and Operations at HBO was surrounded for the discussion of "Game of Thrones." EP at CBS Digital George Bloom led a lively conversation on how Virtual Reality is changing filmmaking, while David Johnson from Infinity Ward talked about video games and real-time rendering. Encore's Stephan Fleet needed to add extra chairs for his discussion of VFX for television. Shotgun founder Don Parker had a lot of interest in his view on entrepreneurship in today's climate, while independent animation producer Brandon Fayette educated his table on how he is using crowd funding to finance his 90-minute feature. Meanwhile, a couple of tables away, DreamWorks VFX Supervisor Dave Walvoord directed discussion on getting your animated project to delivery. Attorney Marc Hankin had many answers regarding the best practices in contracts. Additional venues of special venue and themed entertainment were discussed by Super 78's Brent Young. And TBWA/Chiat Day's EP Sarah Patterson gathered full crowds for her sessions on commercial production.

The first session of roundtables was followed by lunch and networking time – both of which are always welcome and valuable. Then came a second shift our roundtable discussions. These were just as intense, which helped keep everyone going after lunch.

The final offering of the day was a panel on Visual Imagery featuring Oscar-nominated Cinematographer Dion Beebe, Visual Effects Supervisor and CEO of Magnopus Ben Grossmann, and Production Designer Bo Welch. Moderated by VFX Supervisor and Cinematographer Bill Taylor, the panel covered the film production pipeline from preproduction through post.



R to L Bill Taylor Benn Grossman Bo Welch Dion Beebe



Ben Grossman Makes a Point

Discussion began by addressing how things are changing with Dion saying, "Somehow we have to figure out how to work it all out. If we bring everyone on earlier, we can plan and execute more effectively."

When discussing how important it is for visual effects to be included in the pre-production and the planning, he explained, "I'm not Kinkos: I'm not here to print out your pre-viz." He continued, "Of course, a lot of what we do is being Kinkos and printing out the director's vision." By working closely with the Scorsese, "On Hugo, we were able to do that because we had a huge vfx heat on-set. [By doing that] you are spending money up-front, but then you're saving it at the end."

The discussion then further covered the importance of spending time and money in pre-production. Dion explained, "This virtual world technology doesn't really work unless you have everything built [in the computer] first, as everyone then knows where they're starting."

Bo talked about directing a new film and how important it is for the "workflow to all be at the same time, so all eyes are seeing the same thing. Every one should start and finish at the same time."

Dion continued, "For me it's a deal-breaker. If I'm not in the DI suite, I won't take a job. It doesn't make sense to me that the cinematographer is part of DI – isn't invited to DI."

The panel ended by agreeing that "all these problems are solved by having everyone involved at inception."

The audience obviously agreed, as the applause was loud and long – and the conversation continued as people stood up from their tables and walked to the valet to collect their cars and head home.

Overall it was another successful VES Summit. We heard lots of enthusiastic comments on the speakers, the content and the value of the day. Although tired, those of us on the Summit Committee are looking forward to putting together the 7th VES Summit. Stay tuned next year at this time.

In the meantime, more details about today are available at <http://www.visualeffectssociety.com/news-events/summit>. Watch for videos of today's event to be posted in the days to come.

Related links

[Marvel Studio's Victoria Alonso to Keynote 2014 VES Summit](#)

[Bill Desowitz's report on the VES Summit](#)

[Mark London Williams report on tackling workflow and finding a job](#)



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