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Drones, Storytelling And VR Top Items At 2015 VES Summit

Intuitive Aerial Inc. presented the head and legs of a drone at the 2015 VES Summit.

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Shaped a bit like a spider's leg, the light fiberglass appendage was pass between the hands of seven curious

onlookers at the "Drone Based Image Capture" round table. Eric Bergez, Vice President of Intuitive Aerial Inc., stated these feather-weight parts were crucial in protecting expensive camera equipment and lenses in the result of a drone crash.

"The arms have vibration sensors," said Bergez. "They come into play during signal interference, wind, or other factors that can affect commands. They take the force of impact away from the lens."

Bergez's round table discussion was amongst the many activities available to attendees at this year's VES Summit. Held for the second consecutive year at Hollywood's W hotel, visual effects professionals from around the country gathered to discuss recent VFX innovations, ponder elements affecting the VFX industry, and honor top achievers in their field.   The event kicked off with a round table breakout that featured discussions n augmented reality, directing for virtual reality, immersive experiences, multiple story telling panels and Bergez's focus on drones. While the group at this table excitedly discussed image capture, weight loads, and the benefit LED lighting had against paint colors (the lights become a little easier for VFX artists to remove drones in post), Bergez specifically wanted to share the news that his company was working with a California-based tech company to develop an affective drone initiated image capture system.

"To date motion capture has been doable within five feet of the target," said Bergez. "We're working with a company to develop sensors that fit onto the drone for reliable accurate readings."

Immediately following the first round of breakout sessions, the attendees gathered for this year's keynote presentation featuring Dean Devlin, found and president of Electric Entertainment. Moderator and LA Times editor Javin Davis started the panel by asking Devlin if, when wearing his producer hat, he ever feels hesitant to approach effects heavy content due to technical of financial challenges. Devin stated he never lets budget become a prohibiting factor for taking on a project. He actually enjoys finding creative ways to apply technology and merging practical and visual effects to overcome budgetary hurdles.

"It's funny, sometimes the things that seem the hardest, like the decimation of a large city, are the easiest to achieve," said Devlin.

Davis asked Devlin for his thoughts on creating virtual reality entertainment. Devlin, who also felt that film and television cater to a different type of story development (letting a story wash over you versus being directly engaged in the action) stated that story telling hasn't evolved in a way that incorporates virtual reality — at least not at this point in time.

"Think of 3D. The best movies were thought up with the language of 3D in mind," said Devlin. Virtual reality needs its own language, and that hasn't been found yet."

Before leaving the stage, Devlin stated he felt the production industry suffers from too many layers between the film makers and the visual effects artists. He encouraged producers to integrate the effects artists into all stages of production to improve the ultimate outcome. Wrapping previs artists, such as Chris Edwards of The Third Floor into the conversation, Devlin stated the work they do often presents options filmmakers hadn't conceptualize, ultimately revising entire sections of the film.

"They came up with great ideas. They should get all the credit for those sequences," said Devlin.

Moving into the afternoon, the first two featured speakers dealt with defining story elements. WME Story Editor Christopher Lockhart shared the key components he looks for in a script. Defying the common misconception that a good script can be identified in its first ten pages, Lockhart states he reads a full script, looking for cause and effect throughout the pages.

"One script that didn't grab me in the first ten pages was 'A Beautiful Mind,'" recalled Lockhart. "There was a lot more that went into that character that came as the story unfolded."

He shared his three "C"s that everyone should look for in a script: Character, concept and conflict.

"The stakes have to be very high for the character," said Lockhart. "'Pee Wee's Big Adventure' may not be Hamlet, but in his world, the quest for a bike was his Hamlet."

TV, OTT and Extended Content Forms explored the ever expanding delivery systems for content. Moderated by Variety co editor in chief Andrew Wallenstein, the panel featured Matthew DiPietro from Twitch TV, Rachib El Guerrab from Google, Sarah Malkin from Maker Studios, Melissa Schneider from New Form Digital and Catherine Stephens from Awesomeness TV. Wallenstein began by defining OTT as "Over the Top" or those resources that go beyond broadcast. The panelists felt finding interesting characters and content that engaged people was crucial to obtaining viewer interest.

Andres Garza broke up the story focus by presenting Meccano – his CES 2015 winning interactive robotic product. Designed to encourage young children to enjoy the challenges of design and data, Meccano was a challenge presented to him to update the classic "erector set" toy. A voice-activated computer, Meccano can be assembled into multiple characters, and is presented at a low price point making the design affordable for most households.

The last presentation united virtual reality experts Mark Bolas, Robert Stromberg, Andrew Chochrane, Guido Voltolina, Jon Goldman and Ted Schilowitz in a heated debate as to where each saw virtual reality headed in the next five years.
Stromberg, an Oscar winning visual effects artist and the founder of The Virtual Reality Company, felt that virtual reality is the next phase of entertainment.
"Sitting in an airport waiting area I saw forty people, and every single person was on their phone. Connectivity has become part of our evolution, and virtual reality is the next part of our evolution."

Stromburg was careful to stress, however, that he felt for virtual reality to catch on properly, there needs to be a clear story depicted. This point became heavily debated by the panel, with several members stating the user creates their own story each time they enter the world.
Before wrapping the session, Schilowitz expressed the importance of VFX companies holding firm to rates, and not undercutting costs in order to get involved with VR partners.

"That just presents unrealistic expectations for the producer and ultimately hurts us all," said Schilowitz. "Everyone needs to present fair bids and production pricing for the huge amount of work presented."
This year's summit wrapped with the presentation of special awards. Carl Rosendahl, VES and Jeffrey Okun, VES were inducted as Lifetime Members. Richard Hollander, VES, Scott Squires, VES and Okun were inducted as Fellows. Okun completed his hat trick by receiving the VES Founders Award.

"When I first heard of the Society I wanted to be in it because I wanted to be in a union," joked Okun. "I am still committed to serving this community. I had a recent meeting with the local union, and am still working on this goal."

To learn more about the Visual Effects Society, please visit:

https://www.visualeffectssociety.com/