

VES Summit Highlights: VR Rules



Dean Devlin emphasized breaking up the layers between VFX and the rest of production in his VES Summit keynote last Saturday at the W Hotel in Hollywood, and Virtual Reality took center stage as the new frontier.

Devlin, who straddles TV and movies as well as indies and the mainstream, discussed some of the VFX advancements that have made next year's *Geostorm* and *Independence Day: Resurrection* possible. The space suits and *Gravity*-like animation of heads in helmets were utilized on *Geostorm*, which he directed; and photo-real vistas, greater interactivity and the advent of drone cameras were vital to Roland Emmerich's sequel.

Alas, if the VFX can't break down production barriers and function more collaboratively, Devlin predicted that the industry will continue to falter. As far as VR, he finds it "insanely exciting" to come up with a new language. But we're just not there yet. First, the price of headsets needs to come down, with new tools helping us adjust.

There was plenty of VR discussion: Oscar-winning production designer/VFX supervisor-turned director Rob Stromberg (*Maleficent*), said it'll all come down to creative content and finding emotional depth. As founder of the Virtual Reality Co., he's working on a VR experience for *The Martian* for Fox. Mark Bolas, a director at the Mixed Reality Lab and a film professor at USC, added that the dividing line between virtual work and play worlds will soon fall off.

However, Richard Taylor II, creative director of XLNT FX (*Tron Legacy*), who led the Immersive Experiences roundtable, provided a cautionary note. While he believes VR has a place as a holodeck-like theatrical experience, and is involved in a project to transform the 42nd Street Times Square theater into an immersive, hybrid panorama with solid state LED projectors and light-weight polarized LED glasses, he stressed that to reach mass adoption VR needs to overcome being a cumbersome, isolated experience.

Alternatively, Taylor offered, "I think the world is waiting to see famous people on stage or to go back in time or to experience the wonders of the real world."

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