

3-D driving Euro d-cinema shift Funding remains roadblock to the 'big opportunity'

By Carolyn Giardina
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LAS VEGAS -- What is driving digital cinema in Europe?

"The first is 3-D, the second is 3-D, and curiously enough the third is 3-D," said David Monks, president of the European Digital Cinema Forum, during a session Monday at ShoWest. "3-D is just so hot, it is a bit frightening."

Next year is being viewed as a benchmark in terms of digital 3-D installations, but there still are critical d-cinema transitional challenges that remain.

"We want to get on with it," said Monk, speaking of the d-cinema transition in Europe, which is challenging because of the large number of countries and cultures. "We think by not doing so, we are missing a big opportunity. ... It has been a very frustrating for most people because they have really wanted to move."

One lingering concern, he said, is that exhibition needs a competitive choice of funding plans.

"There have to be funding options," he said. "Nobody feels comfortable with a single supplier, and the single suppliers are just as anxious to get more competition into the market because they know their case will be strongest."

He also noted that anxieties remain over annual technical costs. "I appeal to (stakeholders) to think about costs when you put a tweak in the (technical) spec that has an upward cost implication. We should be intolerant of anything that compromises security, but we have to be much more creative in other areas."

Monk also warned: "There is natural reaction in Europe to say, 'Perhaps we need our own standard.' That's getting an incredibly large amount of intellectual thought but no credibility whatsoever in the exhibition space. ... Of course, it is nonsense; we are about at the end of that now. But it pops up every time there is a struggle that seems to be 'those nasty people in Hollywood.' "

Monk emphasized that the community needs to factor in small chains and large volumes of local content when looking at business models for Europe.

Charlotte Jones, an analyst at Screen Digest, said it would soon be clear if a virtual print fee can be the encompassing model for all European countries.

Jones reported that there were 6,440 d-cinema screens installed worldwide at the end of 2007, of which about 890 were in Europe. "3-D is a major incentive," she said of Europe's d-cinema transition, though she admitted that the transition is somewhat stalled at the moment. Jones reported that about 24% of Europe's screens were 3-D-ready. There, the U.K. has the largest number of installations with 48, or 15% of its screens.