



Getting Bullish on Venue-Display Technology

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Leading experts in sports-venue-display technologies took the stage at the 2009 SVG Venue Technology Summit Nov. 11 at Cowboys Stadium to discuss a changing display environment that continues to grow more complex for venue personnel but more rewarding for fans and sponsors.

The opportunity is there, more than ever, to use the displays to build a sense of community and bring fans in the seating bowl, on the concourse levels, and even in the parking lot closer together. But installing massive scoreboards, digital-signage infrastructures, and dynamic LED ribbon displays can be only as good as the content displayed and workflows.

The panel, moderated by Chris Williams, VP of Wrightson, Johnson, Haddon & Williams, focused on a future with new business models wrapped around new display and graphics-creation technologies.

"To tie all [the scoreboards and displays around a venue] together, you need to look at some basic, fundamental issues," said **Mark Stross, EVP of technology at ANCSports**. "And those include graphic creation, playlist, and the client's needs."

ANCSports is looking to address those issues with Visionsoft 7.0 software, he said. "It's about making the technology easier to use and also make systems training and auditing easier. And, when you tie the displays into the IP system, you can maximize usage with great content. But you have to make [scoreboard operations] profitable."

Prior to the panel, attendees toured Cowboys Stadium, a \$1.2 billion facility that features the world's largest scoreboard as well as 3,000 (and soon to be 4,000) Sony flat-panel displays.

Chris Sullivan, national sales manager, sports venues, for Sony Electronics, took the opportunity to discuss another recent project, which involved the NBA's Miami Heat. Sony installed throughout the arena flat-panel displays that rely on Ziris Canvas, digital-signage technology that takes advantage of modified Sony PlayStation 3 videogame units.

"We take the same cell-processor technology found in the PS3 and apply Ziris software to it to synchronize video across multiple screens," said Sullivan. "It allows you to create a video wall that just grabs you, and you can take images and move them around in exciting ways. It's a different way to look at video walls."

XL Video President Marcel Dekeyzer also discussed new and exciting video applications, giving an overview of the work his company does on leading concert tours for such groups as U2, Maroon 5, and Jay Z. The company's expertise is in taking LED pixels from manufacturers like Barco and stringing them together so that the pixels can be contoured over stages and around globes, cubes, and nearly any other shape. It not only cuts down on weight but allows innovative signage that maps graphics on a pixel-by-pixel basis via XL Video software.

"You can do a center-hung 8- x 11-ft. scoreboard that weighs less than 2,000 lbs.," said Dekeyzer.

Dave Belding, regional sales manager of Mitsubishi Electronics, cited the massive scoreboard in the stadium as an example of today's technology in action, but he also hinted at a future where OLED technology takes hold. "You'll see that product in the market soon, delivering high-resolution screens for indoor displays," he said. "You can curve it and make it convex and even tile it into different sizes. It will be another year or two before we leverage it in design applications."

Digital signage also continues to be a hot topic as venues leave behind static billboards for dynamic displays. Henning Sittler, project manager for Harris Broadcast, said the Orlando Magic's new arena will embody the merger of broadcast, IPTV, and digital-signage technologies.

"There are a lot of parallels between broadcast TV and what will eventually happen in digital signage," he said. "The business model itself is advertising and sponsorship on a media network. But IPTV allows the monitors to be independently targetable, yet there are upfront considerations for managing the content and billing."

In the end, however, technology deployments are about building a business around technology, not just technology for technology's sake. Michael Falato, VP of sales and business development for Txtstation, said that his company's system brings an interactive element to the displays by allowing the scoreboard operator to post questions and surveys on the board. Fans then use their mobile phones and devices to deliver votes via text-messaging.

"It engages consumers, and the venue gets phone numbers and e-mail addresses," he said. "The Arizona Cardinals, for example, have a promotion where fans text in to get a car key and then see if they win a car. We can also tie our system into Chyron graphics, Click Effects graphics, or ANC and Mitsubishi control systems."

And then there is the opportunity to allow fans to text their photos to the big board. Noted Falato, "People love their two minutes of fame."