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Systems Contractor News



Soundelux Acquisition Blurs Contracting Lines

by Carolyn Heinze

Later this month, executives at Soundelux Entertainment Group are planning to conclude a deal that will see Liberty Media acquire a majority stake in the Hollywood-based company that is involved in everything from systems integration to production and post-production.

This latest in a series of corporate acquisitions, mergers and alliances among entertainment industry power houses is yet another

example of large conglomerates attempting to strengthen their position in the race for control of broadband technology. What is significant about this acquisition is that Soundelux Showworks, the firm's existing systems design and installations arm, will have access to Liberty Media's extensive resources for content delivery, including AT&T. Liberty Media Corp., a wholly owned subsidiary of AT&T, holds interest in a number of international entertainment networks,

video distribution businesses, international telephony and domestic wireless telephony, plant and equipment manufacturers, and companies related to broadband services.

If Liberty is successful in acquiring both Soundelux and Todd-AO (the Soundelux deal is contingent upon Liberty Media's successful acquisition of Todd-AO), the conglomerate's chances for horizontal integration of broadband technology services will be more firmly established. For Soundelux, this progression will potentially define it as an entirely new breed of systems integrator—one that not only designs and installs the technical systems, but creates the content and delivers it as well.

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Addressing The HD Debate

As digital television celebrates its one-year anniversary this month, a new controversy has arisen to perpetuate the confusion that has so far prevented HDTV and digital television from entering consumers' homes on a broad scale.

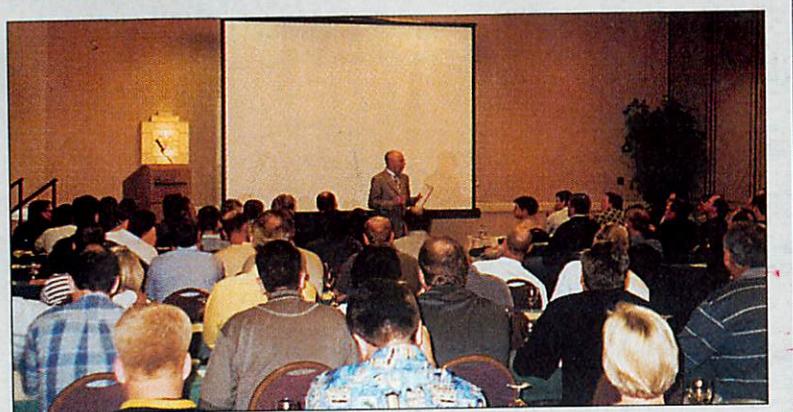
A proposal submitted to the FCC by the Sinclair Broadcasting Group requests that the FCC reconsider its 1996 adoption of 8-VSB as the DTV broadcast standard. Claiming that the present format is not a robust enough transmission standard for reception inside of viewers' homes, Sinclair is advocating a revised standard.

Following the September CEDIA Expo in Indianapolis, IN, where HD products had an unmistakable presence on the show floor and talk on the subject could be heard at nearly every turn, the association has come out against Sinclair and its attempts to alter the format

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BACK TO BUSINESS—Both NSCA and CEDIA hosted their respective business and management conferences earlier this month in Arizona. Guiding the way for NSCA (top, l-r) were Chuck Wilson, Tom Frericks and Mark Dundas. Later, Stephen Lawrence (below, r) offered tips on business plans, and at CEDIA's event Howard Putnam (below, l) shared the lessons he learned from his experiences as a CEO for Southwest Airlines. A complete report will appear in the 12/99 issue of SCN.



AES Expands Digital Slate

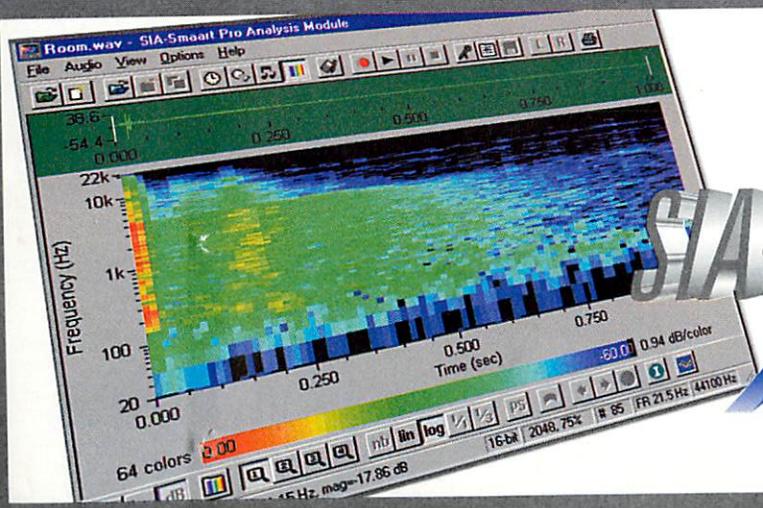
by David Keene

NEW YORK, NY—Behind the scenes at AES a number of players are working to standardize the digital compression and transmission of audio, and contractors and sound system consultants are waiting to see if that effort will affect the control arena in the systems world.

In the meantime, the Audio Engineering Society's 107th convention was back in the Big Apple this year and it kicked off amid heightened anticipation surrounding that issue and a plethora of digital issues peaking at the close of the

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Datastream

All Done! Right?... Wrong!

■ *A Project Is Not Complete Until A Everyone's Needs Are Met*

At what point in the project have you completed all of your obligations to your client? The key word here is "client". Who is your client? Is it the end user who does not understand why the system does not meet their needs? Or is it the person that pays your invoice? We have all heard the old adage that 80 percent of our problems come from 20 percent of our clients and that 80 percent of our work comes from 20 percent of our clients. What happens when these collide with one another? Is it a long-standing client; is it a new client that means months and months of billings; or is it truly a client to whom you can say "good-bye?"

What is the affect of that letter sent with the final report or invoice that states in the best terms that you are done? Does the tone imply that "We are done and are looking forward to working with you again?" Or does it suggest that "We are done and we do not want any more of your business?" Wow there is a thought, "We who are providing you a service do not want any more of your business." Isn't a really strong economy great?

When I first started Thorburn Associates, the Northern California economy was in a major recession. Every client, every invoice was very important to us. We never "wrote off" work. Do we now? Yes. Why is that?

Perhaps it is because we are all very busy right now. Never before have we seen the boom in our industry that we have right now. When it comes to communicating with technology, we are the "experts." Whether the communication is for work, entertainment, or worship it is still communication. Outside of the big three what else is left? Our day is made up of



**LOCATION-BASED
ENTERTAINMENT**

by **Steven J. Thorburn**
THORBURN ASSOC. INC

work, entertainment and worship. Please drop me an email if there is another major category, but I think that this is all there is, and a major point can be made for entertainment and worship being part of the same subset. This means that every aspect of our lives provides a potential for new work and new clients. Can we afford to say good-bye when we complete a project? Or does the corporate client talk to the church client (or are they the same person?) and mention that we did a good job, except...

So when are we done? It used to be that when we

heard the sound coming from the central cluster in a church or the arena, we were done. Then we started looking at the uniformity of coverage within the seating area. If you met the specification requirements you were done. Then we added images to the mix. At first it was easy. All we had to do was make sure the slide was in focus. Now we have to verify the scan rate is correct for each type of computer that is brought into the facility.

As a side note, it stopped me in my tracks when I heard an A-V tech who is working for a Fortune 50 firm say that they really needed a digital projector for the auditorium. Their analog system could not lock on or display the computer signals that they needed to display. Please help me if I am wrong, but why didn't the installer for the projector converge it to the display rates that the client needed? Why didn't the designer or the installer explain to the A-V tech that the analog projector is the best system for matching any video or computer signal?

When are we done? I now have the fun of telling the A-V Tech's boss, our new client, that the analog projector they spent 30K on last year is a really good

analog projector, if you need to look at high resolution video and computer generated details from computers with bizarre display frequencies, in a dark room. The problem is that they *do not!* They wanted a projector that is brighter, but that is all they are really looking for. The projector that they have installed on

dio, video and control systems speak to one another?

Our clients are becoming trained on the computer and the Internet. The concepts of home page and page flips used by a few control system designers are now part of the entry-level vocabulary. What we do not know is whom we are designing

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the ceiling can and will display multiple images in a resolution and set-up that is much better than the digital projectors that are available today, but not as brightly.

What the A-V Tech was asking for, without knowing it, was to get the projector correctly converged for his clients. Guess what, these are not only his clients but also our clients. Did the designer or installer ask about the required convergence rates? Did the designer or installer provide a method of updating the computer convergence rates on a scheduled basis? I would have to say no!

The scary part so far is that we have not yet addressed the "control system, the digital audio or digital video signal"... lions and tigers and bears... oh my! Welcome to the computer world, we have been set up! When control systems started, it was either "on" or "off." It was all yes and no and there was no parity, there were no IR compatibility issues. We are now doomed to a life of dealing with clients that say "But, I thought it would do that!"

Not only do we need to communicate to the people that might hire us but also to the people that will use our design. We are all great designers, we all have the best solutions that will meet the needs of the client, but the question is who is that client. The biggest unknown to us is the control system. How do we make the au-

for. This is the challenge! In some cases when you meet with the client, they will say "Well, they can communicate from anywhere in their room on 'Star Trek,' I want to walk and talk from anywhere in my conference room. If they can do it on TV, why can't we do it in real life?" As the "experts," we need to draw a line in the sand for all of our sakes and say "Yes, it can be done, but to do that we will need..."

We have found that the goals of the control system, or control protocol drive the design of the system more than anything else in our end-user meetings. Yes, end-user meetings. We have found that if we do not meet with the end users for a space, all of the meetings with the client are for not! We must identify the end user, if it is not the client that is paying the invoices, otherwise, we will be in trouble, sooner than later. And we are not truly done with a project until everyone is happy with the performance of the systems!

SEN

Steven J. Thorburn, PE, is a principal with Thorburn Associates, Inc., an Acoustical Consulting and Audiovisual System Engineering firm with offices in California and North Carolina. He is the immediate past chair of ICIA's Design Consultants Council and is active in the design and development of projects around the world. He can be reached at SJJ@TA-Inc.com, or at 510.886.7826.

PRODUCT BRIEFS

ANALOG WAY Launches SMART Switcher

NEW YORK, NY—Analog Way's new SMART CUT 2 offers a variety of functions. The SMART CUT 2 is a video and computer seamless switcher with five video inputs and two computer inputs. Each of these inputs is also an audio stereo input which follows the video line, with a level control for each. The device has an improved line multiplier/scaler capacity which can create a better video quality. The SMART CUT 2 can also function as a switcher which scales and genlocks any video standard into the native resolution of your computer.

For more information on Analog Way, indicate 220 on Fast Facts Card

Williams Sound Adds Monitor Receiver

EDEN PRAIRIE, MN—Williams Sound Corp. has added the new Monitor Receiver, model PPA R751 to its line of wireless FM products. The R751 is a wideband, single channel receiver that can be used for small group listening in cry-rooms and any adjacent room needing to receive an FM signal. The R751 receiver replaces the previous monitor receiver, model R750. The new receiver has improved audio

performance and front controls for easy adjustment. It is housed in a neutral putty-colored case. The PPA R751 is packaged with an extra speaker for use in applications needing two speakers.

For more information on Williams Sound, indicate 221 on Fast Facts Card

Monster Cable Unveils PowerCenter

SANTA ANA, CA—Monster Power, a division of Monster Cable Products Inc., has unveiled the Home Theater PowerCenter HTS400. The HTS400, with Clean Power Circuitry, filters out

power pollution for more natural sound. Designed by AC power expert Richard Marsh, Monster's Clean Power Circuitry uses special filters to reduce noise on AC power lines.

The HTS400 features color-coded outlets and cord labels, and an eight-foot power cord. Contacts are 24k gold and Monster's FlatProfile plug allows furniture to be pushed flush against walls. Multiple Surge Guard protects components, and HTS400 also features special surge protection for coax cables and phone lines used for DSS and cable TV connections.

For more information on Monster Cable, indicate 222 on Fast Facts Card