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Connected TV links IBC programme and show

Adrian Pennington looks forward to a connected world where device shall talk unto device

Adrian Pennington



Having themed halls – and spaces that aren't too vast to navigate – gives IBC the edge over the sprawling NAB, where visitors often get lost

In recent years IBC has built its marketing around the speakers headlining its conference line-up, and this year is no exception, with Facebook's European vice-president and managing director, Joanna Shields topping the bill.

The one-time chief of Google's European operations forged the deals that made Bebo into a teenage social networking phenomenon, before steering it into an \$850m acquisition by AOL Time Warner in 2008.

The full impact of social networks on the broadcast landscape has yet to be felt, but their marketing role for advertisers and TV brands is already significant. They also provide a valuable conduit through which producers can engage with audiences on second or third screens.

Shields's keynote will set the tone for an

IBC dominated by the connected-TV agenda. Moreover, having an A-list female speaker helps combat any residual impression that IBC is dominated by grey-haired, male engineers.

"Historically, IBC has been perceived as a conference for technologists and engineers, but over the past few years I think we have



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laid that to rest," says Michael Lumley, IBC conference committee chairman. "We aim to address an international audience concerned with policy and strategy, as well as those who have an operational interest, without excluding technologists."

This is the third year of IBC's campaign to attract opinion formers from the wider electronic media to complement the show's heavyweight tech focus. Critical to this development is the launch of the Leader's Summit, an exclusive, two-day retreat for 50 of Europe's most senior broadcast players, who will get a chance to mix with each other and a handful of industry power-brokers.

The latter include: Shields; BSkyB COO Mike Darcey; former BBC iPlayer supremo and now Intel's VP for the digital home, Eric Huggers; Ellis Watson, the former MD of Simon Cowell's Syco Entertainment; and the US-based Consumer Electronics Association president Gary Shapiro.

"The Leader's Summit is in response to a feeling that the industry is moving away from chief engineers making technology decisions, which other engineers will implement, towards a more strategic view of the business benefits that technology might bring to an organisation," explains IBC COO Mike Crimp. "We think people want to talk more in terms of what a technology will do for my business, what is my

return on that asset and how will consumer behaviour impact my business model?"

Delegates to the event, running from the Thursday (8 September) before the exhibition opens, include representatives from ProSiebenSat1, Mediaset and TF1.

"We made a promise to the industry to attract this calibre of personnel to Amsterdam, so that they can see what IBC is about and enthuse them with the IBC bug so that they come back again," adds Crimp.

Sony, IBC's biggest exhibitor, has been arguing for some time that IBC needs to attract the chief decision-makers to stay relevant.

"We've been in and out of IBC over the last few years, in part because we noticed that a lot

of the commentary around IBC was emanating from the conference rather than the exhibition," says David Bush, Sony Europe's marketing

director. "We've been talking with IBC about developing its conference agenda, and this type of event in particular, and we are very encouraged to see that it has taken the initiative."

Sony might even pay to participate in the Leader's Summit. "The confirmed attendees are a who's who of European broadcasting," says Bush. "We are definitely interested in taking part."

The selection of VIPs for the Leaders Summit reveals a clear skew towards consumer electronics, an emphasis reflected in an IBC exhibition zone that organisers call the Connected World.

Launched in 2010 and now enlarged with exhibits from Cisco, Ericsson and Intel, this area is promoted as housing everything you need to know about mobile TV and IPTV content creation, delivery, products and services. The digital signage showcase of previous years has been quietly dropped in its favour.

"We seem to be hitting the mark for a lot of companies in that space and spreading the net far beyond our normal marketing into key electronic media," says Crimp. "The Connected World is for anybody interested in how the consumer agenda will drive the professional industry."

This is a necessary adjustment, and a core part of the IBC conference programme, where speakers from Microsoft to Google and Love-Film will debate strategies to generate content and revenue that work across second, third and even fourth screens.

However, this degree of emphasis doesn't please everyone. "IBC's themed areas, such as Connected World, are not helpful to smaller companies, who cannot afford the cost of

renting and staffing a second location," argues SysMedia's head of marketing, John Boulton. "Such zones would seem to imply that connected devices are not a mainstream activity that belongs within the context of the wider broadcast exhibition."

He believes it would therefore be helpful for IBC to publish a list of other exhibitors who



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provide related connected-TV products "so that everyone within that space is represented".

In general, though, IBC would seem to be doing a good job in catering to its various exhibitor demands. Les Zellan, who runs lens developer Cooke Optics, says that having themed halls – and spaces that aren't too vast to navigate – gives IBC the edge over the sprawling NAB, where visitors often get lost.

Pixel Power MD James Gilbert claims IBC "gives us the widest reach to generate new leads, raise awareness and meet in person with potential clients and partners," while Transvideo CEO Jacques Delacoux, reckons that, while exhibitions generally do not fulfil his expectations, "IBC is the one exception."

The main concern for exhibitors would seem to be the cost of hotel rooms which, says Gilbert, "are more than twice those at NAB, for equivalent-standard accommodation. The rates in Amsterdam go up during IBC, which is taking advantage."

Of the 80,000 or so who register for IBC each year, around 50,000 turn up. Crimp says he could deliver a further 30,000 visitors through the door, but at the risk of diluting the quality of attendees. He thinks IBC's visitor numbers about right for the European industry it serves, even though the RAI complex is due to add another hall in time for IBC 2012.

"Everybody seems very upbeat and building on the momentum from NAB," says Crimp. "Despite the setback that Japanese manufacturers have suffered, they seem to be gearing up to communicate at IBC that they are back in business."

This perception is supported by the IABM's latest industry index and survey, which will be published at IBC. According to the trade body's director general, Peter White, the broadcast and media technology sector has made a good recovery from recession globally.

"Initially, the improvement was led by larger organisations, but the evidence is that small businesses are also doing well," White reports. "Whereas sales growth appears to be back to pre-recessionary 2008 levels, the number of vendors in profit is still lower than 2008."

"We anticipate that by 2012 the industry will be marginally ahead of its 2008 peak and this will continue at a steady rate of growth, with the market valued around \$29bn by 2015."

The most intriguing area of IBC, arguably, is one in which there will be no commercially available products. The headline-generating demonstrations of NHK's ultra-HD format, Super Hi-Vision (SHV), at past IBCs have prompted the organisers to build a whole section of futuristic technology around SHV.

So SHV is back, showcasing footage of the penultimate launch of the Space Shuttle, and surrounded by 20-odd prototypes hot from university and broadcast research labs.

The most interesting of these also illustrate immersive imaging advances.

One such is the EU-funded FascinatE project, which will demonstrate the OmniCam, an array of 6 HD cameras that can film 180°

panoramic images. Project partner BBC R&D is exploring ways of seamlessly linking OmniCam video with that from conventional HD cameras. Technicolor, Alcatel Lucent and others will present systems that enable viewers to then control the immersive video and zoom into any part of it.

Warwick University, meanwhile, has been busy building the world's first High Dynamic Range (HDR) acquisition-to-display system. HDR is an emerging video system, sitting somewhere between HD and SHV and with the capacity to record light levels similar to those perceived by the human eye.

There are potential applications in sports, feature film and documentaries. The system includes a camera manufactured by SpheronVR, which captures 20 stops of light at 30 frames a second. By comparison, a Red Epic, the latest digital film camera in use by Peter Jackson on *The Hobbit*, offers up to 18 stops.

Other R&D highlights in the Future Zone include: a social TV app that analyses online opinions about broadcast programmes and displays them on mobile devices; a means of controlling a TV by tracking the user's own gaze; and a multi-sensory device from Japan that combines audio-visual with tactile and olfactory sensations.

Some of these ideas won't get beyond the lab, but others, notably SHV, are moving beyond science fiction into practicality. So the zone will be well worth a browse to see if you can spot the next big thing in broadcasting. ■

The IBC conference runs 8-13 September and the exhibition 9-13 September at RAI in Amsterdam.

