

# Arts on display

A tailor-made video content and display solution comes to London's South Bank Centre



**VIDEO CONTENT IS CHANGED DEPENDING ON THE GENRE OF THE DAY'S PERFORMANCE**



he South Bank Centre, adjacent to the London Eye on the

banks of the River Thames, is one of the most innovative art complexes in the world. It comprises the Purcell Room, the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the Royal Festival Hall and the Hayward Art Gallery, all of which play host to an eclectic mix of traditional and contemporary productions encompassing dance, literature, theatre, poetry and music.

In keeping with the vibrant feel of the Centre, its head of marketing development, Owen Valentine Pringle, has created a network of plasma screens to promote forthcoming events to its three million annual visitors. The installations streams conventional video, animation and still images to ten 43in professional Pioneer plasma displays located throughout the Centre. Unique to the Pioneer's displays is an open-architecture expansion slot that enables third-party developers to connect virtually any signal to the screens. The installation at the Royal Festival Hall is built around this expansion slot, along with a

card created by Adtec Digital that allows the displays to be connected on a network and play back multimedia files. The plasmas are controlled by a single PC that manages the creation, updating and playback scheduling of content.

Assuming that streaming content to a network of plasma displays would be a simple project, Pringle set about specifying the equipment selection criteria, with cost at the top of the list. "Low start-up and ongoing running costs were key demands of this project," he says. "But we are a visual-based business and the system had to look good. The Royal Festival Hall is blessed with good natural light and the displays had to be easily viewable in very bright conditions. They also needed to engage visitors to interact with the, while aesthetically blending into the surroundings."

In addition, it was crucial that the screens could be easily updated and show different content on each display if required. This would allow the marketing team to provide location-based information. So if a classical music event were running at the RFH, the displays there would display

information on future classical events to cross-sell to customers. "When we spoke to integrators it was clear that all of our technical objectives could be met," says Pringle. "However, the flexibility we needed to refresh content, publish exciting multimedia information easily and tailor communication depending on the display's location came at a price. For example, each display needed its own PC."

Just when it looked as though the system would be beyond the Centre's budget, a meeting with digital broadcast consultancy Trimedia resulted in an innovative yet simple solution, as Jon Donovan, MD of Trimedia, observes: "We recommended the Edge-PDP decoder by Adtec Digital. The decoder slots into the back of the Pioneer screen and provides network connections through Ethernet. Each card includes a 20Gb hard drive that enables up to five hours of MPEG-2 video and graphics files to be streamed or stored and forwarded. You don't need to hang a PC off each display."

Kyle Hawkins, the Centre's information screen manager, worked with Trimedia to develop a package that would enable the content to be easily created and refreshed. Hawkins can now remotely dictate schedules in chronological order. The information is designed to catch the attention of people who have limited dwell time and each reel lasts for around a minute.

In a recent survey, 65% of visitors said they had noticed the screens and 70% of these regularly use them. If less than 1% of people who use the displays purchase tickets, the system will pay for itself. With such positive feedback, this goal is likely to be achieved easily, and the team is planning to increase the installation to 20 screens as the Centre is revamped over the next three years.

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**ONE OF THE PLASMAS SHOWING EVENT INFORMATION**

