

# No Toying Around

by Travis McGee

**T**oys "R" Us opened its international flagship store in Times Square last November, debuting a 110,000-square-foot, multi-level store featuring everything expected of a modern-day toy store and then some, including a 60-foot tall Ferris Wheel, a 2-story Barbie dollhouse, a 20-foot high animatronic T-Rex dinosaur, and a 42-inch-tall E.T. pointing "home" to his 1,600-pound spacecraft.

Adding to the high-tech atmosphere is one of the world's most advanced video systems, including an outdoor "GeoffreyTron" Seiko Smartvision LED display, Fujitsu and Pioneer plasma screens, Phillips monitors, NEC projection, and Adtec video servers. "Toys 'R' Us had some big ideas for what they wanted to do, as is always the case," said Phil Lenger, lead producer for system designer Show & Tell Productions. "To their credit, they backed it up. They had a lot of support from the president to make this happen."

Along with the video components, Show & Tell, in collaboration with New York-based systems integrator Scharff Weisberg, put together an audio system comprised of Bose loudspeakers and Peavey MediaMatrix processing. The audio is zoned to 15 different areas of the store, with music custom-produced to correlate with the theme of each zone (for example, Animal Alley, the stuffed animals section, features a jungle-themed soundtrack).

With the intention of having Toys "R" Us Times Square serve as a headquarters for the more than 1,000 Toys "R" Us stores

worldwide, Show & Tell also installed the system with the capability of sending video to all the stores simultaneously. To save space and add flexibility for the in-store video displays, Toys "R" Us utilized Adtec's edge hard-drive-based digital video players. "Because of their small size, they immediately realized they could put them right in the back of the plasma displays," said Kevin Ancelin, VP of products and business development for Adtec. "So that was a huge benefit for them from installation, because they didn't have to worry about running base-band video and audio all the way out there. They just ran Cat-5 to the box, short little loop cables out to the video and audio inputs on the plasmas. They were able to appreciate a much lower-cost installation, and because it's such a short line, the integrity of the signals is maintained as well."

Additionally, Show & Tell developed the concept (and created a custom processor) for the GeoffreyTron, a screen which features scrolling graphics used for advertising and interactive messaging on the building's facade. "There are a whole bunch of interactive things that we've designed," Lenger added. "For example, people from all over the world can go to a website and post a picture of themselves with a message, and it will show up on the screen. So we're really trying to make a sign that's not just advertising, it's really more of a 2-way communication device."



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▲ Toys 'R' Us recently opened its 110,000-square-foot, multi-level international flagship store in Times Square.

Lenger stressed the demand for dynamic video is driving the development of technology. "People are looking for new, different shapes," he said. "We're working with some folks who are all interested in different shapes and making LED signage more architectural than just a big rectangle that's stuck up on a wall. People want them to move. People want them to turn, to become transparent, and of course have higher resolution and better picture quality. The other thing is making it more interactive. We're constantly striving to make all these things more interesting to people. So the more different you can be, the more it will be seen."

In order to standardize on Cat-5 cabling for the system, Scharff Weisberg worked with Extron to develop a custom switcher. "It works hand in hand with customized A/V-to-Cat-5 transceivers," said Josh Weisberg, president of Scharff Weisberg. "So we developed these customized A/V transceivers to take the analog A/V from the switcher, convert it to the impedance necessary for Cat-5 wiring, and then re-convert it back on the receiving end. The purpose was to stay away from having to run specialized and expensive A/V cabling throughout the store—it's obviously a rather large store—by formatting signals so they can be run through Cat-5 cabling. It allows us to run a lot more cables to different places because it's less expensive and easier to install."

According to Weisberg, this use of cable is indicative of an ongoing trend. "The requirement to have a very flexible wiring plan is a trend, so that digital signage can be moved about the facility with ease," he

said. "So you end up throwing a lot more wire to the project than you normally would, and you need a comprehensive wiring and patchbay plan to accommodate that."

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## equipment list

Fujitsu 42-inch plasma screens  
Pioneer plasma screens and DVD players  
Phillips monitors  
Sony video switcher and video monitors  
Extron A/V matrix  
Adtec video servers  
Optibase MPEG encoding systems  
Hewlett Packard Ethernet switches  
Compaq computer workstations  
Dell servers  
Roland audio playback system and digital audio mixing  
Peavey Media Matrix  
NEC video projectors and LCD computer monitors  
Diazit scrolling signs  
SACO exterior LED sign  
Panasonic cameras and camera control system  
ViewCast osprey video overlay cards  
Optibase CommMotion streaming software