

Excerpted from

Cooperation Makes Universal's Shrek Live

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The green creature's 4D appearance is the result of multiple disciplines

Recently, we were invited by TechnoMedia Solutions of Orlando to check out the latest Universal Studios attraction, Shrek 4-D. Under the guidance of Leslee Grizzell who, among other duties, serves as TechnoMedia's director of press relations, we trooped off to see what the little green ogre, his wise-cracking jackass sidekick and his bride and associates (and adversaries) could contribute beyond the popular animated Universal Studios film. We were not disappointed. The animation and dialog were hilarious, but our primary interest was the technology that made this whole thing tick. A day before the attraction opened to the public, we toured behind the scenes and gained a first-hand appreciation of what goes into the implementation of an attraction that is sure to engage the public's interest.



Starts in the Queue

In the queue up, teaser video and audio displays exhort the public's attention to what might lie in store as attendees approach the main attraction. Once inside the pavilion proper, the audience is presented with a transitional sequence that bridges the film into the forthcoming presentation of the Shrek Honeymoon. Animated talking pigs and plasma display images of the villainous creatures abound, whereby the audience is further entranced into what is to come in the main auditorium.



So Where's the Technology?

We were met in the control center by TechnoMedia's on-site installation supervisor Matt Gall, who stepped us through the intricacies of the head-end control networks. It became obvious that the project involved a high degree of coordination between a number of technological disciplines. According to TechnoMedia's project manager Sam Chips, they had to interface and coordinate their activities with several other suppliers and integrators: Anitech Systems www.anitech-systems.com, Cinnabar

Productions Services www.cinnabar.com, Electrosonic Systems www.electrosonic.com, Fourth-Phase www.fourthphase.com, and Iwerks/Simex www.iwerks.com.

TechnoMedia Solutions of Orlando, FL, a full-range multimedia production and systems implementer with extensive experience in providing audio/video systems for theme parks, museums and similar attractions, has received multiple Academy Awards for its technological input for several film productions. The company is also active in commercial, retail, corporate and religious facility designs

and installations, with projects including the Hawaiian Village retail space in Las Vegas, the Empire State Building in New York City and the Henry Ford Museum in Greenfield Village AV installations.

System Designer

For their part, TechnoMedia Solutions designed, installed and commissioned the audio and video playback systems in the queue areas, all of the pre-show video presentations, captioning of the main show playback and the on-site sound mixes for both the main auditorium and pre-show attractions. They also assumed responsibility for the interface between the primary show presentations and the transfer facilities to life-safety evacuations systems.

Another interesting function of the system's operation in the provision of video captioning on dedicated monitors in the queuing areas, the pre-show and the main auditorium. This helps the hearing impaired to follow the dialogue or instructions. TechnoMedia also provided a five-station production intercom system and a zoned paging and special-effects playback panel at the two attraction operator stations. These stations feature a reverse video display screen with menu-driven prompts that keep the operations informed of the status of their paging/playback controls.

Given the sheer number of technological disciplines involved, all with their own agendas and time-frame considerations, keeping the project on-time and within budget was a formidable task. As Sams pointed out, "Yea, we had our differences from time to time, but this overall was a very cooperative venture. Many of us had worked together on previous Universal Studios projects and fully understood our respective roles in delivering a quality product. Meeting the client's deadlines was the essential element."

Note: TechnoMedia Solutions selected two Adtec Digital products for integration into the Shrek 4D attraction at Universal Studios: the Edje Network MPEG Video Appliance for generating video captioning and the Soloist2 Broadcast MPEG 2 Player for video/audio playback.