

3D Market Matures

By: Douglas I. Sheer

Stereographic 3D is maturing and becoming *the* entertainment technology of the new century. With so much history behind it, 3D is a key player in a complex consumer entertainment environment in which many products and services are vying for the attention and dollars of recession plagued and option addled consumers. 3D is exciting more and more consumers due to the increasing quantity of 3D content available and the expanding number of devices that support the viewing of that programming.

History of previous failures and skepticism not slowing 3D

With more than a hundred years of previous attempts to popularize 3D in motion media, the latest trend has surfaced a slew of negative pundits ready to put down any advances of the movement. However, unlike previous and often sensationalistic attempts to popularize 3D, the movement now enjoys much broader support from the entertainment industry. It's not just a movie house phenomenon. Audiences are as likely to be at home, on the run or supporting a premium level approach to revenues in theaters. If there is a sustaining power, which remains to be seen, it will be in no small part due to the breadth of the interest, the wide range of delivery pathways and the clearly higher quality.

3D Awareness Broadening

We can now see 3D awareness building and the experience with actual 3D imagery also rising. Most people are gaining their initial exposure to 3D via visits to movie theaters. Having seen one or more 3D movies, like *Avatar*, most viewers seem to develop an appetite for more, a fact that has been driving theatrical releases and pumping up box office revenues for the past few years.

3D, even with its somewhat more limited application than HD, still represents marquee entertainment, excitement and fun. It seems to be thriving in those tighter confines where it applies best. It supports higher ticket prices, helps pump up attendance, supports the deployment of special satellite and cable channels, creates a demand for 3D Blu-ray, has enlivened the games business. Only 3D TV lags behind, but is likely to catch up soon.

Future-Proofing Sets with 3D as a Feature

While some consumers will shop specifically for a 3D set or device, many others will consider 3D one of a number of features that they would look for. Just as in the past few years, Like 1080p, 3D protagonists must promote and defend 3D against the other features, as few consumers will buy new sets solely due to their having 3D as a prime feature, but rather as one of many features desired in the next set. That said, 3D is rapidly becoming *the* most sought after future-proofing feature requested in sets.

The Glasses

Many 3D admirers would prefer to not have to wear 3D glasses that so far have been a requirement of all 3D viewing whether in theaters or at home. Glasses free 3D TV is generally all lumped together as auto-stereoscopic, even though there are a few subtle differences from system to system. Auto stereo systems, offer glasses free use

Possible Health Impacts and Their Refutation by the Industry

Manufacturers and producers have known for years that some viewers complain of eye strain, headaches, and other discomforts from viewing 3D, in theaters or at home. And, portable devices lend a new potential for discomfort. Now the industry has been taking steps to reassure the viewing public and the healthcare industry that 3D viewing is safe and does no harm.

3D Production and Post-Workflow

For 3D motion pictures, TV programs, sports or any other live events for consumers there must be a dependable workflow that allows the capture and processing of content. And, manufacturers and professional customers have been busy over the past several years perfecting new equipment and re-purposing conventional electronic gear to suit the new purposes of stereo production for motion pictures and beyond.

Emerging in that time frame has been an end-to-end workflow starting with cameras and camcorders, generally mounted on rigs/beam-splitters, then going to processors, then to encoders/decoders and or trans-coders, then switchers, servers or storage devices, and ultimately to editing and graphics stations then back, then out to either theaters or other distribution links and over the communications pathways in some form. Most of this gear with the notable exception of rigs and processors has been re-purposed conventional and that has been a boon to the traditional brands of gear. What this means for manufacturers is a boost to their sales generally and to customers, a reliable flow of applicable devices to a widening and increasingly dependable and reliable workflow.

3D Content is Lagging

One urgent issue that remains in 3D is a lack of sufficient content and that is the most difficult to overcome in the sale of 3DTV sets. For TV set sales to take off, and a broadcast service to succeed, consumers will need to feel that there is a) enough good quality programming, b) lots of live sports and music performances and – ideally – episodic entertainment series, before they start to really buy a lot of sets.

3D has already proven itself to be more mature than we would have expected to see by now, based its past history of the technology and medium. Even the hardest bitten skeptics have to admit that 3D has survived longer than they expected and has now truly penetrated the consciousness of audiences, worldwide. We can expect to see almost every device being capable of playback or screening of 3D imagery by five years from now. Yes, it is less likely that 3D will wholly supplant H-D as the dominant new media technology. Rather, it seems destined to ride the wave that H-D began and become a standard feature in hundreds of devices until almost all viewers will know 3D.

Douglas I. Sheer is CEO & Chief Analyst of D. I. S. Consulting Corporation who just published *3D Production World tm 2011*. He may be reached at dougsheer@gmail.com.

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