

(digital entertainment)



Scene from Eternity shot in Kowloon overlooking Hong Kong CBD

THE DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT LEADERSHIP FORUM CONNECTING HONG KONG AND NEW ZEALAND

By Hal Josephson

Five years ago, in September 2008, I began planning the 2009 Digital Entertainment Leadership Forum (DELDF) held in conjunction with the March Hong Kong Film Festival. At the time, this annual event, DELDF, was the 'digital component' of the Hong Kong FilmFest and held at Hong Kong's Cyberport, a \$2B facility that once billed itself as Asia's "digital media community of tomorrow".

As the annual Program Chair for DELDF, my role each year has been to design and develop the theme for the event, invite all the speakers, both keynotes and panelists, and act as host or MC - make presenter introductions and moderating the multiple keynotes closing panel.

Intriguingly, the CEO of Cyberport at the time, Nick Yang, had been to New Zealand and was aware of the growing notoriety of the creative media community in Wellington, led by the Weta family of content creation companies. Nick and I discussed possible angles to create a full-day conference and then the idea took shape - a set of case studies focusing on how a city or region far from the world's major markets could position itself as a digital and creative force in the global media content supply chain.

The result: 2009's programme theme evolved to become: *Innovate Locally, Collaborate Globally: The Success Story of Wellington NZ.*

The conference focus was on Wellington's creative community and invited presenters were asked to answer the question - how do media makers from a modest-sized city in a small country located so far away from many global markets create customers, generate revenue and build world-class brands?

Shortly after nailing the concept and getting the Hong Kong sponsors and organisers to sign off on both the idea and the underwriting, Mayor Kerry Prendergast agreed to come to Hong Kong and provide the opening context for Wellington's

case study day in Hong Kong. Mayor Prendergast gave an Absolutely Positively Wellington presentation proactively positioning Wellington as the coolest little 'creative' capital in the world.

Other creative media and business executives telling their particular story included:

- *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* Producer, Barrie Osborne, who talked about how and why New Zealand, and particularly Wellington, was an amazing place to produce their Oscar award winning films.
- Weta's Visual F/X Supervisor, Matt Aiken showed how Weta Digital had developed unique world-class technology and software to meet the challenges to create and deliver globally competitive 21st Century state-of-the-art special effects.
- Dave Gibson, founder of multiple media production powerhouse, The Gibson Group showed a range of examples within their diverse portfolio of TV and film projects as well as visitor attractions.
- Scott Houston, then with the NZ Supercomputing Centre and now with Green Button talked about the need for huge secure computing capability to achieve super fast high quality rendering and demonstrated the massive capability to produce animation and F/X.
- Steve La Hood from Story Inc. showed how his cadre of environmental storytellers designed visitor experiences in amusement parks and heritage venues.
- Aimee McCammon, then GM of Park Road Post, explained how their facility came to be known as one of the best post-production houses in the Southern Hemisphere emphasising that it's not merely about great equipment but about cultivating and having the best talent to maximise the use of the tools and facilities.
- Jos Ruffell, now co-founder of the Garage Project in Te Aro, but then Dir. of Bus/Dev with Wellington's most

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successful globally operating video game company, Sidhe Interactive, talked about how Sidhe showed up at all the major video game events like E3 and the annual Game Developers Conference (GDC) and built their international reputation by working on major mainstream franchise game projects.

Also, on-board to organise and moderate the panel sessions were film and entertainment lawyer, Michael Stephens of Stephens Lawyers on the Terrace and Chris Lipscombe, then with Grow Wellington, but now the Manager of Economic Development at Porirua City Council. All of these presenters were hosted guests of Hong Kong Cyberport - invited to share their unique perspective in Hong Kong at DELDF, all expenses paid.

As a sidebar to DELDF 2009, Michael Stephens brought Director, Alex Galvin to the 2009 DELDF conference. It was here that Alex's script *Eternity* - a sci-fi murder mystery started to take shape from words on a page to the feature length film that it has become. The script revolves around a detective who must go into a virtual world to solve a murder. Hong Kong was selected as the near future 'Blade Runner'-esque real world and 1930's art deco and wine country, clean, green Hawke's Bay, New Zealand was chosen as the primary location for the film's virtual world.

Eternity was three plus years in the making but demonstrates a very real example of a Hong Kong/New

Zealand project that took form and shape out of DELDF. (www.eterinity-thefilm.com)

DELDF has gone on to become a strong annual connection for members of the New Zealand creative media and digital community.

In 2010, Sir Richard Taylor agreed to keynote that year's conference. The theme that year was *'Seeing 2020: The Next Wave of Digital Creativity'*, and Sir Richard's engaging keynote is still remembered in Hong Kong for his vision, humour and wit as well as his inspiring wake-up call, inviting fellow content creators to follow their hearts and make their creative dreams become real.

That year, Greg Broadmore, a creative artist with Weta Digital, put on the first Hong Kong showcase of his work and that year New Zealand's MFAT office in Hong Kong organised a reception in his honour. This also timed with Minister Grosser's trip surrounding the China FTA and he also spoke at a DELDF pre-reception.

Most recently at DELDF 2013, where the theme was - *'Pushing the Limits of Digital Entertainment with Cutting Edge Technology'*, Dave Gibson came for a repeat keynote and an update on his company's diverse technological solutions for a wide variety of special media projects completed around the world. These included interactive public video walls in Scandinavia, museum installations in Europe and China as well as a feature length film.

In addition, Martin Baynton, lead Producer with Pukeko Pictures spoke on a panel about next generation content creation and elaborated about how content must be created with global distribution in mind, so media properties can be most easily localised for China or other international distribution.

Michael Stephens who had come to his fourth DELDF had this to say: "Cyberport must be commended for creating this unique opportunity to benefit from the insights and expertise of Asia Pacific Leaders both in digital media IT and content innovation. In terms of thought leadership and networking, DELDF is truly a most valued annual event."

The Digital Entertainment Leadership Forum has been the preeminent annual Hong Kong digital media event for the past dozen years. DELDF attracts over 500 attendees from the greater Hong Kong digital media business, creative, academic and student community.

<http://delf.cyberport.hk>

Hal Josephson is DELDF's annual Program Chair and Executive Producer. DELDF 2014 will take place on April 16th in Hong Kong and will focus on the accomplishments of the 21st Century pioneers and innovators of digital entertainment. Hal is also currently organising a New Zealand content creators retreat and forum in Hawke's Bay called MediaSense, scheduled for May 2-4, 2014. Hal splits his time between San Francisco and Hawke's Bay, along with other international locations that business travel requires.

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Sir Richard Taylor, Founder of Weta Workshop, keynoting DELDF 2010