

COLUMN: As The Saws Turn

TITLE: Another One Off the List

Every once in a while you get to cross something off the list of “things you’ve always wanted to do in life”. My list has contained things like “see the Indy 500 live” (done that...several times) and “drive from Miami to Key West and hang out there for a while” (did that two years ago). It also has listed “walk the show floor at E3”, the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles.

A good friend in the lighting and sound business called me right before this year’s E3 in May and asked if I wanted a tour of the show. His company was responsible for several of the largest exhibits sound and light productions. He could get me in the show and would walk it with me explaining some of the newest technology on the floor.

The timing was perfect. I couldn’t pass on the opportunity. The show ran through Friday, May 14th, and I had to be in Las Vegas the evening of the 15th anyway. I flew to L.A. Thursday, spent Friday with him at E3 and drove over to Las Vegas on Saturday.

For years I have seen the pictures of the exhibits at this show. Incredible images from the Sony Playstation and Nintendo exhibits. Exhibits the likes of which you don’t see in your average trade show. The latest in the use of new technology on the show floor. The coolest use of lighting. The most advanced audio/visual productions. And more larger-than-life video game characters than a Disney amusement park.

All of the images and all of the imaginings of my mind didn’t hold a candle to what I actually saw once I got past the heightened security at the entrance to the hall. It was instantaneous. It was as if I stepped out of the Los Angeles

Convention Center and into another world. Kind of like stepping off the passageway of the U.S.S. Enterprise and onto the holodeck...

There was more eye candy than my brain could process. The lighting, the audio/visual production, the sound production, and the exhibit properties were larger than life. The decibel level in the room jumped dramatically. To converse with my host, I had to practically yell...and he was standing next to me. Everywhere I turned there was movement, there was color, and there were huge images of video game characters.

I saw exhibits that used the full cube of their space...all the way to the ceiling in the hall. I saw more plasma's than I think have ever been assembled in one place. I saw fabric structures with cool lighting everywhere. I saw space age sets and Old West sets and forests and deserts and race tracks and places that must have come from the deep, dark recesses of some programmers grey matter.

Once I got past the initial sensory overload, I began to start looking at the thing behind the thing...what was the marketing message for these exhibits? Who was their audience? Was their message getting through all the glitz? I started watching the audience (by the way...I was probably twice the age of the average attendee...most of them could have been my kids...in my khaki's and polo I was WAY overdressed...) interactions with the booth staff and with the games on display. Behind all the experiential activity – and it was truly an experience – it's still a trade show. There is still business to be conducted.

In that respect, it's not unlike any other trade show you've been to. There are still meetings with top level executives. There are still booth staff qualifying attendees. There are still attendees evaluating new products. There are still lookers and tire-kickers. Given the products they are evaluating – electronic

entertainment – I suppose the impact of the exhibits should be expected. How better to show your new game than to bring it to life on the show floor?

To the 20-something that's been to 5 or 6 of these shows, I'm sure it's nothing out of the ordinary. They see this level of experiential intensity all the time. To guys like me...well, it's one of those "things you've always wanted to do in life".

See you on the show floor.

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