SMPTE - Setting the Standards

Questions and Answers

What size is the image on a 35mm "scope" print? How bright should my screen be? How should a gain screen be installed? What can I use to help train new projectionists? Where can I get test films to align my projectors? What is the future of Digital Cinema, and will my concerns be heard?

Theatre owners and projectionists are faced with many questions regarding the technology of motion-picture presentation. For over 85 years, The Society of Motion Picture Engineers (SMPE) has helped answer these questions. The SMPTE was founded in 1916 to foster and standardize advances in motion picture technology. Television added a "T" to SMPE in 1950. Today, the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers develops and publishes the Standards, Recommended Practices, and Engineering Guidelines that guide almost all motion picture and television technology. Its engineering committees provide an open forum for suppliers and users of the technology to discuss options, concerns and future direction. The monthly SMPTE Journal has documented almost a century of technology, and SMPTE publications have helped enlighten and train users of that technology. SMPTE test materials are widely used to set up and evaluate picture and sound presentation.

SMPTE Today

There are more than 10,000 SMPTE members spread throughout 85 countries, making it a truly worldwide organization. There are 27 local "sections" worldwide, with student chapters at many universities. The SMPTE can be contacted at:

>   Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers
>   595 W. Hartsdale Avenue
>   White Plains, New York 10607
>   Phone: 914 761 1100
>   Fax: 914 761 3115
>   e-mail: smpte@smpte.org
>   www.smpte.org

Let's discuss some of the programs and services of the SMPTE, especially those useful to theatre owners and projectionists. Details are provided on the SMPTE website, so specific links are provided.

Standards, Recommended Practicesand Engineering Guidelines

The SMPTE develops standards that enable the worldwide use and optimum presentation of film and television images. For theatres, these important documents specify everything from the size of the film, to the brightness of the screen, to the frequency response of the sound. They also outline recommended practices and provide guidelines for theatre design, presentation quality, etc. These documents are listed on the SMPTE website and can be purchased individually at:

www.smpte.org/smpte_store/standards/

Many theatre engineers and technicians find the CD-ROM containing all of the motion-picture standards a useful tool. Licenses are available to share Adobe Acrobat .pdf copies of ALL the motion-picture standards among multiple users for only a few hundred dollars. It's very handy to have all the needed documentation with you during a service call or when a technical question arises.

SMPTE Test Materials

The SMPTE also provides test materials for setting up and evaluating projection and sound equipment. Perhaps the most familiar test film is the 35-PA Projector Alignment Film (sometimes known as RP 40) which is used to evaluate image area, focus, field flatness, steadiness, travel ghost, etc. in 35mm projectors. Test materials are available for other film formats, and for aligning optical and magnetic sound. Test materials can be ordered by calling or writing the SMPTE at:

www.smpte.org/smpte_store/

SMPTE Publications

The SMPTE sells a variety of publications covering all aspect of motion imaging and sound, from production to presentation. Of special interest to theatre personnel is the new Projection Manual, published in collaboration with ITEA and BKSTS. This manual, comprised of two main sections, includes a BKSTS projectionist manual, featuring a comprehensive tutorial guide providing a step-by-step training program for the new projectionist. The second half consists of a series of articles authored by U.S. experts in cinema technology. This manual is an excellent resource for newcomers to the projection room, and can be ordered on the SMPTE website at:

www.smpte.org/smpte_store/books/

SMPTE Engineering Committees

SMPTE Engineering Committees are the "heart" of new technical developments in the industry. Engineers and experts meet on a regular basis to discuss the details of technology, and the path forward to implementing and standardizing that technology. These open meetings serve as a forum and sounding board in the standards development process, with formal balloting procedures to approve the standards that specify the technology used in every theatre. Information about SMPTE Engineering Committees can be found on the SMPTE website at. Of particular interest to theatres are the Committee on Theatrical Projection Technology (P3), Committee on Audio Recording and Reproduction Technology (A12), and Committee on Digital Cinema Technology (DC28). Anyone with a vested interest in standards development and a willingness to actively serve can join a committee by completing a "Statement of Participation" at the SMPTE website. Note that you do NOT have to be a member of the SMPTE to participate in an engineering committee. You only need to have a vested interest in the work of the committee, and be willing to work on committee activities.

SMPTE Membership

Membership in SMPTE has many advantages. In addition to receiving the monthly SMPTE Journal, members receive discounts on SMPTE merchandise and registration at SMPTE conferences and events. "Networking" with other members of the industry is invaluable, and the SMPTE Membership Directory provides a valuable and complete listing of industry contacts. The SMPTE now offers a wide variety of "on-line" services, including access to the searchable SMPTE Library of technical presentations, past journals, and indices. You can join the SMPTE by simply filling out an on-line membership application at: www.smpte.org/membership/individual/ When you attend your first SMPTE engineering committee meeting or technical conference and look around the room, you may see a few familiar faces. Some of your friends from Kodak are likely to be there too, working together with you to help define the future of the movie industry.

For more information, contact me at john.pytlak@kodak.com