Are There Too Many?

THE CONVENTION EXPLOSION

by Tom Tolnay

Have we got a convention for you? Have we got any number of conventions for you? In case you haven't looked around the old communications industry lately, conventions, conferences, seminars, workshops, meetings, and retreats of every shape, size and confabulation are proliferating almost as fast as the new technology around which many of these events are geared.

That's part of the problem—and part of the plus—of this convention explosion: Without information, without exchange between professionals, we're sunk. But can too much be a negative? If not too much information, then too much hullabaloo to get it. In at least one sense, the answer is yes—it becomes increasingly difficult for product manufacturers to decide how to slice their budgets—where their promotion cash can be best spent, where they can learn the most, and especially where they will receive the most valuable exposure.
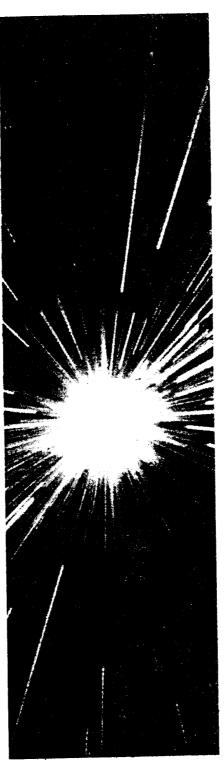
To help clear away some of the cobwebs of those questions, *Business Screen* is presenting a rundown on half a dozen events of recent vintage, domestic and international, most of which have some application in video technologies. As a companion piece to this summary, we're presenting a report on conventions in a generic sense—exploring the pains and pleasures of attending and participating in communications industry conferences.

Business Screen hopes to expand your "consciousness" of some of these considerations. But we'd also like to hear from you—to have you help expand *our* awareness of this phenomenon. Are conventions truly useful, informative, business-building, or have they gotten out of hand both in numbers, costs, and work involved in participating? In short, does the effort and cost outweigh the returns? Would these monies and energies be better spent in other directions?

Let's hear your thoughts, and we'll help share them with the industry.

Of course there are many kinds and shapes of events, with rather different aims. Some are built around awards; others around membership situations with a technical emphasis; the exhibit is King/Queen in many; still others primarily in an educational/workshop format. The follow-

TRW "Deep Space Watch"
by Robert Abel Associates

ing events reflect a spectrum of some of these kinds of events, along with a spectrum of focus—ranging from video technology for broadcast and corporate use to computer graphics and animation.

SIGGRAPH...August 3-7...Dallas, Texas

. Approximately 6250 were registered for this hot ticket in the business/scientific computer graphics field. Sponsored by the Association for Computing Machinery, SIGGRAPH ultimately attracted—depending upon whose estimte you swallow—somewhere between 8,000 and, according to *Business Screen*'s John Lewell, who attended, 11,000.

A declared 135 exhibitors of hard and software swamped the Dallas Convention Center, largest exhibit in the eight-year history of SIGGRAPH. A keynote speaker, and chairman, was Tom DeFanti.

Some 18 courses were offered, often simultaneously on computer/creative areas, including speakers like Jim Blinn (interviewed elsewhere in these pages), artist David Em (also interviewed in *Business Screen*), Ken Anderson of the Anderson Reports, on their respective areas of interest and work: the Voyager television graphics, the art of computer graphics, and commercial and corporate applications.

There was also a series of 21 technical seminars and vendor forums presented primarily by manufacturers, including Hewlett Packard, Polaroid, and Techtronics.

One highlight was the low-cost, complete computer graphics system—up to $20,000. This was the second year for this forum, and once again it proved immensely popular. Among the most attractive of these units was the system marketed and manufactured by Datamax, Inc. out of Palatine, Illinois. The entire fully configurated system comes in for under $10,000, and operates under a new computer language designated as Zgrass. Datamax says this is the first computer language designed for artists; that is, for non-computer types.

Next year's SIGGRAPH is apparently headed for Boston. For complete information, write: SIGGRAPH, One Illinois Center. 111 East Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60601.