Cultural Daily

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7 CES Takeaways for Sundance Filmmakers

Adam Leipzig · Wednesday, January 15th, 2014

Vegas is less than 500 miles away from Park City, and as I got in my car after a week at the Consumer Electronics Show, I wondered if I should just drive to Sundance.

There is, after all, a connection, and it's longer than Interstate-15. CES is all about gadgets and gizmos—the things with which we make and watch movies, TV and webisodes. It is an overwhelmingly gigantic trade show, where 155,000 people push and shove their way through 2 million square feet of floor space.

I have panic attacks just thinking about it. Yet even bigger than the crowds and the new, curved-screen TVs were the ideas I encountered, ideas that have immediate relevance for filmmakers at Sundance and Slamdance this week.

1. Content is still king. What did the big tech companies talk about? The content they offer and enable. Jeffrey Katzenberg of DreamWorks Animation did a cameo appearance for Brian Krzanich, the CEO of Intel. Sony hosted Vince Gilligan of Breaking Bad. Cisco CEO John Chambers gave us Sarah Silverman. Yahoo's Marissa Mayer brought onstage the Saturday Night Live Weekend Update team, John Legend and Katie Couric. Filmmakers—you make content, even though (thankfully) you call it "movies." Without your movies, there would be no reason to buy a wall-size TV.

2. But it must WOW! Sony CEO Kazuo Hirai, the best corporate presenter of the bunch, spoke repeatedly about the Wow-factor—that if something doesn't make you say "Wow!" it's just not good enough. That's true about movies too. Filmmakers, a lot of your movies simply are not good enough: They don't make us say "Wow! That was great! I have to tell my friends right away!" As we explore in our Sundance 2014 Infographic, the indie film world still has too much quantity and not enough quality.

Sony CEO Kazuo Hirai at CES. Photo courtesy Sony via YouTube.

3. Get closer to your customers. The big brands talked about developing unique, one-on-one relationships with their customers. Big data is allowing them to do it, and because they can have one-on-one relationships in the public forum of social media, it's cost-effective—social media amplifies their individual messages.

Filmmakers, you can do that too. Zach Braff and his producing team modeled exceptional

customer-relations in his hugely successful Kickstarter campaign for *Wish I Was Here*, premiering at Sundance on January 18. Crowdfunding is 40% about getting money, and 60% about developing a relationship with your audience.

4. Technology will offer unprecedented tools. The newest generation of cameras will allow you to make creative changes after principal photography—you'll be able to adjust focus, change the depth of field, and reframe with ease. 3D image-capture is becoming a consumer item. By the time Avatar 3 comes out, many of the visual effects of Avatar 1 will be at your disposal, and will be affordable on an indie budget.

5. Audiences are in for better experiences. Better visuals. Better effects. A whole generation has missed hearing uncompressed music, and the newest sound delivery systems will give full dynamic range: you will be able to share sounds as you want them heard, even on iTunes and mobile devices.

Of course, just because the technology is here, it doesn't mean you're James Cameron or Rachel Portman. See # 2: You've gotta WOW!

High-quality 3D TV without glasses at Stream TV's booth, CES 2014

6. Brands and creators are new best friends. Advertising agencies are not going away, nor are they lessening their role. But big brands want to have direct collaborations with creative talent, and agencies get it. That's good news for filmmakers, and opens the door to sponsorships, promotions and more paid gigs.

7. You are the First Screen. There was a lot of talk about the "Second Screen" experience. Twitter CEO Dick Costello calls Twitter the "Second Screen for everyone watching TV." But there's no Second Screen without a First Screen—and filmmakers, that is what you do.

From the invention of the first motion picture camera, technology has made filmmaking possible, and each advance allows more creativity to flourish. Yet storytelling is far more important than technology—a fact tech companies embrace. The key to success in technology and filmmaking really is quality. In a field of over-supply, where audiences have too many choices, and where new tools allow much easier and cheaper production, you have to separate yourself from the herd. Excellence is the great differentiator.

Could CES and Sundance be two sides of the same coin? I think so. We'll be seeing these CES Takeaways in action in Park City this week, and in Festival years to come.

Top image: Intel's WOW! moment at CES created a 3D whale above the audience in real time. Photo courtesy CES.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, January 15th, 2014 at 4:50 pm and is filed under Film, Technology
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