



3D Developments

The glasses are for the kids.

That's the message that has been repeated time and time again when the voices advocating the three-dimensional entertainment business begin to speak. It's not that children are the only ones that are interested in seeing their favourite characters in 3D — far from it. No, the problem is the slow adaptation of the entertainment industry to accommodate a newly reinvented medium, one that has huge profit potential and might just be the hottest thing to hit television since colour.

"We're at the cusp of an entirely new movement in digital communications, totally unlike anything seen in my lifetime," says James Stewart. "Nobody went back to black and white for anything other than creative

reasons... I see it likewise with 3D in the future."

And he's referring to the near future. Of course, Stewart has a vested interest in making sure that the news of the next big development in visual media is heard by all.

As owner of Geneva Film Co. (and producer, and director) Stewart is definitely counting on the success of 3D innovation. And he's a man who puts his money where his mouth is. While his company may do the bulk of their work — mostly advertisements — in two dimensional film, the Geneva Film Co. (www.genevafilmco.com) has done some significant work shooting in 3D as well.

"We're the only company on the planet that produces 3D ads," Stewart says mildly. "In the history of



Why three-dimensional entertainment might be the biggest thing since colour TV



Two of the products available by Wazabee, a 3D shell for laptops and iPhones (above)

James Stewart with the dual cameras required for 3D shoots (left). Shooting for Geneva Film Co. (right)

advertisement, there have probably been five commercials shot in 3D... we've produced three of them."

If Stewart's excitement isn't immediately detected in his voice, you can tell that it's there by the way he tells the story of how he got into the market for making 3D content. Jaws 3D piqued his interest, but it wasn't until seeing a three-dimensional demo by Japanese broadcaster NHK that Stewart started to become the self-proclaimed 3D evangelist that he is now. But that took some time.

"I think in the last decade I've lost my cynicism with technology," Stewart says. "We produced some of the first content in digital 3D, and it was quite a magical moment. Imagine producing the first television commercial. 'Why advertise on TV if you can advertise over the radio?' some might ask. But they never went back."

And indeed, with the success of such films as Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs in 3D and Journey to the Center of the Earth, paired with the hype surrounding James Cameron's Avatar — also in 3D — growing steadily, it would seem that 3D entertainment is on its way to being a home staple within the next couple of years.

Yet the problem is one resembling the "chicken and the egg" dilemma, at least according to Stewart. While producers such as Stewart are eager to create content, there is currently a lack of infrastructure to support sending the message to the home market. On the other side of that coin, theatres, television manufacturers, and cable providers are reluctant to start paving the way for 3D content when such content is relatively scarce.

It's an argument that makes sense. And one which Neil Schneider finds grating to the ear. Schneider is the



The employees of Geneva Film Co. are hard at work (below)



President and CEO of Meant to be Seen (www.mtbs3d.com), a group devoted to advocating stereoscopic 3D in video games not only to players, but developers as well.

"I feel frustrated when I hear about the chicken and the egg statement," Schneider says, audibly perturbed. "It's not a real problem... but let me elaborate. In the field of stereoscopic cinema it is a problem. You need the displays, and you need the standards. But for games, Blitz Games Studios is a great example, they have their games working on all the standards available at home, and now manufacturers are coming out with 120Hz display panels."

That 120Hz refresh rate is important for 3D technology requiring shutter glasses. Those shades help the eye simulate three-dimensional perception by rapidly opening and shutting each eye alternately, with every odd image to one side, every even image to the other. That equals out to 60Hz per eye. With those components affordably available, the only thing left for the 3D computer games market is to have more titles available in 3D. And Schneider says that the most powerful fuel to get that fire going is gamer demand.

"I'm amazed at that disproportion between 3D cinema and gaming," Schneider states. "3D movies are doing very well in the cinema — making anywhere from two

to three times what a 2D equivalent would — it's a convincing statement. But this isn't coming from customers; it's coming from the industry. Customers are saying gaming. From the point of view of customer demand, 3D gaming will be first to be adopted."

So much for the chicken and egg theory in that department. Yet Stewart subtly rebuts the chicken and egg argument as well.

"Well, I have a 3D iPhone that can take 3D pictures," he says nonchalantly.

Um, what?

He points me in the direction of the manufacturer's website. It's called the 3DeeShell, made by Wazabee, a Spatial View brand (<http://wazabee.net>). It costs \$55, and yes, it really exists. Apps are even available through Apple's App Store, and allow pictures to be taken in 3D. And because of the parallax barrier screen no glasses are required, not even the shutter variety.

Whether that's an example of a chicken or an egg, something has definitely started to materialize in the realm of 3D entertainment.

"Currently cinema requires glasses," Stewart says. "However, Spatial View makes commercial television displays that don't require glasses. But glasses-free tech is more expensive. At this point the more expensive glasses-free televisions are in the \$60,000 range, but that's where plasma TVs used to be. It took a decade to come in."

It all adds up, and Stewart admits that things are starting to move in the right direction. He says that at this year's Electronics Entertainment Expo (E3) there was a 3D screen at every display manufacturer's booth. There was even a 3D PS3 that the folks at Sony were somewhat quiet about. But if Stewart and Schneider's hopes are soon to be realized, the volume behind 3D entertainment is soon to rise considerably.

Schneider's group is set to make a major announcement in August, and hit what he calls "Phase Two." While he couldn't reveal exact details at the time of printing, they may be released by the time you read this article.

At the same time, Stewart says his side of things is bound to heat up thanks to the upcoming Avatar.

"At conferences with James Cameron, the way he talks is going to reinvent the industry... jaws drop, it's going to be very good for business," Stewart says.

But ultimately, as Schneider says, the final word will come from the consumers.

By Dorian Nicholson