



An Eye on IBC

By Sara Waddington, Managing Editor, Broadband Journal

SCTE's bursary winners for the IBC conference and exhibition in Amsterdam outline their experiences at the event and highlight how it has helped them with their business needs.



This year, SCTE (the Society for Broadband Professionals) paid for four lucky bursary winners (who were also SCTE members) to fly to the IBC conference and exhibition in Amsterdam and stay for the duration of the event (12-17 September 2013, Amsterdam, Netherlands).

IBC is the exhibition and conference for the broadcast, TV and broadband industries and is a major event in the European broadband calendar. This year, it attracted 1,581 exhibitors and 52,596 attendees (around 1,200 more attendees than the equivalent figure in 2012).

As part of the bursary package, each worth between £600-800, SCTE paid for winners' flights and accommodation plus entry to all the conference and technical sessions. SCTE's Benelux group also held its annual Benelux lecture, focusing on the theme of power consumption in communication networks, on the last day of the IBC exhibition at the RAI venue.

Here are comments from the bursary winners on their experiences...



Richard Squire CPE Engineering, Virgin Media

"What a show! I'd been to a few trade shows in the past, but nothing anywhere near the scale of IBC. IBC (International Broadcasting Convention) is Europe's largest professional broadcast industry show and covers the entire breadth of the broadcast industries; from TV production systems, through to consumer electronics, service suppliers and the ISP and cable operators. The exhibition was made up of over 1500 exhibitors in 14 conference halls with around 53,000 visitors.

IBC came at a really interesting time in my fledgling career. Having just completed the two-year Virgin Media graduate scheme, I was moving into my first 'proper' role on the Monday after the show. My last placements were working in the Customer Premise Equipment (CPE) Architecture and TV Engineering departments. My new role is within CPE Engineering so IBC was really relevant to my recent roles, as well as my new role.

As I walked to the show on the first day, I was taken aback by its size and atmosphere; it was buzzing, full of enthusiastic industry professionals and leaders. There were two clear themes dominating the show: 4K and Multi-Screen. 4K really was prolific - every stand seemed to have some kind of 4K demonstration. Several exhibitors were even talking about 8K, including one very impressive demo by NHK in the Innovation hall. There were a lot of interesting multi-screen and IPTV demonstrations ranging from innovative STB interfaces, companion apps and cloud-based solutions.

Another thing that caught my eye was a BBC R&D demo. The BBC team showed how temporal resolution is equally as important as image resolution: increasing the frame rate really managed to reduce the motion blurring. The result was quite dramatic. There were also several binaural audio (surround sound-style audio when wearing headphones) products, the best probably being by DTS Audio.

As well as the exhibition pass, hotel and flight tickets, the SCTE bursary provided IBC conference tickets. The conference held a series of talks and panel debates led by industry leaders. The discussions were wide ranging about the future of the TV and broadcast industries and technologies. A novel, and engaging, feature was the ability to "tweet" to presenters in real-time allowing the audience to shape the debates.

I'm really grateful that two of my colleagues, Wynn Rees and Alex Ball (of the Strategy and Architecture division at Virgin Media), let me join them as they walked the exhibition and attended various vendor meetings. It was very interesting to be able to join them at sometimes in-depth discussions with various vendors.

And this was just during the day! In the evening, there was plenty of time to network at the various Beach Parties and events held at the conference and in downtown Amsterdam (where there were plenty of sights and sounds to enjoy). Special thanks should go to Cisco and Cotswold for their hospitality as well as to the SCTE committee.

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So all in all it was an incredibly interesting, entertaining and inspiring few days. Without the SCTE, I would have never had the opportunity to attend IBC, and it has definitely provided me with experiences that will help develop me personally as an engineer and technologist. I don't think there is another way I could have learnt and seen so much in such a short period; it's proved to be a unique opportunity at this early stage in my career.

I would encourage anyone else to seek out the SCTE bursaries and certainly be looking out for future opportunities.”

Lesley Cottrell Virgin Media Graduate

“Being a member of the SCTE enabled me to apply for the IBC bursary in Amsterdam. I was fortunate enough to win the bursary and attend IBC.

I have been to many conferences in the UK in the past but IBC was leagues ahead and offered an outstanding opportunity to network with CEOs and graduates like me in the same industry. The scale of the exhibition was incredible and attracted the presence of almost every organisation in the profession to demonstrate their future technologies. The conference opened my eyes to the industry as a whole, and how big but yet so small it actually is, as well as the vast amount of opportunities available.



Lesley Cottrell, Virgin Media graduate and SCTE bursary winner at IBC

Over the four days, I and the other bursary winners browsed many demonstrations, attended lectures and spoke to numerous vendors who were very inspiring. Every aspect of the industry was catered for throughout the halls which were filled to capacity with advanced technology.

This year, there was a huge emphasis on 4K televisions with some vendors looking at 8K. The vendors were very friendly and helpful in demonstrating their equipment. The immense amount of products was overwhelming but gave me a real understanding of how the technology is progressing and the need to be ahead of the technology game. Attending IBC has helped develop my knowledge of new technologies in the industry, where needs could emerge within Virgin Media, and provided opportunities to progress my future career.

My first time in Amsterdam was an experience and it helped that the SCTE organised accommodation close to the RAI where the conference was held. Free transport was provided and helped me and others to commute around the city for food and refreshment in the evening as well.

Overall, Amsterdam was an amazing experience and I am very grateful to the SCTE for giving me this opportunity and invaluable experience. I definitely urge other graduates to apply for the bursary. I would also like to thank John Callas of Virgin Media for being a terrific tour guide. With over 20 years of attending IBC, his knowledge and network of contacts were immeasurable and he went the extra mile to ensure I gained all I could from the city of Amsterdam. Thank you!”

Richard Wood Video and Entertainment Architect, Technical Architecture, Virgin Media

“I had been to the IBC exhibition some years ago so I made sure I had the date in my diary well in advance. I thought I would try my luck at applying for one of the SCTE bursaries and was lucky enough to receive one. With flights booked back in January and the hotel sorted by Bev, all I had to do was decide which conference sessions to attend...

Unlike the other bursary winners, I have worked for Virgin Media for over 13 years and, therefore, as soon as suppliers found



The Virgin Media team at the IBC Party

out I was attending, they tried to commit me to meetings. I didn't want to arrange too many meetings since I was hoping to spend some time just walking around the exhibition and discovering new companies and technologies. Of course, I also wanted to attend the conference sessions.

Two things I learnt from my previous visits were: Don't rely on technology for planning your visit (pen and paper is best) and check where you are meeting people before committing to times. The RAI is massive and there is no chance of making it from one end to the other in less than half an hour. So, armed with a print-out of the conference agenda and a meeting calendar, I set off for Amsterdam.

On arriving, I dived straight into the conference sessions and stayed there for the first two days. There were quite a few sessions that were outside my usual area of interest but I decided to give them a go and did pick up some useful information.

Two key themes kept coming up that are particularly relevant to my current role in Virgin Media; Cloud TV and 4K. The Cloud TV discussions had two intertwined topics - discussions on when the set-top box (STB) would disappear from the home and the rise of cloud services.

It seemed to be accepted that the STB is changing from its current guise of a device that lives under the TV (question: why do we still call them a STB? I have never seen a box in the UK or Europe on top of a TV) to a device that lives under the stairs, the “Home Gateway”. There was debate over the use of Smart TVs for operator services but, as yet, there is no easy way for an operator to control the brand or the experience on a Smart TV due to lack of common standards for the application environment. Therefore, they would remain as an OTT competitor to operator service. Operators would continue to need a device they could use to control access to the network and the customer experience. Unfortunately, this means operators need to continue CPE development for some time to come.

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The other area of discussion, with regard to Cloud TV, was on which services could be moved to the cloud. It makes sense to move services such as metadata search and discovery and personalisation to the cloud today. However, services like network PVR are complex and there are many issues such as content rights and network economics. These issues mean that it is likely that the road to full nPVR will be a slow one and will probably be different in each country and even between different operators in the same country. Although there was much talk of cloud UIs there was not much talk of anyone deploying this at scale. My view is that it is likely to be four or five years away due to the large network investment required to support delivery of UIs with today's technologies.....

4K was obviously the hot topic on the exhibition floor. However, it got a much cooler reception in the conference sessions. This was best shown in an entertaining session *“The Great Quality Debate: Do We Really Need to Go Beyond HD?”* This was structured as a debate with teams arguing for and against moving beyond HD. Before the debate, there

was a show of hands in the audience with the result being about 50/50. After the debate, the vote was 60/40 against i.e. HD is good enough and the TV industry does not need UHD. Based on the arguments, I actually changed my vote and switched from ‘against’ to ‘for’ moving beyond HD. However, I changed my mind again after the SMPTE session later in the day! It is definitely a complex and emotive issue.

SMPTE produced a session with various technical presentations on the UHD Standards, Production, Delivery and Consumer Equipment followed by a panel with content owners and distributors. The panel was unimpressed with the proposed UHD consumer standards and warned that consumers won't tolerate another technology change for the sake of it. The industry needs to demonstrate a big step change in quality and even posed the question of *“Should broadcasters wait for 8K?”*.

There was no consensus answer but one provider stated that maybe we should at least wait for production standards to be



IBC in focus



The SCTE Benelux lecture, on power consumption in communication networks, during IBC

sorted out as some content providers have only just finished HD upgrades which involved laying 80 miles of HD cables!

The general view seemed to be that 4K should only be launched when all the questions are answered. My view after seeing the NHK 8K demo is that this is more likely to be the consumer step change that makes it worthwhile. In a few years from now, we could be looking back at 4K in the same way as 3D. However, 8K needs a rather large screen on a scale that few people are going to be able to fit in their living room, unless we believe the vision of TV wallpaper. But that's another discussion altogether!

I am extremely grateful to the SCTE for the opportunity to attend the conference and would recommend to anyone who has not experienced the full conference at IBC before to apply for the bursary. You might be lucky enough to win. It is a worthwhile event regardless of how long you have worked in the industry. I hope to be lucky enough to attend next year, although realistically it's likely to be as an exhibition visitor only.”

Daniel Choudhary Engineering Graduate, Media Services, Future Media Technology, Virgin Media

“Last November I received, as part of the SCTE newsletter, an email inviting me to apply for the SCTE IBC bursary. As a new graduate just starting out in the company, I was very curious (I still am) and had a bit of spare time in my hands (I don't anymore!) to research and apply for the grant. At the time, I was placed in a network engineering team and applied for the IBC bursary thinking it would be a learning experience, even if I hadn't had any relevant experience in the TV or broadcast domain.

Fast forward 10 months and I was working in the media services team - a fast-paced team working on upcoming OTT and simulcast TV services. IBC was suddenly hugely relevant to the area I work in, even more so as I started to get to know some of the key players in the industry.

The first thought that ran through my head as we walked past the 'I Amsterdam' sign in front of the RAI centre to collect

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our badges, was that this was a huge professional festival. A celebration, if you will, of the great things achieved by the service providers and vendors in the industry and a showcase of great next-generation products to be launched. Vendors and providers use this as an opportunity to meet people they are working with in person to cement their relationship and discuss product maps for the coming year.

As one would expect, the buzz word in this year's IBC was Ultra HD or 4K television. 4K is widely considered to be the next mainstream technology to be adopted into the market and - unlike 3D - is expected to actually appeal to the mass market.

The first element for most IBC attendees to notice would be the proliferation of the number of companies working on 4K technology. Almost every other stand had at least one 4K TV demonstrating their product that could aid in the supply of 4K content to the consumer - whether it be transcoding, monitoring, filming, editing or even to display on a 4K screen. On the same topic, definitely worth pointing out was the technology demonstrated by Japanese company, NHK. When most of the world is debating deploying 4K, it was demonstrating 8K on what seemed to be an 80+ inch TV, with a wide-angle view of a football game, with focus across the entire pitch.

There were numerous conferences as well, discussing the merits and flaws of 4K technology and its maturity for

deployment as a mass-market product. But 4K wasn't the only hot topic in the conferences - other hotly debated topics included second screen, traditional broadcast vs OTT services and set-top boxes vs Smart TVs.

The conferences were very well organised and made to be interactive. Mixing up sideshows with demos and panel talks kept the conferences fresh and interesting. Additionally, audience participation was encouraged using Twitter feeds and the use of hashtags. This allowed the audience to set the direction of the discussions, often pushing panelists to further dive into detail or discuss points that weren't originally planned to be part of the talk. This made the conference a far more dynamic and engaging experience.

HTML5 and RDK were also widely demonstrated throughout the exhibition, in the set-top box world. Text-based interfaces and the ability to browse through catalogues with videos and live streams running in the background seemed to be the trend. These technologies allowed a consistent, familiar interface across different ranges devices, whether high-end home gateway types or lightweight second room set-top boxes.”



APPLY FOR YOUR BURSARY TODAY!

If you wish to apply in advance for next year's SCTE ANGA COM or IBC bursary, email office@thescte.eu with 250 words explaining why you wish to receive the bursary. Full details can also be found on the SCTE's website at <http://www.thescte.eu/index.php/about-us/awards-and-bursaries>

Remember that you must be an SCTE member to apply for the IBC or ANGA COM bursary – joining is easy at <http://www.thescte.eu/index.php/join/membership-categories>