

As seen in



3D Digital Cinema Makes a Splash



Panasonic



Aquarium of the Pacific Takes a New Approach to Environmental Education

By Mark Robinson

...doing nature conservation issues had a lasting effect on the public...



This May, the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, California will unveil a new 3D digital cinema experience powered by the Panasonic Digital Cinema package, designed and installed by Edwards Technologies, Inc. (ETI).

The new attraction will feature nWave Pictures' latest 3D release, PandaVision. Produced in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund-The Netherlands, PandaVision takes audiences on a journey to the most environmentally sensitive areas of the planet to explore the challenges of habitat preservation in a way that is as entertaining as it is educational.

The film covers three of the most pressing issues in global habitat conservation – global climate change, destructive fishing, and tropical deforestation – and introduces character animation to the three computer-generated environments illustrating the crises, including the Arctic, the oceans of the Caribbean, and the rainforests of Borneo.

“The 3D digital characters we created for the film – polar bears, orangutans, monkeys, a sea turtle, sea horse and python – all interact with the audience,” says Charlotte Huggins, producer of PandaVision. “The character interactions with the audience allow move-goers to experience the film, not just watch it.”

The concept for PandaVision was born out of the World Wildlife Fund's desire to create an innovative experience that would bring the Earth's plight to the public in an immersive new way.

“They approached me a couple of years ago to create a 4D theme park attraction – a 3D film about 10 minutes in length with some physical in-theater effects,” explains PandaVision Writer/ Director Ben Stassen. “They wanted to do something special, something where they could envelop the audience in an experience to get their environmental message

across in a very different way.”

The result is the groundbreaking PandaVision 4D attraction now featured at Efteling Theme Park in The Netherlands.

“I thought that doing nature conservation issues in a theme park was quite an interesting and innovative approach, and I saw that it had a lasting effect on the public,” says Stassen. “I've seen very young kids coming out of PandaVision and they really get the core message.”

Taking the Plunge into Digital

Last fall, Huggins began a dialogue with the Aquarium of the Pacific to bring PandaVision to their 156,000 square-foot facility located across from the Queen Mary in downtown Long Beach's Rainbow Harbor.

The Aquarium was seeking to enhance an existing 200-seat theater space, making it a more integral part of the overall guest experience.

“We were looking for a film that would communicate important environmental messages in a way that was impactful and engaging,” says Cecile Fisher, director of public relations for the Aquarium of the Pacific. “When we found out about PandaVision, we felt that it was an appropriate fit for the Aquarium.”

Around this time, Huggins began speaking with Edwards Technologies, Inc. about providing the Aquarium with a digital cinema system that could also double as a multimedia system for presentations and training.

“When we first began talking to the Aquarium about PandaVision, our thought was that we would go with traditional film,” says Huggins. “But when we had an opportunity to see ETI's installation of LEGO Racers 4D at LEGOLAND California, we knew immediately that we had to go digital. The image quality was just outstanding.”

ETI's long-time relationship with Panasonic and experience installing digital projection systems in venues such as the International Spy Museum and Volkswagen Autostadt enabled them to accommodate an aggressive implementation schedule, completing the bulk of the system fabrication and installation within two weeks.

"It's the perfect solution for the Aquarium," says ETI President Brian Edwards. "We're providing a new and exciting guest experience that will truly optimize their use of space."

The completed theater features Panasonic's new 6000-lumens DLP projectors, a 5.1 surround sound system, and an 18-1/2' wide by 14' tall high-gain silver screen by Stewart Filmscreen, designed to maintain maximum polarization, the secret ingredient in 3D projection.

Panasonic Digital Cinema

The Aquarium of the Pacific is the first aquarium to create a guest experience driven by 3D digital cinema technology, representing a greater trend by museums, zoos and aquariums toward creating entertaining experiences that both educate and attract visitors.

In response to this trend, ETI has leveraged its relationship with Panasonic and nWave Pictures to provide a complete hardware, content and system integration package to educational and entertainment venues. In addition to PandaVision, a full library of 3D film titles are currently available and in production from nWave Pictures.

"The Panasonic Digital Cinema package is designed to provide a cost-effective 3D cinema solution for venues with theater or auditorium spaces seating 50 to 450 guests," says Edwards. "We saw a real need to offer an extraordinary type of experience that didn't require a major fundraising initiative."

In addition to a 3D digital cinema system, venues can choose to add a "Multi-Purpose Package," providing video and audio for exhibit areas, queuing monitors, video conferencing and presentations. The "In-Theater 4D Effects"

package offers synchronized special effects such as wind, water spray, and smoke.

"The core of the Panasonic Digital Cinema system is a complete 3D digital cinema package," says Edwards, "but we also wanted to give people the ability to tailor the experience to the specific needs of their venue."

Entertaining with a Purpose

Increasing numbers of educational institutions are recognizing the value of entertainment in delivering even the most serious scientific messages.

"Our ultimate goal at the Aquarium of the Pacific is to provide a deeper understanding of the world we live in and how we humans play a critical role in its future," says Aquarium President and CEO Jerry Schubel. "If we can leverage the tools and knowledge of the leisure entertainment industry to deliver this message in the most engaging and meaningful ways possible, then we have accomplished our objective."

With this type of objective in mind, when the

people at nWave began scripting for PandaVision, they knew they had their work cut out for them. World Wildlife Fund experts and consultants carefully went through each segment of the script, suggesting changes so the environments and animals would be as realistic as possible.

For instance, when a green python was scripted for the film's Borneo rainforest sequence, the WWF quickly pointed out

that green pythons aren't found there. The snake soon became a brown python, indigenous to the habitat.

When Stassen wanted to depict a polar bear family with two parents, the scientists pointed out that male polar bears never live with the mother bear and her cubs. This was quickly changed as well.

nWave even agreed to customize the film's pre-show based on the preferences and objectives of the Aquarium's management and educational staff.

This kind of attention to detail was also given to PandaVision's specially created teacher's guide.



The guide will be offered for use in school curriculums, grades 3 through 10, and will be available through venues exhibiting the film. There is also a full line of merchandise that accompanies PandaVision, including stuffed animal characters and t-shirts, allowing guests to take a little piece of the PandaVision message home with them.

Although nWave has traditionally made more purely entertaining movies for the commercial market, PandaVision is an entertaining movie with a serious message.

“The film is presented in an entertaining and engaging way that we hope children, their parents, school teachers and other adults will enjoy,” says Huggins. “But underneath the fun is an important message. And the message is that we need to be respectful of our planet and take responsibility for it.”

ETI, Panasonic and nWave plan to demonstrate PandaVision and the Panasonic Digital Cinema system at this year’s AAM, ASTC, AZA and IAAPA conferences, and at select venues throughout the country with their traveling demonstration theater.



*For information about the
Panasonic Digital Cinema System:*

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www.pdc3d.com

Panasonic

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Edwards Technologies, Inc.

Founded in 1984, Southern California-based Edwards Technologies, Inc. (ETI) provides audio, video, lighting and show control systems for educational, corporate, entertainment and retail venues. ETI-designed systems are enjoyed literally every minute of every day someplace on the planet, including Universal Studios, LEGOLAND Parks, Nike World Campus, Volkswagen’s Autostadt, Fort Worth Zoo, and the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry. www.edwardstechnologies.com

nWave Pictures

Founded in 1994 by Ben Stassen, nWave Pictures is the first fully-integrated digital studio in the world specializing in the production of immersive content for large-format theaters, motion simulators and 3D attractions. The company offers the largest library of independently produced ride films and attractions available non-exclusively in all film and video formats, including 15 perf, 8 perf and 5 perf 70mm, as well as HD and standard video. nWave is also the largest independent producer of 3D films, and distributes the most extensive library of 3D feature films for large format theaters worldwide. www.nwave.com

Aquarium of the Pacific

The Aquarium of the Pacific, a nonprofit institution, celebrates our planet’s largest and most diverse body of water, the Pacific Ocean. Home to more than 12,000 animals in more than 50 exhibits, the Aquarium of the Pacific explores the sunny waters of Southern California and Baja, the icy seas of the Northern Pacific and the colorful Tropical Pacific. The Aquarium features hands-on Discovery Labs staffed by knowledgeable volunteers; the special exhibit Jellies: Phantoms of the Deep; and its newest interactive exhibit, Shark Lagoon, featuring sharks you can touch and some you can’t. As the key voice and storyteller for the Pacific Ocean, the Aquarium offers a variety of engaging programs, presentations, annual events, festivals and classes providing numerous opportunities to explore the Pacific. A world of discovery, exploration and adventure awaits people of all ages, backgrounds and interests. www.aquariumofpacific.org