edge

ROGERS CENTRE EXTENDS FACILITIES

The Rogers Communications Centre continues to modernize its facility to keep on the leading edge of new technology. "We are always improving our facility," comments Brad Fortner, Operations Manager. "As most people know it's a daunting task to stay on top of constantly shifting technology but it's important so that Ryerson can maintain and grow its applied communication programs."

The Rogers Communications Centre, which opened in 1991, services a number of Ryerson's schools on a day-to-day basis in the area of television, new media, audio and post production. The Centre continues to be a hub for Applied Research in the area of communication technologies. "While many of the improvements have been done with an eye to providing a research base for Ryerson's upcoming graduate program in Culture and Communications, addressing the needs of Ryerson's undergraduate day programs remains my top priority."

Adds Fortner, "We have to ensure that we don't get so far ahead that we lose touch with the roots of broadcast and production. The improvements we have made are all designed to assist students and faculty by providing a modern, realistic facility."

Video Editing

One of the Centre's main areas of specialty and top academic priorities has been the modernization of its video editing technology. Given the budget realities inherent in the University system, partnerships with Intergraph Computers, Digital Processing Systems (DPS) and Panasonic Canada have been extended. "Three years ago the schools of Radio and Television Arts, Image Arts and Journalism started a five-year process of converting from analogue SuperVHS (S-VHS) technology to digital DVC Pro technology.

This conversion required obtaining both cameras and post production equipment. Fortner noted, "By September there will be eight non-linear editing systems in the pool. That's double the number we had last year. It effectively replaces the SVHS analogue edit suites as far as RTA and Image Arts are concerned. "S-VHS will be withdrawn as a supported production format in August of 2001. Journalism will make use of the non-linear editing pool for its documentary courses and make better use of its investment in DVC Pro camcorders with the installation of DVC Pro players in three of its existing editing suites.

Compositing

Another important area associated with the post production environment is compositing. "To the outsider, compositing appears to be doing the same function as editing," Fortner says.

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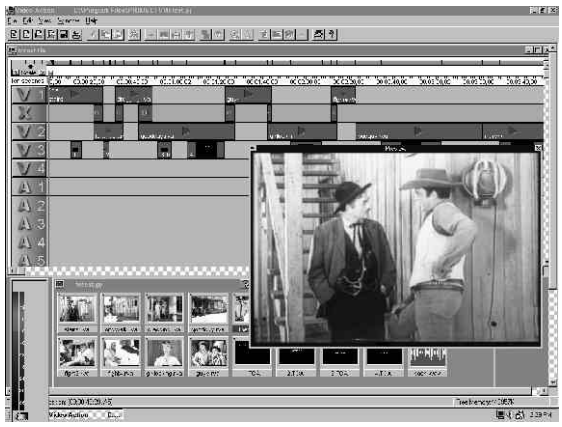
"However, compositing is the process involved in bringing various production elements together. As an example; it combines elements created with 3D animation software, with film (or video) shot on a set. It's an essential component in the area of special effects and a core process involved in modern film making." To address this critical area the Rogers Centre has further extended its strategic partnership with Eyeon software and use of its Digital Fusion software. The Digital Fusion installation can work with standard television resolutions, through to resolutions that match feature films and high definition television.

DVD (Digital Video Disc) is a growing distribution medium that offers multiple playback video streams. The Rogers Centre has arranged a partnership with Pinnacle Systems, Pioneer Canada and Acura Technology that will bring a complete authoring and DVD creation environment to Ryerson. While this initial DVD authoring environment is limited in terms of the entire DVD specification, the Centre is investigating a system that will allow for the authoring of multiple simultaneous video streams.

"This facility is open to faculty and their research assistants and can be accessed through the Digital Media Projects Office," adds Fortner.

Visual Computing Lab

One lab that has to update frequently is the Visual Computing Lab. The original Pentium II Pro 200 platforms that were installed when it opened have been replaced with dual processor Pentium III 450s. This significantly improves the Visual Computing authoring environment by allowing users to operate the authoring software using one of the systems processors while simultaneously rendering animated frames with the second. The original PCs are being converted by the Research Group into a rendering farm that will be available to users as a network resource when the rendering "crunch" occurs next March.



Video Action, a video editing program, is new in the non-linear video suites

Another improvement in the lab will be to better facilitate instruction, especially software training. The room will be equipped with Ryerson's first wall mounted flat panel display. "Projection equipment has simply not worked in this environment," Fortner explained. "The Panasonic 42" flat panel display hangs permanently on the wall, and provides a higher resolution than was possible using LCD projectors in the room. The changes in the Visual Computing Lab provide a better teaching environment and resources that will allow students to work faster."

Interactive Broadcast Learning Centre

The Interactive Broadcast Learning Centre (IBLC) is a lab that has been set-up as a partnership between Radio and Television Arts and the RCC. The IBLC consists of a 20-seat lab that is shared by RTA, RCC and a series of interconnecting rooms for applied research and RTA practicum.

The purpose of the lab is to focus on the emerging area of datacasting (digital interactive broadcasting) and content creation in areas of data-enhanced broadcasting ."The 20-seat lab has been upgraded to contain software that mirrors the software being taught in the Applied Arts Multimedia Minor," Fortner explained.

"However we've gone further than the Minor to address the software needs specific to those working in the field of Radio and Television Arts. In the area of interactive webcasting we're continuing to build upon the tools that employ Real Media. This includes tools that work with SMIL -Synchronized Multimedia Integration Language - along with a significant improvement in the Real Media Server that services RTA and RCC. We're also installing a live Real Media Server that will allow for live webcasting. A camera plugged into the device will instantly be live on the Net and we'll be able to start webcasting events out of the RCC such as the Tuesday evening professional association meetings that occur in the Eaton Theatre."

MBONE

"M-Bone is short for Multicasting Backbone and will eventually be the technology that broadcasters will employ to reach a mass audience over the internet," said Fortner.

The M-Bone facility allows Ryerson to connect to other universities over the CANARIE network with video interactivity and quality similar to that of an interactive satellite conference. The M-Bone capability is an important addition to our interactive communication capabilities"

"On the radio side, RTA is building upon its success with SPIRIT (internet) radio. We're working closely with a company called World Unwired who have developed software that inserts data and interactive content into the new Digital Audio Broadcasting standard. On the television side we now have the authoring tools that allow us to create enhanced and interactive content for set-top box applications like WebTV and WebTV for Windows. WebTV has been the result of a partnership with Extend Media."

To capitalize on the research potential in this area, the RCC has established the Interactive Broadcast Innovation Group, consisting of research faculty from Administration and Information Management, Image Arts and RTA. The group was formed for the purpose of researching and developing the potential of interactive television in Canada. "Given Ryerson's history in all forms of interactive and broadcast media, it's important that we be involved in the development of interactive broadcast media." Fortner said.

Audio Labs

"Perhaps the most significant thing we've done in audio is the new AC-3 Dolby Digital Audio Suite. It's capable of recording and mixing to Dolby 5.1 Surround Sound. This process is significant to the production of DVD, motion picture film and advanced television. I know Mark Banbury and Michael Murphy have been diligent in advancing the audio facilities," said Fortner.

The importance of their work was in the establishment of more audio facilities in the Image Arts building that technologically mirror those found in the RCC. The common technological base means that both schools can share all of the higher end facilities including the Dolby Suite. ○