

## Visual Effects Members Use Online Voting for Awards

### *Encino Organization Moves to Level Playing Field*

**By Mark R. Madler**

Members of the Visual Effects Society begin voting this month on the winners for the group's annual awards presentation.

As visual effects artists already spend much of their time in front of a computer, the Encino-based society decided to put that time to good use with its online view and vote.

Allowing online access to clips and the ballot also gives the worldwide membership a voice.

With the first year of the online voting in particular showing an increase over those who voted in person, the society decided to keep doing it to keep the global membership involved.

While VES officials would not disclose the percentage of its members using the online view and vote, they did state it has grown since first used in 2005.

"We're giving everyone the fullest free path to see the work for themselves," said Eric Roth, executive director of the Encino-based society.

The VES has 1,600 members around the world, including numerous Academy Award winners and pioneers in the field. The organization promotes the art of visual effects and advocates on behalf of artists whose work appears in film, television, commercials and video games.

The online view and vote was the creation of a San Fernando Valley member – Marty Shindler, an Encino consultant working in the nexus of entertainment and technology.

The voting process up until then – having screenings in multiple locations – didn't make sense to Shindler.

This was in 2004 and practically everything was accessible on the Internet, so why not the clips shown at these screenings.

At this same time, the society's membership was growing outside the U.S. borders.

The key goal for the online voting was to make the playing field as even as possible for all the members, Roth said.

Also playing into the decision was that even those living in Los Angeles or other cities where the screenings took place weren't always available, or wouldn't want to take off the Saturday morning to watch the clips and vote.

"With the technology in place we decided we would go for it and do it," Shindler said.

The society's awards committee discussed the online view and vote for about two months before moving ahead. The committee met with the vendors and saw demonstrations of their work.

The materials members watch are encoded and digitized by Technicolor in Burbank. SyncCast, another division of Technicolor parent company Thomson, is the content delivery network. 1:1 Ratio in Pasadena produces and monitors the voting. A Los Angeles accounting firm tabulates the results.

Clips members vote on come from work released by the major studios, especially in the film and television categories. Along with the finished product, submissions include a "before" look at a scene so that members get a better understanding of what went into creating the effects.

With piracy being such a thorn in the side of the studios, creating a secure system was of utmost importance.

Members receive an encrypted link for a secure, dedicated server where they access the ballot and a link to the video clips and supplemental written material describing creation of the effects.

The clips can be streamed directly on a monitor or downloaded onto a hard drive.

The material, however, is protected by digital rights management so it cannot be forwarded or copied. If downloaded, the hard drive version expires after the 10-day voting period.

"This is high profile work and we would be (in a bad position) if we did not make it secure from the get go," Shindler said.

The major categories for film in 2007 were swept by the work done by Industrial Light & Magic for "Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest."

Nominees for this year include "I Am Legend," "Spider-Man 3," "The Kite Runner," and the series "Battlestar Galactica."

Roth called it a stellar group of nominations.

"What it shows is as entertainment industry goes into its future, visual effects becomes a more integrated component in the delivery of all entertainment and not just the big blockbusters," Roth said.

The 6th annual awards ceremony takes place Feb. 10 in Hollywood. Director Steven Spielberg receives the Lifetime Achievement Award.

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