

# Feedback for Ford

Rather than talking to clients, Ford set up an interactive brand experience at this year's Geneva Auto Show. **Geny Caloisi** reports

**THE FORD STAND** at Geneva's motor Show stood out from the crowd. Its corporate blue colour was combined with a vibrant orange through out the stand giving a spacious and dynamic feel to the 2,871m<sup>2</sup> space. But that was not the best part. Touch screens, a giant Barco iLite XP6 LED wall, VJs (video jockeys) and a bit of magic spoke aloud to the public who took active part in the 'Ford Experience.'

## SCREEN AND EXPERIENCE TECHNOLOGY

**IMAGINATION WORKED CLOSELY** with a-v staging specialist Creative Technology to create the interactive space. CT provided most of the a-v equipment, ranging from information touch screens — which were beside the cars — and the flat screens around the stand, to a 10.7m wide x 5.8m high LED display that was integrated with a curvy wall that worked as the back drop for the stand. The LED display was made up of two screens, a main 9.9m x 5.85m screen (1584x936 pixels) and a 13 screen 'fingers' (936 x 504 pixels apiece).

Within the Innovation Theatre, the technology mixed real content — a Mondeo car turning on a circular platform — with a virtual presenter and computer-generated, high-definition imagery. The media playback and timecode to trigger lighting and show control software came from a Dataton Watchout system which also triggered the Bumat car turntable, so that the real car's position stayed in sync with animated media.

For the Musion system, two 20,000 lumen 1400x1050 resolution Barco FLM R20 projectors were hung from the ceiling at an 80deg angle to achieve a smooth, edge blended image, which was projected onto a floor area covered in screen paint (a Digital Grey base and top coats by Nexmix).

The transparent foil for the Pepper's Ghost effect was a 4m x 6m screen hung at 45deg, and to complete the immersive experience, the theatre had 5.1 surround sound that completely blocked out the noise from the show floor.

But, unusually for motor shows, the car manufacturer wanted people to be part of the stand and contribute to its content.

Creative company Imagination was in charge of the brand communication. Ford wanted to transmit its core brand values — environment, performance, innovation and design — with a fifth value, emotion, running across all the others.

'We wanted to make the Geneva show stand interactive, to give our visitors the opportunity to be part of the stand environment', said Paul Thomas, vice president marketing, Ford of Europe.

## HAVING YOUR SAY

There were many ways of 'having your say.' One was through two media hubs — hot spots where people could forward their opinions or photos either by using the Apple iMacs on the desks or by using bluetooth from their mobiles. The iMacs ran custom software designed by Imagination that captured still images from visitors and also send their messages to a central server. There was a moderator that made sure the messages and photos were appropriate.

A crew armed with cameras and microphones walked the floor of the whole show conducting 'vox pop' interviews that were also broadcast on the LED screen at the stand. People were asked about current hot issues in the car industry - such as environmental matters, new designs and what development would make the most difference to people's lives. As an incentive, prize draws (with products



donated by Sony) took place several times a day.

'Our ambition, shared with our client for the Geneva show, was to listen to and involve the audience through integrated digital experiences that facilitated an emotional relationship with the brand', says Imagination's Damian Ferrar, the head of its media group.

'By pushing boundaries, by challenging creativity and technology, we wanted to use digital channels to enhance customer relationships and to strengthen the bond. It's emotional. It's mutually beneficial. It's a digital application. It's a great experience.'

#### VJ-ING AWAY

Once a moderator had OK'd the content received, it went straight to the VJs, who would generate an original play list that was then broadcast live on the LED screen.

Six 65in Panasonic screens stood proudly at the centre of the stand. On one side, three screens showed people's submitted content and a bird eye view of the stand. On the other side, the 65in plasmas were fitted with U-Touch interactive overlays which the VJs used to perform their amazing tricks.

Imagination's production technology and media group teams created the bespoke programme for the data management and it worked with Digital Antics — a specialist in developing software for live events — to develop the technology.

The VJs created play lists by using the touch screen with an Apple Mac style drag and drop intuitive interface, which even had an iPod-style wheel to help scroll through the content.

When the VJ was happy with his play list, the live performance started, combining music, still images, video clips and texts. The VJs could also select their favorites,



rating them with stars, which were regrouped at the end of the day to wrap up the show.

VJ Toby Harris, who normally works in discos, was very excited by the system. 'This is where disco meets corporate,' he said, 'Each day we get more and better content and we can work creatively. People love it. They love seeing themselves on the big screen. The shows are always different and we have had big crowds watching us working.'

The VJs work in pairs. One, who has created the list, calls the shots and the other operates the console that links up to the LED screen.

The final result is so good that it does not look like a live performance — where mistakes are some times made. It looks like something that has been edited and worked on with great care for detail.

And although they had to work standing up and their arms got tired from working with the vertical touch screens, the VJs wanted more and could see this system being used for other applications.

#### THE JEWEL IN THE BOX

The use of new technology didn't stop there. The other jewel of the stand was the Innovation Experience.

Situated towards the back of the stand, this theatre-style 15.7m x 6.9m, 'black box' of a room allowed 30 visitors in at a time, who were wowed by a multi-dimensional presentation.

The performance used Musion's Eyeliner technology — the updated version of the Pepper's Ghost effect.

The presentation, during which a presenter talked the public through the new features of the Ford Mondeo, was filmed and projected in high definition and delivered in German, French and English. It was so well synchronised and the cuts between the mix of film, animation and a real car were so precise that Martin Smith, brain father of the Ford Mondeo, asked whether there was a real car behind the screen or if it was just an animation.

#### GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS

Overall, the VJ area combined with the Innovation Experience to allow visitors to truly engage with the Ford brand. It was an innovative step for Ford of Europe, which has moved away from the conventional way of 'broadcasting' to its audience and has challenged visitors to give their opinion.

'It has been an innovative and challenging project', says Sylvie Hellmann, account manager for Imagination's Ford of Europe department.

'The Video Jockey experience and the Innovation Theatre were two bold ways to create a brand experience for visitors at the Geneva Autoshow.' □



**Clockwise from top left: The VJ centre in the middle of the stand; the VJs at work; interactive response systems in use; and the Mondeo 3d presentation**

#### CONTACTS

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