

Claw", carries the expandable, cylindrical video screen which is suspended above the performance area. The screen was designed by stage architect Mark Fisher in collaboration with Chuck Hoberman and Frederic Opsomer, and fabricated by Opsomer's company Innovative Designs of Belgium, using LED pixels manufactured by Barco. XL Video purchased and rented the screen to the U2 360° tour. "The best thing about LED today is that it can be made into any type of shape and form," says XL's Saunders. "It's also lighter and easier to assemble."

In other shows, where the areas of video are much larger, it's more common to find projectors being used. "At the MTV Awards at the end of last year, we used 15 Barco projectors. Using LED for this would have been too expensive," said Saunders.

Paul Hutton, MD of Blitz Communications, says he has seen a sharp increase in the use of video in corporate events and exhibitions too. "Because of the advances on video displays like LED, it's now possible to have a video backdrop, instead of the traditional wood or felt sets. These kinds of resources are used a lot in broadcast TV, conferences and events." He also noted that while video was delivered by specialist video companies, it is now also likely to come from lighting companies.

Content Manipulation

The kind of video content displayed on the screens at live events is a mixture of live feeds and pre-recorded material. In order to run the show smoothly you need clever playback and content manipulation tools. The most commonly used are the Hippotizer (Green Hippo), Catalyst (SAMSC Designs), Pandora's Box (Coolux) and Spyder (Vista Systems) as well as some PC and Mac operated servers.

Sometimes, for especially demanding shows, the directors prefer using a tool that will allow them to see in advance what the whole scene will look like. To do this they have previsualisation tools such as UVA's D3, which was used to pre-visualise U2's 360° tour, and also featured in L&S's coverage of Massive Attack's recent tour (L&S! October 2009).

"As stages become more sculptural, it is ever more difficult to anticipate how two-dimensional moving content will look," notes UVA's software director, Ash Nehru. "Previsualisation allows you to check that content is correct - in terms of frame-rates, resolution and layout. You can create short clips or stills to test and reject aesthetic blind alleys and see how content will look on camera from various angles. Put simply, previsualisation allows you to truly understand what you're making, long before you arrive at rehearsals. This way, you spend your content budget more effectively, throw away less material and require less re-rendering in the crucial - and expensive - rehearsal phase."

The key is to understand the power that video has as a communications tool and a scene setter. At the ATP world finals held at London's O2 Arena, CT London combined LED screens and projection to bring spectators closer to the action, communicate the scores and also to give the arena a state-of-the-art look. CT supplied 98sq.m of Mitsubishi OD10 LED screen, plus 64sq.m of Lighthouse R7 LED screens. A further 92 linear metres of Barco OLite 612 LED modules were also provided for the courtside perimeter advertising boards, while four Panasonic 10,000 lumen projectors were used for the court surface projection.

As video content and displays become more widespread and sophisticated, the video director's role grows. Video is here to stay and take us to new wonderlands on stage . . .

- > Barco: www.barco.com
- > Blitz: www.blitzcomm.com
- > Christie Digital: www.christie.com
- > Coolux: www.coolux.de
- > CT London: www.ctlondon.com
- > Green Hippo: www.green-hippo.com
- > Innovative Designs: www.id-be.com
- > Lighthouse: www.lighthouse-tech.com
- > SAMSC: sams-c-pm.com
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