



Studios Try to Agree Upon Digital Master Standard

By Chris Tribbey | Posted: 25 Mar 2009

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Disney, Paramount, Warner Bros., Sony and other are working with the Entertainment Technology Center at the University of Southern California (ETC@USC) to establish a new set of digital standards for the masters studios send out the door.

Currently, production houses and others have to deal with masters with huge amounts of input material, including varying screen sizes, codes and bit rates. If this new, voluntary Interoperable Master Format were agreed upon, it would aim to make things easier in the world of digital distribution.

The project grew out of independent work along the same lines at the studios, and ETC@USC hopes to have the project complete by the end of the year. The Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers will be asked to review the standard.

Bi-weekly meeting will be held at the studios and at ETC@USC's Los Angeles lab, and service providers and manufacturers are being asked for their input. Walt Ordway, former CTO at Digital Cinema Initiatives, will serve as project director.

"With respect to the masters, there are simply no standards," said ETC@USC CEO and executive director David Wertheimer. "The end goal is to make it as simple as possible for people internally to move content around on post-theatrical masters.

"We've just got to simplify the world of creating these masters, streamline what's coming downstream ... in a way that can more cost-effectively reach the growing plethora of distribution channels."

Chris Carey, EVP of worldwide technical operations for Paramount Pictures, said that the studios have been fortunate with the standards for film and tape. "Now that all-digital workflows are commonplace, we need the same kind of universally-understood formats for digital master files," he said.

Wendy Aylsworth, SVP of technology for Warner Bros. Technical Operations, agreed, saying, "considering the increasing downstream distribution channels, a master that enables cost-effective transcoding is critical."

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