HP's Big Workstation Launch Wows 'em In the Big Apple

by David Heller

This year's HP global workstation product launch event was the biggest I've ever attended, and the most exciting in terms of the revolutionary new product offerings presented and the people I met and interviewed.

We gathered early on Wednesday morning in a large hall in the NYC Sheraton Hotel, right in the midst of bustling Times Square, and to get the ball rolling were treated to speeches by some heavy hitting HP workstation users.

Mark Russell, Independent Producer, Director and Vfx Specialist

Mark Russell – Director, Producer, and Vfx Expert

First at bat was Mark Russell, and he hit it out of the park. Mark is an independent director, producer and Vfx creator who produced the soon to be released Paramount Pictures, Martin Scorsese film 'The Wolf of Wall Street,' a tale of financial intrigue that's now in post production and destined to become a blockbuster when it hits theaters on November 15th, 2013.

We were treated to some video outtakes from this production that showcased the VFx work that Mark supervised for this film that was primarily shot and produced on Long Island and in Manhattan, just a quick subway ride to Brooklyn where Mark lives.

When you watch the film you won't know where reality ends and CG takes over, it's done that well. One series of fly-over shots were taken of a mansion in the Hamptons with multiple takes from a 4-bladed radio controlled miniature helicopter equipped with a super high-definition camera that transmitted the video wirelessly to an HP workstation on the ground for processing and viewing in real time. The mini-copter stays in the air for less than a minute before running out of juice and the ground crew had to plop in new batteries fast to get this small bird back in the air before the 'magic' light evaporated. The perfect lighting conditions occur close to sunset and the perfect light window lasts only around thirty minutes, so the film crew had to be super organized to shot this series in the allotted time, and keeping everyone and everything organized was a major part of Mark's job. Oh, and they did make a rendered CG Model of the mansion that you can't tell from the real thing for shots that the mini-copter just couldn't cope with.

The mansion fly-over was a special effect, but not necessarily a CG Vfx one. Computer generated effects were reserved for scenes that couldn't be done practically without CG. For example, there's a scene in the film where a helicopter flown by a drunken pilot dangerously skirts buildings scattering terrorized pedestrians. Mark and his team made me believe it was the real thing and saved a lot of lives and money in the process by not trying this stunt with a real helicopter, buildings or really panicked people . No one was hurt and the pilot wasn't arrested for DUI.

In another scene, a luxurious 100 foot + yacht glides in to a picturesque Mediterranean harbor. The harbor and beautiful setting are real, but the Yacht isn't. Rumor has it that this mini luxury liner goes up in explosive flames later in the movie, and you just don't want to do this with a vessel that could cost between $10 and $60 million dollars coupled with annual operating expenses that could top $500K a year …. That's more than I made last year! OMG.

So, what's the hook? HP workstations of course. Mark has an HP portable workstation virtually glued to him, and uses it daily to organize his crew, communicate, and do Vfx work on the fly. HP compute power was used during the filming of 'The Wolf of Wall Street' and now Mark and his team along with others are burning the midnight oil hunched over HP displays doing post production and editing work, pulling together thousands of shots and transforming these bits and pieces into a stunning movie.

Video Interview with Mark Russell

I had the honor of chatting with Mark Russell that afternoon, and you can watch the impromptu video I made of this informative conversation with a little help from my daughter Ruthie, a camera person par excellence and a young lady who posed lots of probing questions off camera towards the end of our conversation. Check out the video, you'll really enjoy it and learn volumes. I did.

Henric Larrsson, CEO, Chimney

Most major, and not so major, studios and production houses use HP compute power because they can count on working with the latest and best technology, but even more importantly, they can count on HP reliability.

Henric Larrsson, CEO, Chimney

In the movie industry the adage "time is money' should be reworked to say "Time is really, really, really money," and compute power is so inexpensive compared to the other production costs that most studios purchase the best and most reliable machines they can. This was drummed into me when the next speaker, Henric Larrson, CEO of Chimney, one of the world's largest video production houses, stepped up to the podium.

Henric, who lives and works in Stockholm Sweden jumped onto the scene in 1995 when he founded Chimney, and from humble beginnings has grown the business into a worldwide mammoth production enterprise that produces and delivers more than 6,000 films a year in 60 countries.

It's depressingly dark 24/7 during the Swedish winter and this doesn't bode well for the creative talent at the heart of Chimney's creative enterprise, or for the enterprise itself. When things get their darkest in Sweden Henric sends his creative team off to sunny places like Barcelona, Spain to work from 'home' in an environment that fosters creativity. They go off with their HP portable workstations tucked under their arms and do great work as you can see by visiting Chimney's online gallery. Most studios have campuses, Dream Works is one example, but for Chimney, the world is their campus, interconnected with dedicated video conferencing and with artists and animators dispersed around the globe, all equipped with HP portable or desktop workstations.

Chimney Demo Reel

Henric also recounted a story of a critical animation job that was perfect for one of his animators who lives in Indonesia. To fly him to Sweden during the darkness of the Swedish winter, or have him use his HP workstation and the Internet to produce and deliver the work, that was the question, and I'm sure you know the answer. It's obvious. The project was completed in three days without a hitch.

To end his talk Henric accentuated the point that when you're spending $1,000 an hour during production even a $5,000+ workstation is a drop in the bucket. I'm not even close to being an accountant, but even I could understand the value of time and of time lost if a workstation were to fail. The HP executive team was taken aback when Henric said that "compute power is cheap," but then they, and all of us got the point – don't skimp – get the best and most reliable computing power you can get your hands on. Invest by giving your talent the fastest and most reliable tools available so they can seamlessly produce their masterpieces. After all, Chimney is 'The World's Premier Creation Agency.'

There were two more customers in the queue and ready to step up to the stage, and although the first two presentations were extremely engaging, I had to admit that I was getting antsy, and anxious to get to the main course — the new products I had just flown three thousand miles to learn about.

Philip Ra Associate VP and Design Director, Cannon Design's Yazdani Studio

Philip Ra, VP & Design Director – Cannon Design

The room was filled with reporters of every ilk and nationality, some of them flying a much greater distance than me, so I turned on my thinking cap as Philip Ra, Associate Vice President and Design Director at Cannon Design's Yazdani Studio began his presentation. Philip, I later learned is not only a brilliant architectural designer but manages projects right from conceptual design through to project completion as he showed us when he unveiled his current 'Only One Center' project for South Korea's CJ Corporation.

The renders and photographs show the beauty of the design, but as

Atrium

I learned, in this case that beauty is not just skin deep but flows into the building's functionality. As Ra walked us through the project he pointed out that the entire design is aimed at providing the space and environment where CJ's employees can recharge their creative juices and create better product. And, the design does just that, from a sky lit atrium that lifts your spirits, to recessed alcoves built into the meandering exterior walkways that give you a private place to contemplate or meet with others.

CJ Corporation

Ra showed us the individually customized exterior flowing panels, each weighing as much as a small truck that were designed and simulated using Autodesk software running on HP workstations to fit seamlessly onto the side of the structure. There are hundreds of these panels and each one had to fit into place perfectly, the first time. And, even though each and every panel was designed and fabricated perfectly, thanks to the power of CAD, simulation, and physical testing, it still took the crew a year to complete the installation.

The pictures tell volumes, and I hope I peaked your interest and if you'd like to learn more I'd recommend that you check out the Cannon Design – CJ Corporation 'Only One Center' project page and delve in. This structure is, well, it's ground breaking.

Ra's presentation was inspiring to say the least, and shows what us humble humans can achieve when we put our minds to it.

Jon Wells, Senior Designer, Morgan Motor Company

Morgan's iconic 3-Wheeler

Jon Wells, Senior Designer

Last but definitely not least was Jon Wells, Senior Designer from Morgan Motor Company in Worcestershire England, namesake to the famous steak sauce and home of the world's first and only three wheeled production motor car … the Morgan '3 Wheeler.'

With fewer than 200 employees this family owned business is in itself a small family of artisans who hand-craft each and every car produced. And, they produce 1,300 of them each year.

The proud makers of Morgan's Iconic 3-Wheeler

They recently adopted sophisticated 3D CAD Design tools, like Autodesk Alias for styling, and chose HP desktop and portable workstations to do their work on. Jon told us that they actually bring a portable workstation, loaded with a design, right out to the production floor and run it by the people who craft the vehicles to make sure that what they've concocted in the engineering department can actually be done.

Jon proudly told us about the re-launch of their original 3-Wheeler a few years ago in celebration of the company's 100th anniversary. The designers brought the suspension, engine and safety features of the 3-Wheeler up to 21st century standards, and then produced a realistically rendered 3D model of the product. With this photo-realistic image in hand, Morgan Motors was able to book orders for 200 vehicles before the first one hit the production floor.

Morgan motors is now using the latest technology to produce modernized classics that were popular in the early 1900's and that are still going strong today. Equipped with the latest tools and computing power they're now able to get really creative as Jon showed us in rendered visualizations of some very 'far out' concept cars.

Morgan Concept Car

Video Interview with Jon Wells

I really enjoyed Jon's talk as I'm a fan of their 1950's era 'Roadster,' and I was fortunate enough to be able to video interview Jon at the end of the day. Watch this one and you'll learn directly from Jon how this iconic company mixes new technology with classic 20th century design, and makes a success of it.

HP's new offerings

Now it's time for the new workstations and displays! I won't be throwing around a lot of specifications and technical data here, but will give you a quick overview of the presentation and point out the major new innovations. I've included a list of links at the end of this article that will take you to everything you'd like to know about the new workstations and displays presented at HP's launch event so you can dig into the specifics.

Jim Zafarana, Vice President & General Manager, Does his magic

I didn't realize that Jim Zafarana was a magician, but at the beginning of his presentation he pulled off a first-class feat of legerdemain. He first held up two sleek mobile workstations, one in the palm of each hand, and explained that they were the new ZBook 15 and 17 models. He then placed the ZBook 17 on a wooden stool, waved his free hand over the ZBook 15 and then with a little prestidigitation he magically produced a third and much smaller ZBook 14. The audience was wowed! But, he did give away the trick. The ZBook 14 was hidden below the ZBook 15 all the time, and I've heard that Jim is now banned for life from the Mystic 13 club for revealing the secret.

Meet the ZBook Mobile Workstations

These three new mobiles were the stars of the show with a thinner and lighter design and Intel Ivy Bridge technology processors delivering speeds of up to 3GHz and with 4 Cores. (The ZBook 14 weighs in at a minuscule 3.57 pounds/1.62 kg.)

HP's Dream Color Display, that's used by organizations requiring precise and calibrated color viewing across enterprises, is also offered as an option for both the ZBook 15 and ZBook 17.

HP is leading the way again by integrating Thunderbolt I/O technology into their new workstations. Both the Zbook 15 and Zbook 17 and most of HP's new desktop workstation are now equipped with Intel's Thunderbolt I/O that greatly increases transfer performance with bi-directional 10 Gbps speed.

Four Z Desktop Workstations were also shown, including the new Z230, Z420, Z620 and the top performing Z820. These top of the line Workstations are available with Intel's Fast Memory Ivy Bridge technology, super fast Thunderbolt I/O and new NVIDIA Quadro K6000 graphics.

Introducing the New HP Displays

HP introduced two new displays at the launch event. The new HP Z27i 27-inch and HP Z30i 30-inch displays with 3.7 Mpixels of outstanding visual performance and 2560 x 1440 and 2560 x 1600 resolution respectively.

Technical specs and datasheets

Now that you've seen how customers use HP's workstations and displays, I invite you to use the below links to get detailed information and see for yourself the technical innovations and power that's built into each of these new products.

Links to detailed information

Mobile workstations

HP ZBook 14 – HP Official Website – Data Sheet

HP ZBook 15 – HP Official Website – Data Sheet

HP ZBook 17 – HP Official Website – Data Sheet

Workstations

HP Z280 - HP Official Website – Data Sheet

HP Z420 – HP Official Website – Data Sheet

HP Z620 – HP Official Website – Data Sheet

HP Z820 – [HP Official Website](#) – [Data Sheet](#)

Displays

HP Z27i – [HP Official Website](#) – [Data Sheet](#)

HP Z30i – [HP Official Website](#) – [Data Sheet](#)

By: David Heller

David Heller has written more than twelve technical and fiction books published by Addisson-Wesely, Simon-Schuster, Prentice-Hall, McGraw Hill, and more, As a technical writer and professional columnist he has devoted the past twenty-two years to the Internet business primarily focused on MCAD/CAM, Electronic Design Automation, Architectural Engineering & Construction, and Geographical Information Systems

eMail David Heller