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BRINGING DATA INDUSTRY STANDARDS TO THE LAND OF MAKE BELIEVE

By Lisa Griffin, Executive Director,
Sean Tajkowski, Technical Director,
and Eric Rigney, VP, MEDCA

The idea behind the newly created Media & Entertainment Data Center Alliance (MEDCA) can be traced to Sean Tajkowski. Decades of experience building facilities to support various media and entertainment operations demonstrated to him a frequent gap between Information technology standards and media and entertainment's execution of data center infrastructure.

To support its data-centric IT processes and operations, M&E often implemented audio-video standards. This created costly performance issues and inhibited adoption of new technologies to meet marketplace demands. Tajkowski wondered how the financial and operational importance of data industry infrastructure standards, on all its levels, from architectural technical review to cable pathways, might be successfully introduced to everyone involved in the M&E decision-making process. The recent explosion in expensive smart stage construction, with its multiple arrays of data-centric processes, as well as the impending future of edge data centers and AI, inspired Tajkowski to act now to link the two communities, IT and M&E.

Tajkowski first reached out to the IT infrastructure industry associations and key-stakeholders, successful in building the data-centric operations of banking, U.S. Department of Defense, and big-data companies

A PANDEMIC FORCED M&E to adopt pre-existing virtual production workflows. The goal of MEDCA is to promote, encourage, and educate M&E to adopt data-centric infrastructure standards capable of not only withstanding the coming tsunami of data processing demands but thrive within it.

like Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Microsoft. They were excited to get involved. One down, one to go. To engage M&E, Tajkowski reached out to M&E's master technology alliance builder, Guy Finley, co-creator of associations such as MESA, HITS, CDSA and others. Together they co-founded MEDCA. In short time, along with Lisa Griffin and Eric Rigney, they've assembled, and continue to attract, a who's who of data center infrastructure experts, pulling from infrastructural educational experts, manufacturers, service providers, and M&E professionals willing to share their knowledge with M&E executives, operational managers, and



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technical designers/advisors, not only how to build a proper infrastructure, but why it's important to want to build it in the first place.

It's important to realize that MEDCA does not seek to create standards. Nor does it expect M&E operations to read a 5000-page standards and practices document. Instead, MEDCA proposes to survey and advocate for existing standards from architecture to IT, to electric, to monitoring, to HVAC, to fire, and others, parsing from within them the data center elements that pertain specifically to M&E uses. It is equally important to note that the audio-video infrastructure of SMPTE, ASC, AES/EBU does not provide nor advocate data center infrastructure standards. Telecommunications Industry Association, International Organization of Standardization, National Electrical Code, Uptime Institute, and National Fire Protection Association do. MEDCA plans to develop a certification program of installers and installations.

What will it take to get M&E to adopt pre-existing data center infrastructure standards? A tsunami of data and wireless operations perhaps? It took an actual

tsunami in Japan to force M&E to adopt pre-existing file-based workflows. A pandemic forced M&E to adopt pre-existing virtual production workflows. The goal of MEDCA is to promote, encourage, and educate M&E to adopt data-centric infrastructure standards capable of not only withstanding the coming tsunami of data processing demands, but thrive within it. A well-constructed infrastructure costs the same as a poorly constructed one. With MEDCA's help, M&E operations will come to realize this.

A one-size-fits-all approach, MEDCA educational efforts will support multiple operational levels, from executive awareness to technical design and execution, benefiting larger studios, smaller boutique production facilities, and all sizes in between.

Ultimately, Tajkowski and Finley are building an M&E community service via a new industry alliance. MEDCA operates as a non-profit corporation led by a board of directors composed of both key IT/big tech/telecommunication service and product providers as well as production/postproduction service and product professionals. MEDCA is managed through MESA. ■