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SMART CONTENT

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23.02

TURNING TO COMMUNITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

By Guy Finley, President, MESA



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Whether you're down to scraping the muck at the bottom of the barrel — because you may have already scraped the bottom of the barrel mid-year — or you're off to the races and can't keep up with what's going on because you're so busy (maybe because one of your competitors bowed out), the industry challenges this year have been varied and nonstop.

A common phrase repeated over 2023 (frankly, since March 2020) is that “all bets are off” and “everything's on the table.” Everybody is running hard, and everybody is stressed. There's anxiety in the marketplace, no doubt about it, and we can't ignore it as a society. Where do you turn when you have that type of stress? You turn to your community, you turn to your family, you turn to your friends. Ultimately, that's what MESA is all about. Yes, we're a trade association or a group of trade associations, but we do things with a little bit more heart and/or emotion than others. I started MESA on a foundation of authentic community (when community wasn't as fashionable as it is these days ...) and when I look at the day-to-day work that Team MESA produces I am proud of our performance for these communities along with their natural engagement with-in the industry.

Again, the strength of our communities is what carries us through tough times. We have a passion about what we do, evidenced by those leading our communities: Content Delivery & Security Association (CDSA), Hollywood IT Society (HITS), Smart Content and Content Localisation Councils, Entertainment ID Registry (EIDR), and Women in Technology Hollywood (WiTH).

And MESA is the service provider um-

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brella that continues to serve our industry where we started with the Entertainment Supply Chain Academy (ESCA) events that kicked off in 2005. However our supply chain has only become increasingly complex and streaming only makes global delivery more complicated. But never has it been so important to drill down and get to these nitty gritty pieces that are redundant, inefficient, and can be supplemented with emerging technologies like AI. We famously stated over 10 years ago that what we do moved together by platform and API rather than by telephone, email, and spreadsheet. And, ultimately, when you think about that 15-year arc of where MESA began (MESA launched in February of 2009) and what we're all in the middle of now, it's exactly as we've predicted. Our industry is exactly as we've discussed within our communities, our working groups, our events, media, and casual conversation because our members have been at the forefront of transforming the supply chain from its home entertainment beginnings. Just like platform integration, MESA was the first to mention “data journey” a decade ago when nobody had their eye on the streaming ball, when FAST was still just AVOD. When we could still count unit pricings and measure our profit based on a title rather than on a subscription. When you think about what our member companies have done, who's

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come in, and who's embraced it and how the studios have evolved their thinking around their supply chain, and not ascribe to the old theories of vendor lock, everything's turned into a value proposition. That's where MESA shows its true colors and it is through the organizations we manage that the "get sh*t done" mentality in working groups starts to save our industry money on orders of magnitude.

Let's start with CDSA, an organization near and dear to me because my grandfather started it in 1970 as the International Tape Association (ITA). After enduring an incredibly difficult pandemic year, CDSA and its president, Richard Atkinson, moved away from an audit and compliance-driven business focus to member companies self-organizing and driving their own issues to be discussed in a working group. Common problems need common solutions, this is CDSA's mantra, and Richard provided a clear path for members to identify the issues where they wanted to work most. Richard is a subject matter expert, there's no doubt about it, and that expertise helped take the community/association to the next level.

Hollie Choi does the same thing with EIDR, which is less a trade association and more a community around their product that performs a critical role inside of our industry. And, again, having somebody who knows exactly what that product is, does, and can do, has transformed their business. EIDR came out of their austerity plan this year and Hollie's understanding of where EIDR sits in the global entertainment supply chain, along with what the value proposition is to the industry as a whole, is what's allowing it to be successful.

WiTH and their president, Christina Aguilera, are another shining example of self-organization at its finest! Rarely do you find a charitable organization where almost 95 percent of the money raised gets delivered back to the local charities they support. Starting in 2014 as a special interest group within MESA, WiTH formalized their board in 2019 and continues to grow and build leaders for M+E, all in the name of advancing wisdom, skills and careers across our global industry.

Then you have the Content Localisation Council championed by MESA's Caroline Baines. No one has their finger on the pulse of localization like she does and no other segment in our industry is facing the scale/globalization issues that these Language Service Providers are solving. Eight years old now, the Content Localisation Council is making more headway in addressing industry issues across the supply chain than it ever has before.

By modifying the content to serve different markets or demographics you're making it "smarter" and this leads into both Smart Content Council, led by Mary Yurkovic, and the Language Metadata Table, led by Yonah Levenson. These SMEs (along with Hollie and Caroline) are creating a community of data custodians, data librarians, and data enthusiasts. They care about that field level data that makes the global supply chain work. And when you start talking about AI, our industry's future, and where we're all going, we've got to be automated and integrated for Artificial Intelligence to be a viable option. AI2 is the theme of HITS, our tent-pole event every year, on May 22 in Los Angeles.

And speaking of AI, too fast, too much, too soon is not something that Hollywood does well. We'd rather tell stories the old-fashioned way than take a risk on something new or outside of the box, especially at scale. And after getting through arguably the worst three years of our lives (start with a pandemic and end in a 100-plus day strike) we have to start wondering, where's the hope? Yes, there is more pie, there is more content, there is more everything in our future, but who are you holding on to (or throwing under the bus) while you get there?

That's where MESA's message is salient. We're the heartbeat of the global entertainment supply chain. We take risks as vendors and help bring our content creator customers into the next era of entertainment. Sometimes they push, sometimes we pull. But no other trade group provides a home for a community when that community is so new and unknown that many in Hollywood don't get it. And ahead of MESA's 15th anniversary, we're proud to continue to take risks that are centered around innovation. ■