ASK THE ARTISTS:
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CJ Davis is the Creative Director of US based company Quince Imaging, a specialist in court projections and other large-scale media installations. They have created projects for a number of NBA and NHL teams as well as corporate and public events. We met with CJ to speak about the evolution of display technology and the specifics of the US market.

Ventuz:
Let us know a bit about your personal background. What brought you into this industry?

CJ:
Ever since high school I have been into video and filmmaking. My school offered a few classes that focused on digital media and design, and that's where I started to create things that people could look at and appreciate. After graduation, I went to the Art Institute in Washington, D.C. to study film. I needed to earn some money on the side, so I started working at a local lighting and event company, who did trade shows and events all over D.C. After college, I went on a three months tour with Tyler Perry. That was a tough time – just me and one other guy setting up LED, running cameras, setting up all the different playback tools, and tearing everything down again every night. Another city every day, 18 hour shifts back to back for three months straight. Very tough, but it was also where I learned to really be efficient in an event environment, where I learned about all the different types of technology. It was a valuable experience. Once that was over, I started working at Quince Imaging.

Ventuz:
Tell us about Quince Imaging and your position there.

CJ:
Quince Imaging historically is a projection display company. About five years ago, when I started working there, they were trying to enter into the projection mapping market, because that was going to be the next big thing. Initially, I was hired as a playback operator, but I had all this other experience from the event industry. So pretty early on I was tasked to figure out how to do projection mapping.

Ventuz:
Quite a task. How did you go about it?

CJ:
Much like any artist: I opened up Photoshop, tied in a desktop projector and threw the image onto the nearest wall I could find. And it sort of developed from there. It took a while until I came across media servers. The technology amazed me, it looked like these were exactly the tools I needed. I could play back giant pieces of content to any type of display, I had control over the entire digital space, I could even make stuff interactive. With these tools we created our first

temporary and permanent projection mapping installations for professional sports teams, big conferences, conventions and so on.

Ventuz:
When did Ventuz come into play?

CJ:
Only about a year ago, in early 2015. We had been using our media servers for so long that we had been running into walls left and right. We knew how far we could push our systems, but we had all these other ideas of things we wanted to do. Then Ventuz came along, and there was this whole extra component to it. It does everything the other tools do, but it has the ability to make certain content look better. Also it is more modular, it provides a whole new level of flexibility.

Ventuz:
So you had to change your workflow from pre-rendered to real-time content?

CJ:
We still work primarily with pre-rendered content. But we really want to switch over – another reason for getting into Ventuz. Real-time generated content is going to change the

market, because people spend thousands, tens of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars on these content modules for a show. But if you want to make even the tiniest tweak, so much work has to go into that. I am very interested in creating a more modular product for our customers, something that would allow us to be more hands-on. Where a tweak here and there doesn't cost an arm and a leg and a small change doesn't take a massive amount of time to realize. Or even a big change, for that matter.

Ventuz:
How much does interactivity play into your business?

CJ:
Not as much as I would like. But it's getting there. I just recently had a conversation with a customer about equipping their presentations with a Kinect to allow swipe gestures. The truth is, on-stage presentations need absolute reliability and a lot of the interactive technologies that can work on a larger scale are not as intuitive or as consistent in their responsiveness if the presenter does not make the gesture or touch just right.

Most of the time, you can sell the magic of interactivity by having a skilled operator behind the server watching each cue and following along. But this is where the conversation goes. Because after the show you can have that same canned presentation flipped into a user based experience where the audience can come up and manipulate the content. This is where some of that modular functionality of Ventuz is really powerful. We just realized this exact scenario the other day for one of our customers.

Ventuz:
You work with a lot of big companies. How much design freedom do you have when creating projects for them?

CJ:
A lot of customers come to us wanting court projections or building mapping shows, but when I ask them about their ideas for content, they hand over their logos and ask us our ideas. So there is a lot of freedom, which makes it very exciting. Most customers understand that projection mapping is relatively new to the main stream. This actually opens a door to take advantage, to some extent, where subjective design decisions can be backed up by our approach to the contents technical aspects.

Ventuz:
And how do you approach content creation?

CJ:
This is where I probably differ from every other artist you talk to. You always hear people say: It needs to tell a story. In my view, the story doesn't need to be as defined as people think it should be. Court projection is mainly a really cool special effects show. And that's all people care about. They want to see things crashing, things flipping, falling, slow motions, stuff like that. Especially in the arena space. The story the audience is there to see is the game. Our job is to wow them before the game. We create hype moments. Because of that we have the ability to put together content that is just stuff we think would look really cool.

Ventuz:
Is there another industry apart from the event market that you would like to tap into?

CJ:
I would really love to see more projection mapping in the broadcast and filmmaking industry. A while back we did a large project for a TV commercial, where we projected onto a bunch of buildings all over Chicago. It was more of a procedural process for the artist to see what it would look like, we ended up creating the final spot in post-production, but it was a very interesting project to be involved in. It is a new and very realistic way to create special effects backdrops, even for larger Hollywood movies. The event world is a lot of fun, and it is cool to live on a one-take-only-situation, but I think tools like Ventuz are designed to not be limited to one market, so I would really like to try it out in other industries.

Ventuz:
In your view, how does the American event industry differ from the European or Middle Eastern markets?

CJ:
I feel we are at least five years behind the European market when it comes to the creative usage of technology. As an example: Just recently I was preparing a pitch for a project that is coming up. They had a special requirement, no need to get into the details, but I was trying to find out whether I can do this in Ventuz. And I found a tutorial in the archive of the user forum, a video from 2008, that had a complete work-flow laid out for exactly what I wanted to do. This thing, that I have just now come across, has been done in Europe eight years ago – and often enough for someone to create a tutorial about it.

Ventuz:
Where do you see the industry heading?

CJ:
In the near future, we are going to see huge developments in display technology, both in terms of high-resolution as well as in the way we transmit images onto different surfaces. Whether it's LED or displays or flexible monitors or OLED – it's going to feel less like a screen and more like any part of the architecture in your house. Part of your wall, part of the elevator you are riding in at the mall or the airport. That's one component. But you are also going to see renderings become more realistic, with the development of computing, display technology and graphic cards. Eventually, we are going to cross a line where you won't be able tell whether something is a digital display or a sign.

Ventuz:
What does that mean for the way in which we will experience media?

CJ:
I think people will want to experience their media in bigger, more immersive rooms. It will be all about integrating interactive media into the everyday living space. I mean, look at the way people use their phones – and that is the now. It is just going to evolve from where we already are. If you look at the development of home integration, all these devices that you can already control from your phone, it becomes very clear that this is where we are headed. And the more companies jump on board, the more affordable it is going to get. New houses are going to have such technology built in automatically. At some point, you will be able to slap video wherever you want, onto every wall of your house, at every size you wish. It's going to look and feel like a wallpaper, it is going to be less emissive than a common display – it's going to be a natural part of our lives.

Ventuz:
Do you think Ventuz will accompany you into this future?

CJ:
Ventuz is going to play a critical role in our future. As we use it more and more we find it being a great replacement to some of our archaic workflows while at the same time we see it as a vehicle to our next creative opportunity.

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