

The last three years have been tough, but you know that already. The artificial buoyancy of the millennium year with all its one-off events and conspicuous consumption was swiftly followed by a hard dose of reality and a shrinking economy. The entertainment technology industry has usually been somewhat insulated from the vagaries of Wall Street – but not this time. So, it's been tough, but there's a glimmer of a metal-halide lamp at the end of the tunnel.

The good news is that we seem to have stabilized and customers are beginning to talk about real projects with real budgets and real timelines once again. This was the positive repeating theme of the PLASA trade show in September. There was a distinctly bullish scent in the London air which seemed to lift everyone's spirits.

The economic uncertainty has meant that ESTA (Entertainment Services and Technology Association) has been concentrating on its core concerns over this period. The two key programs where ESTA leads the way are in the creation of Technical Standards and the new Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP).

ESTA has had great success with its Technical Standards Program over the last few years and has been able to act as the guide and secretariat for the only ANSI standards related to the entertainment technology industry – particularly in areas of health and safety such as rigging where normal, industrial, standards are not relevant or just don't exist. Over 25 standards are now either published or in process. This is a great achievement and one we are very proud of.

More recently ESTA has made concentrated efforts in the different but connected area of personnel certification. The ETCP will provide a common qualification for entertainment staff with particular emphasis on safe working. Safety and regulatory issues very clearly suggested two key areas for initial development - electrical skills and rigging skills. Recent incidents and accidents have further emphasized the importance of these two areas.

In order to implement this ambitious plan and help raise the not inconsiderable seed funding a Certification Council has been appointed with ESTA reaching out to other leading industry organizations to join us in this important industry-wide effort. The Council now includes members from ESTA, CITT (Canadian Institute for Theatre Technology), IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees), IAAM (International Association of Assembly Managers), TEA (Themed Entertainment Association) and USITT (United States Institute for Theatre Technology) all with the common goal of increasing safety in the entertainment industry. Also on the Council are representatives from Clear Channel Entertainment and distinguished individual members selected for their specific skills and talents.

It was exciting to sit in on that first Council meeting held in New York this September and see all those different groups working together. ESTA was able to build on the spirit of cooperation established in the Technical Standards Program where consensus building is critical. The broader quality input you can get the better the program will be.

One member called the meeting 'unprecedented' – they were right.

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