# UK CINEMA ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE 2019
## TECH: New horizons for the big screen experience

**Summary**

**The aim of the conference was to benefit exhibitors - as well as the wider industry - through providing an opportunity to come together to share knowledge, experience and to network. Over two days, the conference explored technological innovation across all aspects of the customer journey, including presentation, retail, ticketing and signage.**

**Background**

The fifth UK Cinema Association conference – *TECH: New horizons for the big screen experience* - was held on 5 and 6 March at Vue Westfield, White City London.

Held in partnership with the Cinema Technology Community, the event welcomed almost 400 Association members and industry colleagues to hear about and discuss the opportunities and challenges presented to cinema sector by developments in technology.

Sessions across the two days included: audience attitudes towards technology; premium experiences, laser illumination, Direct View Display; digital signage, e-ticketing; funding options; and technology for accessibility. The two days also included a number of 'spotlight' sessions offering a short, sharp focus on areas such as sustainability, technology-assisted lobby-design and immersive technology.

Those attending were invited to provide feedback on the conference. 116 delegates chose to do so - the highest response rate so far.  39 per cent of responses were from cinema operators (a 9 per cent increase on 2018), with the second largest category of respondents being technology supplier or service companies (27 per cent). The number and range of comments received means that the survey results can perhaps be seen as a representative of general views on the event.

**Survey results**

Headlines

Overall, feedback for the event was extremely positive in terms of organisation, content and speakers. This edition was the most well-attended and seemingly well-regarded Association event to date.

Location and venue

The aim of the Association was to encourage as wide a range of members as possible to attend, including those unable to attend similar industry meetings and events.

Given the breadth of Association membership, there is an understanding that while London is the optimal location for the conference given its transport links, the costs of travel and accommodation could be a barrier to attendance for smaller operators in particular. With that in mind, the Association was delighted to be able to offer relevant members a bursary through colleagues at ScreenSkills to help offset some of these costs.

Central London offers an increasingly limited number of cinemas able to offer both a screen capacity of more than 350 seats an equally sizable space for networking. That said, Vue Westfield, White City was considered by the clear majority of respondents (77 per cent) as easy or very easy to access. An even larger proportion (90 per cent) scored the venue as excellent or very good an event space (specifically in terms of the screen, break areas area), indeed several said that they were surprised by the experience despite their general dislike of 'multiplexes'.

While comments were overwhelmingly positive, several respondents did note the poor mobile signal and lack of wifi in the screen – the latter is something the Association will look to address at its next conference.

Catering

The Association understands the importance of providing high quality food and drink catering to a range of dietary requirements. The exceptionally response to the catering provided by the White Label Company - with 97 per cent of respondents scoring the food very good or excellent – was extremely gratifying. Many went out of their way to praise the high quality and variety of food available.

Conference format

Achieving an appropriate balance between the number and length of sessions and important networking time is always a challenge. A large majority (82 per cent) of respondents felt that the both length and number of sessions and networking breaks was about right.

That said, there was a slight increase in the number of those requesting an increase in the length of the networking breaks, possibly reflecting that these were on a number of occasions 'squeezed' this year due to the late running of previous sessions. The Association will place more emphasis on time-keeping at future events.

Maintaining a low and affordable ticket price is important to the Association in ensuring that the event remains accessible in particular to those travelling from outside of London. With regard to overall value, it was pleasing therefore to see that the overwhelming majority of respondents (96 per cent) saw the event as good value for money, with a number comparing it favourably to other similar industry events.

Conference sessions

Both keynote addresses - delivered Christopher Nolan on day one and Kevin Markwick from The Picture House, Uckfield on day two were positively received, with an excellent or very good score from 74 and 80 per cent of respondents respectively.

While some were disappointed that Nolan could not be there in person, many more were pleased with his acknowledgment of the quality of the UK cinema experience and also his nod to the importance of showmanship.

An equally large number responded to Kevin's humour, but also undoubtedly heartfelt plea about the need to continue to invest and improve the customer experience (even if customers are not always as thankful as might be hoped).

*Day one*

Sessions for day one scored highly, averaging 4 out of 5.

Against that background, and reflecting perhaps that those attending responded best to learning new things and hearing people speak candidly about their opinions on industry matters, the highest scoring sessions of the day were those on audience attitudes to technology and the last, more informal, 'In the pub' session with a variety of industry professionals.

*Day two*

Sessions for day two also scored highly, averaging 3.8 out of 5.

The highest scoring sessions of the day were the spotlight session on Odeon Luxe Leicester Square and the final session of the day on technology for accessibility.

Given the broader range of topics covered on the second day, it was perhaps inevitably that audience members would find some more relevant than others, but all had their strong supporters in terms of improving understanding and taking the dialogue forward.

*Summary*

A clear majority of respondents felt there was a good calibre of presenters and speakers, with topics that were found to be interesting and engaging. A very positive 93 per cent of respondents said that the event increased their knowledge and understanding of cinema technology.

Future topics

Respondents were asked to identify potential topics for such a conference. There were as might be expected a wide range of topics suggested (not all of which the Association could tackle for competition reasons), but the following were suggested on a number occasions:

- Insights around audience experience and perceptions;
- Key market trends;
- Best practice and lessons learnt around audience development;
- Pricing and emerging new business models, such as subscription services.

More generally, a number of respondents requested that the Association consider bringing in learnings and experience from counterparts in Europe and beyond.

**UK Cinema Association**
**March 2019**