

Los Angeles May Have Virtual Edge on Content

TECHNOLOGY: Demand from VR firms could yield studio production boost.

THE virtual reality industry is in experimental mode and facing challenges, but that might be to the advantage of L.A.-based companies, according to **Don Karl**, partner and lawyer at **Perkins Coie's** Century City office.

Those conclusions were drawn from a nationwide survey of 650 entrepreneurs, technology executives, investors, and consultants in the virtual reality and augmented reality industries conducted by the firm.

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In particular, 37 percent of respondents viewed the industry's lack of compelling content as its biggest challenge.

Demand for better content could be a boon for local production companies and studios, Karl said. "The finding about the lack of sufficient content plays right into what we do best in Los Angeles."

At this stage, much of the money flowing into the virtual reality and augmented reality industry is funding experimental projects, said Karl.

"A lot of smaller companies are getting paid to create content, low budget, low levels, as an experiment," he said, noting the spread of small virtual reality startups.



Future Focus: Headset from Oculus VR.

"L.A. is chock-full of creative people, so it doesn't surprise me that there are a lot of small companies working on this, oftentimes working with some of the bigger companies."

Much of the funding flowing into virtual reality is coming in the form of strategic investments from studios, such as **Walt Disney Co.** and **Comcast Ventures**, the venture capital arm of **NBC Universal** parent company **Comcast Corp.**, said Karl. **Facebook** is also a player, having acquired Orange County headset maker **Oculus VR** in 2014.

Nearly 90 percent of investors responding to the survey reported that the bulk of their investments during the last year totaled \$5 million or less, highlighting the early stage nature of local virtual reality startups.

As the industry matures, Karl said, it is likely that the number of virtual reality production companies will shrink.



Avedissian



Miller

"The people who show that they can create content will survive," he said. "There's likely to be some consolidation, sort of like there was consolidation in the special effects business."

Career Rivals

Comparably, which is beginning to move into the job matching space, has hired former **eHarmony** President **Armen Avedissian** as chief marketing officer.

Avedissian worked at **eHarmony** while the dating service was developing its **Elevated Careers** job matching website. **Comparably**, of Santa Monica, collects data on salaries and company cultures and announced it would be rolling out its own job matching product in the coming months, a product that appears to directly compete with **Elevated Careers**.

Avedissian was brought in to help acquire additional users and scale the firm's business, said **Jason Nazar**, **Comparably's** chief executive and co-founder.

"Armen is one of the most seasoned tech execs in SoCal," he said. "He's absolutely incredible at big data analysis and scaling consumer brands."

Comparably.com allows employees to share salary histories anonymously, enabling them to compare their earnings to what others make in similar work environments. The

website has gathered salary and company culture information, which is free to view online, for about 10,000 tech companies. **Comparably** is aiming to generate revenue by using its underlying employee data in a paid service that will better match employees to companies. The startup, which launched in March, has raised \$6.5 million in seed funding.

On-Demand Consulting

While most online marketplaces for hiring workers are usually geared toward service-oriented jobs such as caretakers, drivers, or cleaning staff, **Business Talent Group** of West Los Angeles has found a niche connecting highly paid white-collar professionals with employers.

The firm, founded in 2007, has a database of more than 5,500 independent consultants, many of whom have worked for consulting firms such as **McKinsey & Co.**, **Bain Capital**, and **Deloitte**. The firm's clients typically hire consultants on a project-by-project basis, though interim C-suite executives are also recruited on the platform. Companies in the private equity, life sciences, consumer technology, and financial services industries are frequent users, according to **Jody Miller**, **BTG's** chief executive, who added the company has seen an explosion in the need for independent consulting.

"The people in this category, earning more than \$100,000 a year, have grown more than 50 percent since 2011," she said.

BTG closed an \$8 million Series B round led by **NextEquity Partners** on Sept. 12, which will be used to further enhance its platform, Miller said.

Staff Reporter *Garrett Reim* can be reached at greim@labusinessjournal.com or (323) 549-5225, ext. 232.

Showbiz Panel Casts China as Emerging Player

FILM: Execs, academics frame growing market as salve for U.S. stagnation.

IT seems the word on everyone's lips in Hollywood is "China" – and for good reason. It has quickly become the second-largest box-office market, and that has executives, academics, and marketing professionals thinking about how to best reach and serve content to this active theater-going audience.

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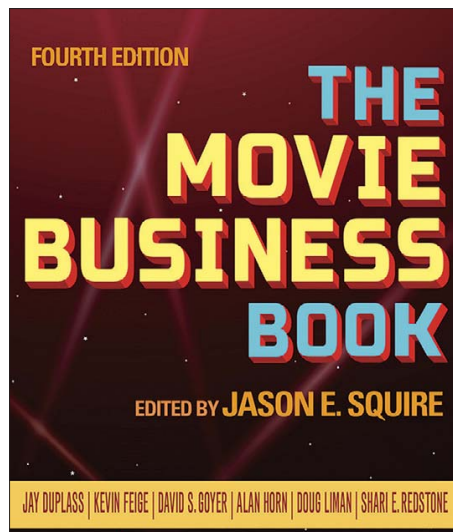
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China's **Dalian Wanda Group Co.** – the world's largest cinema chain operator – announced last week that it will partner with **Sony Corp.** on future film promotions.

"Right now, they're underscreened, but China is building theaters at a rapid pace," said **Alan Horn**, chairman of **Walt Disney Studios**, at the book launch for the fourth edition of **Jason E. Squire's** "The Movie Business Book" on Sept. 12. Squire is an associate professor at **USC's** School of Cinematic Arts.

China was a hot topic of discussion as a panel of industry leaders at the book launch talked through the challenges and opportunities they face as media consumption habits evolve around the world. Squire's book features topic-specific chapters written by key media figures, including **Horn**; **Shari E. Red-**



stone, **National Amusements Inc.** president and **Viacom** board member; and **Blair Rich**, **Warner Bros. Pictures'** president of worldwide marketing, among others.

"The Movie Business Book" also sheds light on the process of producing, marketing, and distributing films at a time when domestic box-office growth has become stagnant and studios look to other territories for growth.

"China can't be ignored," said **Barbara Boyle**, associate dean of entrepreneurship at **UCLA's** School of Theater, Film and Television, who also contributed a chapter titled "The Independent Spirit" to the book. "They don't need a bigger market but they want it."

Emmy's L.A. Story

Smash hit miniseries "The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story" received a slew of plaudits at the Emmys earlier this month. The FX show, which was shot in Los



Horn



Rood

Angeles, received nine awards during the Sept. 18 ceremony, making it the second-biggest winner of all time. Among the show's victors were supporting actor **Sterling K. Brown**, who portrayed Assistant Prosecutor **Christopher Darden**; lead actress **Sarah Paulson**, who played Prosecutor **Marcia Clark**; and lead actor **Courtney B. Vance**, who portrayed Simpson defense attorney **Johnnie Cochran**. The production had a total budget of \$66 million, according to **FilmLA Inc.**, a nonprofit organization that handles TV, film, and commercial permits for the L.A. area.

By the time the crowd departed the Microsoft Theater, a total of 12 awards were doled out to L.A.-based productions.

"Los Angeles is still the entertainment capital of the world," said Mayor **Eric Garcetti** in a statement released by **FilmLA**. He said "The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story," **HBO's** "Veep," and **Fox's** "Grease Live" employed more than 800 people in the city and accounted for \$130 million in economic activity.

"Veep," a series that relocated to Los Angeles from Maryland thanks to the revised California Film & TV Tax Credit program, also took home awards, including the Emmy for lead actress in a comedy given to **Julia Louis-Drey-**

fus. Its fifth season brought a total spend of \$49 million to the region, according to **FilmLA**.

Other winners with a local production presence included "Baskets," whose **Louie Anderson** received the award for supporting actor award in a comedy. "Transparent" creator **Jill Soloway** received a comedy directing award for her work on the Amazon show, while **NBC's** "The Voice" won the Emmy for reality competition.

Media Moves

Caroline Burruss has joined downtown's **Anschutz Entertainment Group** as vice president of global partnerships. She will be responsible for driving sponsorship sales for concert tours, festivals, venues, and other assets of **AEG Live** and its various subsidiaries, including **GoldenVoice**. Burruss joins **AEG** from **Live Nation Entertainment**, where she served as vice president of national media and sponsorship. ... **Century City's Creative Artists Agency** announced it has launched **CAA Social Impact**, a strategic consulting service that works with public-and private-sector companies to develop, implement, and market philanthropic, social responsibility, and cause-related initiatives. It will be led by former **CAA** marketing executive **Aubree Curtis** and **Judee Ann Williams**, the former co-executive director of the **CAA Foundation**. ... **John Rood** has been named senior vice president of marketing at **Disney Channels Worldwide**. Rood will report to **Gary Marsh**, chief creative officer. Rood succeeds **Richard Loomis**, who is stepping down after nine years to pursue other ventures.

Staff reporter *Kristin Marguerite Doidge* can be reached at kdoidge@labusinessjournal.com or (323) 549-5225, ext. 226.