

ESTA Directions February 1999

*by Mike Wood*

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...'

I've no doubt you can apply those first two phrases from the familiar Dickens quotation to almost any time and any situation - it's always a good time for someone and bad for somebody else. However it seems to me particularly applicable to the entertainment technology industry in this closing year of the Twentieth Century.

This is a time of significant change - that much is clear. Whether it is change for good or ill remains less clear. I, like most of you I'm sure, have been staggered by the rapid changes in our apparently comfy and cozy little industry over the last 12 months. We are seeing the world we thought we knew altered overnight - companies are changing, merging, acquiring, allying and coalescing at a frightening rate. At one time it seemed like a bad daytime Soap Opera - 'Who bought who today?'

I said I was staggered, and that's true, I've worked in this business for 25 years and had come to believe we were immune from these kind of activities - they are only for 'real' companies, not us, we're special and different - why, we're almost in Show Business!

Well, we're not special and we're not different. The truth is that the entertainment technology business is a 'real' business after all and we are just now reaching the point where this truth, welcome or not, is making itself known.

Actually, now I've had time to think about it, I'm not frightened by these changes - if they are signs that our business is maturing, taking itself seriously and, more significantly, being taken seriously by the rest of the world then I'm all for it. Yes, some companies will do better than others, some will rise and some will fall I have no doubt. But overall I see this as a continuation of the theme I mentioned in this column last issue - the industry is growing up. Painful, yes, but absolutely necessary for its long-term survival. This is going to affect you whether you have 2 or 200 employees - recognize the world is changing and adapt, it won't ever be the same again.

What difference will this make to ESTA? That's still unclear. ESTA remains committed to the ongoing health of the industry and will adapt as necessary to help its members weather these changes. You have a resourceful partner in ESTA and membership gives you access to those resources. The various money saving programs are obvious benefits of membership but don't forget the networking opportunities and informational seminars. Take full advantage of these in order to maintain your competitive edge. The view of the future may be hazy but it is clear that we all need to continue our education and be pro-active in meeting business challenges.

Talking of seminars - many of the educational seminars are run by members for members to everyone's benefit. As with any trade association in a small industry ESTA relies on voluntary help and support from its membership and just cannot survive without it. The seminars seem appropriate, however it's difficult to predict and gauge their effectiveness. Some are well attended and others less so but this is not necessarily a gauge of their usefulness. What do you think? Do you think it's part of ESTA's role to produce these seminars? Are the topics the right ones? If not, what should they be? As the overall membership profile shifts so potentially do the requirements and it's up to you to help define how ESTA manages this change.

I'm convinced that this change is positive - infinitely better than stagnation - and I look forward to the next 12 months. To continue the quotation from Charles Dickens' 'A Tale of Two Cities':-

'.it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of

incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair..'

I'll have the wisdom, belief, light and hope please.