

## **ESTA Directions March 2004**

***By Mike Wood***

For some reason, maybe because it's Spring, there always seems to be more going on in ESTA to talk about in the March issue of Protocol than any other. Once again there was a really busy schedule at USITT in Long Beach and some really positive items to report.

A year ago in this column I reported that the Biz-Ed committee had decided to repeat their highly successful business survey in 2004. This survey was first carried out in 1995 and the information was getting dated. So, true to their word, the survey is returning – bigger and better than ever.

The 2004 Business Survey will build on the positive response received last time and has expanded to include Production Companies as well as Dealers. They will be surveying three years of data from all the contributing companies and producing a comprehensive summary of the financial trends within those sectors. Participating companies will be able to benchmark their own performance against the average and trending financial ratios of the whole industry – an extremely valuable tool to help plan your business. This survey has the potential of being as important to Dealer and Production Company members as the 'How Big is Big' industry size research has been to Manufacturers. To achieve the same success BizEd needs equally strong participation – so read the more detailed information elsewhere in this issue and join in!

Sometimes ESTA seems to move slowly, we rely upon volunteer effort for a lot of what we do and those volunteers may only meet four times a year at the regular meetings, but sometimes we can move really quickly. A case in point; last November Stan Schwartz of Rosco approached the ESTA Board with a proposal to study the specifying and buying patterns of customers in our industry. How do they make purchase decisions? Do they read print material such as catalogues, and brochures or do they get all their information electronically these days? How important are trade shows and magazines to this process? What are the major influencers in purchasing decisions? Price of course, but what else?

You can see that these are questions we would all like answered. No matter which sector of the industry we are in we all have customers and we all would like to know the best and most effective way to reach them. There was such instant agreement that this was a good idea that a committee was immediately formed, has met many times since via e-mail and conference call and has already come up with an agreed draft document allowing them to submit a Request for Proposals to survey companies to actually make this a reality. I'm confident this will all happen in less than a year from start to finish – that's really impressive, Stan clearly touched a nerve with this idea. Again look elsewhere in this issue for more information.

Another area which seems to be accelerating quicker than anyone might have expected is the ETCP (Entertainment Technician Certification Program). I'm sure you remember that we needed to raise around \$750,000 to kick this off – certification doesn't come cheap. That is a huge amount of money. The great news is that many people and companies have stood up to the plate and showed their commitment with extraordinarily generous pledges. Most recently we've had stunning donations of \$75,000 from IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees), \$75,000 from USITT (United States Institute for Theatre Technology) and \$100,000 from Clear Channel Entertainment.

These contributions, with all the other donations from enlightened givers, take ETCP to just over halfway to their goal. So, we are halfway; that's exciting but it means there's still another half to find and that's likely to be the tougher half.

The next step in the process for ETCP is the hiring of a firm of psychometricians to work with the first group, Arena-Style Rigging Skills, to ensure that the tests they develop are fair, unbiased,

non-discriminatory and completely reproducible and defensible. This is where much of the cost of developing the program lies and so ongoing funding continues to be of major importance. Some late news just before this issue went to press in early April. There have been some changes to the ESTA Board of Directors. Unfortunately both Cindi Manning and Patrick O'Rourke have had to resign from the Board for personal reasons. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them both for all the hard work they've done on behalf of ESTA. This left two important vacancies which needed to be filled immediately so I'm very pleased to report that Dinna Myers (Musson Theatrical) has been appointed as the new Dealer Vice-President and Larry Schoeneman (Designlab Chicago) is the new Dealer Director.

These moves also left a vacancy in one of ESTA's busiest committees – BizEd. Fortunately we have a great replacement for Cindi in Jerome Dunn (Stagelight) who has agreed to step-up and take on the role of Co-Chair.

Finally, ESTA has won an EDDY! No, really! We are all being collectively recognized for the positive work the members and staff do for the industry. The EDDY awards will be presented during the Broadway Lighting Master Classes on June 18 in New York and we should all be proud of our collective achievements, Huzzah!