

TOBY KRONENWETT

SONOVTS



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RIGHT ON TIME

BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

While looking on the bright side of life is an admirable aim, it's not always practical for those living day to day in the world of live production, particularly those who understandably want to provide the best possible picture quality in UHD 4k and HDR.

The reason it's not always practical, in fact disruptive for some, is that the displays reflecting the bright side of live production life are too bright. The type of OLED display panels typically used for reference purposes have exceptionally high contrast and brightness. The problem is that in many production environments, particularly those utilising OB trucks, high contrast and brightness are net negatives because if you sit in front of an HDR OLED panel with a 1000 candela backlight, you either get a nice tan, go snow blind, or both. Without welder's goggles it's very difficult to work for more than 30 minutes under such intense light, let alone three, four, five or more hours.

It's not just the potential for workflow disruption that's annoying, there's the prospect of a potential health hazard. I'm not suggesting that such brightness has been clinically proven to be a hazard, but there's no question that it's tiring. Audio professionals take measures to protect their hearing and, if such measures are not available, they'll often refuse to work on the project. Similar risks exist for those who's job is largely visual.

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CONTINUED
BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

» For the reference purposes a high-end OLED panel is typically used to ensure good looking HDR because many people at home will eventually be watching on an OLED panel. But for everything else in a production module such as shading, monitor walls, EVS slo-mo positions, you would never provide OLED displays unless you want Raiders of the Lost Arc-style face melting, which is always better achieved with a guitar solo.

This over-bright issue is fairly common, but it's dependent on how HDR is produced. Some simply produce HDR in parallel, which means they just take HDR from camera metadata settings and pass it through, but they do all the shadings in SDR. The whole production is in SDR and at the end HDR is added on top.

And as good as it is, and as easy as it is to do, one of the raps on HDR is that some feel that it's so bright and sharp that it looks odd, unnatural, almost harsh. It's similar to when we did our first trials with 4k. The resolution was so high you could easily see, for example, even very minor blemishes. It's perhaps an irony of new technology that the higher the resolution of natural objects the more artificial they tend to look. It's often a case of capturing images with more resolution or a greater colour space than our eyes and brains can actually perceive.

The technology to generate HDR is technically pretty simple. Resolution is basically just a combination of bandwidth allocation and sensor size. HDR is different because it effects colour spacing, and the evolution of colour space in terms of HDR can, unlike SDR, be disruptive.

However, more and more companies want to originate in HDR without an SDR layer underneath. And that became an issue. A lot of our customers started coming to us asking, "Is there any way we can do HDR without being blinded by the displays?"

When we started with 4k UHD displays, they did precisely what was intended. But when HDR came along, those who tended to cover live events with high-end UHD 4k cameras soon found themselves struggling to cope for any extended period of time with the blazing bright images directly in front of them, and there's typically little or no respite from that when you're live. That's when customers started coming to us looking for a solution to the deep-fried eyes syndrome they were experiencing when working with HDR content. They needed operators to be able to stick with their respective display for more than half an hour or so.

We explained to our customers who were having issues with HDR displays that we had developed an alternative. Our goal was to produce displays that were as close to reference standard colour space as possible, but with a backlight that was not as bright and could therefore be extensively used in a day-to-day working environment.

What we did is take our normal displays and run a special interpolation over our lookup table so we get the full HDR colour spectrum on a normal LCD panel with 450 candela backlight. It's easy to see (literally) that at half the brightness of a similar OLED panel it's much easier on the retinas for long hours. Our "HDQLINE" display is very, very close to displays that feature top-of-the range colour space, but without the glaring white, or the price tag. Everyone we demonstrated it to was very impressed.

Our HDR-ready HDQLINE is that delivers a comfortable working environment to those who want to produce HDR content. We've clearly demonstrated that we can supply a display that, on a daily basis, works for people without requiring them to incur the cost of very expensive sunglasses. The monitor wall for the host broadcaster main operations compound of this summer's major sporting event in Russia will consist entirely of sonoVTS HDQLINE displays, and they will be HDR-ready monitors.

The future for HDR is bright, but with HDQLINE, there's no need to wear shades. ■

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