

# texting the limits

## interactive attractions using vote-by-text (SMS)

by Jeremy Scheinberg, Chief Operating Officer, Alcorn McBride Inc.

From buying a drink at a vending machine using a cell phone as an electronic payment mechanism to iPhone applications that allow your burrito to be ready at Chipotle when you arrive, the devices we carry around everyday give us instant gratification in our lives. This interactivity applies to entertainment as well. High-end gaming systems allow users to play in immersive environments with players all over the world. TV shows such as American Idol let audiences vote for their favorite performer. With all of this interactivity at home, it stands to reason that themed entertainment audiences want to do more than simply watch a show. They want to play a role in its outcome.

### Technology

The use of Vote by Text in a themed entertainment environment begins with a prompt to vote, submission of votes by SMS messaging service, the tabulation of the votes, and the control of the show based on those results. A show controller (for example, the Alcorn McBride V16 Pro) can handle these functions and provide a continuous, interactive experience. During installation, the attraction operator creates an account with an authorized SMS messaging service.

- Prompt for Voting - The prompt will be different depending on the type of show or experience. In a hosted show, it could be a specific cue by the host that encourages the audience to vote. In an automated show or preshow/queue line, it could be a media clip that presents the options, explains how to vote using a phone and opens voting.

- SMS Messaging Service - The SMS messaging service is responsible for the collection and tabulation of the votes. There are a number of services that can handle this task. Alcorn McBride has worked with providers to develop the necessary interfaces to allow for automation of the voting process (thereby eliminating the need for an operator to run the message collection process - even in a hosted show). During show operation the V16 Pro automatically communicates with the service to handle the vote processing and incorporate them into the show flow without any operator intervention required. When voting is to begin, the V16 Pro sends a message via its Ethernet connection to the SMS messaging service. The service resets its current vote counts and

begins to accept new votes.

- Tabulation of the Votes - When a guest texts a response to a pre-determined number, that vote is registered and stored. The service keeps a running count of the number of votes for each option. The number of options is only limited to the number of options which work within the show flow. For example, if the guest is to choose their next destination in a "journey", 2-5 options may be a reasonable number. Too many options can lead to decision paralysis and may require a larger voting window in order for guests to make a choice; this limits the number of voting opportunities and can impact show flow, duration and throughput. Depending on how the voting system is configured, guests can be limited to one vote (by source phone number) or they can vote as many times as they want within the voting window. The amount of time within which the system will accept votes is completely configurable. When the voting window expires, the V16 Pro sends a message to the SMS voting service to close voting and return the results.

- Results - Once the results are tabulated, the response is entirely up to the show's designers. The V16 Pro can display the results to the audience via a display system or branch the show's media in a specific direction. The possibilities for how the show proceeds are nearly endless and allow for the creation of fantastic experiences with tremendous audience buy-in.

### Applications

Here are just a few ideas selected from a wide range of possibilities:

1. "Choose your Own Adventure" - Much like the series of children's books, a ride, show or preshow can branch into entirely different areas based on guest feedback. If a story is told in a way that engages the audience, the outcome of the experience can branch in a seemingly endless number of directions. This variety encourages repeat visitors, and provides a sense of ownership in the collective experience.

2. Talent Contest - There are plenty of opportunities to bring a talent competition to any themed entertainment venue. From large-scale band competitions to small venue

karaoke contests, the addition of vote-by-text gives every member of the audience a role in the final outcome, without the expense and hassle of installing a dedicated wired (or wireless) voting system. Even in a hosted live show, the show control system can manage the polling, handle voting tabulation and control accompanying media, lighting, etc.

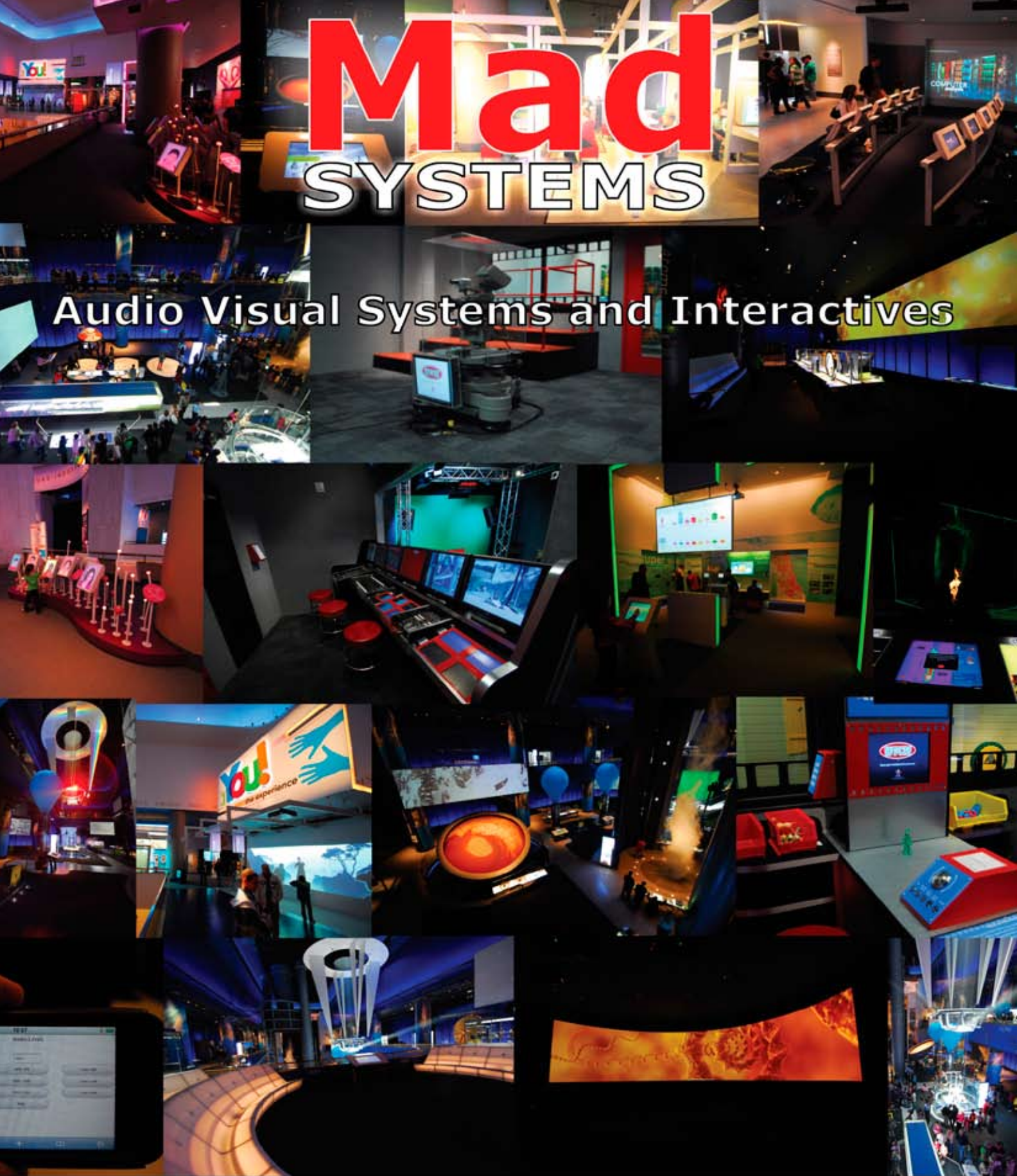
3. Interactive Queues and Preshows - Throughput is an issue in any attraction. Popular rides and shows may have extensive queue lines, with guests becoming restless. Adding vote-by-text provides a number of ways for guests to interact with the environment around them. For example, guests can have a shared experience with the people around them by choosing the media that is presented; they can compete with others in vote-offs to hear specific songs; they can trigger effects that happen to guests elsewhere in the queue (water cannons, smoke/lighting effects, etc.) All of these examples provide an interactive element that makes the queue less of a hassle and more of an engaging experience.

4. Branded Environments - The lessons learned from entertaining and engaging guests in themed venues are rapidly finding their way into the brand space as companies seek to promote their products in new and more interesting ways. This can translate into applications as simple as a kiosk in a mall all the way up to a completely themed retail store. By using interactive elements - such as vote by text - brand managers can create a repeatable engagement between their brand and potential customers. They can also gain valuable market research about those potential customers.

As educational, commercial and entertainment venues look for new ways to engage with their guests, there is an ever-increasing need to provide a two-way experience. It is not enough to simply speak to a guest. It is important to make them a part of the experience. With new technologies like vote-by-text it is possible to take advantage of a device that 90% of your audience already carries—a mobile phone—allowing them to interact with their environment and determine their experience. The promise of creating a unique experience with multiple outcomes encourages your guest to return, in order to find out what will happen next time. **ipm**

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