

BELLEWAERDE:

A SMALL EUROPEAN PARK GOES 4D

Bellewaerde Park is an amusement park in the southwest part of Belgium. For the 2006 season, the park decided to extend its operating season through the Halloween and Christmas holidays. With a longer operating calendar, the park wanted to add a family indoor attraction that could be easily adapted to seasonal events, and opted for a 4D show.

4D shows are great audience-pleasers and thanks to the diminishing costs of technology, 4D theater installations are now affordable for smaller parks. A 4D show usually consists of a 3D special-venue film that gains an extra dimension from in-theater effects such as water spritzers, lighting effects, seat buzzers and leg ticklers, plus themed props and scenery and, in some cases, motion-base seats.

Bellewaerde selected *Forest Adventure*, an existing film from the Showscan library of special-venue films. *Forest Adventure* tells the story of forest animals endangered by a man-made fire. It fit the park's identity as a heavily landscaped amusement and animal park with a family audience.

Austrian manufacturer Kraftwerk Living Technologies was awarded the contract to provide seats and special effects. Barco video projectors were selected as the 3D delivery mechanism. Bellewaerde went to Alcorn McBride Inc., a seasoned provider of 4D theater audiovisuals, for the high-definition playback and control systems.

"Designing an AV system for a theme park is quite different than a boardroom system, for example," notes Henry Corrado, director of Alcorn McBride's French subsidiary. "4D theaters need fairly complex systems with perfect reliability and stability, while often being run by non-specialists."

At Bellewaerde, the heart of the Alcorn McBride system is a scriptable show controller, which makes it possible for non-technical staff to adjust the theater timing if the show changes. The main video sources for the show are two Alcorn McBride high-definition video players designed to run in perfect sync (a necessity for the 3D effects to work). Six audio channels, time code, and video backup are part of the system.

Content is stored on hard drives, with a pair of video reproducers holding a backup copy. In the event of a hard drive failure, the show control system automatically alerts maintenance and switches from the main player to the backup player. The speaker configuration is close to a conventional theater, but with waterproof speakers because water effects are used indoors. All amplifiers are Crown. The theater lighting is controlled by an Alcorn McBride LightCue.

Regional theme parks face the same challenge as all parks: it takes new attractions to keep bringing guests through the gate. But the tighter budgets of regional parks make the



process of attraction design particularly challenging. Smaller venues such as Bellewaerde are discovering that it's well worth the expense of installing a 4D theater, because the systems and effects equipment adapt easily to multiple shows, and can also be configured for corporate events.

Most important, 4D theaters attract visitors. Bellewaerde General Manager Filip Dewitte reports, "More than half of all our guests visit the attraction, and we expect this percentage to rise considerably. Guest satisfaction is unanimously very good."



Alcorn McBride (www.alcorn.com) provided information for this article.



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