



STARDRAW  2007
ultimate control CONTROL



Bunny takes control at Alton Towers

Alton Towers in Staffordshire is Britain's best-loved theme park. However, it's not just the thrills and spills of the ever more daring rides that bring people flocking to the venue. Alton Towers is also a sumptuous and extremely well equipped conference and events centre that is capable of hosting anything from major corporate and social events to the Mad Hatter's tea party. When it comes to creating themed attractions, you can usually count on there being a control element in there somewhere; for this Alton Towers turned to Stardraw Control.

Production manager for Alton Towers' Entertainment Department, Simon Horsley, was tasked earlier this year with creating a children's walk-through Easter attraction in one of the resort's hotel conference rooms. "The attraction was themed as the Easter Bunny's warren and featured several themed rooms where various characters invented, created the taste, painted and finally distributed Easter eggs," explained Simon. "Each character told a story and the children were able to taste the chocolate as it was being "made" and got given a crème egg at the end – they loved it!"

As you might expect, the attraction was not created entirely out of papier maché

and toilet roll tubes; quite the contrary in fact – this was a fully interactive audio-visual - and olfactory - experience, which is where Stardraw Control came in. Simon used Stardraw Control to create the user interface on a touchscreen PC monitor from which the operator can run the whole attraction.

"The Stardraw PC was linked via a bi-directional RS232 cable to an Alcorn McBride V4+ Show Controller which controlled all the audio (using an Alcorn McBride Digital Binloop), lighting (controlled via an Alcorn McBride DMX machine), smoke, smell effects, bubble machines, mechanical effects etc. via sensor triggers which were connected to an Alcorn McBride IO64 input/output expander, and button-press inputs from the performance team (yes, the ones in rabbit suits!)" described Simon.

Using Stardraw Control, Simon created a general operator page designed for the host standing outside the attraction, which indicated via a flashing screen when the next

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party of guests should be sent through. It also relayed information from the last sensor that was triggered, allowing the host to monitor the progress of each party throughout the attraction. Finally, a technical page was included (password-protected so that the hosts or any other unauthorized personnel could not access it) from which the venue could be powered up or down and all the lighting/audio/effects could be overridden for venue checks or maintenance purposes. Individual sensor triggers could also be checked from this panel.

"I have programmed similar systems before using Visual Basic," noted Simon, "but Stardraw Control is a far-more user-friendly option. Better still, it already contains a driver for the Alcorn V4+ Show Controller, which is the hub of my entire system, so that was a huge time-saver. However, I think that the biggest plus point for me in this particular implementation was that the system-wiring component of the job all but disappeared. Instead of having to connect a physical button panel with illuminated indicators and millions of wiring terminations to the V4+ or the IO94 like I used to do, I simply created a number of graphical screens for the operator and the technical teams within Stardraw Control, all with unlimited

amounts of control buttons, feedback indicators, text messages etc. displayed on screen so everyone knows exactly what is going on at any given point, and all of that using just a single RS232 cable between the computer and the show controller. Apart from anything else, it looks far more professional than having wires and cables trailing all over the place, which is an important point when the display is on view to the guests as it was here, while the massive reduction in wiring time onsite was a real boon. When you've only got three days (and nights!) to set up the whole attraction



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Simon concluded by noting that the whole exercise was such a success that Alton Towers will be implementing a Halloween attraction based on the same system and infrastructure that will run for three weeks in October.



Technician's User Interface



Touchpanel



Main Equipment Rack

UI Design by Simon Horsley,
Alton Towers

Equipment List

Alton Towers Easter Bunny Warren

- 1 x HP PC for Stardraw Control Panel
- 1 x 3M 17" Microtouch TFT screen for Stardraw control panel.
- 1 x Alcorn McBride V4+ Show controller
- 1 x Alcorn McBride 16 Channel Digital Binloop audio/video reproducer
- 1 x Alcorn McBride DMX Machine
- 1 x Alcorn McBride IO64
- 2 x BSS Soundweb 9088iis DSP processors
- 5 x Inter-M QD4950 4 channel power amplifiers
- 16 x OHM KS3 loudspeakers
- 8 x OHM BR15B 15" Bass Bins
- 50 x LED PAR56 Cans
Various Birdies
Various custom lighting effects/indicators
- 1 x Martin PSP 12 Channel Power Switch Pack
- 1 x Zero88 Betapack3 6 channel dimmer rack
- 2 x Le-Maitre Speedfogger DMX
- 1 x Le-Maitre Neutron XS Hazer
- 2 x 1.5m long conveyor belts
- 10 x Dale Air Vortex Smell machines
- 1 x chocolate fountain
Numerous sensors/push button inputs
- 2 x Antari B100 Bubble Machines
- 3 x Spacekraft bubble tubes

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