Originally appeared in the **February 2004** issue of *Communications Technology*.

FAREWELL, MEMORIES AND WESTERN SHOW PICKS

By RON HRANAC

If there's been one constant in our industry, it's change. One of those changes is the demise of the Western Cable Show, the last of which took place in December at the Anaheim Convention Center. It's hard to believe that just a few short years ago Western rivaled NCTA's National Show, with 33,000 attendees and nearly 300,000 square feet of exhibit space. The most recent, and final show's attendance topped out around 6,000 and the show floor was a modest 30,000 square feet, including CableNET's 10,000 square feet of high-tech exhibits.

I started attending Western in the early 1980s, when it was still small enough to be held at the Disneyland Hotel. It wasn't long before the show outgrew that venue, and the Anaheim Convention Center became its new home. But when most of the programmers pulled out of the show a few years ago, Western as we knew it was pretty much gutted. A sour economy and 9/11 also contributed to the beginning of the end.

As this show passes into cable's history, I can't help but reflect on a lot of fond memories. Western was where many vendors announced new products, and where a number of today's popular cable channels made their debut. Spending time in the exhibit hall was always a treat: Programmers often had sports figures, actors and other celebrities in their booths signing autographs. One event that I've never forgotten was getting to meet astronaut Pete Conrad.

Of course, the parties thrown by HBO, Showtime and other major programmers were always worth attending, because in addition to food and beverages, those parties usually featured big-name entertainment.

Western attracted a lot of overseas attendees, too, and for a few years the folks at Communications Technology's then sister publication International Cable sponsored the show's international lounge.

Western was the place to take care of business. Seemingly never-ending meetings were always the norm. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to moderate some of the Western Show's panels and speak in SCTE-sponsored technical sessions over the years, too. In between the meetings and seminars of the '80s and early '90s, I managed to find time to wander the show floor, collecting key rings, pens and other booth give-aways to take home to my kids (my oldest daughter once had a bracelet made of cable industry key rings that must have weighed five pounds!).

One year in the '90s I was sitting in my hotel room around 9:00 p.m. when a magnitude 5.0 or so earthquake shook the Anaheim area. It was somewhat unsettling but oddly entertaining to watch the furniture in the room move around.

But the best part of having attended Western for the past 20 years or so is the friendships made during that time. Those are perhaps my best memories.

Show picks

SCTE

TECHNICAL COLUMNS

Official archives of articles and columns written by Ron Hranac for *Communicati-*
Technology and some of its sister publications, published by Access Intelligence, LLC
Reprinted with permission of the author.

One of my regular show activities is wandering the exhibit hall looking for new, interesting, or particularly useful gadgets. The exhibit hall was pretty small compared to previous years, and, despite the fact that the show's hot technology included plenty of VoIP, VOD, high-def, DVR and even some advanced set-tops, what I call goodies and gadgets were fewer. Here are some of the notables.

Speaking of business cards, the best one I saw at Western was industry veteran Tom Jokerst's. Tom is chief technology officer of Broadbus Technologies (www.broadbus.com), and his credit card-size card is a mix of clear and frosted plastic. Way cool!

Overall the final Western Show was a good confab, but the atmosphere, while upbeat, also had an underlying sadness to it. I'll miss this show—it was one of my favorites. Thanks for the memories.

Ron Hranac is technical leader, HFC Network Architectures, for Cisco Systems, and former senior technology editor for *Communications Technology*. Reach him at rhranac@aol.com.