

30 Years of Showmanship Part III

Charlie and Brad now had the deal cut for their first project, a motion theater attraction involving simulated space travel. But they had to deliver it on time! The problem was that the Taiwan Film Culture Park had already scheduled the opening day for February, 1991. It was already November of 1990, so there were only three months left to actually build the attraction – a job that was supposed to take six months! To expedite the process, Charlie had all the necessary equipment shipped from Los Angeles to Taiwan by air freight at a much higher cost than sea transport would have been. Thus, the project was already in budgetary trouble.

Iwerks sent a Chief Engineer and 4 installers to assist Charlie's crew in constructing the attraction, which involved 60 motion-controlled seats and a giant 40 x 90 foot suction screen. This means that the screen was stretched across a concave frame and then sucked by vacuum fans into a concave shape for a semi wrap-around effect. It was a long and tedious process. When the \$100,000 screen was finally in place and the suction fans turned on, a tiny hole appeared at the top. This quickly grew into a big rip that tore the entire screen apart. Watching helplessly, Charlie's heart was torn apart, as well. There were only three days to go before opening day. The attraction had been heavily promoted with a big advertising campaign. Top park executive, Jim Jao was furious. The show had to go on – or heads were going to roll!

Brad placed an emergency call to Don Iwerks, owner of the Iwerks company. The response was reassuring. "Don't panic", said Don. He explained that you could make do by stitching together a big sheet of plastic canvasses and spray painting it silver. It wouldn't work with the suction fans and it wouldn't be concave, but it would work as a giant flat screen – which was good enough at this point! Still, it was a race against time, with a lot of work to be done and a lot of problems still to be solved. Speeding around in a car with his top Taiwanese crew chief, Charlie found a canvas factory out in the remote countryside that had enough

plastic canvasses for his needs – but they were only 4 feet wide by 6 feet tall, so many had to be stitched together. The factory manager suggested a local seamstress woman, and she agreed to handle the job. Charlie and his crew had to help position the growing sheet of plastic as the seamstress pieced it together with an old sewing machine. In the end, including all the material and overtime pay involved, what was supposed to be a \$100,000 screen was improvised for about two thousand dollars!

When finished, they rushed the new screen back to the theater, hung it and silvered it, just 3 hours before the attraction was supposed to open. The spray paint was still drying, when Charlie and his team put the system through its first test run. He sat down in the front row, hoping against hope that everything would work as planned. The line was already forming outside, and nobody knew what was going to happen. When those surround-sound speakers boomed out, that big screen picture came up, and the seats moved in sync with the movie, tears of joy and relief were streaking down Charlies face. It had all come together, after all!

But the area still had to be cleaned up and Charlie still had to change for the premier ceremony. Although the opening was delayed by one hour, the show went on! As one of only two such attractions in Asia (with the other in Japan), it was a tremendous success. The Motion Theater Experience remained as the most popular attraction at the park for many months...while Charlie and Brad got their trying - though ultimately winning – start in the entertainment industry.

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