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Mitsubishi Electric helps bring the magic of cinema to West Africa

An innovative project is helping to bring the magic of big screen entertainment to remote communities in the African countries of Benin, Niger and Mali. Established in 2001, Cinéma Numérique Ambulant (CNA) provides mobile digital cinemas to communities in West Africa - most of which have no electricity, let alone cinemas or theatres. In villages where even TV is a rarity, the social impact of such events is enormous; bringing accessible big-screen entertainment to the wider population and opening an exciting window onto the world for a whole generation of young Africans. Since it began operations in 2001, the CNA has organised around 2800 film events, in hundreds of villages for an audience numbering millions.

From a single mobile cinema in 2001, the CNA is now organised into five divisions, serving Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali and France, operating a total of nine mobile units. Each unit is a fully self-contained cinema facility, complete with generator, projection equipment, 4 x 3m screen and sound system. A team of three CNA crew members travel with mobile units to organise and run the cinema events. Each team operates from a home base in one of several cities across the region. These bases provide workshop and storage facilities to support the local operations, which can cover a radius of several tens of kilometers from each base.



Each event run by the CNA is intended to provide social value as well as entertainment. The first part of each evening's performance consists of a mixture of short films, which can include public information and documentary items as well as fictional features. This is followed by the main feature film. This blend of info-tainment allows serious contemporary issues to be addressed, while also providing an extraordinarily popular entertainment experience. The CNA carefully co-ordinates its activities with village elders in advance to ensure that the event is well organised and well supported.

Since 2006, the operations of the CNA have been supported by Mitsubishi Electric. Along with donating a significant number of video projectors to the CNA, Mitsubishi also provides a number of its photo printing kiosks, which are set up alongside the cinema venues in each location. These kiosks allow the local residents to print high quality pictures - a facility that would be all but impossible were it not for the CNA. An average of 2-300 photographs are printed at each session, brightening the lives of many residents of these remote and often impoverished villages.

The arduous conditions and remote locations in which the units operate mean that equipment reliability and quality is of paramount importance. But just as important, is the continuing support offered by manufacturers such as Mitsubishi Electric. Christian Lambert, director and founder of the CNA, commented, "We are passionate in our commitment to bring cinema to the people of Africa, particularly young people. Video projectors of high quality and reliability are important, of course. But just as important is the continuous support we need to keep operating: To keep our mobile units on the road is a constant challenge. Mitsubishi Electric has been an invaluable supporter and

partner, both in terms of the quality of the equipment it has provided and in the commitment it has shown in supporting our cause.”

Alongside its activities in the field, the CNA engages in a full calendar of cultural events in Africa and around the world to promote and encourage African cinema. Such exposure plays an essential role in promoting the work of African writers and directors, and in contributing to the growth of cinema and television as a popular medium of expression in Africa. One of the most important events supported by the CNA is the pan-African FESPACO film festival. Held annually in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, the festival is the most important showcase of African cinematic talent and creativity. Now in its 20th year, FESPACO 2007 features seven screens showing a broad spectrum of films, reflecting the full diversity of African culture and experience. While being perhaps a little less glitzy than its glamorous Western counterpart in Cannes, FESPACO nevertheless has a central role to play in developing and supporting talent from the whole of Africa.

As for Mitsubishi Electric, the work of the CNA sits comfortably with the company’s commitment to fostering the idea of “cinema for all”. Serge Garner, sales manager for video projectors at Mitsubishi Electric France, said, “The work of the CNA has enormous value, not just as an entertainment medium, but also as a means of inspiration, communication and education. By helping to provide access to this medium, we hope to contribute to the growth of African cinema and the development of indigenous talent across the continent. We are very proud to be partnered with the CNA.”

More Information

Images and additional information can be found on the CNA website at <http://www.c-n-a.org>

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