PLUGFEST 2018

July Plugfest offers testing for compliance and interoperability

BY **MILTON DAVIS**

ANOTHER ESTA PLUGFEST took place on July 20 – 23, 2018, in Westlake, TX. While it may appear that these events have become routine, each one is distinctly different. This time, new attendees came, new protocols were under scrutiny, and the cooperative atmosphere has continued to evolve. Attendees had access to a wide range of gear and input from experts who have implemented draft versions of the latest protocols.

One of the developing characteristics of the Plugfest is that protocols are being implemented and tested *while* the documents are being written. In the past, best effort documents were written and published. Even after public review, acceptance, and

publication, problems have occasionally surfaced with the structure of the protocols. Fixes and revisions were necessary to correct the oversights. We are now able to try out the concepts presented in new protocols during the Plugfest event. For example, as the "RDMNet" protocol (E1.33) draft is being written, developers are including the very latest changes in their prototypes. This allows for verification of the concepts from the documents. During this most recent Plugfest, a minor issue in the draft protocol document was identified and corrected as a direct result of Plugfest activities. These types of interventions potentially save months of public review and revision time.

ALL PHOTOS ARE COURTESY OF BILL ELLIS

Edward Condit, Osram Lighting Solutions; Bob Goddard, Goddard Design; and Eric Johnson, Cisco

As the industry evolves, the ESTA Plugfest events will adapt to continue to make them relevant to the market and the products which support it.

Another area that was active during this event was the development of the BSR E1.37-4 – File Transfer Control with Firmware Upload Capabilities protocol. This extension to the suite of RDM protocols will establish a standardized way to update software and transfer data files to devices on the network. In this case, not only is the protocol being written, but the popular RDM Integrity test software is being updated to test this and other new RDM protocol extensions before the final version of the protocol is published. As a result, the new protocol may be able to be published

Wayne Howell, Artistic Licence; Larry Dew, Benjamin Electric; and Peter Willis, Howard Eaton Lighting Ltd.

Control Protocols Working Group members are available to discuss the ESTA standards and how to implement them during the Plugfest.

in a working state and it can be tested for compliance. This will go a long way toward insuring that new products will be interoperable. The end result is a seamless user experience.

On Saturday evening, attendees in person and an online community were treated to a round table discussion. This time, the topic was the Universe Synchronization feature which was recently added to the *ANSI E1.31 – 2016, Lightweight Streaming Protocol for*

Sam Kearney, ETC, was among the Plugfest attendees who worked to discover, configure, and query lighting products on the test network.

Transport of DMX512 using ACN (sACN) protocol. Eric Johnson and Scott Blair introduced the need for this new feature along with details about the protocol extension that were useful for both developers and technicians in the field. It is anticipated that this well-attended event may evolve into a seminar to be presented in conjunction with a future trade show event.

When it was time to take a break from the hands-on activities in the Plugfest suite, new attendees had the opportunity to participate in task group sessions where standards are created. This provides a great overview of the whole process from idea, to standards creation, to seeing the standards being put into practice. A sense of community and cooperative collaboration is created. Through their involvement, attendees gained perspective of the entire standards process and came away with improved products, professional contacts, and a greater confidence that their products will work well in the field.

Post-event surveys indicate that the length of this event and the overall content was appropriate for everyone. Additional event days were added at the request of past participants. The Plugfest planning committee intends to use feedback from attendees to continue to make improvements in the event. As the industry evolves, the ESTA Plugfest events will adapt to continue to make them relevant to the market and the products which support it. Keep an eye out for future Plugfests which will be publicized through ESTA's website at http://estalink.us/plugfest or email plugfest@esta.org. ∎

Milton Davis has worked in the entertainment lighting industry for over 35 years. He has held positions from production electrician to product developer. Milton currently works at Doug Fleenor Design where he designs products and provides customer support. He is the Co-Chair for ESTA's Control Protocols Working Group and is active in various task groups. He has participated in numerous Plugfest events in the past with products in varying stages of standards compliance. Milton can be reached via email at milton@dfd.com.