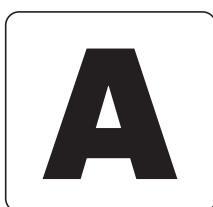




THE AMERICAN ADVENTURE

The magic formula in the United States pavilion is more low-tech but equally effective at managing guest flow and keeping Covid under control.

By Caroline Reid and Christian Sylt.



flat traveller snakes through the pavilion at slower than walking speed “to give guests the experience we want them to see” according to Pete

Ford, project creative director at Thinkwell Group which designed the pavilion. The speed of the traveller comes into its own almost immediately.

The Pavilion is themed to US innovations. Some, like the iPhone, are obvious but others are more abstract. The first is democracy and this is illustrated through a projection-mapped model of the torch from the Statue of Liberty. It starts out in its green copper colour and gradually starts to shine as the sun sets on the 360 degree screen which wraps around the rim above it.

Pulling this off requires 16 projectors and the effect is so spellbinding that if guests were walking at their own pace they would surely crowd around it which isn't safe in the current climate. However, as the traveller moves at slower than walking speed it gives guests the impression that they have spent more time watching it than if they were actually walking. It's the perfect illustration of how to use technology and creativity to solve a health problem.

“AV is key to presenting the narrative of the pavilion and taking our guests on a journey,” says Ford, an Expo veteran who had worked on six pavilions before Thinkwell hired him. The Los Angeles-based design firm specialises in theme parks and has been behind many of the industry's most acclaimed attractions including the world's biggest indoor theme park, Warner Bros. World Abu Dhabi.

Its impeccable experience shows throughout the US Pavilion starting outside with a full-size replica of Elon Musk's SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket which draws guests in as it can be seen from afar. SpaceX gave Thinkwell access to the original rocket as well as the engineering blueprints and it shows. Every rivet is in the same place as the original and the rocket has even been artificially weathered. Ford says wryly that you would have to be a rocket scientist to tell the difference between them.

A 90-second show about how SpaceX services the International Space Station is projection mapped onto the side of the rocket every night and can be seen from the plaza outside. This fits the theme as the Middle East and nearby Africa have been amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the satellites that SpaceX has launched. “To create a unique experience requires the AV design and integration to be considered at the same time as the building design,” says Ford.

Although Thinkwell was responsible for the interior, San Francisco-based architecture firm Woods Bagot designed the exterior of the building which is dotted with steel stars backlit with LED nodes. A huge US Presidential Seal hangs over the entrance which leads to a video address from president Joe Biden and vice-president Kamala Harris. Guests then start their journey on the traveller past exhibits including a replica of Alexander Graham Bell's first telephone and Thomas Jefferson's copy of the Quran which is on loan from the US Library of Congress.

AV is used to move the story forward rather than being an attraction in itself. At one point the traveller passes a wall of moulded stars like the ones on the outside. Projections on them start out like a star field which then forms shapes of key





technological developments like microchips and GPS. It links to the theme of the pavilion perfectly without the technology intruding on the experience.

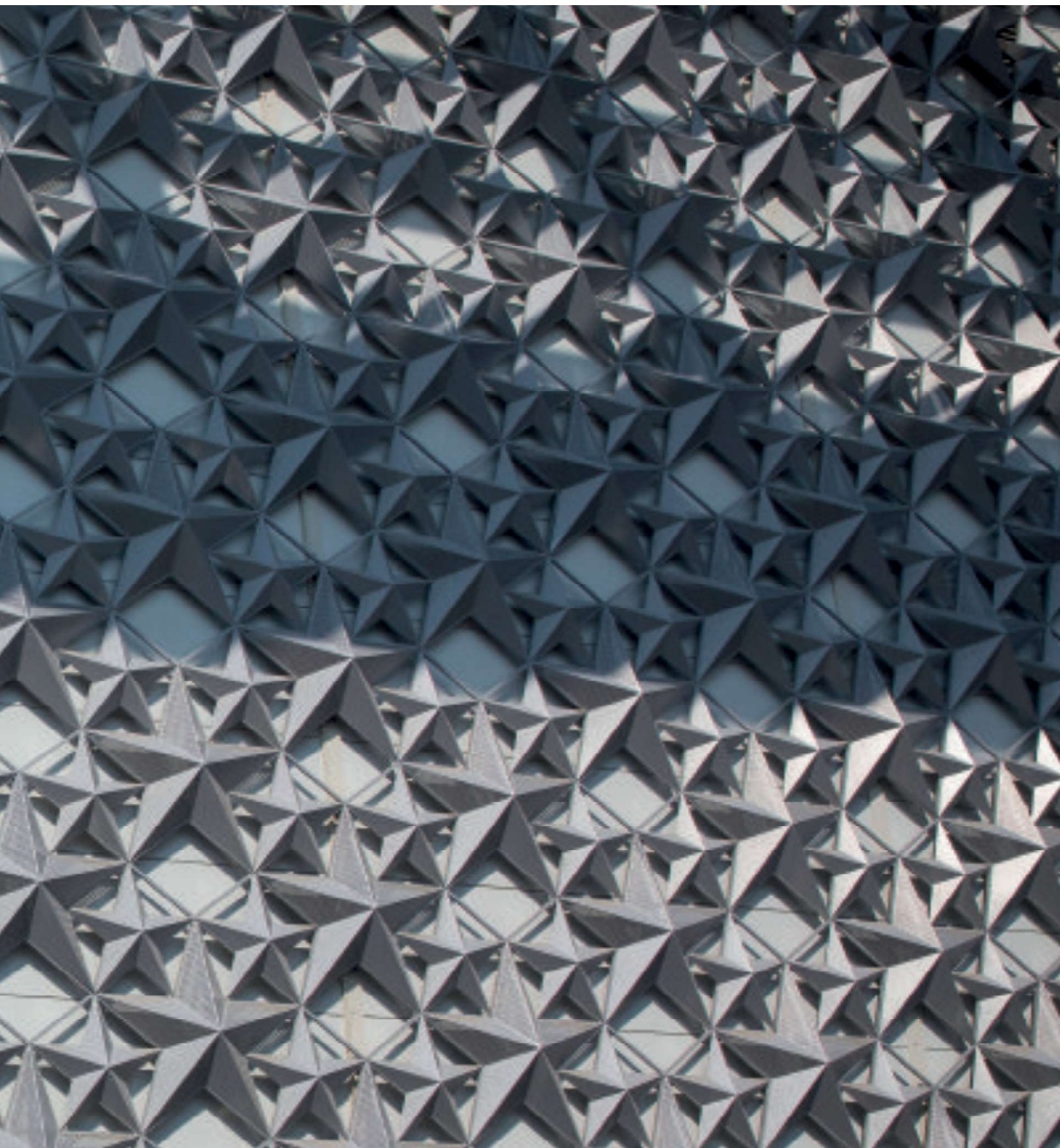
Likewise, later on the journey guests watch video speeches from modern innovators such as Drone delivery company Zipline and Time Magazine's 2020 kid of the year, Gitanjali Rao. They play on

LED screens on the side of boxes which are stacked in a column and turn to face the guests as they pass by.

Ford says that Thinkwell has drawn on its decades of experience to integrate off-the-shelf products in a way which is so intuitive that guests don't get distracted by the technology. Thinkwell has broken new ground through "the integration of

a lot of disparate technologies to create a unique experience - particularly in the use of special fabrics and paints," says Ford.

He adds that the secret to this success is to "consider the use of AV at the genesis of the project and integrate accordingly." He says it is crucial to "find the right partner to make your design better. Ones that are willing to treat this as a partnership



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Pete Ford, Thinkwell

A wall-mounted lenticular formed from triangular strips shows the first photo taken on Mars in 1965 on one side and a recent photo from the planet on the other. The highlight is Cornell University's model of the Mars Opportunity Rover in the centre of the room sitting on a model of a Martian landscape complete with artificial tyre tracks in the sand.

No stone unturned

Thinkwell has left no stone unturned and a live NASA feed from Mars even plays on screens set into the sides of the display case giving it the feel of Mission Control. It is designed to keep guests lingering in the room as the walls are lined with stands from US economic investment bodies eager to get contact details from the wealthy visitors.

Ford says the pavilion looks exactly as Thinkwell intended and it took a surprisingly short time to develop. A team of 35 designers had just two weeks to create the pavilion using CGI previsualisation techniques whilst the finale scene was made in miniature form before being installed. Thinkwell originally had just ten months to build the pavilion but Covid extended that timeframe. Despite this, Ford says that “it has been a real challenge to meet deadlines during the pandemic.” It should be well worth it.

“There will be a lot of publicity for the companies involved,” says Wickham. “They will be using the Expo to push the company profile, and will get projects based on what people have seen and what they have done.” That really is a happy ending. ■

Companies

<https://www.luxtechnical.co.uk>

<https://polyphonia.io>

<https://projects.prg.com>

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and keep working to create the best possible outcomes and add value to the creative. The US Pavilion team at Creative Technology, led by Peter Herring, has been instrumental in the creation of this pavilion.”

It culminates in an AV extravaganza which is being kept under wraps as it has the theme of celebrating future developments from the US.

From there, guests take a wooden staircase past photos of iconic American landscapes. It brings them back to earth before (almost literally) taking them to the moon again as the pavilion's exit room showcases America's fascination with space.

Guests can see a Martian meteorite in a cabinet and touch a moon rock (before using the nearby hand sanitiser of course).