

ISF Chief Joel Silver Shares Proper Calibration Tips

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"When you watch 35mm film, are you watching moving pictures?"

After a slight pause and a smile, the man dressed in black answers his own question. "No," he says, as he stands next to three large Stewart Filmscreen products.

That's how Joel Silver, founder and president of the Imaging Science Foundation (ISF), starts the second day of his two-day training seminar at the Spring Electronic House Expo (EHX).

It's typical Silver style to mix some light-hearted fun with his curriculum of technology-based standards and practices to a room full of custom-installation professionals eager to learn how to properly install and calibrate state-of-the-art video systems.

Silver's mix of one-liners and tech-heavy topics helps his students and followers keep up with the intensive two-day program without ending up cross-eyed from trying to absorb everything thrown at them.

Over the course of the two-day seminar, which was featured as part of the week-long EHX education schedule, Silver covers everything from the basic principles developed for television when it was first introduced to techniques for calibrating white, black and color levels on a modern video system, and how to bill for and explain the services provided.

In a day full of questions, Silver answers why an installer needs to calibrate a video system by quoting a long-time follower. "Calibration of a device is more important than the technology inside it [the video product]," he says, attributing ISF alum Mike Wood.

By mid-afternoon, the fast-moving seminar arrives upon a subject that Silver emphasizes as arguably the most important and the most misunderstood by consumers and even installers. The topic he explains is shapes or aspect ratios, and according to Silver it's a convoluted topic that unfortunately can only be addressed correctly in one way.

"I go with front projection to get rid of the blacks because you have to fit your screen to the movie," he says. "You have to educate your clients on aspect ratios and you have to get use to people bitching about black bars. [From the installer perspective,] I think it's the toughest material you have to teach."

Transitioning onto the next point of his teachings, Silver refers to ground-roots marketing initiatives that have served to fuel the custom industry's rapid growth by pointing out that service is all about perception. It's during this time that he lays out a typical scenario where a client receives a nicely installed system and shows it off to his friend. The friend, he says, goes out and buys the same system, which alienates the first client because he now thinks the friend's system "looks better."

Silver says an installer can avoid this situation by documenting everything from the system's color and brightness measurements down to its smallest details. "The single most important thing for a referral-based business is to document peak light output and to take the bulb's numbers down," he points out. "When light output dips below 30 percent, replace the bulb."

Closing the day out, Silver provides some hands-on time for his students to calibrate color levels with a variety of LCD and plasma displays that line the sidewalls. The class ends with Silver demonstrating the differences when using the right tools. In this case, he uses a variety of equipment from Sencore to show why front projection requires different testing apparatus than flat-panel or rear-projection televisions.

Summing up the seminar's effectiveness, Al Sheppard, president of Winter Park, Fla.-based Smart Space Living, LLC, evaluates Silver by noting how well the industry icon communicates his message. "I think there's a lot of information being conveyed," says Sheppard. "Joel's got a lot of information and his straight-forward manner makes it interesting and thorough. Sometimes these classes are overdone, but that hasn't been the case with this class."

5 Tips for Proper Calibration

- Let products warm up before starting any measurement and calibration procedures.
- Take pre-calibration measurements to establish a baseline of performance.
- Calibrate primary colors before tackling secondary colors.
- If possible, light the seating area and not the screen area of a room to maintain contrast.
- Don't conform to preconceived standards; start a dialog with your client to determine what their preferred seating distance is to ensure their happiness.