



## **Aquarium's Theater Certified by Giant Screen Cinema Association** *Ultimate Wave: Tahiti 3D on Chattanooga's Ultimate Screen*



The Tennessee Aquarium IMAX<sup>®</sup> 3D Theater has become one of the first official "Certified Giant Screen" theaters in the world. The new certification program was announced during the Giant Screen Cinema Association's International Conference which was recently held in Chattanooga. "We wanted to provide members a certification to help accentuate their unique theater characteristics to consumers, setting Certified Giant Screen theaters apart from a crowded marketplace of new projection alternatives," said Tammy Seldon, GSCA executive director.

A survey of 4,700 consumers conducted by GSCA, online and in theaters, revealed that people want movies on a bigger screen. Nearly 70% said knowing they could see a film on a "certified giant screen" would impact their theater-going decision.

To receive certification, a theater must meet specific technical criteria laid out by the GSCA regarding screen size, viewing area and distance of seats from the screen plane.

The criteria include having a screen that is a minimum of 70-feet wide or at least 3,100 total square feet. All seats must be within one screen width of the screen plane.

At 89 feet wide and 66 feet tall, the Aquarium's IMAX<sup>®</sup> 3D Theater has one whale of a screen that almost doubles the size requirements needed to earn the title as Chattanooga's only Certified Giant Screen. "Today audiences have so many viewing choices from smaller, multiplex screens to 3D flat screen televisions at home," said Cindy Todd, the Aquarium's marketing director. "This certification helps define the premium experience visitors enjoy at theaters like ours that were designed specifically for giant screen productions."

To enhance the guest experience, the Tennessee Aquarium IMAX<sup>®</sup> 3D Theater recently added a new digital audio system and new seating throughout the theater. For more than 14 years, the non-profit Tennessee Aquarium IMAX<sup>®</sup> 3D Theater has taken audiences on virtual trips from the ocean depths to the edge of the known universe. "Our giant screen theater complements the Aquarium experience for our guests. In turn, ticket sales help support our education and conservation programs," said Todd. "Our priority is showing films that both entertain and illuminate."

## **Answers to Some FAQ's about Giant Screen Certification**

### **Q: What is the Giant Screen Cinema Association?**

A: The Giant Screen Cinema Association, GSCA<sup>®</sup>, was formed in January 2006 when the Giant Screen Theater Association and the Large Format Cinema Association were unified. The purpose of GSCA is to advance the business of producing and presenting giant screen experiences. Members include theaters, such as the Tennessee Aquarium IMAX<sup>®</sup> 3D Theater, giant screen filmmakers, film distributors, equipment manufacturers, service providers, other suppliers and students. GSCA is an international organization with members from 29 countries.

### **Q: Why did GSCA develop the Giant Screen Certification program?**

A: GSCA developed the program to provide members a certification to help accentuate their unique theater characteristics to consumers, setting Certified Giant Screen theaters apart from a crowded marketplace of new projection alternatives. It is also expected to encourage the production of original giant screen films.

### **Q: What are the criteria for being a certified giant screen?**

A: There four basic criteria. Giant screens are at least:

- 70 feet (21.3 meters) wide, or
- 3,100 sq. ft. (288 sq. meters) total area for flat screens, or
- 60 feet (18.3 meters) in diameter for domes, and
- Place all seating within one screen width of screen plane.

### **Q: How did GSCA determine the criteria needed for certification?**

A: In June 2008, the GSCA Board of Directors adopted a set of initiatives designed to give its members who operate a "giant screen" tools that would help them to differentiate themselves from the growing number of smaller-sized screens utilizing 3D and other new specialty cinema technology. The Board simultaneously appointed a Technical Task Force, chaired by Board member Andrew Oran (FotoKem), to recommend a definition of "giant screen" for the Association and a Marketing Task Force, chaired by Board member Mike Lutz (MacGillivray Freeman Films), to recommend ways those theaters could differentiate themselves in the marketplace.

Oran presented the Technical Task Force-recommended definitions of what dimensions and geometry constitute a "giant screen" to the Board and the general GSCA membership at the GSCA 2009 Conference in Indianapolis. The specific recommendations are detailed below under "Technical Task Force Report."

## TECHNICAL TASK FORCE REPORT

by Andrew Oran

The Technical Task Force's objective was to come up with a definition of the term "giant screen" that was clear, and specifications that were as inclusive as possible (that is, representative of the highest percentage of our current membership) while still being meaningful and technically sound.

We asked GSCA theater members for details of their screen and theater dimensions, and received replies from 76 flat-screen theaters and 39 dome theaters, a total of 115. We also consulted the GSCA's worldwide database of more than 350 giant-screen theaters.

In the end, our specs came down to four basic criteria. Giant screens are **at least**

- 70 feet (21.3 meters) wide, **or**
- 3,100 square feet (288 square meters) in total area for flat screens, **or**
- 60 feet (18.3 meters) in diameter for domes, **and**
- Place all seating within one screen width of the screen plane.

Our starting point on the issue of screen size was the question, How big are our screens at present?

Among the 76 flat screen theaters that replied to our survey, the average screen width was 75 feet (22.9 meters). The average width of the flat screens in our worldwide database was 71 feet (21.6 meters). We decided to lower that specification to 70 feet to include over a dozen IMAX® GT, SR, and MPX system theaters that would otherwise have not qualified.

The average area of the 76 flat-screen respondents was 4,300 square feet (400 square meters). The average for the full database was 3,800 square feet (353 square meters). We decided to lower that specification to 3,100 square feet (288 square meters) to include several GSCA member theaters that would otherwise have not qualified.

### Theater depth

The requirement that the last row of audience seating be within one screen width of the screen plane is based on IMAX® Corporation's original theater designs, which called for a minimum viewing angle of no less than 53 degrees. While human peripheral vision extends well beyond 53 degrees, this angle has long been considered the narrowest practical viewing angle for a giant-screen cinema.

Almost every theater in our database that meets the screen size requirement also meets this immersivity requirement. In other words, our survey results suggest that if the screen was built "giant," it was built to meet the standards of immersivity as originally established by IMAX®.

Linking screen size and immersivity addresses a related question that came up throughout our discussions, namely, "What distinguishes a "giant screen" from its nearest competitors?" With multiplex screens approaching, or even exceeding, 70 feet in width, and the latest digital projection systems (from a variety of vendors) promising to fill that screen width with bright and high-resolution images, we felt that overall screen size (width and height) *combined with* theater architecture should act as our key differentiator. So, while a standard 72-foot-wide, digital multiplex screen with a 1.78 aspect ratio will meet our width requirement, the auditorium's geometry will probably not meet our immersivity requirement. This is borne out by our survey results.

**Q: Do consumers really care about screen size?**

A: GSCA’s extensive research shows they do. A survey of 4,700 consumers showed almost 70% would be more likely to visit a theater advertised as having a Certified Giant Screen than one that was not advertised this way.

**Q: How does a theater become Certified as a Giant Screen Theater?**

A: The program is available to all members of GSCA who own and operate a theater that meets the technical specs of a qualified Certified Giant Screen Theater.

**Q: Can theaters who qualify but are not members of GSCA call themselves Certified Giant Screen Theaters?**

A: No. GSCA has trademarked the icon and tagline, “Bigger. Bolder. Better.” and shall restrict use by only qualifying theaters. GSCA welcomes and encourages all qualifying theaters to contact us immediately and we will work with them to become Certified Giant Screen Theaters.

**Q: How many theaters qualify for the certification?**

A: As of October 12, 2010, only 310 theaters world-wide qualify to become Certified Giant Screen theaters. The Tennessee Aquarium IMAX® 3D Theater is currently one of three theaters in Tennessee that meet the certification criteria. (Malco Paradiso in Memphis and Regal Opry Mills 20 & IMAX® in Nashville are the other two.)

