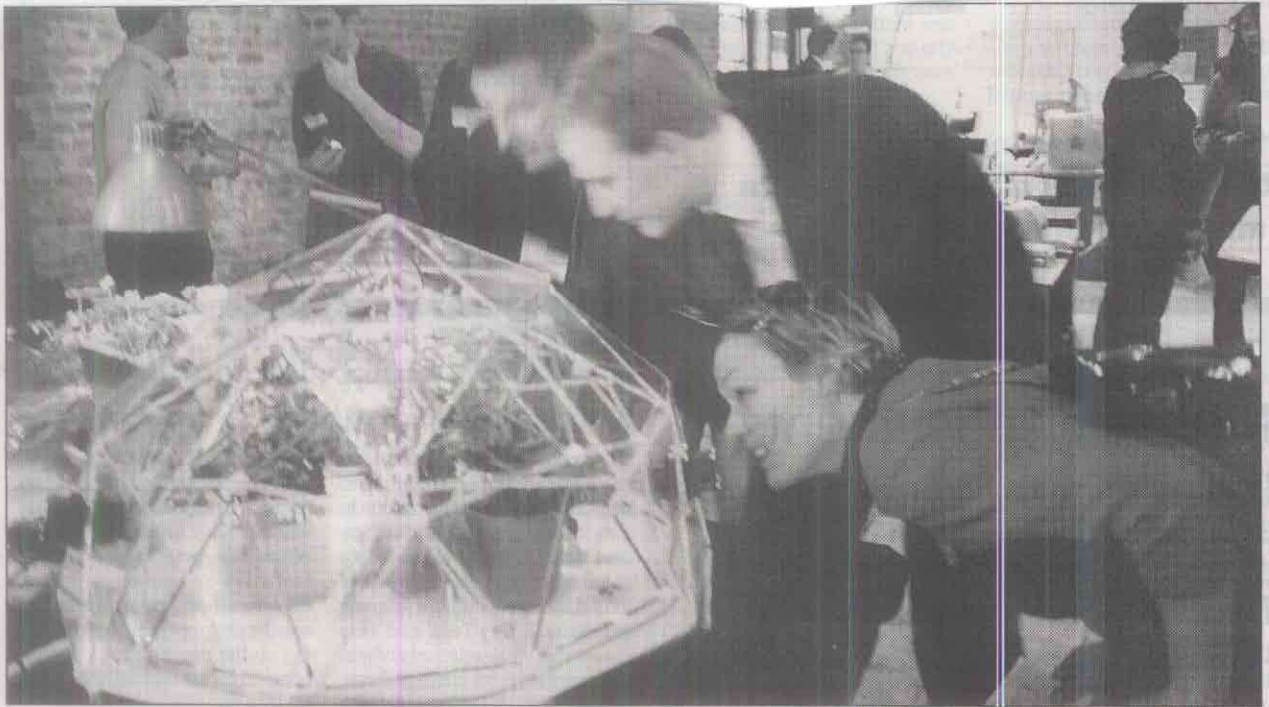


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The Biosphera demonstration from the Everyday Learning group at Media Lab Europe

DIY will bring innovative direction for home cinema

In five years people will make their own television shows, claims expert

MATTHEW MAGEE

THE digital media revolution is still in its very early stages of development, according to an academic and businessman who believes that in five years' time everyone will be creating mini-movies as part of everyday life.

Speaking at a Media Lab Europe conference, Marc Davis said the existence of cheap digital cameras was only the first step towards a digital media-literate society, and that software is on the way that will automate the production of mini-TV shows in ordinary people's lives.

"In five years we will all be creating cinema content. Garage cinema technologies enable consumers to become daily media producers," said Davis, assistant professor at Berkeley University's school of information management and systems in the US, who founded and acted as chief technology officer of Amova.com, a media automation and personalisation company.

The availability of cheap moving and still digital cameras is only a first step, he said. The real impact of digital media tech-

nologies will be felt when software is widely available that automates the capture, editing and production of footage.

"Now it takes effort and money and time to edit content because computers don't understand the content of video data. It is opaque and data-rich," said Davis.

For computers to automate the editing process, they must first understand what is in video. To do this, Davis has worked on technologies that tag content. Called metadata, this enables a computer to know what is in a video segment. It is similar to the metadata at the heart of WML, the web technology that has revolutionised online content and database management over the past three years.

'Garage cinema technologies enable consumers to become daily media producers'
Marc Davis

"We need a standardised metadata framework to enable the construction of a global video archive and that metadata needs to be captured at every stage of the media production schedule," said Davis.

Davis has developed one icon-based system that relies on around 700 images to describe the type of content, spread across a graphical timeline to indicate when it appears. Taking his cue from sheet music, Davis believes this will enable computers to automate the editing of footage according to a user's demands.

While home-produced video and photography is extremely relevant, its quality is often poor. Professionally-produced content, such as films and television, looks better but is less relevant to users' daily lives. Davis demonstrated examples of a hybrid of the two forms, where home-produced content is spliced into professional content, with family members appearing in film trailers through the use of automated editing software.

"This is mass customisation, rather than treating media production as a craft involving highly skilled, highly paid people performing time-consuming oper-

ations," he said.

Others agree that media production will fall into the hands of ordinary non-professionals.

"Increasingly we will see, and you can already see, the dispersal of content production," said Michael Bove, an academic with the US-MIT Media Lab.

Bove believes that whereas content used to be produced and distributed centrally, media is now often produced centrally but dispersed among users with access to email, text messages and peer-to-peer networks. He believes we are now seeing the beginnings of popular dispersed production of content.

"You can see it in the new phones, where people will be producing their own pictures and distributing them, or in people's uses of digital cameras."

Bove believes consumer-created content will be digital media's real success story. "If you look at the things that we say were the successes of the web age, they were eBay and peer-to-peer networks like Napster, where people created their own content," he said.

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