

Origins Centre Museum's new lighting control by Visual Production

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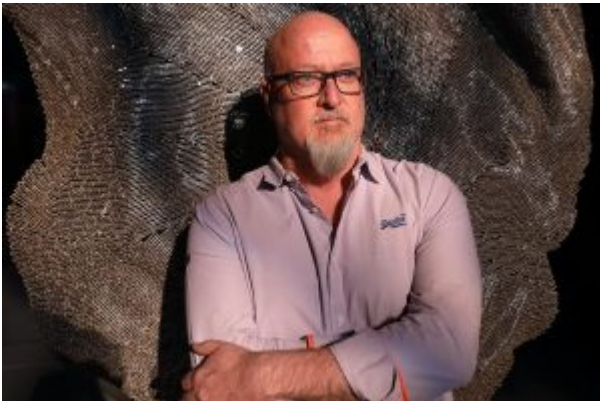


For curious minds intrigued by anthropology, archaeology and the San people, the oldest residents of South Africa, the Origins Centre Museum at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, has an extensive collection of stone tools, fossils and rock art, all interwoven with technology. Since opening its door in 2005 Gavin Olivier of Digital Fabric has been intricately involved in the museum, recently installing a Visual Productions system to centralise lighting control via a single button, but which has delivered more than expected.

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Having spent the last two years in Dubai on Expo 2020, Olivier of Digital Fabric, a company that specialises in heritage work and attractions internationally, was pleased to be back at one of his earliest installations. "I never really stopped going to Origins," he says. "I was part of the original team, working as an audiovisual consultant with Project Director Francis Gerard of Totem Media. Like most things, museums rely on funding, and since then, we've returned several times to assist with small upgrades to keep the system running."



Gavin Olivier of Digital Fabric

Aside from keeping the museum running technically (Digital Fabric have the institutional knowledge of the building and any issues experienced over the years), Olivier has supported

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Origins in terms of budget documentation for fundraising purposes as well as creating a wish list for future projects. Over the years he has rolled up his sleeves to carry out tasks outside his normal scope of work from painting and lighting to the refurbishment of the Spirit World Gallery, where Digital Fabric rebuilt the showcase displays and graphics. Making minimal income on these projects, Olivier is affectionately referred to as a 'Friend of the Museum' by Duncan Riley of DWR Distribution. "When it comes to Origins, we typically do more than our core business, but the current team running the museum are outstanding. While Origins is close to my heart, it's also good for my soul. In this instance, aside from the AV and lighting, we have rebuilt many of the display cases, including dress panels, conservation standards, object mounting, and labeling"



The new Visual Productions system, supplied by DWR Distribution, comprises of 1 x Cuecore2, 5 x IOcore's, 1 x RDM Splitter and 3 x B-Stations with the aim to reinstate a centralized lighting control approach, one of the elements that had died over the years. "The staff were having to chase around the museum, turning switches off or sometimes leaving lights on, which in turn created further maintenance issues," Olivier explains. "The idea was to give them a single button point to start and end the day but thanks to the flexibility of the system, we have given them additional functionality as well."

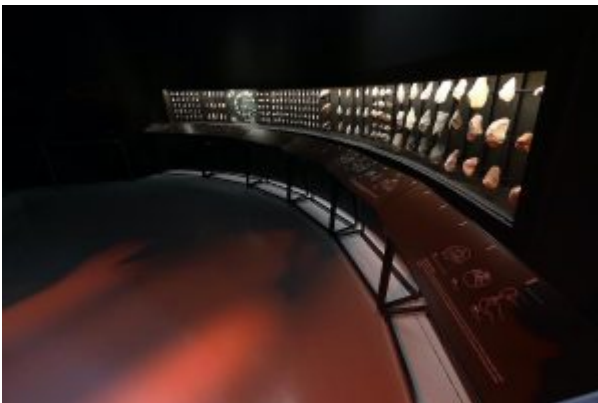
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One of the ways museums survive, and this is true globally, is to offer their space as a venue for events. "Even if museums can't always provide the best conference facility (in the usual sense), they certainly provide one the most interesting spaces," says Olivier. "Origins is very good at selling the concept of hosting small meetings, conferences or lectures in a beautiful and unusual setting, and it's an important part of keeping the museum alive." Using the Visual Productions system, clever circuit separation has come into play. On a normal exhibit day, the display circuits are on, but should the venue be used for a conference, additional tracks can be switched on, the showcase displays switched off and the lighting focused above the seating area, all at the touch of a button. The system also integrates the control of a new moving Robe SPOTE fixture in the largest of the spaces in the museum, which otherwise would have required a separate controller. The SPOTE is used as a presenter spotlight, with pre-programmed positions and colours. The Visual Productions system has also been integrated with the museum's AV systems using UDP, it

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accepts triggers from the video players to dim the lights at the start of a film, returning to the previous light scene when the film ends.



This was the first time that Digital Fabric relied on Visual Productions. “Funnily enough, I had been considering the system for an international project that I was working on,” Olivier explains. “When I got back to Johannesburg and started thinking about the Origins install, I realized that DWR were the agents in South Africa and it all just came together. I needed more than just to buy some boxes. I needed a solution, and we were under time pressure. I needed relay boxes to be

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built and wired, and it was not something we had time to do. I was looking for two things; a system that offered fairly standard components to make for easier maintenance, and one with a flexible software interface that would be user-friendly to program and update. The second thing was finding a bunch of people I could work with. "DWR was last on my list" added Olivier comically "but I tried all the others and they were busy, so I had no choice."



DWR's Robert Izzett explains, "We supplied and helped program the system and it was amazing to work with Gavin again and to also see his father and his sons, helping on-site – three generations at work. DWR prebuilt and prewired all the DB cabinets with Visual Productions CueCore2 to control DMX zones and IOCores which controlled the switched circuits via solid state relays which allows us to add a wide range of loads of up to 20 Amps to every single circuit. We included all the protection and circuit breakers so that when the boxes arrived on site, they would

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just have to be attached to power and connected. The project started with Dylan Jones drawing up the layouts and assemblies, which in turn assisted Sidney Koen and Tyler Pugin to handle the mechanics. Arthur Siko and Goodwin Gaedie then followed a wiring diagram to handle the internal cabling requirements while Jannie de Jager programmed the system."

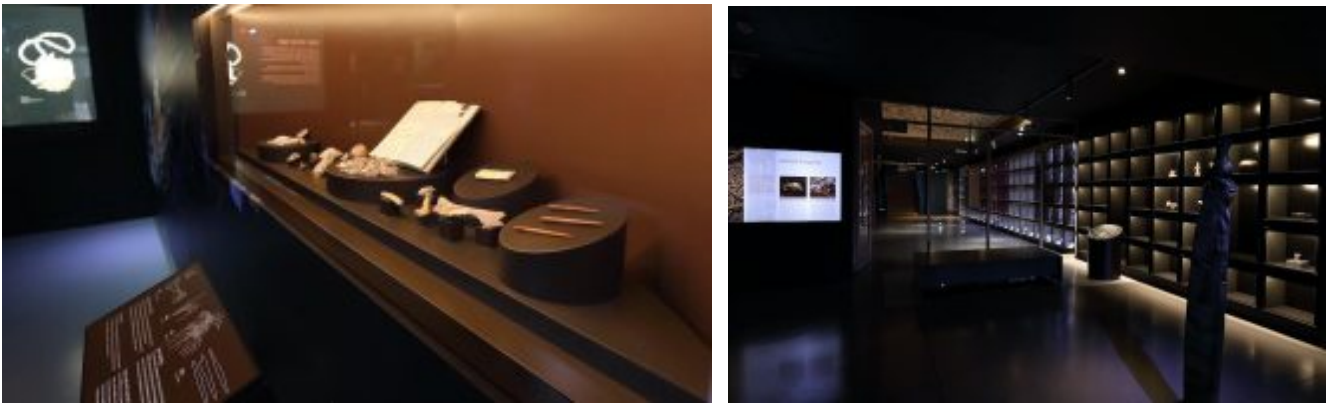


It was a whole new experience for Jannie de Jager to work with Digital Fabric, a company he describes as fantastic installers who are in a league of their own. "Gavin is a wealth of knowledge, knows products and what needs to happen. We programmed the centralized control system in such a way that when the Origins team arrives in the morning, it's the press of a button that sequentially, within thirty seconds, switches on the entire museum whilst managing the in-rush current. One of the venues required DMX control and hence the CueCore2 controls the Robe SPOTE and a few other DMX controlled fixtures. The system accepts external triggers and listens to other incoming commands. That's obviously what Visual Production does very well - as a show management device, it brings everything together to a centralized point so that you can manage your outgoing and incoming triggers."

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With Origins now reopen to the public, the staff are already enjoying the new functionality at their fingertips. Olivier concludes, "What we always find with control systems is that to make something simpler for the end user, it requires more effort on our part as we disguise processes and things that have to happen in the background. So yes, it's a simple system but its powerful."



Photos: Duncan Riley