CES 2016: Syfy Labs

by Shepherd Laughlin - Friday, January 08, 2016

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At CES this week, cable and satellite channel Syfy launched Syfy Labs, an innovation lab that formalizes its commitment to multi-pronged immersive storytelling.

Photography credit: Baby Chheng/Syfy

"Over the past few years we've been looking at blending new and emerging technologies in interesting ways to augment the storytelling experience," says Matthew Chiavelli, senior vice president at Syfy Digital. "We've been taking inspiration from things we've seen here on the show floor at CES, and applying it to what we do digitally."
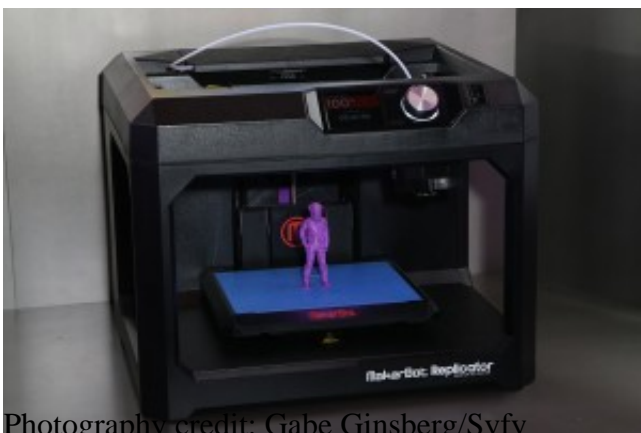
3D printing, virtual reality and the Internet of Things are widely discussed at CES, but rarely in the context of storytelling. Syfy has managed to wrap all three technologies into the narratives of shows including The Expanse, a new series that imagines a far future in which the Earth and Mars are on the brink of war.

Photography credit: Gabe Ginsberg/Syfy

In partnership with [Phillips Hue](#), Syfy has created lighting for viewing areas that responds in real time to events on screen. Rather than being based on a mathematical formula, these responses are pre-planned and triggered by the specific narrative of the show. "We're making these by hand and effectively scoring the episodes with light," Chiavelli says.

Additionally, Syfy is releasing 3D printing files as content on MakerBot's Thingiverse platform, which allow fans to create objects themed around Syfy shows. And a VR app allows users to explore spaceships from The Expanse.

Photography credit: Gabe Ginsberg/Syfy

While initially following after production of the shows, these immersive elements are influencing the

narrative earlier and earlier in the storytelling process. "The first series we did this for was 12 Monkeys, and we started showing the producers and the show runners this in action," Chiavelli says. "As they were starting to work on season 2 they were asking to give us notes on what to do with the lighting. So it's already going full circle in the production."

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